

## Traffic matters. The Quietway

No one can have missed the dramatic growth in cycle traffic through the Amwell area in recent years. As this newsletter goes to press, the 5-ways junction at the bottom of Margery Street is being modified to improve safety for cyclists. The TfL and LBI Quietway Route 2 from Bloomsbury to Walthamstow will go through our area from Margery Street and Wharton Street, to Chadwell Street – notwithstanding residents' concerns about cyclists travelling in the opposite direction to motor vehicles on the south side of Lloyd Square...and Amwell Street now has it's own cycle shop – Freddie Grubb at No 63 which is a welcome, useful and practical addition to the trader make up of the street

Amwell Society member Nick Kocharhook, activist and founder of [www.livableislington.uk](http://www.livableislington.uk) writes: *Islington has secured money from TfL for a new Quietway. This route will connect residential streets via a few larger roads. It's 3.5 miles long and runs from Finsbury Park in the north to Clerkenwell Green in the south. It will definitely run down Amwell Street, but exactly what form it will take is still being decided. This is an opportunity for the Amwell community to reimagine the neighbourhood and reclaim the village atmosphere.*

*Liveable Islington is asking the council to trial measures aimed at improving road safety along the route. Since Amwell Street currently has levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) higher than the legal limit, we want the council to tackle air pollution at the same time and to create a route worthy of the "Quietway" name, we want to reduce traffic noise for those living on the route.*

*We are proposing more safe space for people to walk and relax on what should be the village high street. In addition, specially-designed pedestrian crossings will make it easy for people of all ages to cross the street in the morning peak. The amount of parking won't change, and motorists will still be able to reach the shops as they do today.*

*Please visit our website to learn more about the plan. While you're there, consider signing our petition. If you have thoughts about how to improve the plan, get in touch.*

**Editor's note:** Road safety for children going to Clerkenwell Parochial School will remain important. Until a friendly lollypop man was recruited cyclists had been known to shout at children using the pedestrian crossing. We may also be unsympathetic to 'athlete cyclists' who don't respect the intended calm of the 'Quietway' proposal. The 'Dutch approach' should be our maxim.

## Late summer party for all. Saturday 5 September. 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm

Every year the Society holds a late summer party in St. Helena Garden at the junction of Lloyd Baker Street and Lloyd Square. This is a favourite venue as, for many years, the Society has tended the garden in collaboration with the London Borough of Islington. In the 1990s the garden had fallen into disrepair. It was very overgrown and had become a place to throw rubbish into. With the help of an informal agreement between LBI and the Society the garden was, at first tended by Barbara Holliman supported by volunteers and in more recent years by Darian and Delia Mitchell to whom we are all very grateful.



St. Helena Garden looking towards Lloyd Square

There will be wine, beer and soft drinks will be available free-of-charge at the party and, if you can, please bring food to share. If you haven't been to the summer party before, you'll be very, very welcome.

**If the weather is wet the party will be held in the Margery Street Tenants' and Residents' Hall. Directions to the hall will be displayed on the railings around the garden on the day if necessary.**

# The Amwell Society - Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 43 years

[www.amwell.org.uk](http://www.amwell.org.uk)

## Yesterday's Travelodge

In 1892, a new type of hostel for down-and-out and low-paid working men appeared in London. Rowton Houses were conceived and built by Montagu William Lowry-Corry, 1st Baron Rowton. He was known as Monty, and was Benjamin Disraeli's private secretary from 1866 until Disraeli's death in 1881. Rowton's aim was to provide cheap accommodation that was better and cleaner than anything else available at a time when living rough was even tougher than it is in the 21st century.

The first Rowton House, at Vauxhall was opened in December 1892 and was personally financed by Lord Rowton. Following its success, a limited company was formed to expand the scheme. The King's Cross Rowton House, at the corner of King's Cross Road and Calthorpe Street, was opened on 1st February 1896 and provided 678 beds. The location of the site is shown on this 1916 map.



Note the tramway lines in King's Cross Road

Rowton Houses were all constructed on the same lines. The lower floors contained the entrance hall, dining room, smoking lounge, reading room, washrooms, barber's shop, shoemaker's, tailor's rooms, clothes and boot cleaning rooms, parcels' room etc. The upper floors included private cubicles with a bed, chair, shelf, and a chamber pot. Cubicles cost 6d [£2.46 at 2015 prices] a day. No access to the cubicles was allowed during the day.

*Rowton Houses are the poor man's hotel. The huge building at the corner of Calthorpe Street and King's Cross Road with its hundreds of little windows like so many port-holes, has a somewhat forbidding aspect when first sighted. It might be taken for a prison or improved barracks. It is only after internal inspection that the visitor to Rowton House is able to appreciate the value of the many small windows. Peep into the entrance corridor of Rowton House and you will see its inviting, hospitable aspect. Penetrate further; inspect the large comfortable rooms where lodgers eat, read, or lounge; see how comfortable the bedrooms are, and how clean the whole place is.*

*It is seven o'clock and the toilers or unemployed are turning in. They file past the office where a clerk takes the 6d for a night's lodging and gives the lodger a key. Some are permanent residents and enter their hotel with a familiar air. A few who have supped are sitting on the garden seats provided for them in the lobby. To the left you enter a large smoking-room. There are comfortable chairs and benches, solid tables, the glistening walls and the beautiful pictures. Some men chat together in groups, play draughts or dominoes; others read papers; a few are industriously addressing wrappers; others, again, sit apart smoking, thinking out the problem that presents itself to the sixpenny dosser. We pass next to the dining-room, where there is eating accommodation for nearly 400.*

*Pennyworths and half-pennyworths of everything they need may be purchased here. The quality is excellent, and the price lower than in the shops outside. The shop sells notepaper, stamps and cigars from a penny upwards. There is also a restaurant. The food is served from the bar of the shop. Everyone is his own waiter. A large bowl of soup may be had for 1d, roast beef is 4d, steak pudding 3d, cold meat 3d, potatoes 1d, tea 1d. for a large cup. A slice of bread and butter is ½d. But the lodger may prefer to be his own cook as well as his own waiter. In that case he has the utensils of the establishment at his disposal. The lodger can buy his provisions at the shop or bring them in. He can use his own teapot and cups if he likes although it should be noticed that the Rowton House crockery is very good quality and lodgers are not charged for breakages. You see one man sitting down to a big spread. He has made a table-cloth of an evening paper and has bought two or three courses from the kitchen. He is dining, perhaps, at the rate of a shilling a meal. Near him is another man who has just cooked a kipper on the dining-room fire. He has a big teapot and a tin of condensed milk, as it lasts longer and is cheaper than a half-pennyworth from the shop.*



Rowton House when it was opened in 1896

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He has large slices of bread and butter. His dinner will not cost him more than 4d [2p]. But there is a thin, careworn man, who is sustaining life on a pennyworth of soup — good nourishing stuff it is — a half-penny worth of tea, and a halfpenny slice of bread and butter. He dines for 2d. In fact, the impecunious lodgers can live on 2½d. a day at a pinch. A big bowlful of soup with a chunk of bread costs 1½d is one meal and for another penny he has tea and bread and butter. The men move quietly about the dining-room, or sit in ones or twos at the tables. A few have fallen off to sleep without moving. The servants of the establishment do the washing up.



Proceeding on a further tour of the ground floor we visit the reading-room, a very bright room, well lighted, and decorated with engravings of famous pictures — every room contains valuable engravings — and heads of deer shot by Lord Rowton in the Highlands. Most of the men are reading either books from the library or evening papers the wrapper addressers are again represented while some are lolling unconcernedly in the armchairs, or have gone off to sleep. Lord Rowton provides the books, and they are lent out free to lodgers. The favourite authors are Captain Marryat, Dickens, Thackeray, Lytton, Kingsley, and Charles Lever. The classics are not so much in demand.

In these three rooms we have seen several hundred lodgers, and a contented set of men they are. One is impressed with the quiet behaviour of the men. There is no loud talk, no noise of any kind. Most of them seem to go their own way. A considerable proportion are working men, but Lord Rowton does not ask who the lodgers are. They may be men earning £3 a week, who could afford a house to themselves, or they may be poor unemployed waifs who have difficulty in gathering in as much as will keep them alive in this cheap lodging. Some are in rough, work-a-day dress, some are out at heel, a few have the air of clerks and top hats are not rare. Whatever they be, and however they may be dressed, it is evident that all are at home.

The sanitary arrangements of the House are excellent, and so well are all the rooms ventilated that they are not in the least "smelly." Between seven and eight o'clock the men begin to go to bed. They are let upstairs in batches every quarter of an hour. Each one has a cubicle, which is a little room with a comfortable bed and plenty of blankets. There is a window to each cubicle, which explains the multiplicity of the small apertures: As there are 577 cubicles, the windows, adding those of other rooms, must be considerably over 800.

Although the casual visitor is struck by the quiet, orderly demeanor of the men and their contentment, that does not mean that discipline is not maintained. On the contrary, there are rules which must be strictly observed. Mr. Hyatt, who is at the head of this establishment, carries out the regulations for its good government to the letter.

The great point is cleanliness. The men must be clean, or they do not stay at Rowton House. Almost every day one or more are reported, and the attendant on night duty captures the offenders as they go to bed. For the first offence a caution is given, but the offender has to reform at once or leave. We may say, however, that the men cooperate in maintaining good order. It is a striking compliment for them, and at the same time to the civilising influences of Rowton House, that neither at this House nor at its predecessor in in Vauxhall has there ever been any case of a lodger defacing a table, marking a wall, destroying anything, or writing any indecent expression any where about the buildings. The men appreciate the way in which Lord Rowton and his colleague, Sir Richard Farrant, have so carefully considered their comforts. Lord Rowton himself engenders the spirit of good fellowship among the men and co-operation between them and his company. He discourages any "my lording" of him, as he jocularly remarks, and is familiarly addressed as the "Guv'ner." He makes it clear to the men that, while he looks after them, his company are not philanthropists. They are supplying a great public need, and earn a dividend; but, on the other hand, give the best possible return for 6d. a night which they can. Further, they are always anxious to accept suggestions for improvement, although there is little room for that. The new Rowton House, now almost complete at Kennington, is larger than the King's-cross-road one, and will, if anything, be better, although, from a structural point of view, there is hardly any room for improvement.



...and what came after. The Holiday Inn, King's Cross  
Life at Rowton House was written in 1894 by an unknown author. Thanks also to Peter Higginbottom.

## A message from our Chair, Paul Thornton



It seems like barely 5 minutes ago that many of us streamed into Clerkenwell Parochial School for my first AGM as your Chair, and suddenly our September party is just around the corner. Summer has flown by, possibly because we didn't

have one! I look forward to meeting members old and new on 5<sup>th</sup> September; let's make it a record turnout!

### Basements Revisited

Two issues ago, our Newsletter editor wrote about the vexed topic of Basement Extensions. At that time, Islington Council was seeking community input to help it frame new planning guidelines which would allow modest developments to take place whilst outlawing the "iceberg" excavations which have so blighted other inner London boroughs in recent years. The Council is now consulting on a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which is intended to achieve this goal, and which incorporates many of the proposals made by the Amwell Society.

The key points are that:

- Basements and basement extensions must be no deeper than 1 storey below ground level
- Basement extensions must not be larger than the original footprint of the house, nor must they occupy more than 50% of the garden
- Applicants must provide expert confirmation that their plans will do no harm to neighbouring dwellings, or trees

For **listed buildings**, a more restrictive regime will be in force; to quote the draft SPD "In sites with generous gardens it may be acceptable to construct a modest basement extension close to the original building, provided it is structurally and visually independent of the original building and does not harm the heritage significance of the listed building, including its garden setting"; expect some fierce arguments about the meaning of "generous"!

Members wishing to read, or comment on the draft SPD should go to the Islington home page and click on Current Consultations under the Get Involved heading. The consultation period closes on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

## Open House. London 2015

Design For Living: Open House London will reveal London's most inspiring homes and interiors once again on **19th & 20th September**.

Open House satisfies the appetites of thousands who wish to see beautiful architect designed residences first hand. This year stunning new additions include stylish designs that display creative solutions to building on difficult or overlooked sites, including Courtyard House by Dallas Pierce Quintero – a 95 sqm house built within the walls of an infill site shortlisted for an RIBA award, and the Tin House by Henning Stummel Architects, which makes use of an irregular urban site with interconnecting pavilions arranged to define a serene courtyard.

Open House welcomes imaginative conversion Raw House from Mustard Architects, a light-filled home with industrial aesthetics, featured on Grand Designs and winner of Third Place in the NLA 'Don't Move, Improve' awards. Trevelyan House, a modern redesign of a maisonette within classic 1950s Grade II listed Denys Lasdun building in Hackney will be on view.

More than 800 buildings will open their doors across alongside a programme of walks, engineering and landscape tours, cycle rides and experts' talks. Highlights of the Open House programme include:

The BT Tower which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2015, and 30 St Mary Axe [aka the Gherkin]

London's infrastructure revealed with the Institution of Civil Engineers including engineering walks and site visits to major construction and engineering sites

80 projects with Landscape at their heart with the Landscape Institute

Eco, zero-carbon and retrofit buildings with the chance to talk to experts, see work in action and discover how you can Implement changes in your own home

Speak with planners, architects and engineers on how they create successful buildings and cities

Maggie's and Open House London 'Culture Crawl' on Friday 19th September - A moonlit walk through London with the opportunity to see Open House architecture and raise money for Maggie's Cancer Centres

Go to [www.openhouselondon.org.uk](http://www.openhouselondon.org.uk) for all the information you need to enjoy the Open House weekend