Appendix 2

The old neighbourhood

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

The boundaries in summary

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

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

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

The community's northern boundary was fully defined by the brick wall that ran the entire length of Highbury Station Road, punctuated only by the "Cock at Highbury" public house at the Upper Street end and the railway workers' cottages opposite the Laycock Senior Boys School. The wall separated the pavement (sidewalk) and road on one side from the railway property on the other. There were two minor bends in the road that accommodated part of the station platform and the workers' cottages. At intervals along the wall an extra thickness of brick showed where the Second World War communal air raid shelters were located. Any missing brick provided a toehold for adventurous children wanting to scale the wall and sneak over onto the weed covered embankment for a closer look at the passing trains.
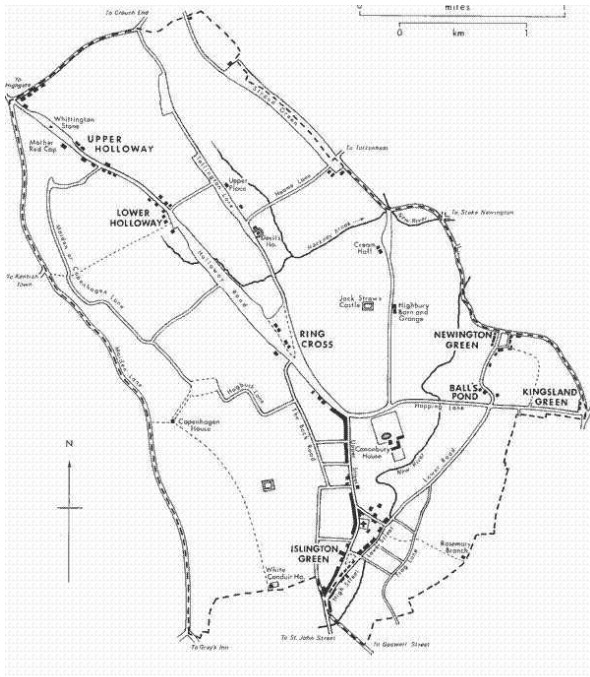
Liverpool Road on the western end of the community was once an important thoroughfare for driving livestock to Smithfield Market and bypassing the commercial route through the village of Islington. Originally it was called the Back Road, then it was renamed in honour of Lord Liverpool. The short block on the west side between Offord Road and the railway bridge contained a hodgepodge of commercial and recreational buildings. These consisted of the corner confectionery ('sweet') shop; shoemenders; Mr. Pettit's oil shop; the Adelaide Arms pub, and Bettridge's greengrocery. Tucked up by the Adelaide Arms was a short, cobblestoned cul-de-sac called Epping Place; an almost forgotten backwater.

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

The boundaries in detail

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

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

Just an Ordinary Bloke

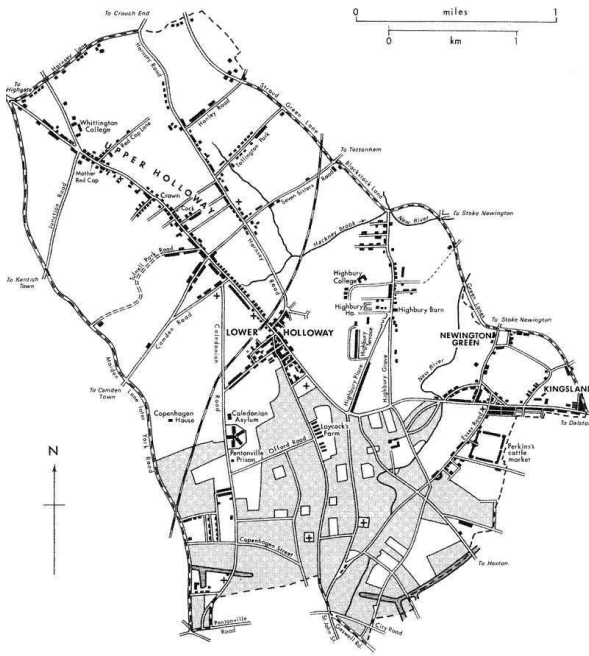*Map of Islington, c1740.*

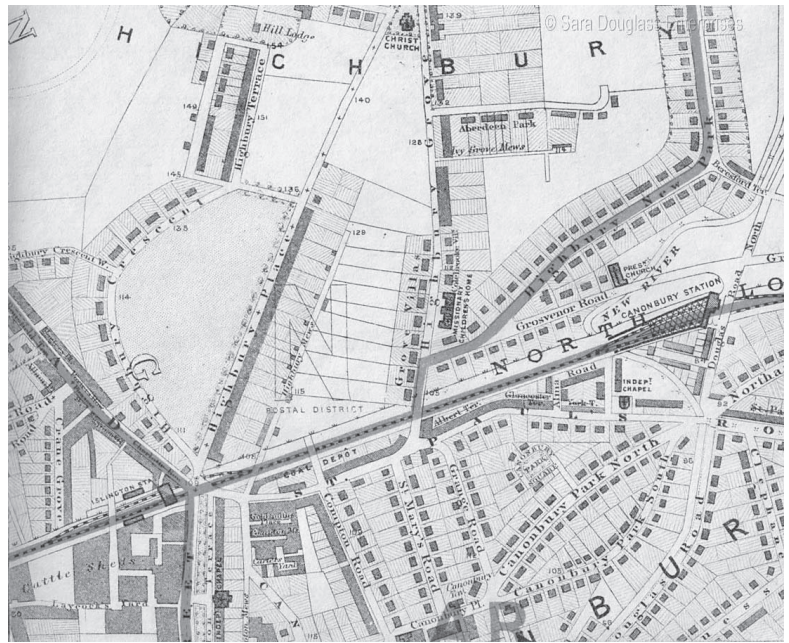*Map of Islington, 1805.*

Map of Islington, 1817.

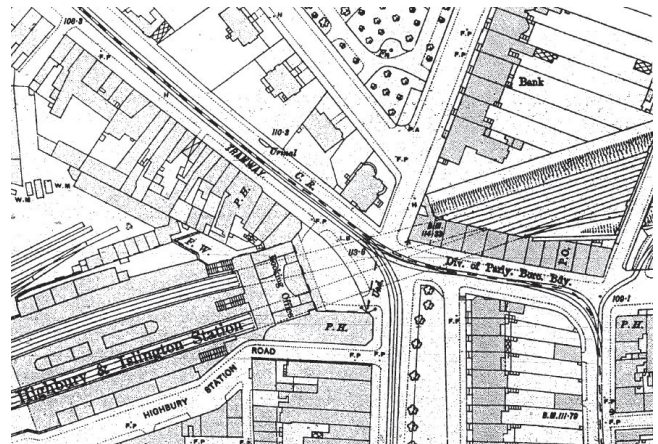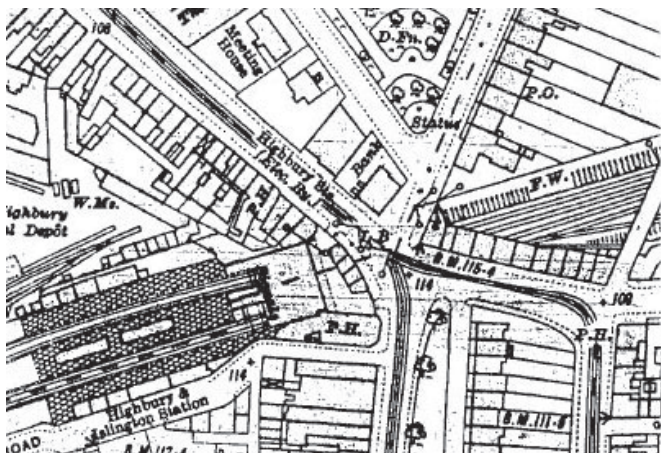*Map of Islington, 1827.*

Map of Islington, c1848.

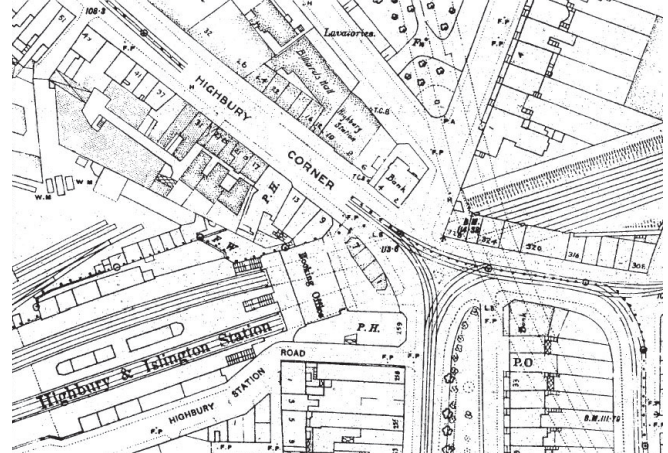

Map of Canonbury, 1872.

Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1877.

Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1894.

Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1916.

Ordnance Survey Map of Highbury Corner, 1938.

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