

# Backtracks

Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre newsletter  
No 21 June 2009



## REVOLVING DOORS



After many years working with us at the Local Studies and Archives Centre Mark Aston has left to take up the manager's seat at the Local History department in Islington. Many of the readers of this newsletter will have benefited from Mark's depth of knowledge and I am sure you will join with us in wishing him all the best in our neighbouring borough.

In his place we would like to introduce you to Rosie Eddisford. Rosie comes to us having previously worked at the Imperial War Museum and we are sure that she will be a great asset to the Centre.

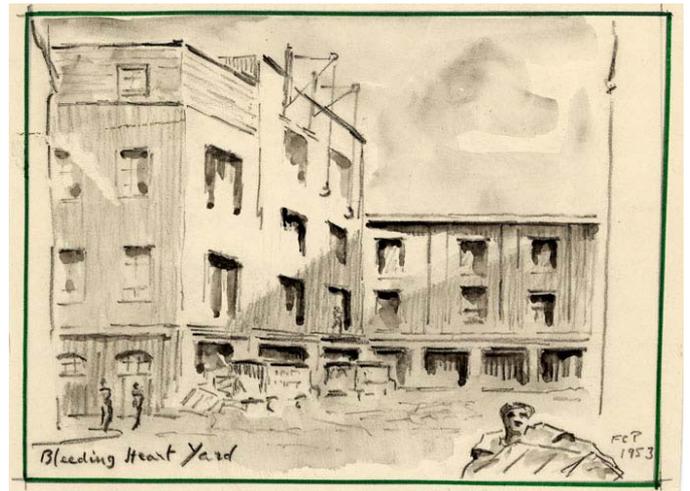
## NEW OPENING HOURS

Now that Rosie has joined the team we are pleased to announce that with some reorganisation of our working patterns we have been able to increase our opening hours. The centre is now open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 10am until 7pm. We also open throughout the day on Saturdays

from 10am to 5pm though we may not always be able to produce items from our stores on Saturdays between 12pm and 2pm.

We hope you'll come along and take advantage of these extra opening hours to complete that research you've been putting off for so long.

## FRANCIS CLARE PREVOT



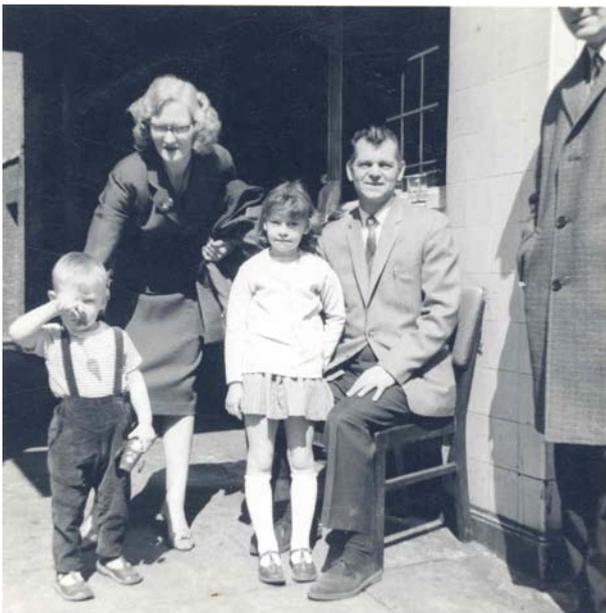
Some amongst you will remember that we mounted a small exhibition of drawings by this talented artist in 1996. Mr Prevot lived in Red Lion Square from 1946 until shortly before his death in 1967. We have few details about his life but apparently he expressed the wish that his body be given to Guy's Hospital for medical research. We have been fortunate in being able to add to our collection by purchasing nine further drawings that recently came up for sale on E-bay. The one shown here is of Bleeding Heart Yard, Holborn in 1953. They are delicate, atmospheric drawings that give a glimpse of Holborn in the years just after the War.

## KING'S CROSS VOICES EXHIBITION

15 June – 26 September 2009

King's Cross is world famous for its railway and architectural heritage, but until now very little has been written about its people - those who have both lived and worked in the locality, and perhaps out of sight and out of mind of the commuting crowds. Today King's Cross is in the throes of a massive redevelopment and is entering one of the most exciting periods of its long history.

Our new exhibition uses extracts from oral history recordings, collected as part of the *King's Cross Voices* project between 2004 and 2008, to tell the stories of those who have lived and worked in King's Cross, both past and present. Amongst the people interviewed were railway workers, students, shopkeepers, market traders, artists, campaigners, politicians, former sex trade workers, factory workers, housewives, publicans, and many, many more. Many of the interviewees were photographed by a volunteer portrait photographer, Sarah Weal. Her portraits accompany the oral history extracts in the exhibition, together with a number of the interviewees' personal photographs, and some from other collections. The picture below, donated by Thelma Dowsett, shows Thelma and her family outside the Boot Public House in Cromer Street during the early 1960s.



The project has created a great deal of interest locally and also nationally, as there have been two programmes broadcast on BBC Radio Four. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to listen to audio extracts of the *King's Cross*

*Voices* interviews, as well as see a display of artefacts relating to the King's Cross area. Very soon you will be able to listen to most of the recordings by logging onto our website - [www.camden.gov.uk/kingscrossvoices](http://www.camden.gov.uk/kingscrossvoices).

*Jessica Mackenzie was interviewed as part of the King's Cross Voices project. Here she recalls what happened on 26 October 1940 when she was seventeen years old. After the War, Jessica was awarded a study bursary at Bedford College as a compensation for her injuries, and she went on to enjoy a career as a social worker.*

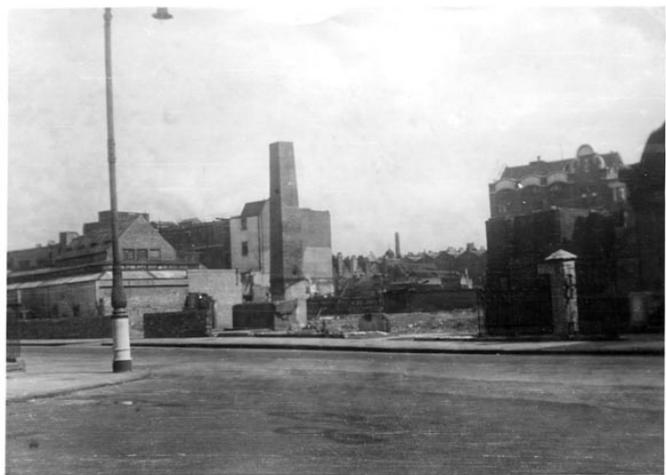
"I had gone to shelter in my aunt's house in Cromer Street. The pub a couple of doors along had a direct hit from a landmine. Everything started to collapse, and we got under the Morrison shelter which also served as the kitchen table. I remember just before that we had all been knitting. Then I must have lost consciousness. I remember waking up, it was terribly dark, and there was a terrible pain in my arm. Sulphuric acid from an accumulator battery was dripping on the crook of my arm. There I laid. I can still taste the earth in my mouth when I'm having a bad dream. I didn't know what to do, and I must have drifted in and out of consciousness. I could hear people several hours later. I heard talking and digging. I called out. Later they said it was like a kitten 'meeowing'. But to me, I felt it was a yell and a scream.

I was brought out at about 1 o'clock the next day and the amazing thing was that they had to take me up a ladder because the bomb had dropped right into the ground and I was right below street level. Later I found out that I was the only one of 67 people who came out alive that night. They were all dead. Except me and a budgerigar, which my mum later kept until it died.

I remember most of all the brightness, and the doctor with a big bandage round her head with 'Doctor' written on it, and this terrific sense of relief. I could hardly breathe. She put an oxygen mask on me and she gave me an injection. My back was in pain, and later I found out that it had been broken. I'd been buried in there for sixteen hours.

I didn't find out what happened until after my mother visited me in hospital, and told me that

many members of our family had been killed. She told me that she had been in Whidborne Buildings looking after grandfather and the windows were blown in and soot had gone everywhere. She also said that she didn't know where I was. My aunt told her to go to the police station, and then she landed up at Holloway Prison. Why they thought I'd be there I don't know! When I eventually came out of hospital, I was given a 'green card', so I could get work as a person who is disabled. I had already been to night school and had learnt shorthand and typing, and so I went to work for the Wellcome on the Euston Road in the War Medical Supplies offices."



The picture, donated by Jack Lambert, dates from c1946 and shows the devastation caused by bomb damage in Argyle Street (where the New Swedenborg Church stood) and behind, the section of Cromer Street described by Jessica Mackenzie.

*King's Cross Voices* was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington and received support from King's Cross Central, the British Library Sound Archive and South Camden Community Learning Centre.

## **UP TO NO GOOD EXHIBITION** **5 October – 4 December**

This exhibition will showcase Groundwork North London's 'Up To No Good!' initiative which aimed to foster intergenerational relationships through exploring heritage and the arts. Six projects were run between September 2005 and December 2008, two in each of the Boroughs of Islington, Camden and Westminster. The projects allowed young and older people, who might not otherwise have

met to get to know each other through various activities including photography, claywork and film-making. The participants also had the opportunity to explore local heritage and visit sites of historical interest. To celebrate the end of this exciting three year project, an exhibition giving an overview of the programme as well as displaying some of the collaborative work created, is touring around local venues in the three Boroughs and comes to Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre in October.

## **DONATIONS**



We always welcome donations from the public and particularly in the case of pictures we are usually able to scan the images and return them almost immediately. We have been delighted to scan a number of family pictures which were recently brought in to the Centre by Mr Parkinson-Hare. He was brought up and lived in the King's Cross area for many years. The picture above shows his two sisters standing by the horse and cart in Judd Street in the 1930s.

## **A NEW DAWN**

The Local Studies and Archives Centre is about to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a bang. We have been working hard behind the scenes to develop an on-line catalogue and thanks to the funding for *King's Cross Voices* from the Heritage Lottery Fund we are finally able to make it available to the public. You will soon be able to access our catalogue, and find details of our printed items, maps, illustrations, audio-visual materials, oral history recordings, archives and local history information from the comfort of your own computer screens. We are gradually adding scans of the illustrations to the catalogue and you will also be able to listen

to the oral history recordings. This is a really exciting development for us and should dramatically increase access to the collections. For up-to-date information please check our website [www.camden.gov.uk/localstudies](http://www.camden.gov.uk/localstudies).

## VOLUNTEERS AND MOTORWAY MANUSCRIPTS



We regularly have the help of volunteers and also short-term work placements enabling us to complete projects that would not otherwise be tackled. A big thank-you this month goes to Elizabeth Wells, currently studying for her MA in Archives and Records Management at University College London. As part of their training, budding archives professionals are required to complete a two week placement in the core skill of archival description. During May we asked Elizabeth to catalogue our records of the Hampstead Motorway Action Group, a body formed in 1965 to oppose the GLC's proposals to route a motorway through the middle of Hampstead and across the Heath, a scheme which thankfully was never implemented. The collection was a complex one to list but well within the capabilities of Elizabeth, who has a first class honours degree in history from Durham University. Thanks to her, future researchers now have a comprehensive catalogue to help them access documents of the campaign and to learn about a very interesting and significant episode in Camden's history. The photograph shows a delegation from the Action Group presenting their objections at the Ministry offices. The lady in the back row, third from the right, is of course Peggy Jay, the tireless campaigner for Hampstead, who sadly died last year.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

Over 10,200 people visited the Centre during 2008/09, an increase of more than 16% on the previous year. The art of letter writing has almost vanished. We had nearly 200 letter enquiries but more than four times as many e-mails. The majority of enquiries were answered within the week. Our webpages continue to be popular as we had over 13,535 "hits", an increase of 19% on the previous year.

In 2008 we took part in the National Archives assessment of archive services in England and Wales. Services are given a rating between 1 and 4 stars. We scored highly for access, management and cataloguing but overall we were marked down to 2 stars because of the poor standard of our buildings and environmental control. The assessment gave us plenty of things to think about and hopefully we will be able to take some of their recommendations on board

## BACKTRACKS ONLINE

*Backtracks* is also available on our website. If you would like to be alerted as to when each new e-edition is published, please forward your e-mail address to the Centre.

## ABOUT US

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### Opening hours:

Monday	10am - 7pm
Tuesday	10am - 7pm
Wednesday	Closed
Thursday	10am - 7pm
Friday	10am - 7pm
Saturday	10am - 5pm