

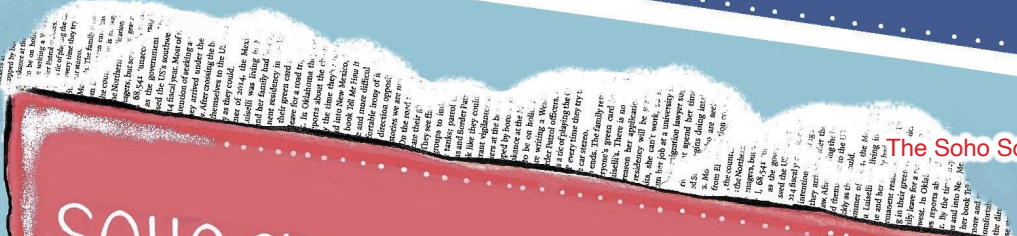


SOHO clarion

NO. 177
THE CLARION
CALL OF
THE SOHO SOCIETY

christmas
2020

The Soho Society's Free and yet
Priceless Magazine



SOHO CLARION

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1972

Support
Soho's Shops
season's greetings

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS





Are you a Soho Resident, Business, Worker or Visitor?

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

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1. Get involved in the Soho community
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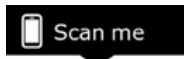
Individual £25/Lifetime £250

Business

Business >30 employees £50

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There are three easy ways to join The Soho Society:



1. Scan the Code
2. Via Our Website where you can pay by card
or set up a direct debit
www.thesohosociety.org.uk
3. Payment via your bank
The Soho Society - Barclays bank
Account No: 13609987
Sort code: 20-10-53
(Use surname and postcode as reference)

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Cover image: Jenn Lambert@sohosketchbook

THE SOHO SOCIETY

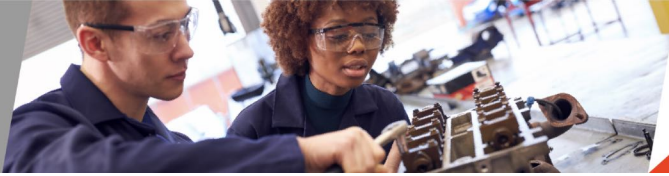
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EDITOR

Jane Doyle



The Kickstart Scheme is part of the Chancellor's Plan for Jobs; it creates six month work opportunities for young people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming Universal Credit. The government pays 100% of the employment costs.

Small businesses are not able to apply directly and so the Society is applying to becoming a Kickstart Gateway to support local businesses who want to take advantage of Kickstart.

What's in it for local employers and Soho business owners?

Each job you create is fully funded by the government for 25 hrs pw for six months at the national living wage (including employers NIC amend pension contributions).

You will receive a one off payment of £1500 for each placement.

The jobs must be new ones, i.e. not currently being done by someone else, there is no obligation to extend employment beyond six months. You will also be expected to provide some basic support with CV and interview preparations and basic skills, such as attendance, timekeeping and teamwork.

What do trainees get?

Minimum of 25 hours per week at the national living wage for six months
In-work experience to build up your transferrable skills.

Support with CV and interview preparation and other basic skills to help long term employability

The Society thinks that Kickstart is a fantastic opportunity to support the community in these difficult times, so if you own or run a local business and think that you will be able to provide a placement from January 2021.

For more details, complete the form at
www.thesohosociety.org.uk/kickstart-scheme

FROM THE TOWER

To say a lot has happened since the Spring 2020 Clarion would be a significant understatement. Further, much may happen between the time of writing and the time of reading given the rapid turn of events. As I write this we are in week two of the second lockdown, Biden has won the US presidential election, Trump is refusing to go, and we might have a vaccine before Christmas. In theory, this second lockdown will end on 2 December 2020 and Soho's businesses are planning how they will re-open.

We have had to wait until now to publish as there was no likelihood of advertising revenue over the summer with Soho businesses mainly closed. This edition of the Clarion has been partly funded by Westminster City Council and we have included a business directory in which all Soho's businesses have been offered a free advert and many have taken up the offer.

Our proposed Annual General Meeting in the Church Hall planned for 20 April did not take place but we did manage to hold the AGM in a remote meeting on 1 October. It was noticeable how by October, many of us are now quite familiar with meeting remotely and it may be that we will use this approach more often in the future. We have two new trustees, Jason Fisher-Jones and Joel Levack, who are both keen volunteers working on the Clarion and the Soho Society Hour on the radio respectively. We warmly welcome them.

The 46th Annual Village Fête planned for 21 June this year had to be cancelled because of the crisis. We continue to review if some sort of replacement event could happen over Christmas, possibly a Christmas Market, but no firm date has been set. We are keeping our fingers crossed for a celebration in Summer 2021 which might, if all goes well, be an event to celebrate the end of the crisis.

The Great Plague in 1665, followed by the Great Fire led to Londoners leaving the old city to move outside the city walls and the creation of London as we now know it. New squares were laid out - Bloomsbury, St James's, Grosvenor, Golden and Red Lion. The first square to have a properly laid out garden at its centre was probably Soho Square (then known as King's Square), built in 1681 by the Earl of Macclesfield. It was laid out as a pleasure ground, with ornamental flowers, shrubs and trees. At the centre was a statue of Charles II, carved by Caius Gabriel Cibber which readers will be familiar with. Soho, as we know it today, was very much a result of London's response to the last plague to afflict the city. Which brings us to the issue of what happens next.

We are only now starting to count the cost of the crisis beyond the human tragedy itself: the lost businesses and restaurants, the abandoned offices and shops empty of international tourists and other visitors. Soho is likely to change fundamentally in response and although all of it seems like loss at this point the crisis will soon raise the question of what we want the future of Soho to be. Do we want to try and recreate where we were on 20 March 2020 when the lockdown began?

Dickon Robinson, a founder of the Soho Housing Association and a great friend to the Society, has talked about this on the Soho Society Hour, and written about it in this issue. He draws a parallel with the closure of the Covent Garden Market in November 1974, the resulting flood of empty property on to the market and the drop in rents which in turn allowed for a flock of new creative businesses to emerge - many of which went on to be successful nationally and internationally. If a similar thing now happens in Soho how do we best prepare and make the most of the opportunity it affords?

Just before the crisis began the Council published its thorough analysis of the cumulative impact of licensed premises on Westminster and the West End in particular. Although it pre-dates the crisis it shows that its policies had failed to control noise, crime, drug offences and anti-social behaviour in Soho, all of which have relentlessly increased as the number of premises licensed to sell alcohol has increased. The first question to ask, therefore, is whether we want to return to that trajectory when the crisis is over? Or do we instead plan a new more diverse and resilient future for Soho's land use. If you care about that future please join the Society and join the debate.

Tim Lord

Chair, The Soho Society

SOHO SQUARE GENERAL PRACTICE

Penceat is the name of the new provider (management company) of this long established Soho GP surgery. They took over the running of the practice on the 1 April, just as we moved into lockdown. The Soho Square Medical Centre, where the practice is located, was turned into an emergency Covid Reception Centre and the practice had to move out from the Frith Street premises suddenly in the last week of March with only a few hours' notice. They lodged with the Covent Garden Medical Centre until they were able to move back at the end of May. There is still a Covid Centre at the Health Centre but it is completely sealed off from the other facilities at the Centre.

This cannot have been an easy time for either practice, squashed into premises meant for one practice. However, friendly relations were maintained, and space problems were probably helped by the fact that nearly all communication with patients was now by telephone, as in all surgeries throughout the country. The Soho Society was also able to put Penceat in touch with Shaftesbury Plc, who were able to offer Penceat space for some administrative staff, and were also very generous in their support for Penceat, for which we thank them.

The established working group of the PPG (Patients' Participatory Group) has maintained regular dialogue with Sree Agawal, the Chief Administrative Officer, and Dr. Helen McCalvey, the Chief Medical Officer, and have been impressed by their willingness to listen and respond to our concerns and suggestions for returning the practice to one that patients and the Soho community can be proud of.

Penceat have made great strides in this respect. They have experienced GPs on the permanent staff, which will enable continuity of care which has been one of the PPG's concerns, so patients can get to know their GP and vice versa (the GPs work regularly on the same days each week). A senior (male) nurse who is an advanced nursing practitioner (ANP) is full-time. He has experience of working with those in the LGBTQ+ community. A female nurse also works at the practice.

Our surgery was originally set up to support the Chinese community in Soho. Until nearly three years ago almost all staff, including GPs, spoke Cantonese. But staff were despairing of being able to provide a high quality of health care under the then provider, and all left (many now working in other local practices). The PPG tried, without success, to persuade the provider to take on Cantonese speaking staff to enable Cantonese speaking patients to have better access to healthcare. Our new provider has listened to us and there is now a Cantonese speaker on reception throughout most of the day and they are seeking to employ a Cantonese speaking GP for part of the week.

So I think it is fair to say that Penceat have made an excellent start, in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, to return the practice to one we can be proud of.

Although initial consultations with a clinician are on the telephone, we would like to stress, as does the Practice, that it is safe to visit the practice for face to face appointments where the clinician or patient feels this is necessary.

Wendy Harcastle

SREE AGARWAL **Chief Officer**

We have appreciated greatly the opportunity to run Soho Square General Practice on behalf of the patients this last seven months..

Since being told we would be doing this in December 2019, I am sure many of us feel that the world is now a completely different place.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has had a significant and far reaching impact on almost all parts of everyone's life, and of course as an NHS GP surgery it has changed the way we do things a great deal.

Starting to run the practice on 1 April of this year, we were right in the middle of an exceptionally challenging period where not just the NHS but the whole world was trying to come to terms and mount a response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Whilst it is our approach to look to the future and see how we can change things for the better, we are obviously very aware of the legacy we inherited, and patients' feelings about the past few years operation of the surgery and the resulting consequences to their care.

During this challenging period (which regrettably is still ongoing) we are very grateful to our NHS colleagues in Central London CCG, our neighbouring practices in our Primary Care Network and particularly to Covent Garden Medical Centre who accommodated and supported us for several months.

We would also like to thank the Patient Participation Group, individual patients, Westminster City Council and Shaftesbury Plc for the support and assistance they have provided.

At this time it is really important that patients do not neglect any health concerns or medical needs that they have. We have been and will continue to operate through lockdown. You will not be putting a strain on the NHS by contacting us.

We have a system whereby initially all consultations are remote, however we have face to face appointments available every day where these are required.

Our aim is to create a stable sustainable GP surgery that genuinely meets the needs of patients from this area.

To that end we have already been joined by several new administrative staff who speak Cantonese and Mandarin and by a clinician who has experience and expertise in understanding the needs of the LGBTQ+ community. We hope to recruit a Cantonese speaking clinician soon.

We feel that over the past seven months, there has been an improvement in the service the surgery offers and we intend to continue that so that we become one of the best GP surgeries in the country.

We would appreciate any patient feedback or ideas that will help us make this happen.

SOHO SOCIETY HOUR

The Soho Society Hour goes out live online from 9.00am to 10.00am every Thursday on award winning local radio station Soho Radio.

During the first lockdown, when the studio closed, Clare Lynch, with the help of Soho Radio technicians, was able to set up and broadcast from her home, and co-host Leslie Hardcastle and guests joined her remotely. This continued through the summer and early autumn months, bringing local news and a wide range of speakers, including local residents and owners of independent retail outlets, Councillors, our MP Nickie Aiken, musicians, representatives of local interest groups such as the Soho Media Club, authors, the local landowners and property developers, the new CEO of Soho Housing Association, and representatives of the theatre, film and post-production industries. Many of the discussions, not surprisingly, revolved around the difficulties that everyone and every sector of the community has been experiencing.

Clare also hosted her own programme, the Soho Hour, on the other days of the week. Her programme now goes out on Saturdays and Sundays.

In September Clare had to step down from co-hosting and presenting the programme and Leslie was joined by Joel Levack, a member of the Soho Society Executive, who is an artist with portfolio career working in live events, film and television.

We continue to welcome guests to one of Soho Radio's two studios in Great Windmill Street and Broadwick Street. Guests have included a small independent retailer (So High



Soho); a favourite Soho Café (Flat White in the market); the newly appointed Curate at St. Anne's Church; Westminster's Cabinet Member for Business and Planning, Councillor Matthew Green; and a new fledgling group representing many of the hospitality venues – mostly on the east side of Soho where street closures

and al fresco dining have been concentrated – the Soho Business Alliance ('SBA'). Unsurprisingly conversations tended to concentrate on the successes of al fresco dining over the summer months and into autumn, the difficulties this gave rise to for some residents and those working from home, and hopes and concerns for an expected continuation of the scheme into the winter months.

As we go to press and move into lockdown again we hope to have some programmes with guests talking about "their" Soho in contexts less constrained by Covid-19 issues, although sadly that is unlikely to be far from all our minds for some months to come.

New co-host and presenter Joel Levack describes the Soho Society Hour as

"A weekly talk show intercut with Soho inspired music chosen by the guests.

A range of relevant guests join Leslie and Joel each week in the studio or on the telephone, and talk about all things Soho. The past, the present and the future of our little village is discussed informally over a few snippets of music tracks linked to the area."



PLANNING

WE ARE WATCHING - MATTHEW BENNET

The number of planning applications has fallen steadily since the pandemic hit us. Many applications were for things following through from schemes put forward pre-Covid and others were applications to renew temporary or time limited consents, such as for tables and chairs or for dual planning uses. As might be expected there have also been applications to allow take-away food and beverage from premises which previously were not allowed to, and for the removal of planning conditions which applicants felt were hampering their business in the light of the pandemic. We judged each carefully on its merits before responding.

The major upheaval this summer was a rushed through change by central Government to the Use Classes Order ('UCO') as a 'build, build, build' response to the economic impact of the pandemic. The UCO is the part of planning which divides different activities (uses) into different planning categories. So, as an example, a shop was in the A1 category and a restaurant was in A3 and it required a planning consent to change from one use to the other.

That was all swept away on 1 September with a new use class, Class E (for economy). Now shops, financial services, restaurants, offices, gyms, health centres and crèches all fall within the same use. That means planning consent is no longer required for an office or shop to become a restaurant or an office to become a gym, etc. 'So what', you may say, but different activities (uses) have different impacts and in having to apply for planning consent it was possible for neighbours and the council to impose conditions to prevent or mitigate any adverse impacts. That's all gone. Pubs and takeaways now move into separate classes of their own and planning is still required to change them.

In another upheaval from the Government they produced in September a 'Planning for the Future' White Paper which proposes dividing all of England up into three area categories – Growth, Renewal and Protected, with automatic planning consent in growth areas. We hope, but do not yet know, that as Soho is almost entirely a Conservation Area we will be in the Protected category but this is not confirmed. The White Paper has attracted widespread criticism and debate so there may well be changes before any legislation is passed. We shall have to see what the long-term impacts for Soho are as a result of these changes.

But all this is masked by the recurring impact of Covid 19 which has already driven some places to close permanently and threatens many others the longer it goes on. However you look at it, change is on the way for Soho.

On the upside there were bits of good planning news. It was good to see proposals coming forward to reopen the restaurant premises which formerly traded as the Red Fort. We were concerned at the loss of the distinctive shopfront and after some

negotiations were pleased to see that it will be retained. At 13 Soho Square there is a proposal to turn one of the buildings on the north side of the square back into a family home. More notably the building is listed as 2* which means it has high heritage importance but the owner's proposals are to achieve the highest possible environmental rating for the building. This is a real beacon of hope that can show the way to how Soho's many important heritage buildings can be adapted to meet the challenges faced by the battle to achieve net zero carbon across Westminster.

Another positive move was that the proposed development over the Dean Street Crossrail entrance has passed its planning hurdles and there will be 92 new flats of which 23 will be affordable.

We will keep watching -and where necessary advising, commenting and objecting.

Soho Neighbourhood Forum

After so much effort and public consultation it was great to see that the forum passed its final (virtual) consultation stage in the summer and has now moved to the independent examination stage to test that the Plan is sound and made in general conformity with the other relevant plans. Once the examiner has concluded her work and reported to Westminster, they will consider her report before starting the final process to put the Plan in its finalised form to two separate referendums: one of residents (who are on the electoral role), the other of local businesses (each business has one vote). It is unlikely that due to the pandemic these referenda will take place before May next Year.

A short virtual AGM was held on 11th November to report on the stages outlined above and to re-elect the Forum Steering Group ('FSG'). There was also presentation and discussion of projects which the Forum will put forward to WCC to approve using funds from the Community Infrastructure levy ('CIL').

Matthew Bennett

POLICE UPDATE

PC STEVE MULDOON

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Clarion again. I would like to give an overview of how policing has looked in Soho both during and after the lockdown. Firstly, during the first lockdown Soho in the main stuck to the rules and stayed at home. In all five fixed penalty notices were issued for gatherings in the street. Other than those our approach around engagement worked. Whilst Soho was extremely quiet we took the opportunity to meet people we hadn't met before. With many residents taking their daily walk around Soho's streets it was great to stop and chat with you all.

When lockdown started to ease we had a new challenge for us; as bars were still closed we found people wanting to meet to drink and party. We had several days where people congregated in the streets, and on top of this we had house parties like we hadn't seen before. Small properties with over 100 people inside were extremely challenging to deal with. Officers, if aware, dealt with the majority of these. However, there were some addresses where we had to work in partnership with WCC to try and prevent any more 'events' taking place.. We have since been given authority to impose larger fines, and although it has not stopped it altogether the numbers of parties have significantly decreased. It is worth noting that should anyone see any setting up of a party - e.g. large speakers being wheeled into addresses, or large numbers of people coming to an address, please call 101 as the earlier we get the notice the easier it is to deal with and in turn the less disruption you as residents will face.

Throughout the summer our crime levels started to increase but still not to anywhere near where they were last year. The main crimes being committed are thefts: this has mainly been where property has been taken from tables whilst people have been eating and drinking outside. To try and help combat this we visited every venue offering stickers for tables and clips for customers to hang bags on (I do still have some if anyone needs them). Whilst we are seeing these offences take place across Soho, Old Compton Street is certainly the hot spot.

I cannot emphasise enough how important it is to look after your belongings whilst out. Where possible never leave your phone or purse/wallet out on a table as this will simply give a potential thief an opportunity to steal it.

As police officers, we have found ourselves dealing with things we never in our lives imagined we'd have to deal with: reminding people about masks, stopping large gatherings and stopping households mixing. This has been difficult and at times confusing but, with the majority of Soho complying, it has been made easier for us.

As we approach the Christmas period we are again in another kind of national lockdown. With this due to end on the 2 December we will be working with WCC to plan for any potential issues that arise out of the easing of restrictions.

Merry Christmas to you all,

PC Steve Muldoon

Soho Ward Officer

@MPSSoho

Non emergency 101 or www.met.police.uk/report or tweet @METCC

In an emergency always dial 999.



SOHO HOUSING

Thank you so much for inviting me to contribute to this much awaited issue of the Soho Clarion. I am Anne McLoughlin the new CEO of Soho Housing Association, the main local provider of truly affordable homes and great commercial spaces in the heart of Soho and the West End.

At the beginning of my career in housing, I was a Housing Rights Advisor in the neighbouring borough of Kensington & Chelsea, at the Nucleus Legal Advice Centre on the Old Brompton Road. Prior to joining Soho Housing I was for many years the Operations Director for the leading rural housing provider, delivering high quality, affordable homes in some of the most desirable village locations across the south of England. It was the vital importance of place and community that attracted me to this new role, together with a long-held love for Soho and the surrounding 'villages' of our global city like Covent Garden, Fitzrovia and Pimlico.

My first day as a new CEO was not perhaps the start that I had once envisaged, simply moving from one part of my house to another to log on for a video call. Yet the warmth of the welcome from the great team, wonderful tenants, local people, partners and community groups helped me feel at home in Soho very quickly.

The impact of the pandemic on Soho Housing has of course been significant. The income stream from our commercial property portfolio has been substantially affected. Many commercial and residential tenants are struggling with rent payments. Our teams have prioritised their focus on those in most need, to understand their economic circumstances and help where we can.

Our first concern remains the health and safety of our tenants and throughout the crisis we have retained our emergency repair service. More routine repairs were impacted by the first lockdown but together with our contractors we have been working hard to catch up on the backlog. We do not believe that we will have to halt routine repairs again in the second lockdown.

A new experience for us is the difficulty we are finding in gaining access to some of our tenants' homes in order to continue our comprehensive programme of safety checks. We are stepping up our efforts to contact residents and understand better their concerns and provide assurance about our Covid-safe practices.

We reported in the last issue of the Clarion that we are developing new affordable homes in Soho in partnership with Soho Estates and though somewhat delayed, construction is ongoing and we look forward to bringing those eight additional homes into use later next year.

Soho Housing was formed in a time when the whole future of Soho was in peril. We are honoured to still count those founders in our shareholders and board members. The impact of the pandemic on our beloved Soho, on the theatre, hospitality, retail

and the associated jobs is extraordinary. Yet we are determined to play our part in recovery. We plan to redouble our connections with the local community, strengthen our services so that our tenants can always rely on us to do the right thing and look together with our community partners, landowners and business for new opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing for local families and workers. Please do contact me if you have ideas or proposals at annemcloughlin@sohoha.org.uk

Together we will build on our unique position, reinforce its community purpose and drive forward a sustainable future that captures the spirit of our founders.

Anne McLoughlin





NICKIE AIKEN

CONSERVATIVE MP FOR CITIES OF LONDON & WESTMINSTER

Soho's community spirit burns as brightly as ever

been elected the Member of Parliament for the Cities of London & Westminster.

Since last December's General Election, all our lives have drastically changed. Then virtually no one in the UK was aware of COVID-19. Now its impact dominates our lives, putting so much on hold, leaving us learning to grasp the "new normal". Many of you will have sadly lost someone to this nasty virus. My sincere condolences to you if you have.

If there is one positive to take from what we are currently experiencing is that communities across the UK have pulled together. And Soho has been no exception. For many people living outside Central London Soho is a place of theatres, bars, restaurants and its reputation for the more risqué side of life. We know differently, that it is a strong and supportive community.

Distinct in its identity from its neighbours Mayfair, Fitzrovia and Marylebone, Soho has always benefitted from a strong community spirit that comes together to support its most vulnerable. The response from local people during the current pandemic has been outstanding, demonstrating Soho's community spirit remains as solid and resilient as ever.

COVID-19 is likely to have long term consequences for all of us. Central London's economy is currently disproportionately affected, with West End and Soho companies, big and small, feeling the effects of the pandemic.

Before COVID these businesses relied on revenue mostly generated from workers, visitors and tourists. We are all aware of the significant proportion of Soho businesses' revenue which is linked to theatres. For every £1 spent on theatre tickets last year in the West End a further £5 was spent in the local economy.

Most theatres have been unable to reopen since shutting down back in March, putting many in a precarious financial position. Theatres are crucial to the future of Soho and the wider West End's economy. I have been calling on the Government to provide greater support for them, and specifically for those self-employed

It is a pleasure to be asked to contribute to the Soho Clarion having

who tend to work in theatre and the creative industries, too many of whom have fallen through the cracks and have been excluded from the financial support schemes unveiled by the Chancellor.

My first led Westminster Hall debate highlighted the importance of theatres, live music and cultural venues to local economies and livelihoods. The debate attracted cross Party support. I will keep campaigning on these issues and working with the sector and Government to enable theatres and live music venues to reopen as soon as possible and to secure the widening of financial support for the self-employed.

I will continue to strive as your Member of Parliament to work with you, local community groups and businesses to ensure we safeguard Soho as a special part of our great Capital.

Need to contact Nickie?

Email nickie.aiken.mp@parliament.uk or call 020 7219 4553.

Follow Nickie on social media @twocitiesnickie

JONATHAN GLANZ

LORD MAYOR OF WESTMINSTER



At the time of writing we are going into our second lockdown of this year, and by the time you read this, we may be in whatever the next phase of 2020's extraordinary journey is.

Covid has affected all of our lives, and every resident and business in Soho and beyond knows that some aspects of our lives will have changed forever.

Many of us have lost loved ones to the pandemic, as well as losing well-loved local businesses, and much of the unique feel of Soho with its blend of restaurants, pubs, clubs and theatres has gone, along with a way of life which we took for granted. For many of us living in the West End was very much part of why we chose to make the compromises that living in the centre of the city requires, and we can only hope that it can be rebuilt.

From a personal perspective, I had been looking forward to being Westminster's First Citizen, with all that that entails. The role reflects the diversity and intensity of activity in Westminster, normally encompassing everything from state visits, national occasions like the Trooping the Colour and services at Westminster Abbey, to visiting local schools, libraries and nursing homes.

This year, all of that has gone, with very few exceptions, and whilst I have tried to attend events by Zoom and Teams, it has proved to be a very different experience from that which had been enjoyed by my predecessors.

However, during Covid, I have witnessed at first-hand some positive aspects in changes to our lives. There has certainly been a significant revival in community spirit, with neighbours and others helping each other with practical difficulties, advice and support. Talking to those who have volunteered, sometimes they tell stories not only of people who have been unable to get access to food and medicines that they need, but who are experiencing loneliness, isolation and in some cases mental health issues as we face all the challenges that the pandemic has thrown at us.

The other positive that I have noted, is the collapse of the Airbnb and short-lettings market generally. Whilst there have been well-publicised issues with a party house in Carlisle Street, the hundreds of flats that were regularly used as Airbnb properties in Westminster have stopped being so used.

As a result, these properties have come back into the long-term rental market, and that, together with the general economic position, has led to significant rent reductions for private rental properties, benefiting some people and allowing others who might not have been able to live in our area the opportunity to do so. It will be interesting to see how long this continues once international travel is re-established but it allows Westminster's enforcement teams the chance to prepare for future resumption.

I also hope that we will be able to maintain the improvement in air quality as, even if traffic levels increase again, the number and percentage of electric cars and taxis will increase.

Across Westminster, we have seen the al fresco experiment, and many restaurants have said that it has been a lifesaver for them, and it was clearly enjoyed by many whilst the weather held.

However, I am sure it was less fun for close living close by or inconvenienced by the road closures, and, as with all these issues, the balance between residential amenity and commercial activity will need to be considered carefully if this scheme is to be extended, revived or become part of a more permanent approach to how we utilise our streets.

The West End has been written off many times. Its doom had been predicted on the introduction of Saturday parking, congestion charging etc, but I have never known such a wide-ranging threat to the entire ecosystem that is the West End. Without a significant increase in visitors from home and abroad, with a substantial reopening of our offices, and the revitalisation of our shops, both large and specialist, it is difficult to see how the recovery from this can be anything other than slow and uncertain.

All we can do is to support that process as best we can, both in practical terms, and encouraging Government to do likewise, and seek to keep the best of the experience to help shape the future.

Picture by Westminster Digital



PANCHO LEWIS

LABOUR WARD COUNCILLOR

I hope you and your friends and family are keeping safe and healthy through these very difficult times. It's been an incredibly challenging year. Unfortunately as a result of the second wave, the second national lockdown, and what will no doubt be continued restrictions once lockdown ends (at the time of writing it has only just begun), the months ahead are likely to continue to be very tough. Please continue to look after yourself and others in the community, and remember that I'm here to help in any way I can.

How to get help and get involved with volunteering opportunities

It's important that people in Soho know there is help out there for those who need it. Westminster Connects, a service run by the Council to support those who are vulnerable due to Covid, is up and running again. It provides access to food delivery parcels, mental health support services, befriending programmes, and other forms of support. You can ask for help for yourself or someone you know by calling 020 7641 1222 from Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm.

You can also sign up as a volunteer via Westminster Connects and take part in community activities. Volunteer activities include helping with delivering food and supplies and joining one of the befriending services to connect with those who are feeling lonely, by taking simple steps like calling those who could do with a chat. Find out more by visiting www.westminster.gov.uk

Outside of support provided by the Council, there's also a food bank that's running in Covent Garden. It is run by Covent Garden Community Centre (CGCC) & Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust and is based at 42 Earlham Street, WC2H 9LA. Residents can find out more at <https://www.sevendialsclub.com/>

Marshall Street leisure centre

Turning to issues I've been taking up as your councillor, there are two key issues I want to raise. The first is to do with Marshall Street leisure centre.

I am very disappointed that Cabinet Members at Westminster Council took the decision to close the pool and severely cut back on opening hours at Marshall Street leisure centre. The

Soho community will remember that there was a long-standing campaign to reopen Marshall Street after the Council closed it for several years. Given this recent history, and given also that one of the best ways to maintain one's mental health is exercising, it is inexcusable that they should be cutting back on opening hours and closing the pool - precisely at a time when they should be encouraging, not putting up barriers to physical exercise.

The decision by Cabinet Members is due to be revised in the new year. And of course, as long as any national lockdown remains in place, the leisure centre will - together with others across the country - remain shut. But I want to make it clear to the Council that the Soho community feels very strongly about this decision, which is why I've organised an open letter to the Conservative Leader of the Council objecting to it. I'm grateful to the dozens of residents who have already signed it. If you would like to add your name please let me know. I hope that by keeping the pressure up, we can get them to think again and realise the very real damage they will do if they insist on their current approach.

Free school meals

The second issue is free school meals. The Westminster Labour group of councillors has been calling on the Council to support free school meal vouchers during school holidays, following the Government's decision to refuse access to support. London councils of all political persuasions - from Labour's Hammersmith and Fulham to the Conservative's Kensington and Chelsea - have funded access to vouchers, which makes the decision by this Council to refuse support all the more upsetting. No child should go hungry during the school holidays; it should be noted that over 5000 children in Westminster are eligible for free school meals. At a time of hardship and distress for so many families, shouldn't the Council be helping those who need support? It's baffling and shameful that they haven't been.

Remember - I'm here to help if I can

I can be contacted on plewis@westminster.gov.uk, 020 7641 5377, or you can write to Cllr Pancho Lewis, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

I also have a monthly e-newsletter that most residents find helpful, so if you'd like to be added to it please contact me and I'll pop you on the list.

TIM BARNES

CONSERVATIVE WARD COUNCILLOR



Nine long months and counting...

Back in February, I wrote with delight that we had managed to save the 100 Club with a new exemption on business rates, our campaign to halt the closure of the Soho Walk-In Centre and new actions to stop pedicabs. How long ago that seems.

Since then, the Covid pandemic and the actions taken nationally and locally to mitigate infection have led to huge changes in how we all work and relax. Soho, with arguably the greatest concentration of bars, pubs and restaurants in the country, has been particularly hard hit. At every level, a balance that was probably always going to be impossible to find has, nonetheless, been sought. For many, there has not been enough priority given to stopping the infection, and for others not enough on saving businesses and jobs.

In Soho the most acute sense of this has undoubtedly come from the policies Westminster City Council introduced over the summer to allow tables and chairs to be placed in over 30 of our local streets during evenings and at weekends. This had to be done quickly to maximise the impact and we were ready the first day that such measures were allowed.

Across Westminster, residents have supported this scheme, which finished at the end of October. The excellent survey carried out by the Soho Society to assess the local responses showed strong support from the majority of residents and businesses here. But it should be underlined that for a small number of residents, the scheme did bring genuine problems of noise and nighttime disturbance in their homes and on their doorsteps. The negative impact on them has been real and I am sorry that we were not able to mitigate it further. They have been on Soho's frontline and have our thanks, as well as sympathy, for what they endured.

Several local bar and restaurant owners have stopped me in the street to thank us for introducing the Al Fresco scheme, saying it was the difference between survival and bankruptcy for them. I have met with many more who have outlined the ups and downs of lockdown – some in tears and some pleased that they have just made it this far. There is still more troubled water to navigate but we now have some sense of the timescales into 2021 that enable planning that was much less certain before.

Whatever long term changes we see in Soho once Covid recedes, most of us will want it to still be the humming, diverse and vibrant place it has long been. For that to happen, we need to ensure that many of the best local bars and restaurants survive and not just those backed by big chains. That's why local actions to support them are so vital.

Winter Is Coming

We are now looking at what can and should be done this winter as lockdown returns and many of those same bars and restaurants that define Soho today look to a difficult future. Typically, the

Christmas and New Year period can see businesses take a quarter or more of their annual income and if there is insufficient trade they will not have the reserves to make it through the difficult months of January and February.

Across Westminster, we have consulted with amenity societies, residents associations, individuals, businesses and experts on what should happen next to help. There have been requests for enhanced cycling and pedestrian routes to support socially-distanced movement and some of these are already appearing on Soho's western edge, along Regent Street. But the overwhelming request was to find a way to continue the best elements of the Al Fresco scheme with some modifications for winter such as heaters and covers. The national government has made legal changes to the licences some businesses will need and we have attempted to bring together groups of restaurants and bars and required them to consult with local residents on their plans. Any businesses that did not have local support would not see their plans proceed.

I am delighted that the Soho Society was among the groups that was able to feed back on these plans. The Society's response included direct comments from residents and survey responses showing a significant majority in support of the Al Fresco schemes in principle, but with concerns about some specific plans. These will be listened to and acted on.

At the time of writing, we expect nearly 100 local restaurants and bars will soon be submitting their licence applications for further pavement access through the winter months and residents will be able to respond to the consultations on each one via the Westminster website.

Helicopter Noise Nuisance

Several weekends over the last few months have been blighted for Soho residents by police helicopters hovering over us for hours on end. Most of this has been as a result of the need to monitor various protests. While we would probably all agree that safety and good order are priorities we would support, the impact on people who live or visit the centre of the city must also be considered. I have been working with our local MP, Nickie Aiken, to reduce the problem by working with the police. Nickie has a form on her website if you want to add your voice to this campaign. Please sign up at: <https://www.nickieaiken.org.uk/campaigns>

Have an issue you want to raise?

Regular surgeries had to be suspended for much of the summer due to lockdown. I managed to hold two before the second lockdown came into force and we will pick these up again in the new year with one in Soho on the last Friday of every month at

St Anne's on Dean Street from 5pm and another on the second Saturday of each month from 11am at the Mayfair Community Space on North Audley Street. You can just turn up and drop in – no appointment needed – and all local residents and businesses are welcome.

Until then, please feel free to contact me via phone on 020 7641 3411, @CampaignTim on Twitter or tbarnes@westminster.gov.uk if you prefer.

Nickie Aiken MP and Cllr Timothy Barnes discussing trade in Soho with the owners and manager of MyPlace, Berwick Street in August.



MARKET TRADERS HAVE NOT BEEN ABANDONED

Westminster residents are rightfully proud of their markets; from Church Street to Strutton Ground, there have long been stalls feeding workers and providing essential supplies to locals.

But the Covid crisis and the measures introduced to counter infection have had a huge impact on these valued resources. Data produced by Arup suggests numbers of local office workers around to buy things is down by 60% but most of us would probably agree that it feels a lot worse even than that. Tourists and office workers are the main source of business for the traders and their loss is a huge hit.

Westminster City Council have provided significant financial and non-financial support for all of our markets, including Berwick Street here in Soho. Contrary to some of the stories that have appeared on social media and elsewhere, we have offered a significant amount of financial assistance and we continue to look at what else can be done to help individual traders survive now and thrive in future.

During the summer, the Council was able to support a number of businesses that applied for discretionary grants, specifically put in place to help compensate for the issues presented by trying to trade through Covid. These were set at £10,000 each and seven traders on Berwick Street and Rupert Street markets received these payments, which were not offered to market traders by councils in much of London.

Many of the key traders on the market, including those supplying fruit and veg, milk and cheese, and other fresh food, make use of a storage unit close to the market on Peter Street. The

Council brought this back in-house in January and is spending a significant sum to refurbish it, prompting one Berwick Street trader to say it looks the best it has in 20 years. Rents there range from £80 to £500 per month but as part of the Covid response, these were waived during the lockdown, saving traders that use them an average of some £2,000.

Sadly, while pitch fees were waived at the start of lockdown, the amount traders pay each day to trade did have to be increased, for the first time in thirteen years. There are statutory regulations around what can and can't be charged for and they have to cover all our markets. Councils cannot make a profit on these by law and all the money – considerably more in fact – is ploughed back into the market operations. The total increase in charges, which vary by day, mean most of the regular traders on Berwick Street faced an increase of about £100 per month when they came into effect in July, having been put back by a quarter in response to Covid.

References in the media to this representing a 20% increase are technically correct, but perhaps a little disingenuous as the complete picture should see the £500 incurred in the five months to date set against the £12,000 or so of additional support in grants and saved storage costs received by some of the most high-profile traders operating through the summer.

These measures are on top of the usual market support activities. Across Westminster, we continue to spend about £1m per year on our markets to support their activities, from regulation to installation of wi-fi to help take contactless payments.

Of course, it never just rains but it pours. In addition to Covid, for those few traders that did persist through the summer (and whom we all thank!) there were additional network upgrades on the street to contend with. We helped here, too, by waiving pitch fees again for the period they were taking place on both Berwick Street and Rupert Street markets during June and July.

We also tried to activate the market with more trade from the cafes at the north end of the street but these had to be curtailed after one of the traders complained. The majority of traders were supportive and thought the additional trade was positive, but it was not possible to continue as we had been doing from that point on.

Overall, the attitude of those with licences has remained extremely positive and it has been wonderful to see. All of the traders who have not been present have continued to pay to keep up their licences knowing that they will be valuable when conditions improve, excepting one who has given notice of an intent to quit, citing personal changes in circumstances. Most see the licence as too valuable to return but traders are free to do

that at any time and there are new applicants coming forward. Rumours can abound in the informal atmosphere of markets, but while times are extremely hard, we will help them come through. The future of Berwick Street Market is not in question.

We should all be proud of our markets, many of which have centuries of tradition, including here on Berwick Street. Westminster City Council has not abandoned traders but paid out meaningful cash and other support. We will continue to invest in their infrastructure and offer help in difficult times such as these. Those who are unable to trade, given current guidance, have had their fees waived, too.

But the best thing we can all do to support the markets is to stay local and use them, because their greatest need is customers. Please take a look at your local market and see what you can buy!

Tim Barnes

BERWICK STREET MARKET COMPLAINT

You may or may not have noticed that as traders have disappeared one-by-one from Berwick Street Market (due to the collapse of the local economy and Westminster City Council's quite extraordinary backdated pitch fee increases), a number of cheeky little banners have sprung up on the lamp posts (along with the graffiti and waste sacks that line the street). The banners are strangely reminiscent of Morris Minor indicators - funny where your mind goes after a few days of lockdown.

The banners are small with a dirty orange and white stripe and the words "Berwick Street - W1 - Market Established 1778". No one can be quite sure where the dirty orange came from but it kind of ties in with the enamelled steel "art" adorning the front of the magnificent new Premier Inn development that has so uplifted the Soho experience over the past five or six years.

But it is the date that catches the eye. 1778 is the year of our first recorded complaint, not the year of establishment. It was the year that ten brokers living in Berwick Street and New Street (Ingestre Place) were summonsed for setting out goods in the Street after complaints from residents and a rebuke from the

Vestry Committee - 'don't do it again', apparently. One hundred years later in March 1883 it was still going on with proceedings taken against another such offender, at 101 Berwick Street, who had knuckles rapped for 'placing out baskets and boards containing vegetables', and around the time the Vestry tried to compel the removal of a stall outside 100 Berwick Street, but after the owner had stated that the stall had stood in that position for years no further action was taken. Complaints continue to this day in an endless procession like demolition and construction vehicles.



What no one seems to have fully comprehended is that Berwick Street Market was actually born out of a complaint in 1687, a complaint made by King James II about blocked drains in the Hay Market that caused his palace to flood. And while that complaint has echoes today (with one person or another complaining about vegetable water on the cobbles or attributing dustcart dribbly-dregs to the toil of hard working people) it is worth recalling that the Hay Market was a huge service station in 1687, with carts and traders and stables saturating the streets around, building the West End and, yes, clogging the sewers with hay, straw and no doubt barley,

given all the breweries we had brewing and belching in the back streets.

Anyway, “Enough!” said James II who in 1687 granted permission to developer Pollett to transfer the Hay Market to his own ground in the ‘olde Sohoe’ and make it ‘fitt to receive Carts Wagons or Waines of hay and straw and for the keeping of the said market’. Pollett built sewers in Berwick Street (South) (North came later) and laid out the market place that evidently began as, and was for some years known as, ‘the new Haymarket’. “About the Middle of this Street is a Place designed for a Hay Market, and a great Part of the low Ground raised, with some of the Houses built Piazzo wise, and sustained by Stone Pillars; but whether it will be finished, Time will make appear.” Strype 1720. (Sounds familiar) The small buildings that line the East side of Berwick Street, from Gosh to the Blue Posts, flanked a large market square that was laid out despite the king being deposed and the developer going bust, complaint after complaint after complaint - then as now.

So to all of those newbies and nimbies who whine, whinge and gripe with councillors, spread lies and cause misery for traders, simply to serve their own purpose, I say this - carry on. You are sewing yourself into the fabric of an extraordinary street market history and if you shout loud enough you may even make a footnote.

However, if you want to do something positive, complain to Westminster City Council’s Greg Ward, gward@westminster.gov.uk about the total lack of development of this idea for a Berwick Street Market revival that was stalled in its tracks more than three years ago despite mutual engagement and enthusiasm.

Robin Smith

Berwick Street Traders Society / Soho Dairy



LICENSING UPDATE

As reported over a year ago, there are times when we take issue with Westminster City Council's application of its own licensing policy. This has happened several times recently. One instance was where the Council granted an extension to the licence for a cocktail bar until 1 am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. This is time limited to coincide with the end of the Business and Planning Act 2020 (September 2021). This is disappointing as during these unprecedented times the Society feels that Westminster City Council should refuse such extensions. COVID-19 presents significant challenges in the prevention of the spread of the virus in venues and in the surrounding streets. Although premises have worked extremely hard to ensure they abide by the guidance it is difficult to ensure this is maintained when people leave premises. The large number of licensed premises with high capacities all concentrated in a very small area has resulted in large numbers of people on the streets late at night. The ability to maintain social distancing is nigh on impossible when people have 'had a few too many' - their inhibitions are lowered, which increases the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

However, in another instance, in accordance with their licensing policy, the Council refused an application by another cocktail bar for a 1.30 am licence as the Committee did not feel they had proved they were an exception to the policy.

Westminster's Licensing Policy has to be reviewed every five years, and is currently going through the renewal process. The Society has made lengthy submissions on the policy, particularly as Soho is within the cumulative impact area, which is thus defined: 'The principle of cumulative impact is to identify which areas are saturated with a significant number, type or composition of licensed premises, causing the benefits provided by alcohol

outlets to be outweighed by public nuisance, crime, disorder and other costs of excessive alcohol consumption.'

They then presented a series of quite alarming figures, for West End Zone 1 (which includes Soho) which is that 3% of the borough's footprint held 25% of 'unique licence locations'. They then gave the crime figures for the two year period between 2017 and 2019, which make sorry reading, and include serious violence, robberies, theft and drug offences. Also alcohol-related call-out incidents, anti-social behaviour and demands on services were prevalent in Westminster during this period, and are among the highest in the country. All incidents observed concentrated in the West End, many occurring in the evening and at night as well as weekends (10 to 13 times higher compared to the Borough average).

Their updated policy is due to be published early in 2021 and we will be able to give a much better update and more information in the next issue of the Clarion.

In the meantime, if you wish to object to any licence application it is important to do so, as it feeds into the information available to the Licensing Committees when coming to decisions. It's easy to do online. If the Society can help please contact us.

The Soho Society would like, as always, to thank Richard Brown of the Citizens Advice Bureau Licensing Project for his invaluable help and advice. Richard can be contacted at licensing@westminstercab.org.uk and will be happy to help with any problems.

Jane Doyle

Proportion of Westminster's Incidents of Cumulative Impact, by Area

The proportion of incidents recorded over the last three years in Westminster are summaries below by area.

Proportion of Borough's Public Realm Crimes 2017 – 2019, by Area

Area	Unique License Locations	Footprint	Footprint Licenses Ratio	Proportion of Borough Total between 2017 – 2019 by Area			
				Serious Serious violent crimes – Night	Robberies – Night	Thefts – Night	Drug Offences – Night
West End 1 + 2	38%	7%	5.2	46%	54%	54%	53%
West End Zone 1	25%	3%	8.1	38%	44%	47%	45%
West End Zone 2	13%	4%	3.1	15%	21%	21%	13%
West End Stress Area	32%	4%	7.2	14%	20%	21%	12%
Marylebone Corridor	6%	3%	2.3	1%	3%	4%	1%
Paddington	4%	2%	1.8	2%	2%	2%	1%
Mayfair	4%	1%	4.0	2%	2%	2%	1%
Victoria	3%	1%	3.7	2%	1%	2%	1%
Fitzrovia North	3%	2%	1.8	1%	2%	1%	0%
Queensway & Bayswater	3%	1%	5.2	2%	1%	1%	1%
Edgware Road	1%	0%	3.2	2%	2%	1%	2%

OXFORD STREET UPDATE

Amid a second national lockdown, now is a good time to reflect on the work and resilience that the West End district has been shown throughout this cruel pandemic. It is the strength of our community that cements the West End as a top destination to visit, work and live.

It's been a busy year at New West End Company, with the team doing everything in our power to protect and safeguard our district in partnership with our community groups and local authorities. Despite this continued uncertainty and stop start measures that are undermining confidence and worsening this already catastrophic situation, we are determined that there is light at the end of the tunnel and we will be working with the whole West End community to ensure that once lockdown is eased, the West End can once again return in its full festive glory this Christmas.

Earlier this month, amid these uncertain times, we brought some light and joy to the district with the turning on of our Christmas lights on Oxford Street and Bond Street. We illuminated the Capital, and celebrated our first hero, Anis Ali an NHS Volunteer Responder. It was truly humbling to hear of the hard work and incredible acts of kindness that Mr Ali has shown throughout the pandemic, and as a community, we are honoured to celebrate his work, and the work of all our future heroes in the lights over the next seven weeks.

Since the Christmas lights, and the lockdown announcement, the West End saw its best footfall this year, with the three trading days before lockdown bringing in a third more visitors than seen in previous weeks, with footfall only down 39% in comparison

to 2019, a rise of 14% from the -50% we had stalled at since retail reopened in June. Despite this footfall rise being short lived as we enter a month-long lockdown, we are looking forward to welcoming back customers to our district in December to give

a much needed Christmas boost to retailers who are facing £2 billion loss in sales.

Beyond Christmas, we are continuing our efforts in urging Government to offer reassurance that in the long-term, London remains a competitive location for international brands and retailers. A continuation of the business rates relief beyond April 2021 and the reversal of the tax-free shopping decision remain our utmost priority in ensuring that the West End can emerge from lockdown with the best possible trading environment. The West End is resilient, but the Government's earlier decision to abolish tax-free shopping has already put 25,000 British jobs at risk. London is already threatened by the reduced spend this year and cannot continue to prosper without



further, long-term support.

At New West End Company, we firmly believe that we are better together, and we will continue to work with our community, businesses, residents and authorities to navigate these challenging times ensure that our district continues to thrive.

Jace Tyrrell, Chief Executive, New West End Company

THANK YOU FROM THE SOHO SOCIETY

The Soho Society would like to thank all those ‘essential’ local shops who helped keep Soho alive during the first lockdown. They include, but are not limited to, I Camisa on Old Compton Street, where they remained ever cheerful and, unlike the supermarkets, never ran out of pasta. They’re also open during the second lockdown, for which again we thank them.

Also, the Vintage House remained open, supplying all things alcoholic (to go with the pasta) and cigars.

Then in Berwick Street market Soho Dairy remained open and was somewhere to go to see a friendly face and have a chat during either ‘essential shopping trips’ or ‘exercise’, as was Jimmy’s for fruit and vegetables - if only Soho had a butcher’s or fishmonger, you’d never have to leave!

Bagels were available throughout from B Bagel on the corner of Wardour Street, which saw queues (properly socially distanced) as it was one of the only places then to get a take-away coffee, and was very popular with both the Met and British Transport Police.

Also deserving of a mention, though required to remain open as being essential, is Watsons, the chemist, who had to move from

their premises in Frith Street to temporary accommodation in Charing Cross Road, supplied to them by Soho Housing, and then back again.

We mustn’t forget the newsagents and take-away restaurants, who opened when they could. We thank them all. Don’t forget they’re open again during the second lockdown, alongside a number of other shops, such as Lina Stores, Gerry’s Wines, Café de Nata, Gail’s.

Also open as we go to print are My Place, Flat White, Violet’s and The Breakfast Club in Berwick Street, to keep the Soho Dairy company.

Also thanks to Clare Lynch and Leslie Hardcastle for keeping us all informed on Soho Radio and to all those who volunteered in so many ways.

We wish you all a Happy Christmas, and a healthy 2021.

Jane Doyle

OUR NEWEST SOHO RESIDENT

HEAD, — On Nov. 9, 2020, at University College Hospital, London, to Rachel Waddell, partner of Stephen Head — a son, Keith Ian.



SOHO - PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

BY DICKON ROBINSON



It is fifty years since Charlotte and I moved into an unfurnished flat in the middle of Wardour Street. Much has changed but superficially at least the physical environment – streets, squares and buildings is largely unchanged. Our neighbours included two Italian waiters, a tailor, a bookmaker and soon after we arrived, a film editor: all the key activities for which Soho was noted – food, rag trade and entertainment. Well almost all, one shouldn't overlook the very obvious presence of the sex industry which gave it its reputation as a racy if somewhat sleazy neighbourhood.

But much has changed. The Soho we found was characterised by small businesses such as skilled tailors, jewellers, and makers of musical instruments: by Italian and Jewish immigrants and their food: by specialists of all sorts and by a blend of creativity and tradition. Property ownership was highly dispersed and many businesses owned their own premises. To us it seemed a highly diverse economy in which shops, restaurants, pubs, workshops, offices, galleries, theatres, cutting rooms, clubs and cafes seemed

well balanced. Of course it was evolving – workshops gave away to offices, as did much housing in the seventies, only to revert back to housing as Soho became seen as a desirable place to live over the last twenty years.

As newcomers we were soon struck by the poor condition of most of the housing stock and the lack of family housing options for people working long hours in those traditional trades. We were part of the small group which set up the Soho Society and the Soho Housing Association. The latter was instrumental in improving much of the local affordable housing in the seventies and eighties, and by developing new homes, primarily in Soho and Covent Garden, has done much to ensure that the area has a socially balanced residential community – a key feature of a civilised city and critical to ensuring Soho continues to be the place we recognise and cherish.

One big change has been in the pattern of property ownership. Unlike its neighbours to the west Soho was never dominated by large landed estates. However the growth of Shaftesbury,

Soho Estates, and CapCo in Covent Garden has brought both welcome investment and professional standards, but also an inevitable corporate ubiquity demonstrated by their desire to “brand” large areas of the neighbourhood. The relentless search for rental growth at all costs tends to result in an erosion of the highly mixed urban grain as retail, or food and beverage, take over every ground floor in a street. In the long term this seems to me to be unsatisfactory – the equivalent of the contrast between prairie and mixed farming, the latter being as we all know far more sustainable in the long term. Covid has thrown this into sharp relief and the West End turns out is much more vulnerable than we thought. Rents from F&B and retail have evaporated while those from offices have largely held up. Residential market rent levels are under pressure but affordable rental income is largely unchanged, partly due to support from housing benefit

Every challenge is also an opportunity and this is no different. However early signs of the response by those large property interests give some cause for concern. Turning Soho into a vast outdoor eating and party venue risks making it highly unattractive for residents, and curtailing vehicular access may drive out many of the other businesses which have long made their home in the area. Handled sensitively, al fresco lifestyles may work well but it is important that the interests of those who visit Soho for pleasure do not undermine the quality of life of those who live and work there.

There is no doubt that when the crisis is over there will be a considerable amount of vacant ground floor space as sadly many businesses will not survive and others will wish to scale back. This is a once in a generation opportunity to stimulate new businesses by providing prime space at very low rents to small businesses and start-ups, much as happened in Covent Garden in the early eighties when the Fruit and Vegetable Market moved to Nine Elms. I would hope that the major property interests – including Soho Housing which has its own commercial portfolio – might come together to promote a Soho wide initiative. Business incubation is a well established urban regeneration concept to which Soho could contribute its own advantages; highly connected, an established network of existing businesses, and a unique reputation. Taking a patient money approach now will reap great social and economic dividends later.

Looking further ahead climate change will be the greatest driver of change. However I suspect most of the buildings, streets and squares will still be recognisable in fifty years, albeit adapted to cope with higher temperatures and more extreme weather. I would also expect the residential population of Soho to continue to grow, in spite of any Covid inspired temporary exodus; and servicing their needs will become a more important driver of the local economy. But all will still be welcome in Soho, and we will still be a key destination for great food and a good night out.



Photos - Tim Lord

PETER TATCHELL

THE TRAILBLAZING GAY LIBERATION FRONT WAS FOUNDED 50 YEARS AGO IN 1970

Peter Tatchell reveals that some of the UK's early LGBT+ rights protests were planned in Soho.

The Gay Liberation Front, founded in London in 1970, was a milestone in LGBT+ history - the beginning of the modern 'out and proud' movement for LGBT+ human rights in the UK. I was part of it.

GLF did not plead for reform; it demanded change. Feisty and radical, our goal was the transformation of straight society. Indeed, GLF set the agenda for all the LGBT+ gains of the last five decades.

Inspired by GLF's freedom cry, for the first time thousands of us stopped hiding our sexuality and suffering in silence. No longer prepared to remain passive victims of injustice, we came out and marched with pride for LGBT+ liberation.

GLF's unique style of political campaigning was "protest as performance": theatrical, imaginative, camp and witty. It promoted the LGBT+ rights message in entertaining ways that caught people's attention.

There were spirited media stunts and street theatre spectaculars.

The 1971 Miss World contest at the Royal Albert Hall was upstaged by an alternative pageant outside the main entrance, featuring the GLF drag queens, Miss Used, Miss Represented and Miss Treated. GLF allied itself with the women's liberation movement against sexism because we understood that straight machismo oppressed both women and LGBTs.

Some GLF actions were planned at Alan Wakeman's flat in Denman Street Soho. Over tea and cakes, we'd brainstorm new ways to confront bigotry, often using humour and satire to make politics fun.

A 12-foot papier-mache cucumber was delivered to the offices of Pan Books in protest at Dr David Reuben's book, *Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Sex*, which suggested that gay men were obsessed with shoving vegetables up their bums.

When Mary Whitehouse began her crusade against the "moral pollution" of the "permissive society" (homosexuality, abortion and pornography), GLF disrupted her launch rally at Westminster

Central Hall with mice, whistles and kissing gay nuns.

There were also serious civil disobedience protests, modelled on the tactics of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King; including sit-ins in pubs, like the Chepstow in west London, which refused to serve "poofs" and "lezzos". GLF raided Harley Street against the "psycho Nazis" in the psychiatric profession who said homosexuality was a mental illness.

These protests helped raise public awareness of the homophobia that was wrecking our lives. They grabbed the headlines and put LGBT+ issues on the public agenda; provoking debate and helping change homophobic attitudes.

Most importantly, the sight of LGBTs fighting back against our persecutors dispelled forever the idea that straight society could walk all over us with impunity.

This transformation from victim to victor was emotionally uplifting for millions of previously downtrodden and downcast queers. It helped banish our internalised shame; repairing much of mental damage done to us by centuries of homophobia.

Through GLF we became the first LGBT+ generation to cast off the stigma and self-hate that had burdened us for over 2,000 years. The

result? We became happier, more confident people, determined to assert our rights and unafraid to challenge even the most powerful homophobes.

* Peter Tatchell is Director of the Peter Tatchell Foundation:

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THE VINTAGE HOUSE

**42 OLD COMPTON STREET, W1D 4LR
020 7437 2592**

Situated right in the middle of Old Compton Street is one of Soho's oldest family run businesses, the Vintage House, whose 75th birthday it is this year. There was to have been a party to celebrate but that's been put on hold due to Covid.

A little of the history is that the business was started by the present managing director, Malcolm Mullin's grandfather (on his mother's side) during the war, whose name was Donaty - he thought he was Italian, not the best thing to be at that time - so the company is called Donatel Freres (to make it sound more French) and now trades as the Vintage House. As an aside there used to be three flagpoles outside - an American, English and French flag. Malcolm's mother married an American airman and Malcolm was actually raised in the building, and two of his daughters, neither of whom are in the business, still live in the building.

Malcolm's father sadly died while Malcolm was at university studying aeronautical engineering, and on completing his degree Malcolm started working at the shop 45 years ago, and the rest is history.

The shop is an Aladdin's Cave and contains something like 2,000 whiskies - malt whiskies and blends from around the world - at all prices, the most expensive being £39,000. There are also about 400 rums and 50 different gins, alongside wines from across the globe, but specialising in French and Champagne.

They also sell a wide variety of cigars, which they've sold since Coleman Cohen closed - Coleman Cohen being a long established cigar and cigarette shop on the corner of Frith Street and Old Compton Street (as an aside they appeared in an episode of Minder). There are approximately 200 different types of cigars on offer, the majority Cuban (but there are also, amongst others, Nicaraguan, Honduran and Dominican Republic and Italian).

The Vintage House was open throughout the first lockdown for which the residents of Soho are very grateful, as, after two days, they were considered 'essential' (not least for retaining a semblance of sanity). Apart from anything else, the cigars

needed looking after as they have to be kept humid at all times. The humidors need topping up every two days, otherwise large numbers of cigars would become unsmokable.

Upstairs on the first floor is the Soho Whisky Club (which readers may or may not be aware of) which opened about eight years ago. It is a members' club, although pre-booked tastings are available for non-members. The club has a capacity of 40, there is a covered smoking terrace, with lots of comfortable chairs. Free tastings are, in non-Covid times, held roughly weekly. At the moment, these are done by Zoom with sampling packs being sent to members. There are also cigar tastings, but as it is illegal to give cigars away there is a cost for this, and the cigars are matched with whisky, rum or

To become a member you to chat to Malcolm or George, the manager. Otherwise all that is needed is a love of whisky (there are about 800 whiskies upstairs). The membership is £250 per annum and a £50 joining fee, but if you attend the tastings that more than pays for itself. To quote Colin Vaines, Soho resident and long time member, "It's just a lovely, convivial place, and highly civilised as you can buy and smoke cigars there to go with the astonishing range of whiskies (also very good wine and other spirits). The terrace is a real little oasis in Soho." I don't think you can ask for more than that.

The Vintage House, like so many Soho businesses has suffered badly from the downturn in business during the current pandemic. Another cause for concern has been access for their customers during the al-fresco months due to the road closures and the sheer numbers of people on the streets at times, though they did eventually get a licence to have a very small number of tables outside during the summer.



Jane Doyle

Picture of Colin Vaines by Salim Malan



Photography By Richard Piercy

40 YEARS OF GAZ'S ROCKIN' BLUES

BY RICHARD PIERCY

DJs spin a variety of ska, reggae, rock 'n' roll and classic rhythm 'n' blues; giving way to bands appearing live on stage. Welcome to Gaz's Rockin' Blues, London's longest running one-nighter, where every Thursday clubbers pack the dancefloor of this Wardour Street venue. A night of revelry in one of Soho's last remaining dive bars, presided over by club host, DJ and musician Gaz Mayall.

This year marks the club's fortieth anniversary, having first opened back in 1980. It was originally held at Gossips on the former site of The Mandrake in Dean Street, until Gaz moved the event to its current venue, the St Moritz in 1995, after Gossips then owner refused to continue allowing live bands to perform on stage.

I met with Gaz Mayall, the ebullient founder and host, to chat about his eponymous club, music and all things Soho.

Gaz has been surrounded by music his entire life; his father is blues legend and guitarist John Mayall. Although originally from Manchester, family friend and fellow blues musician, the late Alexis Koerner, advised his dad that if he wanted to make it in the music business he should relocate to London immediately. Consequently Gaz and his family moved to South East London in the 1960s. This era also heralded Gaz's introduction to Soho and its thriving club scene. He recalls going to see his dad play at venues such as The Flamingo, situated in the basement of 33-37 Wardour Street and the Marquee Club on the same street. He vividly recollects the tiny dressing room of the latter, its walls autographed by the multitude of musicians who had played there – many of them now household names. In true club tradition the night was always rounded off with a few classic Sinatra tracks.

During his mid teenage years, Gaz lived in Wales. His mother had by this time married an antiques dealer. Gaz took the opportunity to teach himself to play keyboards on the various pianos that his step-father acquired through his business, or as

he puts it, 'I locked myself in the barn and didn't emerge until I could play, sing and dance at the same time.'

The early 1970's saw a return to London where Gaz moved into a basement flat in Orme Square in West London. It was here that the seed of what was to become Gaz's Rockin' Blues was sown. During this period he was the owner of a shop in High Street Kensington Market that sold both clothes and vinyl records. When the shop closed at 6pm Gaz and an entourage of friends would head back to the Orme Square flat to continue the party that had begun earlier that day. As word spread of these progressively infamous house parties and the numbers of revellers increased, bigger premises were required and duly found. On Thursday 3 July 1980 Gaz's Rockin Blues opened for the first time at Gossips in Dean Street and the rest, as they say, is history!

Government Covid restrictions sadly prevented a 40th party at the club, the occasion instead marked by a live streamed party on Facebook from the Welsh borders. A double album celebrating 40 years of Gaz's Rockin' Blues will be released at the beginning of next year – further details and updates can be found online at gazrockin.com

Congratulations Gaz!

ARTIST SUPPORT PLEDGE

It was hard to imagine Artist Support Pledge growing into the phenomena it has become. Started back in Lockdown one point zero - the initiative began on the 16th March in response to the Covid Pandemic.

Matthew Burrows MBE, an artist himself, began receiving messages, emails and notifications that a huge wave of exhibitions and shows were due to be cancelled. Thinking on his feet, aware that something had to be done, and knowing the art sector would be in trouble too he considered the desperate situation.

He came up with the idea #artistsupportpledge as a way for artists to showcase works that might not otherwise be shown. All artists have 'stuff' in their studio - studies, smaller paintings and drawings that would never make it on to gallery walls. This is one of the clever things about the scheme - it doesn't compete with the classic model, so in no way does it threaten the mainstream market.

He wanted it to be on a more or less level playing field - so established that there would be a price cap of up to £200 per work. This feeds into the pledge - when an artist has sold £1,000 worth of works - they pledge to spend 20% (i.e. £200) on other artwork that could be found using the hashtag.

"It's my belief that if you create a context where trust and

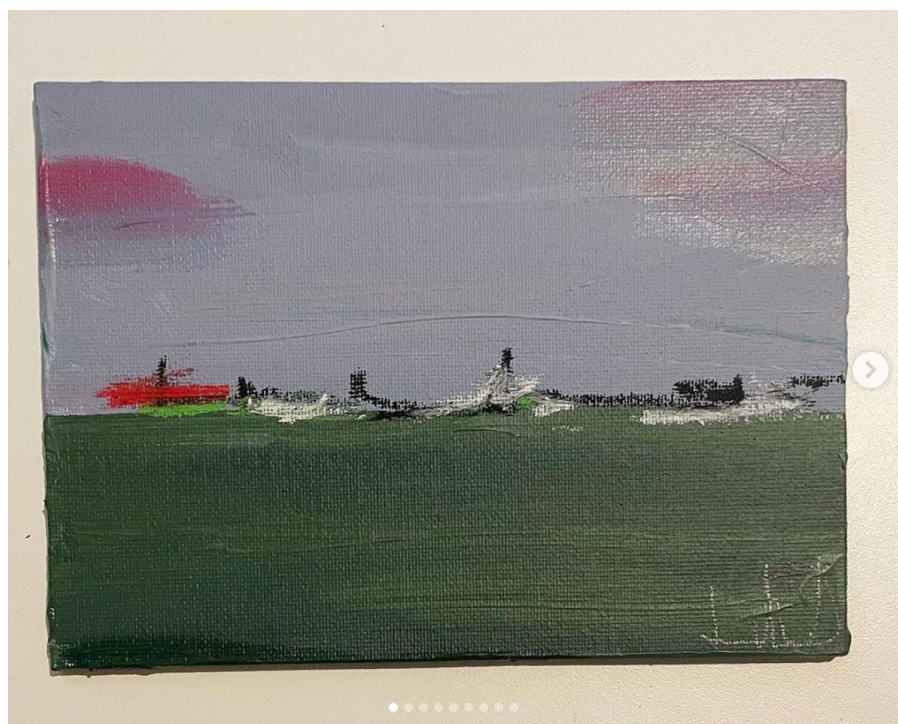
generosity are your founding principles, everything becomes easier", says Burrows when I interview him over the phone in his Sussex studio. "Support for one another becomes easier, developing projects becomes easier". It's these same key pillars Matthew learnt from his peer mentoring that he's worked on for the last decade that he applied to The Artist Support Pledge. This, alongside its simplicity, is what made it grow to an estimated £15m of sales per month.

Any artist can get involved, following the simple rules that are listed on the ASP instagram page or website:

<https://artistsupportpledge.com/>

Although designed to be used on Instagram - a platform many artists use to showcase their work - the ASP has grown and now crops up on many other social networks. Just type in #artistsupportpledge and you'll find a wealth of work to look through. It's become a great way for artists, galleries and collectors to come across new works and new artists.

"Cashflow has always been an acute problem for artists, it's boom or bust", says Burrows, "this method of selling really helps combat that issue". He hadn't planned for the growth of the project, at first thinking it would help out maybe a hundred or so artists. It's actually grown internationally, so works out of



 **joellevack** ...

 **joellevack** I have six of these baby canvas boards from Autumn Skies series. They were due to be in a place that's now closing from Thursday - so I'll be selling them via the rather wonderful #artistsupportpledge instead. 7"x5" acrylic and mixed media on canvas board (£25). DM if you want one they are all signed and numbered and you get a free striped bag. Postage not included in price. ARTIST SUPPORT PLEDGE is a generous culture and dynamic economy in

 Liked by **katherinej_p** and 23 others

6 DAYS AGO

Add a comment... Post



America and Europe operate with maximum price tags of \$200 or €200 etc - and aside from shipping (which is separate), that's the most anyone can charge. This really helps keep it to a near level playing field - another reason for the success of the scheme.

Matthew took the idea for his movement from pre-industrial society, "It's a system that's based on customs and codes of behaviour, not on laws and legal contracts" . That idea of simple trade dates back to the beginnings of civilisation. I know as an artist myself, there's often far more joy in trading an artwork with a fellow artist than selling for money. ASP manages to do both.

Catching up with Matthew over the phone, he comes across as a lovely bloke who's very humble: someone who could have made a lot of money from an idea - but decided that wasn't the point - it was about helping others in need. It's no doubt it is that self-effacing attitude that led him to appear on the recent Queens Birthday Honours List.

Joel Levack





SOHO BIDS FAREWELL TO BROADWICK SILKS

BY RICHARD PIERCY

The Clarion was sad to learn that Broadwick Silks fabric shop has closed its doors and relocated, after being in Soho for nearly 30 years. Spencer Harvey, owner and founding partner, looks back on an area he has been heavily involved with since childhood and explains his decision to move.

Spencer's introduction to Soho was as a child when he used to 'help out' on the family fruit and veg stall in Berwick Street Market, which was owned by his father Billy and Uncles John and Michael. The family home in Chorleywood had fruit trees in the garden. Spencer and his brother would pick the apples and sell them from a pitch directly in front of the family stall – the entrepreneurial spirit clearly in evidence from an early age!

A future in the fabric business however was yet to reveal itself and Spencer left school at 16 to become a trainee sound engineer at Silk Sounds, 13 Berwick Street. After 18 months it became evident that this wasn't the career for him, so he left. His dad had by this time jacked in the fruit stall and, with a friend, had invested in a fabric shop called By The Yard at 14 Berwick Street. This new venture provided Spencer with a stop-gap job, whilst he got enough money together to go off travelling. A change in circumstances meant that his temporary job became a full time one in an industry in which he was having great fun. The shop specialised in selling fabric to the theatre, film and television industries. Consequently, there was an endless stream of famous faces passing through the doors - Kylie, Lily Savage, Grayson Perry, Joan Collins; even Madonna put in an appearance. After work drinks would often end in the small hours, with the shop's office couch providing a bed for the night, before emerging back on to the shop floor the next morning.

Business was good and a second shop called Soho Silks opened

further along the street. Spencer worked there with his soon to be business partner Mike Greene for the next few years, but knew that if he was going to make a career out of the fabric trade, he would need his own business. In 1990 with the blessing of his dad, Spencer and Mike took a lease on a shop unit on the corner of Broadwick St and Duck Lane opening as Broadwick Silks in January 1991. The shop had a very boutique feel to it, which was part of its appeal. The intricate and stylish window displays became its signature; originally dressed by a woman named Valerie Wall who was a couturier, and then by a customer who used to dress Selfridges windows. The business was a huge success, with its exclusive fabrics and handwoven brocades and beaded laces proving a hit with its clientele from the film, theatre and television industries. With over half a million metres of fabric in stock, there was always plenty to choose from.

Like many businesses, Spencer was forced to close during lockdown. During this hiatus he realised that, with the benefit of a niche professional client base, the business no longer needed to be in the West End. The exponential rising costs of doing business in the area were also contributory factors, although he has asked that credit be given to his landlords who offered quick and generous support when the pandemic struck.

As one door closes another always opens and Soho and its business community has weathered many storms during its history. Lets hope it's ability to evolve and reinvent itself will once again provide an exciting future as the pandemic subsides.

Soho will miss you Spencer but wishes you luck!

Photos – Spencer Harvey



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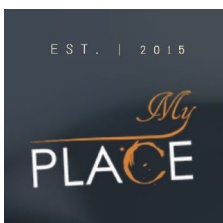
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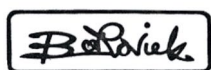
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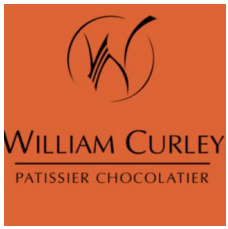
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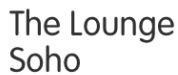
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All I want for CHRISTMAS is you!

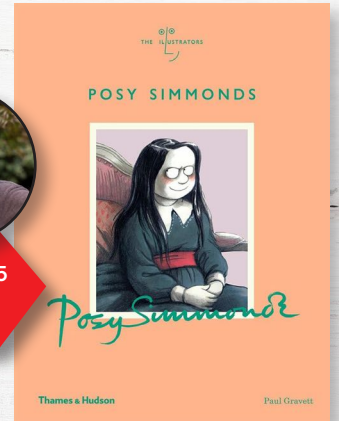
Shop local and Shop Soho this Christmas!
Lucy Haine asks the Society Exec to choose their
favourite Christmas gifts from Soho's best independents.



Leslie
Selection of British Cheese
£15 - Soho Dairy
Berwick St Market



Bob
Posy Simmonds Book - £18.95
Gosh Comics, 1 Berwick St
goshlondon.com



Fr. Simon
Spicy Anchovy Stuffed Olives
£1.50/100g - I Camisa & Son,
61 Old Compton St



Rachel
Late Night Tales, Hot Chip
£10.99 - Sister Ray Records
75 Berwick St, sisterray.co.uk



Takashi
Hugh Masekela - £23.99
Sounds of the Universe
7 Broadwick St
soundsoftheuniverse.com



Matthew
Ravioli di Zucca - £7.50/300g
Lina Stores, 18 Brewer St
linastores.co.uk



Jane
La Cafetiere Classic Espresso
£21.95 - Algerian Coffee Stores
52 Old Compton St





David

9in Fruit Cheesecake -£38
Maison Bertaux, 28 Greek St
maisonbertaux.com



Tim

1965 Glen Grant Whiskey -
£894.95 - The Vintage House,
42 Old Compton St
vintagehouse.london



Joel

A Bespoke Suit
Tony the Soho Tailor
1st Floor, 16 Berwick St



Quentin

A Pipe Wrench - £16
Romany's, 51 Brewer St
romanys.co.uk



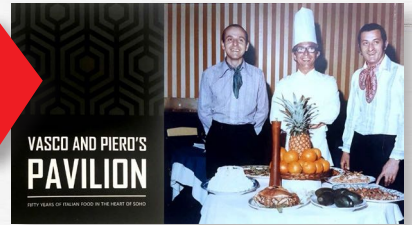
Jason

Truffle Honey - £11.95
Lina Stores, 18 Brewer St
linastores.co.uk



Marina

Dinner Voucher - £75
Vasco & Piero's Pavilion
15 Poland St
vascosfood.com



Richard

Shuggie Otis LP - £15
Reckless Records, 30 Berwick St
reckless.co.uk



Lucy

Tea for Two - £50
Ham Yard Hotel, 1 Ham Yard
firmdalehotels.com



Andy

Christmas Panettone - £18
I Camisa & Son,
61 Old Compton St



Margaret

A nice bottle of Fizz! - £42
Gerrys, 74 Old Compton St
gerrys.uk.com



SOHO:

A STREET GUIDE TO SOHO'S HISTORY, ARCHITECTURE AND PEOPLE

Dan Cruickshank

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £20

Most Soho aficionados walk, work, drink or eat there, and rarely look beyond the shop windows and neon signs. But if they looked up or behind, they might catch a glimpse of a Soho of the past. Often, the higher storeys of Soho buildings reveal their usually 18th-century beginnings. Occasionally, the interiors retain original fittings. For instance, 9 Gerrard Street, dating from the 1750s, was once the Turk's Head Tavern and home to Dr Samuel Johnson's Club. Now a Chinese supermarket, there is some fine panelling behind the exotically packed shelves; at the building's heart is a splendid staircase.

Dan Cruickshank, a well-known television presenter, and author of many books on historical architecture, is passionate about the Georgian period, and indeed lives in a Georgian house in Spitalfields. (This he gently restored himself, without altering too much: it pained him to introduce electricity...) He has a long affection for Soho as well. In the early 1970s, for instance, he was horrified that Richmond Buildings, a terrace of handsome (if decaying) four-storey houses built in the 1730s, had been demolished. He rescued pilasters and cornices from the rubble and 'took it all home on the Underground'.

A devotee indeed...

His captivating book is primarily an architectural gazetteer of the precious square mile that is our Soho. After a historical overview, the book is arranged as a walk through the present-day area, detailing facts and figures of the streets and buildings that have physically survived many decades of depredations – and telling enlightening and endearing stories of the people who lived, worked and died there.

We learn about the small private estates that gained possession of the fields that were to become today's Soho, starting from the mid 17th century. The estate landlords, lessees and builders laid out their acreages individually, which accounts for many eccentricities of layout when estate met estate. The 'set-backs' in both Meard Street and St Anne's Court, for instance, mark the junctions of two different estates.

Soho was originally thought of as a wealthy enclave, so many grand houses were built, then came an influx of immigrants, primarily the Huguenots in the 1680s. The area's social character started to change, and some of those mansions were pulled down, perhaps after only 50 years, to be replaced by more downmarket and smaller buildings and workshops. This perhaps worked in Soho's favour, architecturally. Cruickshank argues that, because the area attracted those who sought sanctuary, who needed to rent cheaply, who needed to practise their calling – from potter to prostitute – it remained less attractive to those who might have wanted more upmarket or dramatic change. So the 18th-century

buildings remained, and the area, gradually absorbing waves of immigrants and refugees – Jews, Italians, Russians, Prussians – became a thriving, if fragile – and perhaps a little seedy – community.

Throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Soho's character changed yet again, becoming an area of light industry, commerce and manufacturing. For instance 12-13 Greek Street had been a grand late 17th-century mansion, but became the London showroom of the potter, Josiah Wedgwood, around 1774. Later, in the early 19th century, Crosse & Blackwell bought and remodelled 21 Soho Square (once the White House Hotel, a notorious brothel) and built behind it along Sutton Row: in the new building was their jam and pickle factory; bottling and labelling took place in the Adam rooms of the original house.

Soho, with its haphazard streets, its burgeoning restaurants and plentiful bars, began to acquire a reputation for a sort of bohemian creativity, seasoned with a hint of danger. This attracted developers as well as punters, and buildings were acquired and demolished, rents rose, and from the 1970s, Soho was on the way to losing its sense of community, and its soul. Independent businesses are still being priced out, family houses have become offices, and corporate chains and consumerism in general are sucking the authentic life out of the area we love. What is happening now is even worse. Much of Dean Street has been lost to Crossrail, and Crossrail 2 is threatening another block between Romilly Street and Shaftesbury Avenue.

Cruickshank does not pretend to have an answer to Soho's problems, other than to hope that those who care for the area should continue fighting. I learned a lot from his erudition and enthusiasm. Who knew about painted staircases, Venetian windows, that Soho had known Canaletto, Nell Gwynn and Emma, Lady Hamilton (the latter in her early 'working' days)? Who knew that, behind the bright restaurant fascias and bobbing Chinese lanterns, Gerrard Street was so architecturally rewarding? I longed to walk the streets (so to speak) with this book in my hand. It would make a splendid Soho Christmas present.

Susan Fleming



THE BEST SHOP IN LONDON

THE FINE ART SOCIETY MOVES TO SOHO

BY CLIVE JENNINGS

The latest addition to the Soho art scene is the Fine Art Society ('FAS'), one of the oldest fine art dealers in the UK, famously described by the painter Walter Sickert as 'The Best Shop in London'. The FAS now occupies the upper three floors of an elegant Georgian townhouse off Carnaby Street. It was started by Marcus Huish – friend of John Ruskin, critic, author and collector of Japonaiserie - in 1876 at 148 New Bond Street, and its first board were writers and art enthusiasts. It remained there, a respected London institution, until a few years ago.

At that time, New Bond Street was already famous for its great variety of luxury suppliers, was fast becoming the preferred location for London's top art galleries and was poised to become a vital centre of the London art trade. The Royal Academy had moved from the National Gallery to its current home at Burlington House on Piccadilly in 1869, and in 1875, Arthur Liberty opened his exciting 'Japanese Warehouse' on nearby Regent Street. The façade was famously remodelled by E W Godwin in 1881, who ingeniously created a 'walk in' front window space lined with glass showcases, a transition with potential for introducing the themes which are developed in the exhibitions within - an iconic design solution, much copied.

Initially operating as a print publisher, they exhibited Pre-Raphaelites Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais. Ever the innovators Hunt's 'Light of the World' (a copy of which used to be a feature of most Methodist Chapels) was toured around Australia on a horse and cart, in much the same way that the big auction houses take major pieces on world tours today. The uncommercial connotations of the choice of name were carefully calculated, and throughout its history the FAS has remained dedicated to academic exhibitions and research. Over time and hundreds of exhibitions, they have shown hundreds of artists from Rembrandt to Bloomsbury Group artist Duncan Grant to Turner Prize winner Jeremy Deller.

The Fine Art Society was originally supported by a tightly knit group of art lovers drawn from London's intelligentsia, then - as now - obsessive and passionate collectors with a love for art

that may have fallen out of current favour. Critics recognised a dimension beyond just selling works. Untypical of most London galleries, they have always recognised brilliance in both art and design, displaying paintings and sculptures alongside furniture and silverware. A Ben Nicholson design and a Nocturne by James McNeil Whistler are displayed with a tea set by Christopher Dresser and a Marcel Breuer chair. This ethos continues today, and works very well in the domestically proportioned Georgian rooms of their new home.

Connections with Soho before relocating to Carnaby Street are many, not least the association with sculptor Alfred Gilbert creator of 'Eros', unveiled in Piccadilly Circus in 1893. Actually a representation of Anteros, Eros's twin brother, the model was 16-year-old Anglo-Italian, Angelo Colarossi, from Shepherds Bush. Officially known as 'The Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain', it was the first statue in the world to be cast in aluminium.

A recently exhibited portrait by John Minton of his young friend and student Eric Verrico was once in the collection of Dean Street's Colony Room

Club's infamous owner Muriel Belcher. In 1988, The FAS held an exhibition of 'Artists in Soho', to coincide with the publication of a book by the famous chronicler of Francis Bacon and Soho life, Daniel Farson. It included works by Minton alongside his close friends Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde, famous regulars at The Coach and Horses. FAS also hosted Leigh Bowery's memorial exhibition, and Lucian Freud, who had famously painted his portrait, sent fresh red roses to the gallery every day.

The Fine Art Society, 25 Carnaby Street, W1F 7DE (Entrance on Marlborough Court)

(Strictly by appointment)

www.thefineartsociety.com





RONNIE'S

A NEW DOCUMENTARY ABOUT LEGENDARY JAZZ CLUB RONNIE SCOTT'S

Sensitively directed by Oliver Murray (whose other films include *The Quiet One*, a documentary about Rolling Stones' bassist Bill Wyman) and scored by Alex Heffes, this gentle and quietly authoritative documentary is a love letter to Ronnie Scott, to the club named after him, which became a national institution, and to the music he adored. Funny and moving, *Ronnie's* features performances by some of the greatest musicians of the 20th. Ronnie explains, "Jazz has always been considered a bit naughty, so it fitted into Soho".

The film features nostalgic images of Soho over the decades: a wealth of photographs, sound clips and archive footage bring the club and our neighbourhood to life. Free of obtrusive talking heads, contributors feature as voices only, discreetly identified by onscreen graphics. "It was the place you went to worship", says Michael Parkinson, while a music journalist described it as: "A bunker from which we all finally learned what an important music jazz was".

Ronnie had an East End Jewish upbringing, his parents divorcing when he was four. He followed his father in his career as a saxophonist and by age 16 was playing at Soho bottle parties. At 18 he joined the famous Ted Heath Band, and at 28 started his own band with co-founder of *Ronnie's*, Pete King. He joined the so-called 'Gerald's Navy' playing on the cruise ships that crossed the Atlantic so he could check out the New York jazz clubs on 52nd Street, like *The Two Deuces* and *The Downbeat*

and was inspired by sax players Art Pepper and Charlie Parker.

Ronnie always preferred clubs to concerts, and on the boat home he planned his own club. In 1959 Ronnie and Pete started *Ronnie's* in a former cab drivers 'caff' in a Gerrard Street basement. Many other Soho clubs were run by 'felons', and jiving and bebop was banned in many venues. *Ronnie's* was revolutionary and the top jazz musicians all wanted to play there. Ronnie was the Master of Ceremonies and the public face, while Pete was the business brain. Ronnie was famous for his lame jokes, which became a legendary element of the Club's charm - "I love this place, it's just like home, filthy and full of strangers".

The only saleable jazz musicians were American, but there was an ongoing feud between the British and US unions that restricted musicians from playing on the other side of the Atlantic. Ronnie managed to negotiate a deal which effectively allowed 'exchanges' of talent. This not only meant that he could book top US performers, but paved the way for the 'British Invasion' of the US in the mid '60s by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and many other rock groups. He later mused: "The Sex Pistols would go to the US and we'd get Sonny Rollins, which was the bargain of the century".

The move to Frith Street in 1965 was prompted by a desire to book bigger bands like Count Basie and Buddy Rich. The second half of the film features often previously unseen footage

of some of the Jazz legends that played there, including Nina Simone, Cleo Laine, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Oscar Peterson; and rather bizarrely Van Morrison singing Send in the Clowns (reading the lyrics) to a soulful trumpet accompaniment by Chet Baker.

On 16 September 1970, Eric Burdon and his new group War were playing Ronnie's when a buzz went round that Jimi Hendrix was in the building, clutching his Fender Stratocaster guitar. He joined them on stage to jam, and amazingly the gig was illicitly recorded by a young punter with a tape recorder in his bag. It was Hendrix's last gig – two days later he was dead.

The progress of the club was beset by problems, often financial, which Ronnie usually left his partner Pete King to sort out. "If you'd been better businessmen, this wouldn't have happened to you", Ronnie and Pete were told. "If we'd been better businessmen we wouldn't have opened a jazz club in the first place", replied King with alacrity. Once when they were £100,000 in the hole, record producer and reggae supremo Chris Blackwell chipped in £25,000.

Scott said of musicians: "Some of the best players are hopeless as human beings". Sadly Scott had his own demons, and his lawyer Wally Howser knowingly described him as, "A very interesting bunch of guys". Beset by spells of mental illness, those closest to Scott talk about drugs, gambling, alcoholism and manic depression; music was how he felt OK, how he expressed himself. "In the jazz world you could be an alcoholic or a heroin addict but you couldn't acknowledge mental health problems". His long-suffering wife, Francoise Venet, poignantly, describes his issues. When dodgy dentistry left his mouth permanently damaged and rendered him unable to play the saxophone, it was a blow from which he was unable to recover.

Ronnie's also does much to explain why, having weathered storms both before and after Scott's death in 1996, King soldiering on to 2005, and then under Sally Greene, the club was prospering as never before when the great lockdown of 2020 came, and will no doubt do so again.

As Ronnie observed, and famously often finished the night with: "You've been a marvellous audience, you've made a happy man very old".

Clive Jennings

Ronnie's can be seen on BBC iPlayer until May 2021



COCO'S CORNER

BY GABRIEL WILDING

An honest food review from Soho resident canine culinary expert, exploring the array of new dining options available to dogs and their humans.

Andrew Edmunds

46 Lexington St, Soho, London W1F 0LP

31/10/2020

Clad in all black and a little overzealously applied powder (for myself) our little unit tramps along to Andrew Edmunds for a very adult evening of good food, with not a Halloween costume in sight. Spooky but sophisticated, it is the perfect venue to hide away from the world's problems and gorge oneself, thankful they are fond of dogs.

Coco (our eponymous and very picky food critic) dons her best turtleneck, and after requesting a booth snuggles down for a nap (sleeping on the job, not very professional).

It looks like the humans must do the hard task of eating. Andrew Edmunds is tucked away in a charmingly Dickensian 18th-century townhouse on Lexington street. Opened in 1985, it is a relic of old Soho yet still very much alive and kicking.

Normally filled to the rafters with people, the experience has undoubtedly changed as a result of the Covid restrictions. Space between the tables is not wholly unwelcome and the expected buzz does begin to build as the evening progresses.

With the flickering warm glow of candles, the pale yellow walls and tasteful looking artworks framing the old wooden furniture nicely, you get a sense of years gone by, an old French eating house before bistros sprang up all over the city. Everything is tasteful and intimate which makes sense for a restaurant that has been hailed as London's most romantic.

So to the food: Coco's head shoots up the minute the chunks of sourdough bread and salted butter hit the table and is spoiled rotten which is fitting considering her role as guest of honour. Pyefleet rock oysters follow in all their oceanic splendour, the light gleaming off their wet bodies. What a start!

A dog bowl is brought for the queen of Sheba and the fussing she

received proves that their dog-friendly statement is not just a shallow promise. We feel welcomed, two and four-legged creatures alike.

The bottle of Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Chereau loosens our tongues as the bread and bivalves begin to tighten our belts. The mains arrive, my whole baked Lemon Sole eyeballing me with what I sense as resentment. Tartare sauce drips from the buttery flesh that falls away with the slightest provocation. Frustratingly it comes with no sides, which seems a little ungracious, but large golden brown potatoes are added by yours truly. Perfection.

Cut to a good 30 minutes of me stripping the carcass of any morsels, and spitting our bones while at the same time trying to look as demure as possible, both partner and pup are sufficiently revolted.

Across from the marine murder sits the Barnsley lamb chop looking more like a minimalist sculpture, a rather small one at that, next to a pile of carrot and swede mash. Although the meat is excellent the meal feels rather paltry in its presentation and proportions.

Sipping our glasses of wine whilst tucking into three Neal's Yard cheeses (served with four crackers so be ready to politely ask for more) we are sustained. Supporting local businesses and stuffing myself with dairy products? Sign me up! Coco looks pleased with the pampering and people watching, and the human cohort are equally sated.

Due to the uncertainty which faces the hospitality industry, this old dog is learning new tricks. From teaming up with Dishpatch to selling Hampers online, Andrew Edmunds are ready for whatever 2021 can throw at them!

Despite some small disappointments this candle-lit cavern will always have a place in my heart, but also leave a space in your wallet as romance never comes cheap. We wander home tails-awagging, smiles beaming and faces warmed by candlelight as the cold evening closes around us.



A GREEK STREET ODYSSEY

BY TIM LORD

Noble Rot, 2 Greek Street

Viet, 34 Greek Street

Maison Bertaux, 28 Greek Street

The Gay Husaar closed in 2018 and has now been reopened as Noble Rot. The Gay Husaar was a significant part of both Soho's and the UK's political history as it was the preferred drinking and eating place of the country's left leaning politicians for many decades and scene of much political plotting. Lunching MPs are no longer as common in Soho as they were, as long lunches even pre-Covid were frowned upon, which is a great pity. The death of the office lunch has caused a knock on effect on a number of well liked Soho eateries. Maybe when returning to the office becomes a rare treat and more focused on meeting work colleagues rather than just sitting at a computer we can hope that longer lunching during the working week will be resurrected. It would be a good thing to see.

The FT did a very good review of Noble Rot on 10 October 2020 which I recommend to anyone interested in the history of the Gay Husaar or indeed lunching in Soho in general. The Noble Rot has been brought to us by Dan Keeling, a former A&R man who discovered Coldplay and his business partner Mark Andrew with Stephen Harris - chef of the Sportsman in Seasalter (next to Whitstable) and head chef Alex Jackson. The Noble Rot is actually a magazine for wine enthusiasts that did a little brand extension into restaurants - the mother ship is in Lamb's Conduit Street.

My partner and I were, pre lockdown, looking for a last minute place to dine and on the off chance thought we would see if

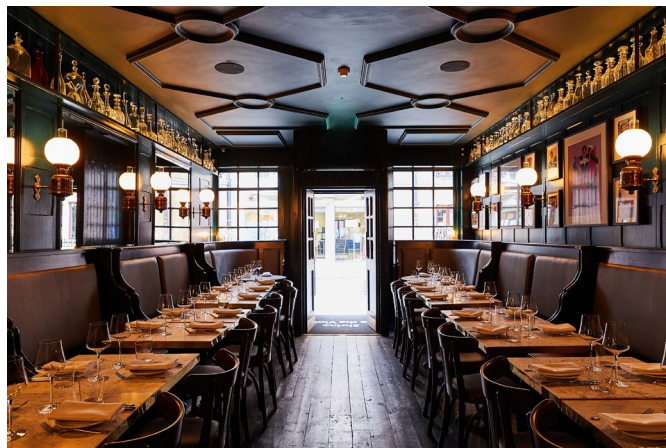
we could be accommodated. The staff eyed us up and down for a few minutes - fair enough really as we were looking a bit local, but then seated us at a most favourable corner table in the window. There is a special joy of finding a superb place to eat without having to make a reservation - pleasure more intense for lack of anticipation or overly rehearsed expectations. The staff

proved to be discreet, charming and knowledgeable about the wine which is handy as there is a very long list. We ate devilled eggs, chicken liver parfait in choux pastry, smoked trout and veal carpaccio and a spectacular chocolate concoction. We are spoiled in Soho and this is another place no one deserves - lovely renovation, great staff and amazing food and wine. If you have not been then go as soon as you can once lock down is over. It must be in top three in Soho now.

I also wanted to mention another place on the same street but at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of both location and price level - Viet Pho. This place offers a fantastically good value lunch - and in particular I must mention the "number seventeen". This is cold noodles, freshly chopped mint, bean sprouts and julienned vegetables and intensely crispy fried mini spring rolls which you cover with a light chilli and

rice vinegar before eating. Number Seventeen sits on a slightly unloved part of the menu but is the best thing there.

Then have a raspberry mille-feuille at Maison Bertaux a matter of yards away. Happy eating.



MINCE PIES WITH SEASONALLY SPIRTED BUTTER

SUSAN FLEMING

My late friend, Rosemary Stark (another Soho addict), was good at mince pies. She would make a batch, put them still-warm in a straw basket under a cloth, and take them round to a friend for tea (usually wine). She would put brandy or rum butter under the pastry topping; the butter would unctuously melt over the mincemeat, enriching its flavour so much that even the most adamant of mincemeat avoiders would be converted....



The pastry is Rosie's, taken from her *The Loaves and Fishes Cookbook* (1976). It is an 'instant' pastry mix, which you can keep in the fridge for about a month, or freeze; all you need do thereafter is add a little water. (And there is an added bonus: you can mix a little of this pastry mix into hot sauces to thicken them.

Makes about 16

about 350g best mincemeat

1 small egg, beaten

Pastry

450g plain flour

300g fat (all butter, or half butter, half lard)

Seasonally spirited butter

100g unsalted butter, softened

220g icing sugar, sifted

4 tbsp brandy (or rum)

Make the pastry first. Put the flour in a bowl. Cut the fat into small pieces, add to the bowl, then rub fat into flour with your fingers until the mixture looks like fine breadcrumbs. Store now in a polythene bag in fridge or freezer. Or, if you are making the pastry immediately, add the minimum amount of cold water necessary to mix to a pastry dough. Let it rest in the fridge while you preheat the oven to 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6.

Meanwhile make the spirited butter. Put the butter in a bowl, and beat with a wooden spoon until it is really soft. Beat in the icing sugar until smooth then, carefully, add the brandy or rum. Keep in the fridge until ready to serve.

Roll the pastry out thinly on a lightly floured work surface. Cut out 16 circles using a 7.5cm cutter (to fit the average 12-hole bun tin). Use these circles to line the holes in the tin (bake in batches if you only have one tin). Fill each with about 2 teaspoons mincemeat.

Roll the pastry trimmings out again and cut 16 tops using a smaller round cutter, or a star cutter. Place these on top of the mincemeat, and brush the pastry with a little beaten egg.

Bake in the preheated oven for about 12-15 minutes, or until the tops are golden and crisp. Allow to cool slightly. To serve, lift the pastry lid and adorn the mincemeat with a spoonful of spirited butter.

SPICED WINE

A hot spiced wine is traditional all over Europe. In the UK it is usually called mulled or spiced wine; in Scandinavian countries it is Glög; in Germany Glühwein. Whatever name you use, it is delicious, warming and convivial, perfect for Christmas or New Year – and you can make a batch in advance, which frees you to socialise (socially distanced, of course).

Serves 6

2 small oranges

6 cloves

2 cinnamon sticks

1 x 7.5cm piece fresh root ginger, sliced

50-60g soft brown sugar, to taste

60ml brandy

1 x 75cl bottle good red wine

Wash the oranges, then slice into thin circles. Put these, along with all the remaining ingredients, into a large pan. Place over a low heat, stirring occasionally until the sugar melts. Do not allow to simmer, let alone boil. Just heat gently for about 20 minutes until hot. Serve in glass mugs, avoiding the flavourings, but perhaps topped with an orange slice.

IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS!

St Anne's will be lighting up the gardens on Wardour Street again this year, with a huge Christmas Tree. The tree is being sponsored, for the second year, by Shaftesbury PLC and the tree will be provided and decorated again by Soho's very own Christmas tree experts, Storm Flowers London. Storm's Director Joao Rocha says "we hope this tree brings sparkle and light to all in Soho, and we are looking forward to the day when we will



get together again". This year there can be no switch-on party in the gardens, so we will have to wait another year to hear the choir from Soho Parish School sing carols before we all tuck into Christmas cookies, mulled wine and hot chocolate as we normally do. The tree will be switched on from Thursday, 3 December and will be lit through until 6 January.

Revd Simon Buckley

Rector of St Anne's, Soho

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CHRISTMAS AT ST ANNE'S

In the Fourth Century the Roman General Vegetius reportedly advised that in times of peace we should prepare for war: don't wait until the enemy are coming over the hill before assembling an army. When I worked in television the motto might have been 'in Summer prepare for Winter'. We frequently made Christmas TV shows and commercials in August and it was always amusing, on a hot summer's day, to see fake snow blowing out of the open dock door to a studio. As the Rector of St Anne's, I peculiarly find myself in November still unsure how we will celebrate Christmas. Like all of us I'm making plans and preparations aware of the possibility for them needing to be revised, scaled back or even cancelled next week or even the week before.

We all live with some degree of uncertainty and yet, despite the turmoil we have witnessed in our world in recent years, most of us have not felt something as global as the Coronavirus impact on our lives so personally and completely in this way before.

So, this Christmas, like Joseph in Bethlehem with a young woman going into labour and no hotel reservation, we might need to improvise if things can't quite go as planned. Not that I anticipate that if the Prime Minister extends the prohibition on public acts of worship in churches that they will be allowed in stables - spaces not generally conducive to social distancing. But, as I reminded the children at Soho Parish who feared that 'Christmas was going to be cancelled', Christmas will still definitely happen, it will still be Christ's birthday - but it might not be celebrated quite as in the past, just as many of them had had their own birthday plans scaled back this year.

St Anne, by tradition the mother of Mary, wasn't able to be with the family for the birth of her grandson - just as families this year have known the painful separation from their loved ones. More than

ever, we need to hold those we cannot hold in our arms in our hearts and minds. However we spend it, may we find happiness in this season and be there for one another as we prepare for further challenges, but pray for a better year to come for everyone.

Revd Simon Buckley

Rector of St Anne's, Soho

St. Anne's Church, Soho

Christmas Services 2020

Carol Services
Thursday 17th & Friday 18th December at 7pm
 A traditional service with a Soho twist,
 featuring Christmas carols, readings & prayers
 Music provided by professional singers
 Mulled wine & mince pies (Prior booking essential £5)

Christmas Eve 5pm: Gathered at the Manger
 A service for all the family with familiar carols, soloist and
 puppet Nativity play 'Birthday in Bethlehem' (booking advised)

Christmas Day 11am: Eucharist for Christmas Day
 A service to celebrate the birth of Christ

All welcome!

Visit www.stannes-soho.org.uk/news for details of how to book and which services are also live streamed.

55 Dean St, W1D 6AF
 The Church of England in Soho.

How to get in touch with your council

General enquiries

☎ 020 7641 6000

Adult services

☞ westminster.gov.uk/adult-services

☞ peoplefirstinfo.org.uk

☞ adultsocialcare@westminster.gov.uk

☎ 020 7641 2500

Births, deaths, marriages and citizenship

☞ westminster.gov.uk/births-deaths-marriages-and-citizenship

☎ 020 7641 7500

Street closures and al fresco

westminster.gov.uk/

Business unit

☞ businesswestminster.com

☞ businessunit@westminster.gov.uk

☎ 020 7641 2070

Children's services

☞ westminster.gov.uk/children-services

☎ 020 7641 4000

Recycling, streets and environmental health

☞ westminster.gov.uk/recycling

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