

Appendix 2

The old neighbourhood

My old neighbourhood (henceforth known as ‘the community’), the same as any other district, was a living, breathing entity. These were intangible, but palpable qualities that embedded themselves in our childhood psyche. The immediate community was roughly bounded, direction wise, by Highbury Station Road to the north; Laycock Street to the south; Highbury Corner/Upper Street to the east, and Liverpool Road to the west. In reality, however, the community extended beyond and encompassed parts of the districts of Barnsbury, Highbury and Canonbury. We lived in what may technically have been part of Barnsbury, but the boundaries blurred with Highbury, and, I think we aligned ourselves more with the Highbury faction rather than those from Barnsbury. Certainly, in our teenage years all the youths in our area gravitated to Highbury Corner and preferred to be identified as ‘The Highbury Mob.’

The boundaries in summary

The community evolved as Islington developed from a rural village to a metropolitan borough of London. It lay alongside the principal north-south road (the Great North Way) to the City, and at one point in its history occupied prime real estate where livestock being driven on its way down the Back Road (Liverpool Road) to Smithfield Market could be accommodated overnight in Richard Laycock’s extensive cattle layers (sheds) and pens for up to 5000 sheep. Richard Laycock’s father, Charles Laycock, had previously established a poultry farm in the vicinity of present-day Laycock Street in 1720, and was reputed to be “... one of the greatest goose-feeders in the kingdom.” Richard, however, saw potential in dairy farming and built up a herd of 500 cows. Later, he switched to the more lucrative livestock accommodation, but retained some interest in dairying on nearby pastureland. His successors continued in this enterprise until it was severely affected by an outbreak of cattle plague in 1865.

The oldest part of the community was at its eastern boundary—Highbury Corner/Upper Street. Before the corner was recognised as such, three terraces of buildings occupied the west side of Upper Street—namely Sebbons Row, Wells Row and Charlotte Row. Wells Row was probably the oldest, named after John Wells, brickmaker, who was letting new houses there from 1722 and had kilns on land to the west. Sebbons Row—or *Sebbon Buildings 1806* as shown on an inscription on the façade—is the name taken from a local family. Walter Sebbon kept the Crown and Anchor pub at No. 5 Barnsbury Lane (Laycock Street) in the mid 18th century. No. 239 Upper Street in the terrace was one of many London Penny Bazaars that were transformed into Marks and Spencer retail outlets. A good part of Wells Row and Charlotte Row were changed when the East & West India Docks & Birmingham Junction Railway acquired land in 1846 for its right of way and station building. The section of the railway between Highbury and Bow was opened in 1850 and the line was renamed the North London Railway in 1853. The 1850 station was originally called Islington, but the name was changed to Islington and Highbury on 1st June, 1864, then to Highbury and Islington on 1st July, 1872 when the impressive Victorian-Italianate building with a drive-in forecourt was erected.

Over the years the corner was to undergo many other alterations. The first of two most notable being the devastation caused by the explosion when a German V1 flying bomb (*Vergeltungswaffe eins*) landed at the end of the Compton Terrace gardens at 12:46 p.m., Tuesday, 27th June, 1944, that killed 26 people and injured 150. The second was the construction of the Highbury Corner roundabout or gyratory system in 1958.

The community's northern boundary was fully defined by the brick wall that ran the entire length of Highbury Station Road, punctuated only by *The Cock at Highbury* public house at the Upper Street end and the railway workers' cottages opposite the Laycock Secondary Boys School. The wall separated the pavement (sidewalk) and road on one side from the railway property on the other. There were two minor bends in the road that accommodated part of the station platform and the workers' cottages. At intervals along the wall an extra thickness of brick showed where the Second World War communal air raid shelters were located. Any missing brick provided a toehold and it didn't take much effort to scale the wall and sneak over onto the weed covered embankment.

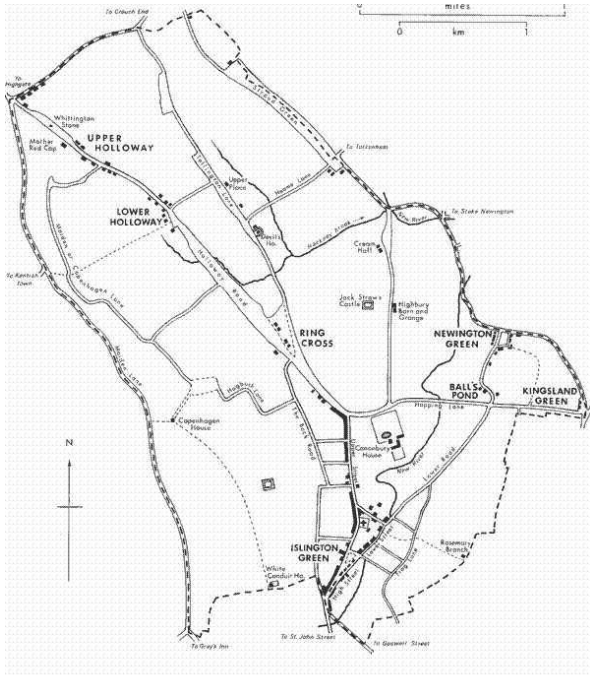
Liverpool Road on the western end of the community was once an important thoroughfare for driving livestock to Smithfield Market and bypassing the commercial route through the village of Islington. Originally it was called the Back Road, then it was renamed in honour of Lord Liverpool, prime minister (1812-27). The short block on the west side between Offord Road and the railway bridge contained a hodgepodge of commercial and recreational buildings. These consisted of the corner confectionery ('sweet') shop; shoemenders; Mr. Pettitt's oil shop; the *Adelaide Arms* pub, an outlet for the Essex Flour & Grain Co. and Bettridge's greengrocery. Tucked up by the *Adelaide Arms* was a short, cobblestoned cul-de-sac called Epping Place; an almost forgotten backwater.

The southern boundary followed one of the oldest right of ways in the immediate area. Various known as Barnsbury Lane, Laycock's Lane, Flight Street and Laycock Street, it started as a mere pathway between the Back Road and Upper Street, but developed into an important neighbourhood road and serviced commercial, industrial, residential and institutional properties. The current winding road follows the line of the original cow path that meandered over the pastures of Richard Laycock's dairy farm before the area was built over.

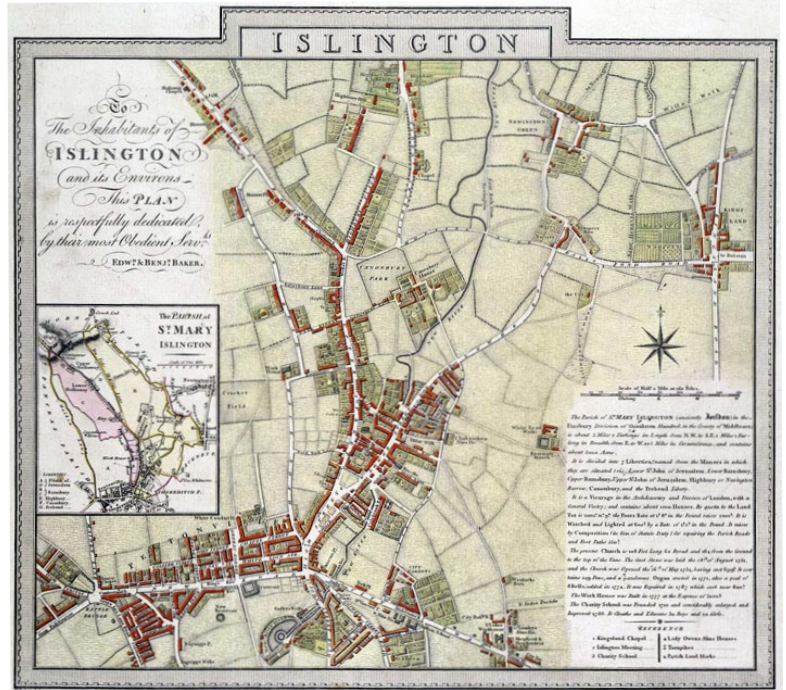
The boundaries in detail

The foundation of the community was strictly agrarian. Then, with the rapid encroachment of urban sprawl, it wasn't long before the land formerly occupied by Richard Laycock's farm and cattle layers (sheds) was completely built over.

Up to the construction of the East & West India Docks & Birmingham Junction Railway in 1846, the village of Islington had experienced modest expansion with the development of Pentonville, Barnsbury and Canonbury. Highbury was still very much in the hinterland, and Highbury Corner had yet to be identified as an important junction on the Great North Way. Ribbon development along Upper Street and Holloway Road was a natural progression as transportation methods improved and a suburban lifestyle took root.



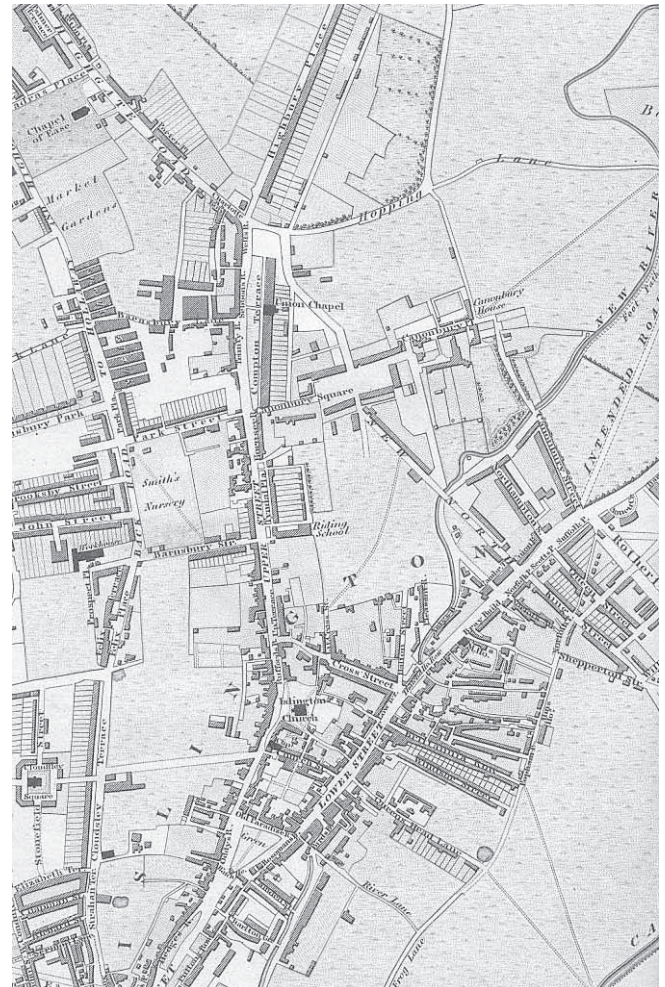
Map of Islington, c1740



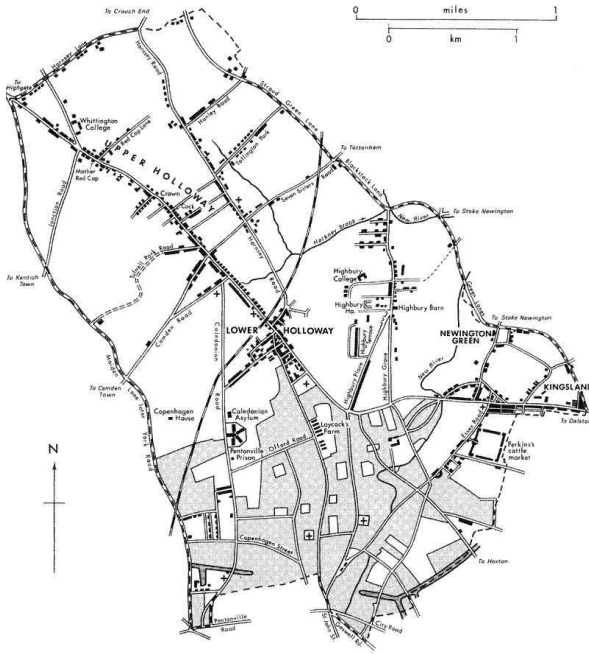
Map of Islington, 1805



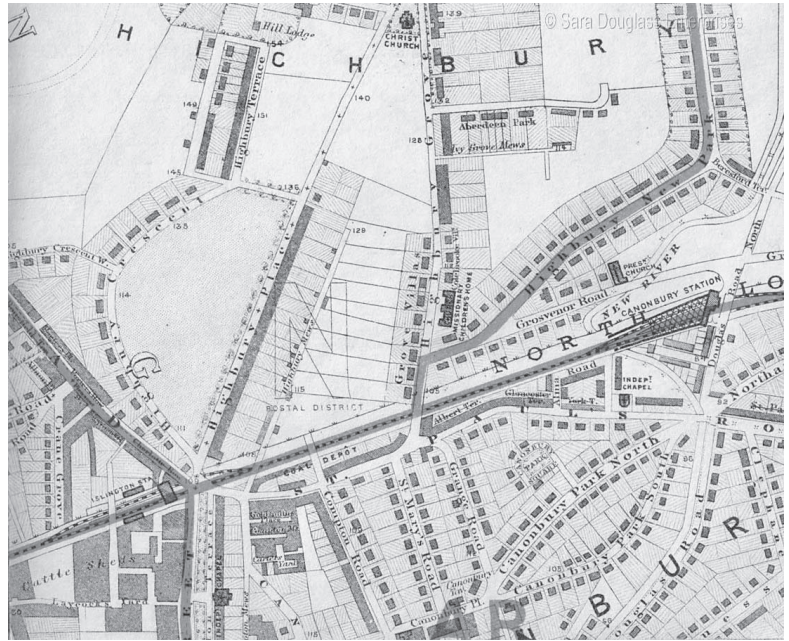
Map of Islington, 1817



Map of Islington, 1827



Map of Islington, c1848



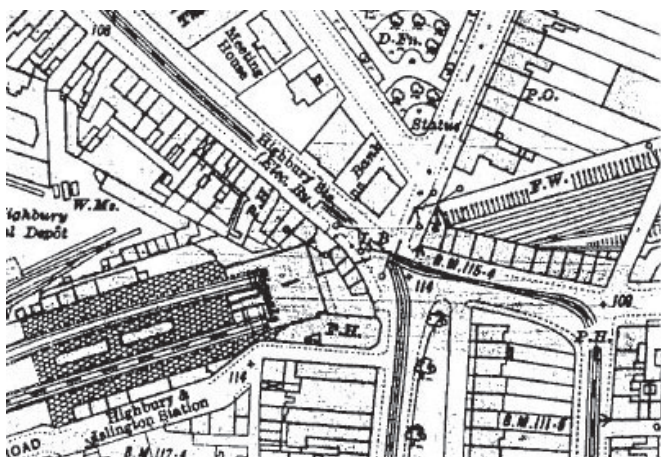
Map of Canonbury, 1872



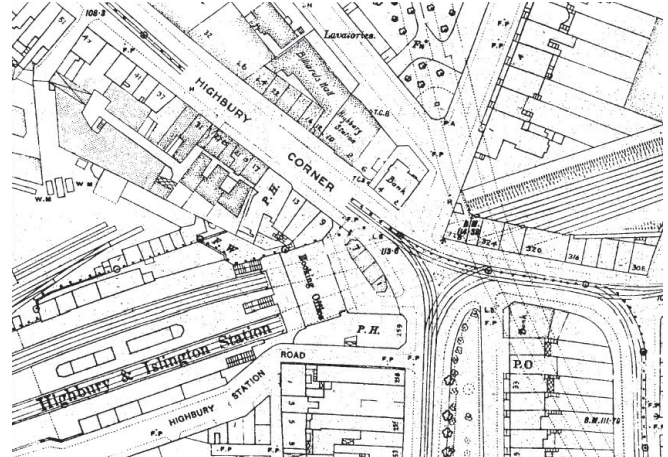
Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1877



Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1894



Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1916



Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1938

As early as the 1770s more affluence was making its presence known with the development of Highbury Place, followed by Highbury Terrace between 1789 and 1794. Highbury Place retained its own private gates, and wealthy residents enjoyed unrestricted views across Highbury Fields—the sole remaining untouched pastoral land in the area. Similarly, in 1806 the first Compton Terrace houses and the Union Chapel were built. St. Paul's Road (formerly known as Hopping Lane) tended to attract the building of smaller houses and shops. Gradually the development of Highbury Corner into a major road junction took place.

The coming of the railway, however, was to alter the character of Highbury Corner. This was a major civil engineering undertaking designed to link the London docks with the northeastern suburbs and the junction with the London and North Western Railway. The first phase of construction between the railway company's headquarters and workshops at Bow and the original Islington wooden station building was completed and opened September 26th, 1850. There was an intermediate station at Hackney, and new stations opened at Kingsland on November 9th, 1850 and Camden Town on December 7th, 1850. In 1853 the railway company was renamed the North London Railway (NLR).

The railway was built in a cutting as it traversed the districts of Canonbury and Barnsbury. This was to remove any unsightliness of train traffic from the orderly middle class neighbourhoods. The alignment of the railway intersected the busy junction of Upper Street, Holloway Road and St. Paul's Road. Whatever construction method was used (presumably cut-and-cover), the resulting bridge over the train tracks was a significant undertaking. No image of the original Islington wooden station building or the original 1856 *Cock Tavern* (No. 21 Wells Row) seems to exist. However, the streetscape of what was Wells Row had changed considerably and would be altered many more times in the future.

The success of the North London Railway, particularly when the new line that branched off at Dalston Junction and terminated at Broad Street in the City of London was opened on November 1st, 1865, meant that the railway company could afford to upgrade its infrastructure. An Act of Parliament in 1861 (known as quadrupling) also encouraged improvements, and the original Islington wooden station building was replaced with a magnificent brick and stone Victorian-Italianate structure that was opened on July 1st, 1872. The NLR Act, 1865 (2 June 1865 [28 Victoria, chapter lxxii]) empowered enlargement and improvement to Highbury station by blocking up Swan Yard (otherwise known as Albert Street) and acquiring land. At the same time, the name of the station was changed from Islington & Highbury—established June 1st, 1864—to Highbury & Islington.

The hotel-cum-station building, incorporating a drive-in forecourt gated at both ends by cast iron pillars, consisted of the main structure that housed the railway booking office, freight handling facilities, and two wings. The southern wing housed *The Cock Tavern*—a capacious public house with a grill room on the second floor—and the northern wing being a small block containing shops. The materials used were Suffolk bricks for the face and Portland stone and red terra-cotta for the dressing. Ornamental cupolas surmounted the four towers and there was also a châteauxque treatment of dormer windows, chimney stacks and cast iron cresting around the roofline. The design was attributed to architect Edwin Henry Horne, who used elements of a 'house style' indicative of other important North London Railway station buildings. Shortly after 1910, a single storey arcade of four shops was built on the open land in front of the station building.

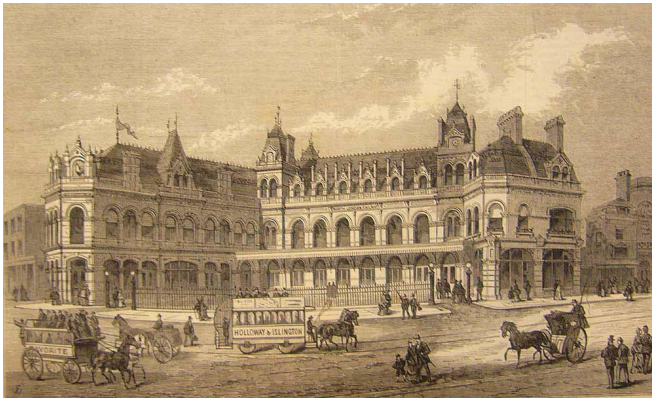
There were changes to Wells Row on its Upper Street frontage as new commercial developments became established. Sebbons Row—or *Sebbon Buildings 1806*—is probably the remaining original façade in the streetscape between Laycock Street and Highbury Station Road. Behind the Upper Street frontage there was a labyrinth of courts and alleyways containing low-grade buildings for housing, and outbuildings used for the dairy industry that continued to operate. Albert Street (later Swan Yard), Albert Square and Hampton Court were indicative of these narrow, cobblestone back streets. Gradually the open land that was Laycock’s farm became built over, and included the London board school (1885) in Highbury Station Road and the extended London General Omnibus Company’s (L.G.O.C.) factory adjacent to Laycock Street (1886).

Highbury Station Road was laid out in the late 1870s and followed the alignment of the railway tracks and cutting from Upper Street to Liverpool Road. In 1883, open land between Highbury Station Road, Liverpool Road and Laycock Street that formed part of Laycock’s dairy and cattle layers (sheds) was procured by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company. The company constructed five blocks of model working class tenements, called Liverpool Buildings, on the site. Adjacent to the flats on the east side was a small terrace of two storey artisans’ houses. Further to the east and next to the school playground, small factories and secondary industries took the place of the rundown tenements of Albert Square. In the end block facing west up the road were two small shops, an off-licence on the corner and a peas pudding & faggot outlet next door. These buildings were the remnants of those destroyed in the V1 explosion of Tuesday, 27th June 1944.

The western boundary of the community provided a number of convenient businesses for the neighbourhood including the ‘local’ public house, the *Adelaide Arms*. A relatively modern pub, it was a Bass-Charrington house, and although now no longer operating as a public house, the original tiled toby jug ornamentations remain. Everyday household items were available from Mr. Pettitt’s oil shop next door. The odour of oilcloth and paraffin being unmistakable as customers entered the gloomy interior. Mr. Pettitt, a bald and diminutive figure wearing a stained apron, would mysteriously appear from seemingly nowhere. For threepence (3d) you could buy a bundle of kindling wood secured by a few turns of post office string—the hairy kind. *Esso Blue* or *Aladdin Pink* paraffin was dispensed from a can that incorporated a funnel into the customer’s container. Hardware items such as nuts and bolts were stored in the various nooks and crannies of the shop—places known only to Mr. Pettitt. For shoe and boot repairs, and leathercraft of other descriptions, the cobbler next to Pettitt’s oil shop was a handy outlet for such needs. Barker’s newsagency and confectionery made up the end shop at the corner of Offord Road, with the Florence Café alongside.

Across the cobbled lane of Epping Place were two shop units, the Essex Flour & Grain Co., and Bettridge’s greengrocery. Mr. Bettridge and his mate ran the greengrocery and were well known in the community. Mr. Bettridge, himself, was a short, rotund and bespectacled individual with sparse white hair and always wore a striped butcher’s apron and a large leather change purse. His mate, a tall, lanky fellow was unmistakable in his flat cap and inevitable cigarette ‘dog end’ tucked behind his ear. He always handled the vegetables wearing woollen gloves minus the fingers and thumbs.

Laycock Street appeared to be a natural boundary division between the community and its southern border. Largely because of the neighbouring Samuel Lewis Trust Buildings estate where another high density population was in competition and ‘territorial rights’ were bound to exist.



Highbury Corner and NLR Station, 1873



Upper Street from Highbury Corner, 1906



St Paul's Road from Highbury Corner, c1900



Holloway Road from Highbury Corner, c1910



Highbury Corner from St. Paul's Road, c1923



Highbury Corner from Highbury Place, 1952