

# THE BELSIZE SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER  
AUG 2024

*The Belsize Society is a Registered Charity (number 1180842), continuing the work of the Belsize Residents Association.*

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

## Notes from your Chair

Welcome to the August Newsletter of the Belsize Society.

We look forward to seeing you at the Society's summer party, due to be held on 1 September. We are really grateful for the venue and hope for a sunny day.

This Newsletter also advertises the next Society local history walk, led by Averil Nottage.

Averil has also written an article about the Victorians that shaped Belsize, the topic for her walk, and exploring how much of Belsize looks as it does today because of decisions made in Victorian times. On the walk and in her articles, we're introduced to three builders, each favouring different styles. You'll also find out about the Vicar who contributed substantially to the cost of St Peter's Church and preached powerful and passionate sermons there until he was 92. Do book your place now on eventbrite.

Last Newsletter, we described how the Society honoured David Percy, local historian, for his considerable work featuring the area. In this Newsletter, we interview him and he describes both his career and the background to his latest book.

The architectural heritage of the area was celebrated at the Isokon's 90 birthday event. This iconic building is one of only two Grade 1 listed apartment blocks in the country and we have an article about the celebrations as it ends its ninth decade.

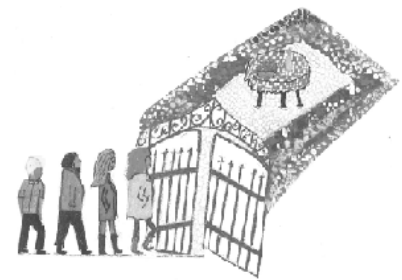
The Newsletter includes some updates about Society business. We are also updating the website and plans for this are described. At the last AGM, we decided to raise membership fees and the next steps on this are outlined. We would really appreciate members taking a few minutes to update their standing orders with the Society for next year.

Enjoy this Newsletter.

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## Belsize Society Annual Summer Party



**3pm, Sunday, 1 September**  
**Garden Flat, 7 Buckland  
Crescent**

**Tea, cakes, strawberries**  
**Members only**

## Victorians who shaped Belsize as we know it today

*Giving us a flavour of BelSoc's autumn guided walk, Averil Nottage writes:*

When you see the stuccoed houses of Belsize Park, or St Peter's Church, or the shops in England's Lane, do you ever wonder who made the decisions that shaped our area?

From the end of the 15th century Belsize House and Park was a country estate for the gentry. But in the early 1850s, when London was edging northwards, the leaseholder decided to pull Belsize House down and replace it with an exclusive estate within the old park walls. The main builder was Daniel Tidey and, because he took the financial risks, he decided what houses to build and where.

When Tidey came to Belsize in 1856 he had already built Italianate houses in Chelsea and North Kensington.

Although by then Classical styles were out of fashion, Tidey was convinced that his large ornate stuccoed houses would still appeal to the wealthy middle classes. He added his trademark curved rear bay windows using the latest glass technology. The

reception rooms were especially impressive with lavish plaster ceiling decorations and massive doors that could accommodate wide crinolines.

Tidey started building in Buckland Crescent and moved on to Belsize Park, Belsize Square and Belsize Terrace. He offered to build a public garden by Buckland Villas but as residents wouldn't agree to maintain it, he decided against creating a public garden in Belsize Square.

When Tidey got approval to build on fields to the south-east of the park, he pulled down the old walls to create Belsize Park Gardens and Lambolle Road. In total he built about 250 classical stuccoed houses.



No respectable estate was complete without a church. St Peter's Church was consecrated in 1859 and its first vicar, the Rev Francis Tremlett, made a significant contribution to its cost. A man of strong convictions, he was a passionate supporter of the Confederates in the American Civil War, believing that slaves and their masters lived in harmony. He strongly opposed vivisection, Socialism, Atheism and all sorts of depravity. He attracted such a large congregation that the church was extended in 1875. He preached for the last time in 1913 aged 92.

The respectable middle classes didn't want their estates sullied by lower class people, so shops and mews were confined to their boundaries. From the mid-1860s Tidey built a pub and a row of shops on Belsize estate land on the north side of England's Lane and Samuel Cuming built shops on Chalcots estate land opposite them. At that time both estates were still quite separate, but as more houses were built, they merged together with the shops as a focal point.

## ... continued

Local shops were important because before refrigeration perishable goods had to be bought daily. Middle-class customers could be very demanding as they expected high levels of service but sometimes used credit to live beyond their means. The first shopkeepers appeared to flourish. By the late 1880s Thomas Gurney Randall, the butcher, was a purveyor of meat to Her Majesty the Queen. Barratts still trade from the butchers' shop that Randall opened, although there is no longer an abattoir in the mews behind. Tesco is in a shop that has been a grocer for over 150 years.

In the late 1860s Daniel Tidey struggled to sell his classical Italianate houses and went bankrupt. Other builders stepped in, the most influential being William Willett and his son. Already established in Kensington, in 1876 Willett started building houses in Belsize Crescent and shops in Belsize Terrace. He donated land to create a village green where the pedestrianised area is now.

From the early 1880s the Willetts built substantial red brick houses in Lyndhurst Gardens, Eton Avenue and Strathray Gardens. With a reputation for comfort and elegance, each house was unique, drawing on an eclectic range of architectural styles. By the late 1890s the Willetts were competing with developers in more spacious suburbs. They responded by building houses that were wider and lower, with horizontal windows, large halls, fine timber staircases, elegant rooms, and separate and well-equipped domestic facilities. They also had front gardens with privet hedges. These houses can be seen in the middle of Eton Avenue and in Elsworthy Road and Wadhurst Gardens.

Two other significant local builders were Thomas Batterbury and W.F Huxley who identified a demand for artists' studios. The Mall Studios off Parkhill Road and Steele's Studios off Haverstock Hill were single story workspaces for artists. At 35-39 Steele's Road they built grand houses with north facing studios for eminent painters. We owe our local artistic heritage to them.

If you are interested in finding out more about Victorians who shaped Belsize, Averil will be leading a local history walk on 29 September at 11.00 am and again at 2.30 pm. Tickets are available from Eventbrite - see box.



### **BOOK YOUR PLACE!**

*To book your place for Averil' Nottage's walk "Victorians who shaped Belsize as we know it today" register on Eventbrite or through contacting us (back page).*

For 11am, 29 Sept: <https://belsize-society-local-walk2024-1.eventbrite.co.uk>

For 2.30pm, on the same day, the link is: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/belsize-society-local-history-walk-tickets-951863408077>





## Belsize Society Interview: David S Percy

The Belsize Society and the Belsize Conservation Area Advisory Committee recently presented an award to David S Percy FRSA ARPS for his contribution to local history at an event to launch his latest book, "Remarkable Homes of NW3". We recently chatted with David.

*BelSoc: We know you grew up in Belsize Park. Do you think the area has changed and what was it like growing up in the area?*

DSP: The area has changed to a certain extent, but in some ways not so much. Many of the buildings in the Italianate part of Belsize appear to be rather the same externally and were originally built for single-family ownership. However, since the war, the vast majority have been divided up into flats.

I would say the key difference is that the streets were virtually empty with hardly any parked cars in the 1940s with the roads appearing much wider than they seem today. Now we have wall-to-wall parked cars almost everywhere as illustrated by the photo of Belsize Avenue from that time.

My family lived in the ground-floor corner flat in Manor Mansions on Belsize Park Gardens. The milkman used to stop outside the block. And I remember helping him offer up the nosebag to his horse just before he went on his rounds of the flats. And I recall walking to St Christopher's school with my nanny to the Village through these virtually empty streets. Until the 1950s Christopher's took boys and girls; now, of course, it's just a girl's school.



Belsize Avenue, archive image

*BelSoc: Can you give us an outline of your career? How did you become involved in documenting the history of Belsize Park?*

DSP: My first film assignment was in the 1960s: it was a documentary filmed in the Middle East that was followed by various other documentaries and fund-raising films that took me all over the world. Some corporate jobs involved travelling to Australia many times. I've been a filmmaker for most of my life, although I've also had other businesses. I used to run the Classic Cinema on Pond Street in the late '60s, where we premiered Easy Rider in Europe. This cinema, The Hampstead Playhouse, was one of the oldest cinemas in the UK and boasted a large fan that brought fresh air in from the Heath. Afternoon tea could be served in the balcony and during matinees.

And then in the 1970s, I had a display mannequin company with our factory at 98-100 Belsize Lane (where Ergotec is now). The spray booth exhaust chimney was located on the back wall of the building adjoining Daleham Mews - something that most certainly would not be allowed today!

Having been a filmmaker for most of my life, I thought that in my semi-retirement I would give something back to my beloved Belsize Park. I decided to document the history, people and architecture of Belsize in a broadcast-quality video production. It was to take three years to complete working full-time. I persuaded our neighbour Fiona Bruce to narrate the Belsize Story documentary - it's free online for anyone to watch on the Belsize Village website. Inevitably, it led to other local history projects and exhibitions etc. My earliest documentary in the area was in 1975 when my film unit was commissioned to document Hampstead Garden Suburb, a production narrated by HGS resident Sir Donald Sinden.



Fitzjohn's Avenue

homeowners, hearing their stories and linking them to the area's history, in some cases to the famous people who lived in their homes or nearby. That led to seeing and photographing for the record what they have done to their homes to make them their own.

Several houses come to mind as being rather unusual. One is on FitzJohn's Avenue and had previously been a 30-person bedsit hostel. The current owners set about gutting the entire house and rebuilding it inside from the basement up. They managed to create a most magnificent interior, with the upper and lower ground floor extensions served by one enormous set of sliding glass windows six and a half metres high! Everything, including the decor and the furniture, was designed by the owner.

The entire book project was both enlightening and rewarding, for which I took over a thousand photographs. These are going to be added to my extensive library of local photographs, and when I finally put down my camera for the last time, I will ensure that the entire collection is lodged in the Camden Local History and Archives Centre.

*BelSoc: How did you go about doing the research for 'Remarkable Homes of NW3'?*

DSP: I was asked by Michael McHale, a fellow resident also born in Belsize, if I would create a book on interesting houses in Belsize. This grew into a much larger project that incorporated remarkable homes throughout NW3. We sent out invitations to a selected number of homes that are still in single-family ownership and received a surprising number of replies. This local history coffee table book features around 100 houses.

The most enjoyable aspect was meeting the



Fitzjohn's Avenue sliding glass window

## ***Monitoring air quality in your own home***

*Camden Council's Clean Air team writes:*

Would you like to know what the air quality is like in your home? We now spend 80-90% of our time indoors and certain indoor environments can be even more polluted than outside. Because of this, it is becoming increasingly important to understand our indoor air quality and to take simple steps to breathe cleaner air indoors. We are offering residents the opportunity to borrow a free indoor air quality monitor for 4 weeks that measures and displays some of the common types of air pollution.

If you are interested, please email [AirQuality@Camden.gov.uk](mailto:AirQuality@Camden.gov.uk) or speak to a member of the team by calling 020 7974 8896.

## A very special birthday

*Committee member Peter Wallace tells us about 90 years of Isokon*

It was party time at the Isokon Flats in Lawn Road on July 9 this year, the precise date back in 1934 when the building was described as "the epicentre of Modernism" and first opened. A jazz band and a 1930s Bentley were on hand to add a touch of the pre-war atmosphere to Isokon's 90th birthday celebrations. Even the original sandwich menu was re-created for the occasion.



The 36 flats, inspired by the Bauhaus architectural school of pre-war Germany, were the first of their kind in the UK, pioneering the idea of minimalist, stylish city living. Isokon was unique, not just for the modern design but also the materials used - reinforced concrete cast in steel shuttering panels.

John Allan, Chairman of the Isokon Gallery Trust, told guests that architect Wells Coates was instructed to ensure the flats lasted until 1950 .... "and look, after 90 years, they are still going strong" !

Notable residents and guests in the thirties and forties included the three Bauhaus masters, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and László Moholy-Nagy, writer Agatha Christie, sculptors Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth as well as a "nest" of communist spies.



Christie often said she invented her characters from what she had observed going on around her at the Isokon.

The block, now owned by Notting Hill Genesis, was restored by Avanti Architects and re-opened in 2004 as a mix of social and privately owned apartments - and are a growing attraction. Around 40,000 people have visited the building over the last 10 years according to Isokon Gallery Director Magnus Englund.

Isokon is the only Grade I listed building in Belsize Park, and one of the only two Grade I listed blocks of flats in England (the other being Highpoint in Highgate).

The Isokon Gallery is open at weekends displaying the building's fascinating history - and it's free entry! Check the website for more details: [www.isokongallery.org](http://www.isokongallery.org).



WISH Plus is a Camden Council referral service covering Warmth, Income, Safety and Health. You can refer yourself or someone else to get access to a range of services. You don't need to know all the services available through WISH Plus to refer, just that the person you are referring might need some support to improve their health and wellbeing.

WISH Plus puts people in touch with the services they need after discussing these with them first. They are not emergency call out services and some services do have eligibility criteria so they are not available to all.

Services include a well and warm home energy efficiency improvements visit; a telephone energy advice service; home security check and free provision and installation of measures such as door locks, spy holes and window restrictors; a free fire safety visit, including installation and the provision of a smoke detector; free provision and installation of stair gates for those with a child aged four and under; and carers' support.

Find out more about what is offered by going to [www.camden.gov.uk/wish-plus#eojt](http://www.camden.gov.uk/wish-plus#eojt) or phoning 020 7974 3012.



### Consultations about planning applications

There are two live local planning applications which are of interest. The Society is conveying its concerns about the exterior changes planned as Leyland Paint Store take over a shop on Haverstock Hill. BelSoc's planning committee member, Alan Selwyn, highlighted to the Ham & High the tackiness of the six illuminated cold white LED signs and vinyl stickers blanking out windows for the area. He has also objected to the Council for the Society.

Development at the 100 Avenue Road site stalled after planning was approved with the site remaining a building site for the past few years. Regal London have outlined their future plans at local events. These informal consultations usually precede a formal planning application.



### BelSoc's online presence: time for a refresh

Websites need refreshing every so often and now is the time to review and update the BelSoc site. It needs to be a more dynamic portal for interacting with users and attracting new members. We need to be able to join, pay our subscriptions, book events, learn about local issues and find information more easily. The membership details need to be held on a secure database linked to the site. The Committee needs an area for their business.



We want to keep the site simple, elegant and gimmick-free and also to use some of the wonderful images from the existing site. We also want to keep costs down and will probably use an open-source platform such as Wordpress with its wide choice of easy-to-use themes and plugins. We have been well-served by the present provider which has considerable experience providing charity sites very economically. They understand our needs and sticking to an existing provider is usually the most efficient way to get what is needed when good relations already exist.

We also need a social media presence and will first set up a Facebook page and look into other options.

Alan Selwyn and Heather Harte have recently joined the committee and are leading this review and are keen to hear members' views and suggestions. Send them to [info@belsize.org.uk](mailto:info@belsize.org.uk).



Did you know you can buy a subsidised composting bin from £5 via Get Composting? Visit [getcomposting.com](http://getcomposting.com).

### BelSoc's annual membership fees

For the 2025 subscription year, the BelSoc annual membership fee will rise from £10 to £20, following the resolution at the AGM. The Society is a not-for-profit and non-political Charitable Incorporated Organisation, led by volunteers, but costs for activities have risen since we last raised fees over a decade ago. Membership fees support all our activities, and you will continue to see the Society engage with the concerns of residents on planning matters and local issues, organise events about the heritage of the Belsize area, and publish the Newsletter and TYCT.

We would be grateful if members that pay by standing orders can adjust these to £20 ahead of next year's payment due next January. Over the coming months, we will be refreshing Society publications, such as the forms to join, alongside updating the website which will enable new and old members to support us. Contact us using [membership@belsize.org.uk](mailto:membership@belsize.org.uk) with any

# Dates for your diary

## Belsize Society

1 Sept, 3pm: Annual Summer Party at Garden Flat, 7 Buckland Crescent. All members welcome.

## Camden Arts Centre, Arkwright Road, NW3

[www.camdenartscentre.org](http://www.camdenartscentre.org)

5 Sep, pm. Garden Nights. Maxine Pennington blends mystical, musical and spiritual tones to experience collective sonic meditations. £8/10.

## St Peter's Church, Belsize Square, NW3

Sunday 22 Sep, 6.30pm. English Baroque Music including pieces by Locke, Purcell, Boyce and Handel. Tickets in advance £15:  
[www.wegotickets.com/event/621207](http://www.wegotickets.com/event/621207).

## Burgh House, New End Square, NW3

Sun, 25 Aug, 2pm. Echoes of the Clarinet: Debussy to Rautavaara. Clarinetist Kristina Newton and Swedish pianist Joel Slott bring a diverse range of classical styles and eras. £13.50/£7.50.

Wed, 18 Sep, 7pm. Creative Sanctuary: Artist Refugees from Nazism in 1930s Hampstead. Join art historian Monica Bohm for an illustrated talk about the artists that took refuge from Nazism in Hampstead, and their fellow artists who welcomed them in. £6/£4.

## Belsize Community Library, Antrim Road

Thursday 19th September, 7.30pm. Finding Nemon by Aurelia Young. The extraordinary life of the outsider who sculpted the famous. Aurelia Young tells the remarkable story of her father's career which brought him close to those who shaped and impacted the 20th century. £5 suggested donation.

Thursday 17th October, 7.30pm. Michelene Wandor: Orfeo's Last Act. Michelene combines imagination, scholarship and musical expertise to bring the magic of Mantua, Florence and Venice to life. £5 suggested donation.

Thursday 21 November, 7.30pm. Pamela Holmes: The Curious Life of Elizabeth Blackwell. £5 suggested donation.

Online monthly, 7.30pm-9pm, first Mondays from 7 Sept, Belsize Book Club. Reading books from around the world. Email: [belsizelibrary@thewinch.org](mailto:belsizelibrary@thewinch.org).

## Contact Us

For membership and general enquiries:  
020 7794 0874,  
[membership@belsize.org.uk](mailto:membership@belsize.org.uk)

Prabhat Vaze (Co-chair)  
07930 406230  
[chair@belsize.org.uk](mailto:chair@belsize.org.uk)

For Newsletter submissions and letters:  
[info@belsize.org.uk](mailto:info@belsize.org.uk). Deadline for next issue is: 20th October 2024

To send posters for noticeboards:  
[haverstockboard@belsize.org.uk](mailto:haverstockboard@belsize.org.uk)  
[villageboard@belsize.org.uk](mailto:villageboard@belsize.org.uk)

To send details for Tradesmen You Can Trust: [TYCT@belsize.org.uk](mailto:TYCT@belsize.org.uk)

For planning matters:  
[planning@belsize.org.uk](mailto:planning@belsize.org.uk)

Interested in keeping up with Belsize news and events? If you wish to receive occasional emails from us with news about Belsize and BelSoc and are not already on our list, please send your email address to [info@belsize.org.uk](mailto:info@belsize.org.uk)

To find out the latest about Camden Planning:  
<https://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/navigationenvironment/planning-and-built-environment/>

Would you like to join our committee and/or help with events, distribution and other tasks? If so, please email [info@belsize.org.uk](mailto:info@belsize.org.uk)

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