

NNA NEWS

SUMMER 2007



www.netherhallneighbourhoodassociation.org.uk

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Keeping Soho at bay

THERE HAS been a nasty spate of licensing applications for late opening up and down Finchley Road this spring and summer – some until 4.30am at weekends. The NNA has vigorously tried to oppose the new hours, with varying results, in an attempt to retain the residential character of the area and have less late-night disturbance, bottle-smashing, pubgoers' cars and litter.

The NNA sent in letters protesting against 4.30am weekend opening of The Establishment nightclub in Swiss Cottage, and attended a hearing at Camden Council, but was unsuccessful in opposing a 3.30am licence six days a week for Secrets, 'the oldest lapdancing club in London', on Finchley Road. Its near neighbour, the 3 One 7 Bar by the railway station, also put in for 2.30am at weekends. There will inevitably be more.

Thanks to the hard work of Joan Wilson of the Finchley Road Community Forum, the Subway sandwich shop was refused a 3am opening, and cut back to 2am on Saturday, 1am on Friday and midnight during the week. She also successfully opposed late opening for the Juice Pool Bar, and Joshi's 24-hour supermarket was refused a 24-hour alcohol licence. Despite her opposition to extended hours for Wetherspoons in the O2 Centre, however, they now have an alcohol licence from 9am to after midnight at weekends.

The more personal letters we can send the council, the better – the thickness of the complaints file seems to have some effect. But what really works is turning up at the licensing panel and complaining about noise and violence, and taking photographs. Otherwise, we'll increasingly be in for Soho-style hours and disturbance.

If you can help at all in these ways, please contact me at muirka@gmail.com
Kate Muir

Royalty comes to Maresfield as Danish Y celebrates centenary



THE RED carpet – and the sun – came out at 43 Maresfield Gardens on 3rd June when Princess Benedikte, sister to the Queen of Denmark, came over specially to celebrate the centenary of London's Danish YWCA, of which she is patron.

She also took the opportunity to confer the Danish equivalent of a knighthood on the house director Palle Pedersen and chairman Karen Maibom.

Among the 250 guests, other notable visitors for the occasion included the

Danish Ambassador, the Bishop of Copenhagen and six guards from Copenhagen's famous Tivoli Gardens.

The day began with an 11am service in the Danish Church in Regent's Park, after which the royal party and guests repaired to Maresfield where the Tivoli band welcomed them. There followed speeches, wine and canapés in the garden and more music. The Princess stayed until 5pm, after which there was a buffet supper. *See full story, page 6*

At last, parents' parking permits to go – almost!

PARKING permits for parents delivering and collecting children from schools in the area will continue to be phased out, following a six months review of the former Labour administration's 2002 policy, and Camden Council, now under its Conservative Lib-Dem coalition, aims to complete the withdrawal of surplus permits by September 2008. Each of the 37 schools with plans showing steps

being taken to promote car-free modes of travel will receive an average of about 25 permits this September and 13 next September for parents with extenuating circumstances and emergencies.

But, *NNA Traffic and Parking representative Mayer Hillman* told *NNA News*, this number is so low as to be almost certain to ease traffic congestion on school days.

"Under much pressure from residents' groups," Mayer added, "Camden is also going to ensure strict enforcement of the policy."

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NNA NEWS[©] welcomes news stories, announcements of events and ideas for articles. We will also accept a small amount of paid advertising. Please contact Susanne Lawrence, 47b Netherhall Gardens NW3 5RJ. Tel: 020 7435 4140 susanne.lawrence@ppltd.co.uk

Helen Annis

HELEN ANNIS, an inaugural and longstanding member of the NNA, died very suddenly just before Christmas. Helen's lively, vociferous, open and unbounded approach to all matters in and around the neighbourhood will be sadly missed.

A respected psychiatrist at the Royal Free, she was a member of the Royal Free Music Society. Although Jewish, she would sing with gusto the choir's Christian programme – masses and requiems. In her memory the choir sang a Jewish lament for the dead at their last performance. It was a lovely, moving piece in honour of a greatly missed member of the choir.

Helen is survived by her faithful partner Monty and her two sons David and Ethan.

AGM and new officers

THE NNA's 24th annual general meeting was held on 13th March at the Anna Freud Centre in Maresfield Gardens. Speakers included Sergeant Philip Hewetson of the Metropolitan Police on crime in the neighbourhood and *Times* journalist and NNA member Ben Macintyre on his bestselling book *Agent Zigzag*.

Stuart Houghton and Lilly Sahni were re-elected Chair and Hon Treasurer respectively. Pat Whitehouse, founder of the NNA and acting Hon Secretary, was not willing to stand again but the position has since been filled by Gilda Riccio and Ruth Stone as a 'job-share'. Pat and husband Ronnie were awarded honorary membership of the NNA.

NB Next year will be the association's 'Silver Jubilee'. Watch website for dates of events including 25th AGM.

Don't bin it!

THE NEW bin collection schedule for the NNA area - one ordinary and two re-cycling per week (instead of two ordinary and one re-cycling) – is only a pilot scheme. But, says NNA chair Stuart Houghton, it will be rolled out across the whole of Camden if it is deemed to be a popular success in our area. "So, if you have any views on this matter, don't keep them to yourself. Let Camden know!"

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RESTAURANT REVIEW

atma

106c Finchley Road, NW3

Tel. 020 7431 9487

STEVE and I have twice visited atma, our relatively new neighbourhood restaurant at the bottom of Trinity Walk, and have had excellent meals on both occasions. Owned by Ravi Binu, an award-winning chef who learnt to cook in his mother's kitchen, atma specialises in food from Southern India.

But this is no ordinary South Indian restaurant. Binu combines unusual ingredients and delicate spices, with each dish appearing artistically on the plate, served with an enticing accompaniment of grains and vegetables – including aubergine crush, mushroom risotto and stir-fry beetroot with coconut.

On our first visit we indulged in the tasting menu, 'a voyage through atma's ark' (£24.50 for 6 courses), which started with a crispy baby potato salad with mint, sweet yoghurt and tamarind chutney, and ended with the most delicious home-made rose petal ice cream and orange and rice pudding. The food was delicately balanced and served in just the right sized portions. The head-waiter was on hand throughout the evening to explain the different dishes and to talk enthusiastically about the food.

Atma has recently been discovered by Fay Maschler, who wrote in the *Evening Standard* that 'It is up-market Indian but with reasonable prices, a well considered wine list and one of the nicest most gentle head-waiters in town. I'm really quite passionate about it.'

Do book a table and go soon. You won't be disappointed.

Linda Williams

Glugging with Gluck

Cork or screwcap? Sommelier or sommelière? Maresfield Gardens' resident wine buff Malcolm Gluck is unequivocal on both points

Photo: Ben Wellington

In spite of WSET (Wine and Spirit Education Trust) courses and MW (Masters of Wine) exams for those set on a professional career in the wine industry, mountebanks abound, self-proclaimed experts who lack expertise cower behind every corkscrew and we are plagued by ignoramuses purporting to be wine waiters every time we pay for lunch and dinner.

Why is this? I shall reveal the precise scientific basis for there being so many clods involved in writing about, tasting, selling, marketing, publicising and, horror of horrors, even making wine before I finish, but first let us go to a tasting of dessert wines at Le Gavroche.

It is run by a well-known wine bore and author. During the lunch which follows I ask a waiter to replace a half of Chateau Climens, a sweet white Bordeaux, because it is faulty. The well-known wine bore appropriates the bottle and proclaims its earthy undertonality to be a feature of the estate's wines. But that earthy undertone is cork taint. It is, to use jargon, corked. Why was this well-known wine bore so ill-equipped to analyse wine? All will be revealed.

At an Alsatian tasting I came upon a wine which was vividly corked; when I asked the man who had poured it, brother

'We are plagued by ignoramuses purporting to be wine waiters'

of the wine maker, if I could taste the same wine from another bottle, my glass was seized and the cork taint I accused it of ascribed to minerals. What could possibly be wrong with this individual that he could get it so wrong? We shall find out in a moment.

At an international wine fair I was invited to taste a rioja by its UK marketing manager. The bottle was two thirds empty and upon insertion of nose in a glass it was obvious it was badly corked. The marketing manager said none of the dozen or so other visitors who had tasted it had uttered anything but nice words. The wine maker was called over. He seemed to think it might



▲ Malcolm in Maresfield garden

be the wood when I proclaimed it faulty. I left the stand before my sides split.

At a branch of Sainsbury's several years ago I was doing a book signing alongside a tasting of Chilean reds. When another national newspaper journalist turned up, we agreed it would be fun to open a bottle of Domaine Leroy Richebourg, a red burgundy, to compare. In those days, certain Sainsbury branches boasted temperature-controlled cabinets for posh wines. The Richebourg was priced, a snip really, at £199.

When the cork was pulled, the wine was clearly oxidised, that is, spoiled by excessive aeration due to a faulty cork. It was a shadow of the wine it was made to be. I stuck to my Chilean merlot but not the other journalist. He waxed lyrical about the Richebourg.

I could offer you four dozen similar stories. At one Michelin-starred restaurant in Charlotte Street - I'll spare you the gruesome details - lawyers got involved as a result of my refusal to accept faulty wine. At the Sugar Club (when it was newly opened and not where it is now), three Kiwi wines on three separate visits were all corked and each time I had to order second bottles and have a side-by-side tasting in order to convince the management (male) that the first bottle was dodgy. Raymond Blanc once refused to replace a clearly faulty wine I ordered at Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons on the grounds that it was supposed to taste like that!

Now let us visit a restaurant in Leeds, Le Racasse (no longer there, alas). By the time my companion and I had sent back the third half-bottle of Chateau d'Yquem the sommelière was worried. She called a halt and said we were right,

the wines were faulty; she was going to send the whole batch back to the wine merchant.

What is so different about my last example? Yes, that's right. The wine waiter was a woman.

Men are the problem. Most men treat wines as if they were their own children. Women treat wine on the evidence of their senses. They neither equivocate, nor sentimentalise. They are also simply better-equipped tasters than men. We poor men really have to work at it, but most women are born with the gift of smell and taste.

Taste bud test

Worse, and this where we discover the crux of the problem, not everyone has the same genetic capacity to analyse smell and taste. Research published in 1997 by Dr Linda Bartoshuk at Yale University is fundamental.

Human beings are divided into three groups, according to how many taste buds they have per square centimetre on the tongue and in the mouth. Super-tasters have an average of 425, medium-tasters 184 and non-tasters have 96. How many of the people in the latter two categories are, perhaps, working in wine? Writing about it? Flogging the stuff? Making it?

I believe that at least one third of my *Guardian* readers, when I was that newspaper's wine correspondent, had fewer than 200 taste buds per square centimetre. This does not mean they could not enjoy wine. But it does mean they were blind and dumb to its subtler nuances and many of its faults caused by corks.

This does not legitimise them as wine drinkers but it surely makes them unfit for employment as wine waiters. And wine waiters, let us stress the gender, can give us headaches greater than any wine they might serve. Small wonder I campaign to have all wines screwcapped. *Le tire-bouchon est mort! Vive le screwcap!* NNA

Malcolm Gluck was wine correspondent and columnist for The Guardian for 16 years and now runs the Superplonk.com website

The joys of Netherworld

*For the second in our series on noteworthy local residents
Susanne Lawrence talks to actor and director Richard Wilson*



▲ Sir Anthony Sher's pen and ink drawing of Richard when the latter was directing him in 'Changing Step' in June 1989. The drawing featured in Sher's 'Cast of Characters' exhibition at the London Jewish Cultural Centre in Golders Green earlier this year.

*'They say I might as well face the truth
That I am just too long in the tooth
So I'm an OAP and weak-kneed
But I have not yet quite gone to seed
I may be over the hill now I've retired
Fading away but I've not yet expired
Clapped out, run down, too old to save
One Foot in the Grave'*

OK, let's get the catchphrase out of the way quickly – I almost didn't believe it when actor/director Richard Wilson finally turned up at my front door, ready to talk to *NNA News* about what he calls "the joys of Netherworld". I'd been 'chasing' him since February but last year's hit play at the Bush 'Whipping It Up' had just transferred to the West End, and the combination of natural media interest and promotional obligations meant he was feeling a bit 'interviewed out' by then.

Actually, I had in mind to approach him when I first conceived this column early last year but, despite the fact that he lives just four doors up from me, it took some sleuthing to locate him – we share a (very discreet) window cleaner!

Richard first came to live in London nearly 50 years ago – a "ghastly" residential club in Belsize Park Gardens which he found through the *New Statesman* – and he's lived in the Belsize/Hampstead area ever since. There was a bedsit in Lyncroft Gardens, just the other side of Finchley Road, then a bigger one across the landing and then his first proper flat in Tudor Close off Belsize Avenue, just behind the Town Hall.

The garden flat he's lived in for the last 16 years now is near the top end of Netherhall. He finds it calm, pretty, likes the height ("no risk of flooding here") and the light. He can walk to Hampstead Theatre, where he has directed a few times, uses the Heath, local shops and the odd restaurant (I saw his signed photo on the wall at Villa Bianca the other day, so it can be no secret that that's still his favourite). We commiserate over the paucity of really good restaurants in the area, albeit the inability to park, together with high rents, makes the situation somewhat understandable.

Apart from the "nightmare" of being trapped in a taxi in Maresfield because of the traffic at school-run times, he says he has never had any desire to leave.

Of course, it's a long way from Greenock where he was born Iain Carmichael Wilson in July 1936 (the name change was to avoid confusion

with another actor called Ian Wilson). His father was head clerk at one of the Clyde shipyards and Richard recalls what a treat it was to watch the huge vessels being launched down on to the river.

There was no history of professional showbiz in the family, albeit his father played the trumpet in his youth and he describes his mother as "quite theatrical with a great sense of humour". One cousin, Roy, went to Oxford and joined the Oxford University Dramatic Society, but never actually made acting his career.

It was at school where Richard really got the bug – one of his teachers, Miss McLeary, was very keen on drama. The school gym had a stage and, after his 11-plus, he was allowed to put the chairs out for performances, go home for his tea and come back to watch the show and put the chairs away again.

Pantaloons

According to the 'Official Richard Wilson Archive', his acting debut was at Sunday school where he played the king in 'The Princess and the Pea', wearing pantaloons made of paper stuffed inside a pair of girl's black gym knickers.

However his ambition was somewhat thwarted by a High School drama teacher who criticised his speaking voice, so he opted to train as a hospital lab technician when he left school at 17. After two years he moved to another hospital and this job gave him some spare time for amateur dramatics. When he was called up for National Service, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, and the education officer there persuaded him to join a theatre group. He was posted to Singapore for a spell, but then returned to Greenock and the hospital job.

In fact he claims he was as keen on cinema as on the theatre and soon headed for London, as much as anything so that he could indulge his taste for foreign films. He found it pretty scary here, not knowing anyone, but before long he was joined by a friend and soon settled down.

He enrolled in acting classes at the City Lit, while working as a lab technician at Paddington General

Hospital, and then a couple of years later, when a girl at a party told him he might qualify for a London County Council grant to train properly, he applied to and was accepted at RADA.

There followed what a BBC website strangely describes as “a long and unspectacular career as a TV comedy actor, with hundreds of bit-part and supporting roles, before - in his mid 50s, and probably much to his own surprise - being elevated to superstardom” – as, of course, Victor Meldrew in the long-running (six series) TV sitcom ‘One Foot in the Grave’.

But the implication that he went from nonentity to ‘national treasure’ almost overnight is to understate a very varied and creditable quarter century between Rada and Meldrew – by no means just TV (‘Only When I Laugh’ with James Bolam and Peter Bowles, 1979-82, and John Byrne’s wonderful ‘Tutti Frutti’ – with Robbie Coltrane, 1987, *inter alia*) but cinema (Turton in ‘A Passage to India’ in 1984 and ‘A Dry White Season’ five years later) and theatre, directing as well as acting – and teaching.

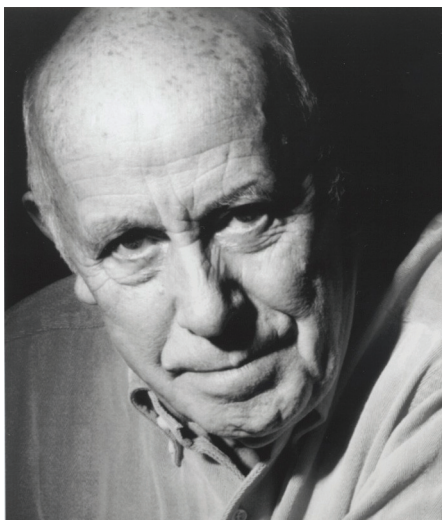
His first acting job, predictably for a Scottish lad, was in Dr Finlay’s Casebook, and subsequently he appeared in repertory with Glasgow Citizens, the Traverse and Edinburgh’s Royal Lyceum Theatre, before moving on to the Stables Theatre in Manchester where he started directing - for the stage and TV.

More recently he has appeared (‘What the Butler Saw’) and directed (‘Primo’) at the National Theatre and been an associate director of the Royal Court.

He gave a masterclass recently at the Theatre Royal Haymarket but he started ‘teaching’ many years ago, taking improvisation workshops way back at the Stables Theatre and giving acting classes at Glasgow University, where he helped to fund a new drama building and is now a Visiting Professor.

In 1994 he received an OBE for services to drama as director and actor, in 1995 he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters by Glasgow Caledonian University and in 1996 he was elected Rector of the University of Glasgow for a three-year period.

When he met me he had just finished editing the film version of ‘Primo’, starring Sir Anthony Sher as the brilliant writer, chemist and holocaust survivor Primo Levi. After the short run at the National, Richard and Tony took the play to Cape Town and then Hampstead Theatre and ultimately Broadway. The film was made for HBO, which should



guarantee a US, if not worldwide, audience, and he hopes it will get a BBC2 release here, maybe in October.

But he finds the process of film editing, the post-production work, both time-consuming and rather tedious. “You have to be there all the time, checking the sound effects, getting extra bits of music composed, ensuring the technicians don’t overdo things.” I could hear the tension in his voice when I phoned him for our interview during this period.

What he does enjoy is directing new writing, although ‘Whipping It Up’ has put paid to that for the first time in ages.

He was just about to appear in his hundredth performance when we met, the longest he’s been in anything, and a tour was being planned for this autumn. “It shouldn’t be too bad,” he says – seven weeks and three weeks with two weeks off in between; and he can get home reasonably easily from at least three of the places. “It’s nice to take new work out to the provinces. You get better audiences, bigger houses. In London people tend to be wary of new plays.”

In fact, the New Ambassadors, to which the play transferred, was a 400-seater and, despite brilliant reviews and the Bush run having been completely sold out, the theatre was rarely full. It was a real learning curve, he said, because the audiences were so different. On Mondays and Tuesdays they were really “limp”; and as for the matinees... One day the first act lasted 47 minutes in the afternoon and 50 minutes in the evening, the three minutes difference being accounted for purely by laughter!

He finds long runs fairly taxing – “you have to get to the theatre in a positive sparky state,” he says, “and that’s a bit much when you’re doing eight shows a week.” It’s the midweek matinee that for him is the real killer. Between performances on a Wednesday, he would

go off to Groucho’s for an hour’s sleep, and on Saturdays he used the Garrick. After the evening show he might go and eat at the Ivy; other nights he would come straight home.

He very much enjoys going to the theatre as an audience member, but of course this is impossible when he’s acting himself. Which is one reason why he likes to vary what he does.

And he is certainly not without other interests. A keen Manchester United supporter, he often goes up there for matches. He loves (watching) showjumping and has a half share with an actress friend in a former racehorse, which is being retrained in Suffolk. He still plays squash and swims - at the RAC Club. And music is important to him too, not least pipe bands and especially drums – African and Latin American rhythms. He also used to love dancing at parties but insists his legs can’t stand it any more, albeit he keeps very fit. And, as a Governor of Sadlers Wells, he became a big fan of contemporary dance.

His interest in politics and close links with the Labour Party are well-known and, when we met in mid-May, he was very much looking forward to Gordon Brown’s “new broom” and what he hoped would be a shift back to the left. Interviewed for the parliamentary *House Magazine* earlier this year, he said he had suffered a “nasty and frightening” loss of heart in Tony Blair over the Iraq war. Meanwhile, he has been a frequent spokesman on pensioners’ rights and his support for the party has earned him invitations to Chequers and Number 10.

Scotland’s most eligible

But he was now very much looking forward to a holiday before his autumn tour. Majorca and Tuscany, where he has friends, are favourite destinations. Plus he has a nephew working in Moscow, whom he visits, and another in Greenock. His sister Moira still lives in Scotland, so he’s up there a fair bit, not least for the Edinburgh Festival. And, birth and family apart, it’s not surprising he has a soft spot for that country – two years ago *Scotland on Sunday* ranked him no 8 in their top 50 most eligible men (“sexy, successful, sought-after and single”)!

Despite the strictest rules about keeping his private life private, the flouting of which turns him into Victor Meldrew in an instant, he is a really gregarious man, a dapper dresser and a delightful neighbour. Belsize Residents Association – eat your hearts out – he’s ours!

NNA

The evolving story of the Danish Y

Palle Pederson, director of the Dansk KFUK, talks to NNA News about the many changes of address and function of this 100-year old 'home from home'

When the Dansk KFUK (or K, as it is known) was founded here in 1907, it had no permanent premises of its own. From sharing a building with the English YWCA in Hanover Square, it moved via various temporary homes to Lorn Road in Brixton in 1921 and then in 1929 to Fellows Road in Swiss Cottage. When the lease there was up in 1958, the freehold of the then 70 year-old Nutley Court in Maresfield Gardens was acquired (for £18,000), so next year will see yet more celebrations - of 50 years in its present home and the 120th birthday of the house itself.

As assiduous NNA newsletter readers may recall from the piece published in the winter 2004 issue, the K was started by a priest Pastor Axel Berg and his wife as a meeting place for young Danish girls working as maids for English families or domestic help in schools and nursing homes. Bible studies played a not insignificant part of the deal then and even now, as well as offering shelter and advice, an element of K's role is "to bring the Christian message to young Danish people in their own language".

Now, of course, the maids have gone and the main raison d'être is to provide a hostel (maximum stay six months) for young Danes of both sexes – mostly between 18 and 22 – studying or working in London as part of their gap year between school and further education. It really is just a 'start up'

A 'K' for the 'K' keeper

PALLE PEDERSEN, director of the Dansk KFUK, was made knight of the Dannebrog for his services over the past 16 years and a similar honour was bestowed on the K's chairman Karen Maibom.

Both were requested to arrive at the Danish Church about an hour before the K centenary service was due to begin, Palle told *NNA News*. "We thought this was so we could be given our instructions about where to stand, what to do and so on.

"In the event the Princess Royal arrived 45 minutes early so that she could present us with our medals."



home for those who don't know anyone and/or while they look for a flat or a job.

Other activities include running an au pair agency to match young Danes with English families and an informal advice bureau for any young Danish people living in or passing through London.

Xmas bazaar

The K organises regular concerts and other cultural and social events, many of them fundraising, including the Midsummer Night's party every June and the Xmas bazaar which attracts up to 2,000 people each November and contributes £33,000 in profits. Additional

financial support comes from Danish companies and trust funds.

But in the early days money was a problem. In 1917 the YWCA in Denmark provided funds for a full-time secretary for its London offspring, but it was another four years before overnight stays could be accommodated. During the depression in the 1930s heavy restrictions were imposed on foreign workers, and the K had to take in other nationalities, men as well as women, to maintain its income.

In the 2nd World War agreement was reached that any Danish workers in London, again men *and* women, could stay free of charge and over 5,000 overnight stays were recorded during that period, thanks to financial support from the Danish community at large.

The Danish YWCA is an independently registered charity with its own Board but it also comes under the auspices of Danish Churches Abroad (the DKU); it was those two bodies which had to be convinced that Nutley Court, originally a private residence but by the 1950s a boarding house, was a 'good buy'. As current director Palle Pedersen told *NNA News*, the key criteria were proximity to a tube station and an area where the girls could walk around safely. But the DKU representative Bishop Erik Jensen thought the house had "too many gables, nooks and crannies", which in his opinion was not to Danish taste.



▲ Princess Benedikte pins on medal

The Order of the Dannebrog was instituted in 1671 by King Christian V and is awarded for special deeds or conspicuous service to Denmark.

◀ Palle, staff and guards at the centenary celebrations

Needless to say, it has undergone many changes since then. Gorgeous stained glass windows are original and reflect the business of the family who had the house built in 1888, but the last 15 years alone have seen these revitalised, plus new windows, roof, heating, fireproofing, front wall and in 1992 an extension to provide more bathrooms.

Up to 60 residents at any one time pay £70 a week each for bed – in a 3-4 person room with shared showers and loos, breakfast and two evening meals. They can buy extra meals, heavily subsidised, for £3.50 – pitched to compare favourably with MacDonalds – to encourage them to eat in.

There are seven employees in total all of whom live on the premises – a housekeeper and three assistants to clean the rooms, wash the bedlinen and cook, and two secretaries and Palle himself, who has his own flat upstairs, to provide the admin, the au pair agency and the advisory service.

He describes K as an unofficial embassy or consulate in that the real Danish embassy closes at 4pm, whereas if someone gets mugged and has their money stolen or an au pair falls out with her family or is simply homesick, “we’re here 24/7”. K staff also visit people in hospital, taking along Danish language magazines and newspapers.

Palle is paid by the Danish parent organisation to manage the house and do the youth work; the other staff are paid from the rents. There is council tax to pay and insurance, but no mortgage.

The au pair agency generates some money – it charges families a matching fee of £100 (commercial agencies charge more like £500) but only about 40 placements a year are made now as compared with, say, 15 years ago when there were 300 girls on the books. “Scandinavian girls no longer want to clean and look after kids, when there are so many other opportunities,” says Palle. “They prefer to be independent.”

Besides, K attracts the cream of Danish youth: they speak excellent English, are good timekeepers and can find jobs very easily in shops, hotels and restaurants.

Relations with neighbours are fine. There is the occasional complaint of noise – perhaps when a group is walking back home at night – but in the main K is regarded as an asset to the community. Palle has keys for two next door neighbours over the road, one of whom



is wheelchair-bound, and he looks out for them; not least K staff can see their houses from the office so, if they do spot anything, they will call the police.

He has noticed some increase in local crime lately. “We have had people come into the house and steal, and we do see more groups of youths hanging around than we used to.” Recently there was a break-in through a window next door; a handbag was taken containing car keys and the culprits took the car. And last November, he says, police caught two people in the garden trying to break into the house next door and not long before that a woman was mugged round the corner in Nutley Terrace. “We do tell people not to walk down the slope to Finchley Road at night. But other places are much worse. This is really a wonderful area, and we do see a police presence most days, which helps.”

Value and convenience

Palle worked in the house himself as a secretary from 1982-84, before going into commercial training in Denmark. He returned to Maresfield and his current job in 1991 and loves it. “No two days are the same,” he says. “You’re meeting new people all the time and it’s so nice to be able to help young people. In any one year we have maybe 600 to 700 people living here.” Most do in fact stay the full six months. “They hate sharing – and the rules! But then they see the prices of bedsits in London and appreciate the value and convenience of this place.”

Apart from the rise in crime and the downturn in the au pair business, another change has been the increase in the number of mature students coming



▲ Cake-cutting time in the Maresfield marquee and (top) the Tivoli bandsmen play on in the June sunshine

over. “They can be in their mid 20s up to 30 and wanting a year abroad while at university. It is not ideal for them because it is hard to study when you are sharing a room.” But over the last four years K has bought six studio flats in West Hampstead, paid for by the Danish foundations, which students can rent for just £80 a week, as against the true going rate of about £200. And the plan is to grow this to 10 flats.

The original idea was to buy a house and convert it into small flats, rather like university halls of residence, but neighbours objected on potential noise grounds, so the fallback was separate flats in the same area. They are called the Queen Ingrid College flats after the late Danish Queen Mother and were opened by her daughter Benedikte.

Life certainly doesn’t stand still at the K. So here’s to the next 100 years! *NNA*

Anthony Coles reports:

Since the last newsletter NNA members and friends have had the opportunity of enjoying an informative and entertaining wine tasting plus quiz (17 Nov) with Malcolm Gluck; a fascinating visit (28 Nov) to Holy Trinity School with head teacher Rosey Lyall; a New Year reception with great food and drink (17 Jan) at the Danish YWCA hosted by Palle Pedersen; another reception at the AGM (13 Mar) at the Anna Freud Centre where Ben Macintyre, the *Times* journalist and author, regaled us with the exploits of *Agent Zigzag*, which included a war-time robbery at the Swiss Cottage Odeon; Linda and Steve Williams' beautiful garden (20 May and 9/10 June) at 16A Maresfield; and an evening of good fun and good food (21 May) with the *Pampered Chef* Cheryl Cook, organised by Gina da Silva.

Plus there have been several opportunities to listen to the wonderful recitals organised at Netherhall House courtesy of Peter Brown.

Garden party

The NNA garden party (15 July) hosted by Monika Caro and opened by charity organiser Princess Helena Moutafian MBE was a great success despite intermittent rain which had everyone dashing inside and out again! Some 65 people enjoyed afternoon tea with sandwiches, home-made cakes, scones,

strawberries and cream, soft drinks and wine — all donated by members. Live entertainment by June Tedbury and John Asher, a new 'Olympic' hoop game by Ronnie Whitehouse, along with a raffle made for a fun event. The afternoon proved a great opportunity to welcome new residents — including one family who had arrived in the UK just five days earlier! It was also good to see support from Camden Council in the form of staff members and two of our Ward Councillors — Andrew Menear and Martin Davies.

Forthcoming events

The next three events are the Anna Freud Centre Open Day (16 Sept — a free admission afternoon featuring tea and many activities for children), a special evening to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Anna Freud (tba) and Christmas Party (tba). We are considering organising a car boot sale and also a murder mystery evening for next spring.

For updates and further information about any of the above, please check the NNA website: www.netherhallneighbourhoodassociation.org.uk or email events@netherhallneighbourhoodassociation.org.uk or drop a note into any of the following contact addresses:
Flat 3, 22 Netherhall Gardens,
20 Maresfield Gardens or
55 Maresfield Gardens.

Following the regalanising of the NNA and the mushrooming of activities, volunteers with regular computer access are sought for the:

Planning and conservation committee:
The current flood of applications is too much for one person to handle, especially as he already has a more than full time 'day job', so extra help is urgently needed to turn what is effectively a one man band into the committee it was meant to be. Professional expertise not vital but must be able to 'read', understand and comment relevantly on plans and drawings in order to help members make sense of neighbours' (or more often developers') planning applications. *Contact: Liam O'Connor*

Newsletter: Just for occasional interviews or to research specific local issues and write up the results when Editor's day job encroaches on *NNA News* deadlines. Must be able to write reasonably journalistically! Also looking for anyone familiar with Adobe Indesign software. *Contact: Susanne Lawrence*

Membership committee: Practical and creative assistance needed if we are to attract and sign up all eligible residents — unity is strength remember (in terms of putting over our views) and maximising subs revenue enables us to do more for members. *Contact: Jenny White*

NNA MEMBERSHIP 2007

If you've not yet renewed your NNA membership, or are new to the area, please join now. It's only £8 a household or £5 for an individual. Apart from working to maintain and/or improve the character of the environment, running social events and being 'good neighbours', we also give all paid-up members a copy of our much prized and recently updated list of trades and services providers. So please fill in the form and return it with your payment to the address below. And if you have a new neighbour, or there are other flats in your building, please spread the word and encourage them to join (email jennywhite@waitrose.com or tel 7794 5886 for more forms).

FORENAME(S).....

TITLE (Mr/Ms, etc) and SURNAME(S).....

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

TEL (home).....(wk).....(mobile).....

EMAIL.....

I/WE ENCLOSE £.....(£5 indivs/£8 household) TICK IF RECEIPT REQUIRED.....

Please return with payment (cash or cheque payable to 'NNA') to the NNA Membership Secretary, Flat 3, 22 Netherhall Gardens NW3 5TH (opposite Netherhall Way)