

## **HORNSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Our society was founded nearly forty years ago - on 29 April 1971 by, among others, local teachers, a Haringey council records officer, Ian Murray, and Bridget Cherry, General editor of Pevsner's Buildings of England. They felt that there was a need for a society to research and celebrate local history. In due course, they were offered a permanent home in what was then dilapidated public conveniences in Tottenham Lane, owned by the council, but had actually once been the first free primary school in Crouch End! These pioneers, mostly by their own labour and efforts, set about converting it into the meeting-place and shop that we have today, the society's headquarters, the Old Schoolhouse.

Ms Cherry remains a Vice-President, as is a former chair, Peter Barber, Curator of Maps at the British Library, well-known from appearances on television. The present Chair is Keith Fawkes, of the Hampstead bookshop – a direct descendant of *the* Mr Fawkes, whose special day we hope to celebrate once again here next year. The late Joan Schwitzer and Ken Gay are also former officers who were well-known locally. Ken has written a book on Alexandra Palace and was my predecessor on this Committee.

The Society is a registered charity with nearly 500 members and its objects are “the promotion of local history studies, conservation work, and archaeological research within the ancient ecclesiastical and civil parish of Hornsey and the parliamentary constituency of Hornsey as defined at various times, by means of lectures, publications, exhibitions, visits, research, and by such other means as the general committee of the Society shall decide”. That is the starting point of our interest and involvement in the Palace and Park, which are now in the parliamentary constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green. Members get a quarterly newsletter, a yearly Bulletin, outings and lectures. We have a yearly AGM which elects and delegates a General Committee of trustees, which meets monthly. Conservation is a fixed agenda item to which I report on Ally Pally matters. Our Conservation officer, David Frith, is a retired Chief Planning Officer of Haringey council. We work closely with Bruce Castle museum and its officers.

The Society played a key role in the listing of the Palace in 1997. Ken Gay, author of our book *Palace on the Hill*, represented the Society on the original single Alexandra Palace Advisory Committee set up in the early 80's, after the transfer of the charity from the GLC to Haringey. This was a non-statutory council committee and importantly comprised representatives of not just residents but also interest groups like ourselves. It may be that one reason we and others were excluded from the statutory committee set up under the 1985 Act was that some local residents feared Haringey's ambitions for the Palace and Park which sat in their backyard, whereas HHS has always supported, and still supports, its traditional role and tourist potential as a cultural, educational and sports centre, and preservation as historic landmark, for the benefit of all London (not just Haringey or Muswell Hill) – in fact for the whole country – and so the duty and cost of preserving the building should, like any other nationally-important building, be a responsibility of all London and the nation, not cash-strapped local ratepayers. We have, in particular, always stressed the international historical importance of preserving and celebrating the worlds' first TV studios and mast, and the happy accident that they survived the 1980 fire. We also supported campaigns for the Organ and the Theatre. It was a letter from Ken Gay which appeared in the Times in 1990, drawing attention to the plight of the studios, which caught my attention and led to my own involvement in both the Society and Ally Pally. Another member drew to my attention the fact that Ally Pally was meant to be from the outset a Palace for the People, an education and artistic centre for the newly-literate masses by the now forgotten Henry Brougham MP. It was actually he who with Wilberforce got Parliament

to declare slavery illegal, and he also played a key part in setting up free primary schools in Britain – and was a founder of London University.

We have a very active archivist group, which conserves original local documents and publications including many connected with the palace and park. This is available for consultation, by appointment. We have offered help to the General Manager in sorting the historical material still surviving in the Palace. And regularly we publish books on local history, available in local bookshops, and articles in our yearly Bulletin, which often bring to light new research about the building or park. In fact our last Bulletin contained an article about the huge Hangar actually built in the Park for a giant Airship; all members are invited to an illustrated lecture about this to be given by the author on 9<sup>th</sup> February next year. So let that be our motto – onwards and upwards!

Dr Barton & his Airship - Eleri Rowlands. Lectures take place on the second Wednesday of each month at the Union Church Hall, corner of Ferme Park Road and Weston Park, N8. Talks start at 8pm prompt.

Headquarters and shop: Old Schoolhouse, Tottenham Lane/Rokesley Avenue, Hornsey N8. Open Saturdays.

For all info visit Website [www.hornseyhistorical.org.uk](http://www.hornseyhistorical.org.uk). Webmaster: Rachael Macdonald