

# THE BELSIZE SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

### MAY 2022

*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 May Newsletter of the Belsize Society.

We were able to hold an AGM in March that was face-to-face, and this issue describes some of the discussion. We also returned to Belsize Square Synagogue in May to listen to candidates for the local elections at our hustings and you'll find a report in this Newsletter.

This Newsletter has two articles about Belsize in the 1930s, one about the pioneers of the British Modernist movement. Averil Nottage is due to host a historic walk later in the year drawing on themes in her article. We also have a piece about the 1930s block of flats Howitt Close, based on research Barbara Abraham has undertaken about the building. Built at around the same time as the cutting edge modernist flats of the Isokon building, the article highlights the rich Art Deco architectural pedigree of Webb's building.

There has been some good news for all of us who would like to see a greener Belsize. The Society secured Community Infrastructure Levy funding and this will allow Camden Council's Greener Spaces team to plant trees in the triangular island at the junction of Eton Avenue, Lancaster Grove, Lambolle Place and Eton Garages. The Newsletter also has an update on discussions between the Council and a number of resident bodies about the enforcement of construction policies during development.

Thanks to members for contributing to TYCT, and we are really pleased to include the 2022 edition with the Newsletter.

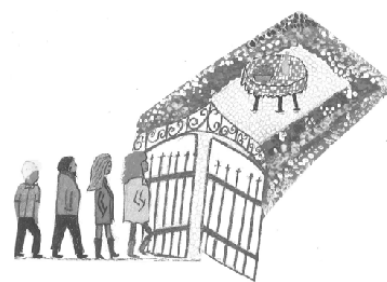
The Newsletter has more dates for diaries than the past couple of years, as Hampstead Theatre and other local venues begin to host a fuller set of events. We also note an initiative inviting locals to have a drink at one of the popular restaurants in Belsize Village.

We are holding the first summer party since emerging from lockdown. Details are in the Newsletter and hope to see you there. Enjoy this Newsletter.

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## Belsize Society Annual Summer Party



**3pm - 4.30pm, Sunday 19 June**  
**Garden Flat, 17 Lambolle Rd,**  
**NW3 4HS**

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

## A NEST OF GENTLE ARTISTS

*Local history expert Averil Nottage writes:*

Tucked away between Parkhill Road and St Dominic's Priory are the Mall Studios. It was here in the 1930s that a "nest of gentle artists" pioneered the British Modernist movement.

In 1927 the sculptor Barbara Hepworth and her husband moved into studio no 7. Barbara had studied at Leeds School of Art and the Royal College with Henry Moore, so in 1929 when Henry, and his new wife Irina, were looking for somewhere to live, Barbara suggested that they rent a studio and flat at 11a Parkhill Road.

In September 1931 Barbara Hepworth fell in love with artist Ben Nicholson whilst on holiday with the Moores and other friends. Barbara returned to London to ask her husband for a divorce. Ben announced to his wife that he was leaving her and their three children, although he continued to visit them frequently. Soon after, Ben moved into the Mall Studios with Barbara.

The 1930s were particularly productive for all three artists. Hepworth's and Moore's work became increasingly abstract. In 1931 Hepworth first pierced a hole in a sculpture and after that, revealing the interior space became a central motif for them both. Moore later suggested that the hole "can itself have as much shape-meaning as a solid mass".

In 1932 Ben Nicholson's wife moved with the children to Paris and whilst visiting them, Ben met Braque, Brancusi, Picasso and Mondrian. Under their influences he developed his distinctive white wooden reliefs on different planes.

In the early 1930s Herbert Read, a well-established art writer and critic, became a strong exponent of Moore's and Hepworth's work. After leaving his family and job in Edinburgh he settled, with his new partner "Ludo", at 3 Mall Studios in 1934. Herbert and Ludo enjoyed hosting parties and became the social glue of the Modernist movement by bringing together people of different ages and nationalities. Ben Nicholson later said that no-one who hadn't lived in Mall Studios could understand the excitement of the new ideas generated there. Herbert Read provided a public voice for the artists as they rejected figurative art and negotiated around Surrealism and abstract-constructivism to shape British Modernism.

The discussions were enriched by the arrival of eminent European refugees. Walter Gropius, the architect who set up the Bauhaus School in Germany, fled to England with his wife in 1934. They were invited to live in the new cutting-edge Modernist flats in Lawn Road, (now known as Isokon), around the corner from the Mall Studios. Other Bauhaus teachers, including architect Marcel Breuer and the Hungarian artist Laslo Moholy-Nagy



*Pierced Form Barbara Hepworth 1932*

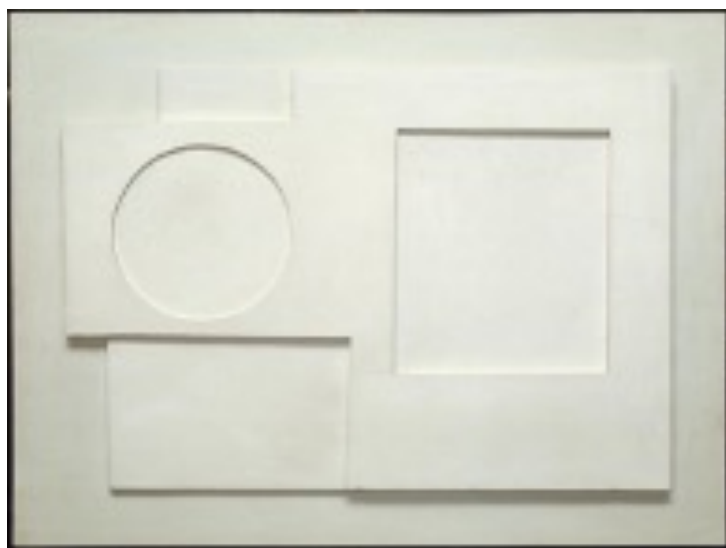
## ...continued

were also given refuge there and became frequent visitors to the Reads' soirees. It was hoped to establish a British Bauhaus, but it never happened. When Piet Mondrian arrived from Paris in 1938, Ben Nicholson found him a room in Parkhill Road overlooking the Mall Studios. He had his walls painted white and added patches of primary colours, reminiscent of his grid paintings. The British Modernists saw his work as the logical conclusion of abstract art.

Herbert Read believed the foreign artists came to this area because the way had been prepared for them. Hepworth said that they made England seem suddenly "alive and rich". For a few years it seemed that London was becoming the international centre of Modernist art, but with the threat of war the "nest of gentle artists" dispersed. The British artists moved out of London whilst the



*Composition Henry Moore 1934*



*Ben Nicholson Relief 1934*

refugees travelled on to the States, which later became the Modernist art centre. Read said: "Such a feeling of unanimity was never to exist again after the war, but English art had come of age. Within the next decade it was to become, what it had not been for more than a century, an art of international significance."

**Averil will lead our autumn walk on "Artists, Refugees and Spies" which will include more about the artists living around Parkhill Road in the 1930s. An article about local spies will appear in the August edition of the newsletter.**

## **Community Unity Drinks**

Kire Estate Agents believe there are many benefits from meeting neighbours to make friends with adults and children alike. This isn't always easy so Kire have joined forces with Calici Restaurant in Belsize Village to have monthly get-togethers. This will be on the first Wednesday of each month from 19.30 in Calici's bar area, with 20% off drinks and any food ordered on the night. Local residents can apply at <https://www.kire.life/events/community-unity-drinks>.



## Howitt Close - a hidden history in Belsize Park

*Committee member Barbara Abraham has been researching the history of a Belsize building too often taken for granted:*

Howitt Close is a mansion block, in Art Deco style, that has nestled comfortably and rather unassumingly at the curved southern end of Howitt Road for almost a century. Last autumn a most unwelcome planning application to add a fourth storey and mansard roof brought it into the limelight. The Belsize Conservation Area Statement of 2003 mentions Howitt Close as a building making a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the conservation area but little other information about the flats was readily available.

Establishing its heritage was important in opposing the planning application and so began a rather frantic search for historical information, which brought to light both Howitt Close's significant architect and some interesting comparisons and contrasts with the Isokon Building.

A careful look at Howitt Close reveals that it was designed with considerable architectural skill to suit its specific location. The L-

shaped block of flats was evidently intended to make optimal use of the available space, but without dominating its prominent situation at the junction of Howitt Road and Glenilla Road. Aesthetically it was designed to blend with the earlier Edwardian terraced housing in the neighbourhood, whilst proclaiming its era of construction through its overall form and Art Deco flourishes. The building comprises two red brick storeys topped with a white roughcast one, with both the red brick and white roughcast mirroring the materials of the Edwardian houses across the street. The pale storey



above two darker brick storeys appears to diminish the height of the block. "Setbacks" and tripartite main windows are used to divide it visually into vertical sections that approximate to the width of the houses in the vicinity so that, from afar, the mansion block can be mistaken for a terrace of houses.

A day spent in London Metropolitan Archives yielded some background information but not the date of construction of Howitt Close. But a visit to Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre proved more fruitful as one of the archivists unearthed a "Notice of new buildings, drainage works, and apparatus in connection therewith", filed with the Borough of Hampstead in October 1932. The notice was signed by Henry F Webb & Ash, an architectural partnership that also owned the site.

Subsequent research established that the same partnership was responsible for the 1932 Ambassador Cinema at Hendon Central, and that Henry Frederick Webb (1879-1953) was the architect behind other significant north London buildings. He went on to design Elm Park Court, Pinner, constructed in 1936 and now Grade II listed. Elm Park Court is considered one of the icons of the modernism characteristic of 1930s "Metroland", a form of modernism that owes more to Art Deco than to the later "brutalist" strand of modernism. Despite Elm Park Court's very distinctive character, its Art Deco heritage is apparent and the development has a number of features reminiscent of Howitt Close.

Howitt Close was built 1932-1934 and the General Rate book for Belsize Ward shows that its 46 flats were fully tenanted at April 1934. Its construction dates between 1932 and 1934 mean that it was contemporaneous with the Grade I listed Isokon flats on Lawn Road. The Isokon design was developed 1929-1932 and the building was officially opened in July 1934, shortly after Howitt Close was first occupied. Volumes have been written about the Isokon flats: a project “to design an apartment building and its interior based on the principle of affordable, communal and well-designed inner-city living... aimed at intellectual, working middle class people” (<https://www.ignant.com/2016/04/04/the-secret-history-of-londons-isokon-building>). The Howitt Close flats were also intended to provide compact living spaces for the middle classes. The original plans for the building were titled “Proposed Block of Small Type Flats,” and it had a restaurant from the very beginning on the lower ground floor, whereas the famous Isobar restaurant in the Isokon building was not opened until 1937, when the block’s communal kitchen was converted into a restaurant. The impetus behind Howitt Close was similar to that of the Isokon building and, with its contrasting architectural style, it provides context for the modernist Isokon flats. Without good comparable examples like Howitt Close the significance of the Isokon flats cannot be fully understood.

In contrast to the well-publicised and dramatic history of the Isokon Building with its celebrity tenants - “Very few pre 1945 tenants do not have a Wikipedia entry” - Howitt Close has had a quiet history, and remarkably little has been written about it. It is understood that it was used as residential accommodation for civil servants at some point and further research may reveal an interesting story of this early example of inner city, partly communal living for the middle classes. Whilst the Isokon Building fell into an appalling state of disrepair and required total refurbishment, Howitt Close has remained in a reasonable state of repair over the past 90 years, partly because it lacks some of the structural design faults that contributed to the Isokon’s deterioration.

It is fair to say that Howitt Close, as a pleasing presence in its location, has been taken for granted over the best part of a century, at least until the threat to its architectural integrity posed by the current planning proposal. It is surely only a matter of time before this building becomes highly valued and rightly appreciated for its distinctive architecture and well-preserved authenticity, and achieves listed status - unless the proposed development succeeds in violating the block before then.

And what of the planning application? The development proposal generated over 100 objections, including from The Belsize Society, Belsize Conservation Area Advisory Committee (BCAAC) and the Twentieth Century Society, and no expressions of support. As at April 2022 we still await a decision from Camden Planning Committee.

Note: the author continues researching the history of Howitt Close and welcomes information/reminiscences about the building and its occupants. She can be contacted via [info@belsize.org.uk](mailto:info@belsize.org.uk).

### ***Plant a Tree for the Queen’s Jubilee - Update***

*We are happy to be able to report progress with our tree planting project on the triangular island at the junction of Eton Avenue, Lancaster Grove, Lambolle Place and Eton Garages.*

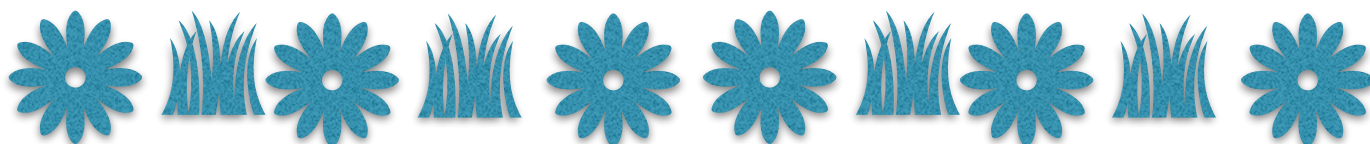
*With help and support from our three Belsize Ward Councillors, we submitted an application in March for Local CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funding to cover all the preparatory work and the tree planting. The application has been accepted and we understand that the project should be fully covered by CIL funds.*

*The work will be carried out or commissioned by Camden Council’s Green Space Team and work is expected to take place on the site this summer so as to be ready for the next tree-planting season, which starts in October.*

## BelSoc local election hustings

Belsize Square Synagogue was once again the venue for the BelSoc local election hustings, which took place on Sunday 1 May. Candidates from the three main parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats) shared a stage to answer pre-circulated questions from members. The Greens were invited but did not attend.

Issues ranged from housing, the encouragement of independent shops, traffic, trees, the future of 100 Avenue Road, the merits of the Belsize Village Stretery and the planned redevelopment of the area now occupied by the O2 Centre. Following the election, Belsize ward returned three Liberal Democrat councillors. If you want to know who was successful in your ward, go to [www.camden.gov.uk/local-council-elections-5-may-2022-results](http://www.camden.gov.uk/local-council-elections-5-may-2022-results). The Belsize Society looks forward to working with all councillors in the Belsize area.



## BelSoc Annual General Meeting

*This year's AGM was held at Belsize Square Synagogue on Sunday 6 March, with about 50 members attending.*

The Chair reported on a year that - while affected by the restrictions due to Covid - did allow for more activities. He highlighted the successful historic walk, an event for the film Moll King's Belsize Houses and a well-attended carol singing event.

Discussion at the AGM focussed on whether Belsize should develop a neighbourhood plan, a request for follow-up on the pollution monitoring exercise and how the Society would be re-engaging with community services such as policing now that we were emerging out of lockdown. Attendees also mentioned some live planning applications, such as development of the O2 Centre.

The Society's finances remain healthy. A new committee was agreed (see box). Michael Jampel and Barbara Abraham will serve as Trustees for the three years, with the other Trustees continuing for at least another year.

The Chair outlined some plans for 2022/23. This Newsletter includes an update on the Queen's Green Canopy and reports on the BelSoc local election hustings. In the rest of the year, the Society will organise a full roster of events, such as its summer party and a historic walk. The meeting ended with tea and cakes kindly prepared by volunteers.

### **BelSoc Trustees and Committee members, 2022/23**

Prabhat Vaze (Chair, Trustee)

Artur Carulla (Planning)

Sarah Courtin (Secretary)

Tom Symes (Planning)

Neil Harris (Treasurer, Trustee)

Anne Stevens (Membership Secretary, Trustee)

David Thomas (Local Services)

Michael Jampel (Trustee only)

Sanya Polescuk



## What's coming up at Hampstead Theatre?

### Main Stage until 4 June - The Breach

Love has no limits for the Diggs siblings: there's nothing that 17-year-old Jude won't do to keep her younger brother Acton safe. Growing up in the turbulence of 1970s America, Jude works nights and weekends to pay the bills, just so that they can stay together and with their mother. But when Acton's troublesome pals form a club in their basement, a foolish game threatens to upend Jude's plans, and derail their lives forever. How far will Jude go to protect her brother? And who will pay the eventual price of her doing so?

As trust and loyalty are put on the line, hindsight proves devastating in Naomi Wallace's absorbing drama *The Breach*, directed by Sarah Frankcom.

*Coming soon...*

### The Fellowship: 17 June - 23 July

The world premiere of Roy Williams' *The Fellowship*, directed by Paulette Randall, is, by turns, an electrifying, hilarious, gripping tale set in modern Britain.

Children of the Windrush generation, sisters Dawn and Marcia Adams grew up in 1980s London and were activists on the front line against the multiple injustices of that time. Decades on, they find they have little in common beyond family...

### *Tradesman You Can Trust*

We were delighted that this year, your contributions were sufficient to give us a marginal increase in entries to 165 and that was from fewer contributors. Some of you were marvellously resourceful, sending us two forms full of commendations. We, and presumably other members, are very appreciative. Also, there were fewer deletions than usual so gradually, we're creeping back to pre-pandemic list levels of around 180 tradesmen.

Interestingly, two of the largest categories, builders and plumbers, and also electricians, have maintained their number of entries over the years, but decorators, who used to be up with the top two, has just half the entries it had seven years ago.

Just a reminder that your contributions are very welcome all through the year and can be sent by email to [TYCT@belsize.org.uk](mailto:TYCT@belsize.org.uk), be it on the form in the centre of the booklet or 'Freehand'. Please give full details for the entry (website addresses are very useful) as well as whether you prefer your phone number or email to be used by other members to contact you for more information.

### *Camden enforcement: Residents meet with Council*

BelSoc, Camden Resident Association Action Committee, the Heath and Hampstead Society, and Hampstead and RedFrog Neighbourhood Forums met with Camden Councillors and officers about enforcement in construction projects.

We have been in discussions with the enforcement teams about whether they may routinely inspect sites. This would parallel the current complaints driven enforcement. This approach is seen in other Boroughs, where systematic inspections can encourage best practice and identify issues without the need for neighbours to complain.

Camden used the meeting to present some piloting. An officer to visit sites and put in place the checklists and guidance to inspect has been recruited. It is a start: they are finding issues and the construction businesses are then resolving them. The officer is working through all significant developments in the Borough.

Further progress updates with the Council are planned.

# Dates for your diary

## Belsize Society

19 June, 3pm: Annual Summer Party at Garden Flat, 17 Lambolle Road. All members welcome.

## Camden Arts Centre, Arkwright Road, NW3

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

13 May - 26 June. Jesse Darling - Enclosures. Darling works across installation, film, text, sound and performance. Free timed ticket.

29 April - 18 Sept. Lily van der Stokker - Thank You Darling. Brings together works made by one of the Netherlands' most celebrated contemporary artists between 1989 and 2021. Free timed ticket.

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

Wednesday, 25 May, 7pm. Fundraising concert for Ukraine. Whittington Festival Players perform Mozart, and Haydn. £18 for UNICEF and DEC. Book online: <https://thelittleboxoffice.com/whittingtonmusicfestival/event/view/158699>

Sunday 29 May, 6.30pm. Belsize Baroque with the Amici e Voci choir: Bach, The Ascension. Tickets in advance £15: [www.wegotickets.com/event/539436](http://www.wegotickets.com/event/539436).

## Burgh House, New End Square, NW3

Wednesday, 15 May, 6.30pm. Hunter Davies, The Heath. £8, online.

25 May, 6.30pm. Lara Feign and Caroline Maclean in conversation. Maclean discusses her new book about Hampstead's modernists, Circles and Squares. Tickets £10 through Eventbrite.

## Belsize Community Library, Antrim Road

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).

## Keats House, 10 Keats Grove, NW3 2RR

2022 Hampstead Summer Festival in the garden.

Saturday, 2 July, 1pm and 5pm. The Taming of the Shrew by William Shakespeare, designed for outdoors. Tickets £25 with concessions, tickets from eventbrite.

Sunday, 3 July, all day. Hampstead Summer Festival Art Fair, in association with the Hampstead School of Art, free.

# Contact Us

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Sarah Courtin (Secretary)

[secretary@belsize.org.uk](mailto:secretary@belsize.org.uk)

For Newsletter submissions and letters:

[info@belsize.org.uk](mailto:info@belsize.org.uk). Deadline for next issue is: **16th July 2022**

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: [info@belsize.org.uk](mailto:info@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)