

# MAIDA UNVEILED



[www.W9W2.co.uk](http://www.W9W2.co.uk)

Artwork by Liam O'Farrell

# A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to this, the 10th Edition of Maida Unveiled, marking 5 years of publication! Quite a milestone to have reached and our thanks go to Alice, Giulia and Robert who must take most of the credit, supported by a number of dedicated folks. Maida Unveiled continues to bring to life the special nature of our area, both its intriguing past and its vibrant and engaging present. It's covers have become eagerly anticipated as they typically feature artist with a local connection, either past or present, who have all captured the spirit of the area in different ways.

Turning to a few updates regarding PWMVS/W9W2 activities over the last few months. Recently we held our 2023 AGM which was well attended. Covid considerations has meant that the AGM timing has slipped back to the autumn, which is not ideal in terms of the cycle of the year and the weather, and so for 2024 we anticipate being back to our usual spring timing, hopefully in person. That said, the online format was well attended, with some constructive discussion to guide our work for the year ahead.

Also at the AGM we elected this year's Committee. We were pleased to not only have a number of current Committee members stand again but also to welcome new members. The committee is always keen to have new members join, with particular emphasis at present on attracting new members with Planning and Social Media skills as well as those with responsibility for parenting/ caring for youngsters and school age children. Please do feel free to contact us on [contact.w9w2@gmail.com](mailto:contact.w9w2@gmail.com) if you would like to see what joining the committee might involve.



*Right: Artwork by Eleanor Abou-Sakr*



In terms of the next few months, we are likely to see progress on three PWMVS supported CIL Section 106 initiatives which we are developing in collaboration with our MV and LV Ward Councillors and WCC Officers. The Elgin Avenue Greening scheme has been through the WCC Consultation process with valuable feedback from the local residents that is now being considered prior to the scheme being finalised. The Paddington Places initiative, which, amongst other goals seeks to enhance and improve the pedestrian routes between Paddington and Little Venice 'through' the Westway, as well as 'green' the area around the Warwick Avenue 'Stack' will shortly begin discussion and consultation in earnest. Finally to note is the continued work on a new play area in St Mary's Churchyard. Please look out for communications from WCC and ourselves as to how you can play a part in shaping these schemes.

More immediately, a reminder that this year's PWMVS Christmas Carols will be held on Wednesday December 6th, at 7PM, in St Mary's Church, Paddington Green, by kind permission of Father Andrew. As ever, the choir will be provided by the children of St Saviours School. We hope that you will join us.

Finally, if you want to keep up with our work between editions of Maida Unveiled, then please follow us on Instagram [maida\\_unveiled](https://www.instagram.com/maida_unveiled).

**John Zealley,**

**November 2023**



# A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

**Maida Unveiled: Welcoming you to our 10th Issue!**

We are thrilled to present our latest Autumn/Winter 2024 edition of Maida Unveiled. This time around, we're delighted to reveal our festive cover, designed by the talented artist Liam O'Farrell. For more on his work, be sure to check out the inside pages.

Join us on a journey through history with Julien Futter, who talks us through the bombing of Warrington Crescent and a gripping murder mystery. Plus, Kate Saffin takes us back in time with a look at the canal's past and what life was like for women.

As usual, we have updates from our chair, local council members, and MP Karen Buck. Jo is back with some heartwarming winter recipes, all presented in her signature fun style.

We hope you enjoy this holiday issue of Maida Unveiled, which can be found (while stocks last) at Brimful, Shivam convenience on Formosa Street, D1 Coffee shop on Aberdeen Place, and Planetis on Clifton Road.

Warm festive wishes from your editors,  
Alice Sinclair and Giulia Matteoni.

Please feel free to contact us about any content ideas or feedback to the email below:

[MAIDA.UNVEILED@GMAIL.COM](mailto:MAIDA.UNVEILED@GMAIL.COM)



## FIVE YEARS OF MAIDA UNVEILED



**Alice Sinclair:** Editor, Transpersonal Psychotherapist and Feminist Activist

Alice Sinclair is a psychotherapist, feminist activist, and charity chairperson for the healthcare section of The Circle NGO. She has served on the board of The Samburu Girls Foundation in Kenya and has been a proud resident of Maida Vale for over a decade. Alice has a private psychotherapy practice in Maida Vale. And is passionate about fostering a strong sense of community and was recently recognized by the late Queen in 2021 for her dedication to this cause during Covid.

Five years ago, Alice had the idea of creating a local magazine that would bring the community together. Thus, Maida Unveiled was born – a magazine that has been embraced by the community ever since.



**Giulia Matteoni:** Editor, Environmental Consultant

Giulia works as environmental consultant for a multinational professional services firm in London, where she specializes in the management of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for urban development projects. Giulia holds a qualification as chartered environmentalist with the Institution of Environmental Sciences; she is also a chartered member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. Giulia moved to London in 2013, after completing her studies in Civil Engineering at the Technical University of Denmark, near Copenhagen. She has been living in Maida Vale since; you may have seen Giulia walking around the area with her inseparable companion Oscar, a Labrador Retriever.

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"The Views expressed in Maida Unveiled are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily of PWMVS"

*If you are a local business and would like to be included in our next issue, please contact our editorial office  
([alice.sinclair@w9w2.co.uk](mailto:alice.sinclair@w9w2.co.uk))*

# LIAM O'FARRELL

## Our front cover artist

We have been very fortunate with the art content in this Autumn/Winter issue of Maida Unveiled!

Liam O'Farrell has generously allowed us to include two of his beautiful artworks, representing the Regent's Canal (as reproduced on our front cover) and Avalon Flowers, a local flower shop on Lauderdale Road.

Liam is a professional artist, originally from Portsmouth though he spent almost a quarter of a century living and working all over London. These days he resides in the quieter corners of Somerset though visits London to paint and exhibit on a regular basis.

He has exhibited at The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition on several occasions. Also, annual open exhibitions at The Mall Galleries for The Lynn Painter-Stainers Prize, The New English Art Club, The Royal Institute of Oil Painters, The Royal Society of British Artist, and The Royal Society of Marine Artists.

### The Ordinary World

Whether it's the place we live, our nearest and dearest, or even ourselves, the trouble with 'ordinary' is there being so much of it. There is a tendency to no longer 'see' when looking at people and things with which we are familiar; it becomes difficult to appreciate their unique beauty.

Like his influences, Spencer and Lowry, he tries to notice and celebrate the ordinary things around us; believing much of life's genuine and lasting pleasures are those right in front of our eyes and under our noses.

### People and places

Liam prefers to work in front of the subject if possible: *"You can capture so much more in the moment and space – I also get to chat to passers-by who feed into my work with rich stories and fascinating conversation. For me, working purely in the studio would be like painting through a letter box."*



Above: Liam O'Farrell

### Maida Vale

In Liam's words: *"There is something about Maida Vale that has always attracted me, and I can never quite pin down what it is. It feels modest and diminutive and quite self-contained. You just 'know' when you have drifted over the border into Maida Vale. Added to that, the path of the canals evokes a welcome piece of rural England ploughing through the metropolis. It's almost magical."*

*To me, the contrast between the canal-based and land-based communities is one of the things that makes Little Venice so compelling. When I decided to produce a painting that evokes both communities within a single image the gods of art must have been on my side because not only was it not raining, I also found exactly the scene I wanted. The view across the Regents Canal over to Blomfield Road."*



*Above: Our front cover, an oil painting representing a scene along the Regent's Canal in Little Venice by Liam O'Farrell.*

### A scene of the Regent's Canal

In his painting blog "A walking and painting video tour of Maida Vale in London", Liam describes the scenes of Maida Vale that he painted over the years. This is what he says about about the oil painting that is shown in our front cover:

*"This part of the Canal is known as Little Venice. There is a bit of a mystery about who first named it Little Venice but I have a canny idea it might have been a smart estate agent.*

*My aim for this painting was to capture two communities: the ever moving canal community and the community of houses that populate its banks...*

*...This scene had everything I needed: the canal, the canal boats, some lovely buildings and some fine trees."*

You can read more about Liam's walking and painting tour of Maida Vale here:

<https://www.liamofarrell.com/2023/06/little-venice-painting-2/>





*Above: a photograph of the scene along the Regent's Canal painted by Liam O'Farrell. Note: the photograph was taken in November 2023, while the scene was painted in 2018.*

### Exhibiting at the Mall Galleries

Liam's oil painting of Little Venice has been chosen to be exhibited at the Royal Institute of Oil Painters, Annual Exhibition at The Mall Galleries in the West End.

In Liam's words: "*The gods of art smiled on me again as my painting of Little Venice was lucky enough to be chosen to be exhibited at The Royal Institute of Oil Painters annual exhibition at the Mall Galleries from the 29 November 2023 to 16 December 2023.*"

More details here: [www.mallgalleries.org.uk](http://www.mallgalleries.org.uk).

Personal website for enquiries, purchases, and commissions. I also do art talks.

[www.liamofarrell.com](http://www.liamofarrell.com)

# KAREN BUCK

## Our local MP

It's now official. After thirteen years Westminster North parliamentary constituency will cease to exist. Little Venice and Maida Vale wards will become part of Queens Park and Maida Vale, which extends north into Kilburn and Harlesden, whilst St John's Wood joins the Cities of London and Westminster, and Bayswater and Lancaster Gate join Kensington and Bayswater. None of these changes affect the position in respect of the local council- all stay part of Westminster Council. And I will remain the MP for the whole area until the election, doing my best to respond to problems and queries.

Inevitably, the NHS continues to be a dominant issue locally. The Imperial NHS Trust has the largest maintenance backlog in the country no one can go into St Mary's or Hammersmith hospitals and fail to notice the need for an urgent upgrade. St Mary's was rightly included in the list of the promised 40 new hospitals which featured so strongly in the 2019 election but sadly, this summer the government bumped St Mary's off the list, throwing the plans into chaos and prompting a grave warning from Imperial's leadership team that doing nothing was not a safe option. Discussions are continuing, but it is deeply disappointing to see the promises made 4 years ago thrown aside. Although not an exact swap the estimated £3 billion required from public funds for Imperial, is within the estimated £2.5-5 billion needed for the five RAAC hospitals not then in the 2030 programme. I've been talking to senior managers at Imperial and lobbying Ministers to try and get the scheme back on track. Together with the MP for the other Imperial hospitals – Charing Cross and Hammersmith. I wrote to the government to say: *"While we would like you to think again and reinstate Imperial hospitals in the 2030 programme, you should at least set out the revised timetable for undertaking and completing these works. Imperial's estate is the most dilapidated in England. It is not reasonable to leave world class hospitals in their current condition without even setting out the programme for their improvement or reinstatement"*.

There's uncertainty, too, about the Randolph surgery in Maida Vale, taken over not long ago by the US health giant Centene.



*The government's review process for the Canal and River Trust grant funding arrangement has seen a steep reduction of over £300 million over a ten year period.*

Centene bought a chain of GP practices but have now announced they are pulling out, and I am waiting to hear from the NHS about what happens next to ensure a good service for patients. Interestingly, Babylon, the owners of the big digital primary care service 'GP at Hand', which was taking large numbers of patients in West London, has also collapsed. Whatever your views on having private providers in the NHS, one thing is sure- patients can't be let down when companies fold or sell up.

Meanwhile the cost of living crisis has not gone away, with a new analysis showing 35,000 adults in Westminster are having to ration heating and electricity because of debts and other financial pressures. It's good news, therefore, that Westminster Council has built on the Mayor of London's funding to provide free school meals for all under 14s. 14,000 in all- saving families up to £570 a year. Thousands of low income families do not usually qualify for free meals, so this makes a really important contribution to family budgets. Rapidly increasing rents- up 12% in London last year- combined with squeezed incomes and a freeze on the housing allowance in the social security system have also contributed to another rise in rough sleeping. Westminster's location has also put us on the rough sleeping front line, but the number of street homeless people has increased by more than a quarter in a year across the country as a whole, despite the government having a target to end it entirely by the end of this Parliament.

Everyone living locally appreciates the beauty of the canal and the basin. I've always loved it most at this time, when autumn colours in the surrounding trees reflect off the water. We are lucky to have some 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England and Wales. They are hugely important, providing habitats for nature, homes for people and a place to take part in recreational activities. They also help to prevent floods and give us a network of green corridors steeped in rich industrial history unlike anywhere else in the world. There has, therefore, been understandable concern about the government's review process for the Canal and Rivers Trust's grant funding arrangement. MPs heard from the Trust Chief Executive in July warning that

*"Whilst the Trust welcomes a further long-term commitment to the nation's historic waterways, the amount awarded represents a steep reduction in its funding of over £300 million in real terms over the ten-year period. This presents a serious threat to the nation's canals, including those in your constituency. It represents almost a halving of real-terms public funding for canals in the ten years from 2027 compared with recent years. It will lead to a decline in the condition of the canal network and the alarming prospect of canal closures.*

*The decision is despite the Government Review that confirms funding for the Canal & River Trust is 'clear value for money' with the network of canals across England & Wales shown to deliver substantial benefits to the economy, to people and communities, and to nature and biodiversity."*

I am concerned the Government does not understand the value of canals, which help make the lives of people better by creating green space for recreation and reflection. Without maintenance, canals will fall into disrepair, cutting off these vital blue and green routes and access to nature for many. I am also disappointed by the delays to this decision which has put the future of our canals and all those that rely on them at risk. It has made it more difficult for the Trust to plan and hampered the progress of a number of larger projects designed to help build and shape much-needed resilience to the harsh and increasingly frequent effects of climate change. The Canal and River Trust, alongside local navigation, harbour and waterways authorities, does a crucial job protecting and restoring our internal waterways. We are seeing an increase in their use, and it is therefore vital this protective and restorative work continues and that the Government does not roll it back, as it is crucial for reaching net zero goals.

As always, policy enquiries and requests for help continue to pour in, and as I've said, I'll continue to respond as well as I can until whenever the election may be.

You can email me at [buckk@parliament.uk](mailto:buckk@parliament.uk)

**Karen Buck,**

**November 2023**



# AN UPDATE FROM OUR MAIDA VALE COUNCILLORS

## Free School Meals Expanded To Include 11 to 14 Year Olds

We're very pleased that the new administration at Westminster council has been able to fund primary free school meals since the start of the year. In even better news, from September, thanks to the Mayor's London-wide scheme, we are extending council-funded school lunches to many nursery children and 11 to 14 year old pupils. Now, 14,000 children are eligible for a free lunch at school in Westminster. The council's investment will save families up to £570 per child, per year which makes a real difference in this cost of living crisis.

## Dockless E-bike Parking Bays

We want to get e-bikes off the pavement and encourage responsible cycling and parking across the city. So, we're pleased that Westminster Council has begun the roll-out of over 220 designated parking bays for dockless e-bikes and e-scooters, after striking a deal with three operators – Lime, Tier and HumanForest – to control the use of their vehicles. There will be one parking bay every 300m across the city. Dockless e-bike users will need to end their trips in one of the designated bays or face a fine from operator.

The bays proposed for Maida Vale are Elgin Avenue (by the station), Grantully Road (at entrance to Paddington Rec), Carlton Vale (next to Renfrew House), Chippenham Road (junction with Grittleton), Lauderdale Road (outside Le Cochonnet) and Randolph Avenue (opposite Starbucks).

Westminster is also consulting on three new locations for cycle hangars. These are very popular, and we have a waiting list of over 200 people in Maida Vale alone. The proposed locations are Lanhill Road, Widley Road and Randolph Avenue, near the junction with Sutherland.



### **St Mary's hospital**

Unfortunately the refurbishment of St Mary's hospital is currently delayed until 2030 because the government has had to prioritise hospitals built with RAAC concrete. Imperial Healthcare trust are desperately looking for alternatives because the hospital estate is in such poor condition and costs so much to repair. Government ditches pledge to rebuild St Mary's. For more information:

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/government-hospitals-2030-st-marys-paddington-charing-cross-hammersmith-steve-barclay-b1083783.html>

### **Funding for local charities and community groups**

Westminster Council has opened a new fund for charities and community groups to apply to do healthy activities with residents. This is part of an initiative together with local NHS partners to halve the life expectancy gap between the richest and poorest wards in Westminster by 2035. Details of how to apply are available here: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/healthy-communities-fund>

### **North Paddington Youth club and the reverse vending machine at Paddington Recreation grounds**

Maida Vale and Little Venice wards host very few charities but one of them is the North Paddington Youth club. With amazing facilities on Lanark road they offer a full schedule of activities for young people and a full holiday club during half term and other holidays. If you want to support the activities of the club, you can do so by recycling single use plastic bottles and aluminium drinks cans in the Reverse Vending Machine in the Pavillion reception at Pad Rec.

For more information on free activities available, contact Ronnie at [clubmanager@northpaddyouthcom](mailto:clubmanager@northpaddyouthcom)

### **Post Office -Elgin Avenue**

Sadly, the post office facility on Elgin Avenue looks to be closed from Saturday 4th November, following 'the resignation of the postmaster and the withdrawal of the premises for Post Office use'. For more information:

<https://www.postofficeviews.co.uk/national-consultation-team/elgin-avenue-w9-1nj-146006/>

### **Summer Fair – Forty Tree Green**

We helped out at the Summer Fair on Forty Tree Green on Randolph Gardens. This featured bouncy castles, face-painting and information stalls about useful council services. The day was paid for by Westminster's regeneration team and Osborne, the building contractor, as a thank you to residents affected by construction work over the past year. You find out more in this short video:

<https://youtu.be/Qxjtj8ZdJ38si=iLrIGOrYllNajl0W>

### **Torridon House**

The construction work at a new block of 22 council flats at Torridon House is coming on nicely and was "topped out" by Cllr Matt Noble, cabinet member for Regeneration.

### **Vale Antiques on Elgin Parade**

Cllr Geoff Barraclough has objected to plans for this shop. The owner has applied for planning permission to convert the ground floor to an office and the basement to a small flat with very little natural light. You can see more details and give your views on the Westminster planning portal.

### **Maida Hill Market**

Westminster Council has begun extensive work to refurbish Maida Hill market including new paving, greening, seating and a new, above ground accessible toilet block. Construction will be paused for Christmas and restart in the New Year. Construction work on the two related canalside projects – Westbourne Green and Harrow Road Open Space – will start next summer.

### **BBC Studios**

We're pleased that Hans Zimmer, a famous film composer, has bought the Maida Vale Studios in partnership with Working Title Films. Cllr Geoff Barraclough met with representatives of the new owners who assured him that the building will remain a music recording venue. They are very keen to link the rejuvenated studios with the new North Paddington Creative Enterprise Zone and provide opportunities for local talent.

Cllr Barraclough advised the new owners to make contact with local residents on Delaware Road and Shirland Road in the near future so that they can give their views on how the site should operate. However, the BBC doesn't move out until 2025 so there is plenty of time.

### **Changemaker Studios**

Cllr Geoff Barraclough and Cllr Iman Less visited the new Changemaker Studios located at the college on Elgin Avenue. This is an initiative from Unloc, a social enterprise which develops entrepreneurship among young people, and is supported by Westminster Council. Many local schools are taking advantage of this facility.

### **Chippenham Hotel**

We're pleased that the owner of the Chippenham Hotel has complied with the S215 notice served by the council and tidied up the outside of the building. The old pub had become a local eyesore. Although it looks nicer today, the building badly needs a tenant.

### **Paddington Recreation Ground**

We have asked council officers to investigate opening the Rec later during summer weekends. The park closes at 9pm during the week but at 8pm at weekends. This is a shame, especially when the weather is nice.

We're delighted that Westminster has opened a Changing Places facility in the pavilion at Paddington Rec. The new facility was opened by Cllr Gillian Arindell, Westminster's disability champion and Cllr Iman Less. Changing Places are for people who can't use standard accessible toilets and can make a huge difference to families with disabled children.

**Cllr Geoffrey Barraclough, Cllr Nafsika Thalassis, Cllr Iman Less**

### **Maida Vale Labour Councillors**

#### **November 2023**



# AN UPDATE FROM OUR LITTLE VENICE COUNCILLORS

## **Farewell to DHIGS**

The start of September saw a farewell party for DHIGS whose family business had been in Formosa Street for nearly half a century. Over 200 people gathered on a very sunny Sunday afternoon to thank D & H and their family for their long service to the Little Venice community. Cllr Caplan gave a speech on behalf of the community to celebrate the wonderful service that the Patel family had provided to so many local people with mention for the outstanding role they played during the pandemic. We will miss D & H and the Little Venice community is so grateful for their years of dedication and wish them all the best for the future.

## **Silver Sunday**

The first Sunday in October saw the annual Silver Sunday events throughout Westminster. Melvyn and Lorraine were pleased to attend the activities at Leonora House in Lanark Road. The day started with some bingo and moved seamlessly through lunch into Bollywood dancing. It was a most enjoyable event, and a good time was had by all those involved.

## **Travis Perkins Site**

We successfully opposed the planning application to build 800 student flats in 2022 and it looks like we are going to have to deal with another planning application which is likely to be submitted next year.

We will continue to support residents who oppose this development which proposes buildings which are too tall and will block the views of little Venice residents and cause disruption due to the number of services needed to support this large a population of students. We will keep everyone updated as we await any new formal planning application being submitted.

## **Westminster Council Major Housing Works Projects**

We remain very concerned about various major housing works projects within the ward. We have always supported works being made to carry out essential repairs and upgrades that are needed to the housing stock within the ward. Any such works should not be at a cost to residents which is unaffordable. We have seen this with the proposals for John Aird Court and for those for Hall and Braithwaite Towers. In the case of the former, before we intervened, the works were going to cost lessees up to £100,000 which was totally unaffordable. We will continue to support all residents who face eye watering bills whilst at the same time supporting tenants who need essential repairs made to their properties.

## **Anti-social behaviour issues on the Hall Park Estate**

The last few weeks has since a significant growth in the number of anti-social behaviour issues caused by students from the City of Westminster college. Students from the college are frequently entering the landings and stairwells of several of the blocks on the hall park estate. This is causing a lot of anxiety for residents who live here and are entitled to both privacy and safety. The police have caught several dozen students and are looking for the college to take appropriate disciplinary action including exclusion from the college. We will continue to press for more police resources to patrol these areas and for the college to use their resources to stop their students entering the hall park estate and John Aird Court.

### Trees cut down in error

We were horrified to see that a healthy tree was incorrectly cut down in St Mary Terrace. This followed a similar incident that happened in Sutherland Avenue earlier this year. We are concerned by these incidents and have asked for assurances that we will not see future occurrences.

### Transport Concerns

We have been receiving a significant number of issues which concern the Mayor and his responsibilities for Transport for London (TFL). These range from complaints about tube noise which is affecting several residents in Warrington Crescent to concerns about the poor condition of Warwick Avenue Tube station which is desperately in need of some refurbishment and maintenance. We also remain concerned about the traffic light phasing at Maida Avenue which continues to cause traffic gridlock at various times throughout the day.

### Flooding

Finally, we are still concerned about potential flooding affecting many residents throughout the ward. We need the council to pay attention to known flooding hotspots streets and to increase the gully cleansing frequency in those streets. We also need Thames Water to produce plans and to build a long-term infrastructure to increase the water capacity of their system.

*Right: Cllrs Lorraine Dean and Melvin Caplan at Leonora House in Lanark Road on Silver Sunday.*

### Keeping in touch

If you wish to contact any of us, you can phone the Little Venice Conservative councillors' hotline on 0207 289 9929 or email us at [littlevenice@westminsterconservatives.com](mailto:littlevenice@westminsterconservatives.com).

You can also write to us at  
2 Lanark Mews, London W9 1RY.

Cllr Melvyn Caplan, Cllr Lorraine Dean,

Little Venice Ward  
Conservative Councillors

November 2023





# AN UPDATE FROM OUR LITTLE VENICE COUNCILLORS (continued)

## New Public Realm Scheme for Little Venice

I'm very excited that the new administration has unveiled a new public realm improvement strategy which includes a number of excellent improvement plans for Little Venice. We have taken onboard many of the ideas proposed by W2W9. The strategy includes plans to improve the area above Warwick Avenue underground station with greening and seating. A promenade leading up to the canal is also part of the proposal. In other areas, we will be looking at better lighting and making our green spaces and walkways more welcoming including near Paddington Green. We are also planning an accessible play park for children with special needs.

## Supporting the Canal and Rivers Trust

I have become increasingly concerned over the current government's dramatic cuts to the Canal and Rivers Trust (Up to £300 million) and have been working to see how this could affect us in Little Venice. Council Leader Adam Hug was one of nine council leaders to sign a letter to secretary of state Thérèse Coffey warning that the cuts are an *"existential threat to the already underfunded and over-polluted waterways"*.

## Paddington Green and Security Incidents

I have been trying to push for more support and serious action amid continuing security incidents near Paddington Green and City of Westminster College. I have been speaking to the police, the college, community groups, young people and London's Violence Reduction Unit to try and work on solutions. Residents were reassured by the increased police presence following the latest incident, but were concerned once they found out that this was temporary. In general, there is strong support for more regular patrols by Paddington Green.

## Little Venice Film Festival

This week we saw the launch of what we hope will become an annual independent film festival and competition in Little Venice.

The festival is supported by Westminster City Council and has corporate sponsors like British Airways and Zopa. It supports independent filmmakers and champions inclusivity by supporting female, LGBTQ+ and Global Majority filmmakers. Most importantly, it uses local venues like the Canal Cafe and the Puppet Theatre Barge.

## Flood Risk

In preparation for the autumn/ winter, the Council will be conducting regular cleaning and maintenance of gullies in Little Venice. Residents on affected streets will receive a notification letter before the works will commence. The council will be installing sensors in selected gullies across Little Venice. A programme of sustainable urban drainage solutions (SuDs) are also due to be installed later this year and into the next to improve surface water retention. If you see a gully that requires attention, please report it using the council's website on the 'Report it' section.

## Local Developments

I joined residents and fellow Labour Hyde Park councillors at the community consultation held by Travis Perkins on the future of their canal side Paddington site. Previous proposals for a student accommodation block were rejected by the council because the building was too tall. The council at the time said: "The height and bulk are excessive – blocking strategic views of Little Venice including John Aird Court and St Mary's Terrace and views from Warwick Avenue Station towards Paddington". Residents at the meeting expressed concern over potential loss of daylight /sunlight. I'll be monitoring the situation carefully.

**Cllr Sara Hassan,  
Little Venice Labour  
Councillor**



**November 2023**

# COST OF LIVING CHALLENGES

As a result of personal experience, one local resident W9W2 member offers their tips to MU readers on how to offset some of their costs of living by acting on 3 fronts:

## 1. Cost of building insurance

The flash floods that occurred in July 2021 caused devastating damage to properties located in Maida Vale and surrounding areas. More than a month's rainfall fell in an hour causing drainage systems to be overwhelmed, leading to widespread flooding of basements.

Whilst many of the resulting insurance claims have now been settled, policyholders have been faced with stiff challenges in the subsequent terms imposed by the insurers of the properties concerned. Significant premium increases, increased deductibles and in the most extreme cases the exclusion of storm and flood cover are all still being experienced by insured's 2 years on. Such increases are not inevitable; why?

Satisfactory cover at significantly reduced premiums can, however, be obtained by using a competent insurance broker. The advice from one broker who has acted for many residents in our area is as follows:

*“Attempting to obtain terms through search engines is not going to deliver the desired results. It is important to access an underwriter who can take a positive view on proceedings, and it is vital that an insurance broker is preparing a detailed risk presentation on behalf of a policyholder. The focus is to provide full underwriting details and highlight the positive post loss risk improvements implemented, and how these will mitigate future losses. This will allow the underwriter to positively assess the information in order to view a risk in the most encouraging terms. As devastating as the flood damages were, it is equally important to remember that this was something of a freak and hopefully one off event.”*

## 2. Water

My neighbours and I have managed to reduce our water charges by approximately 40% by fitting a water meter. How? The policy from our water supplier was until recently to refuse to fit water meters to flats but this policy appears to have changed. In many cases they will be able to fit the meters, and these will automatically provide readings, so there's no need to manually report these. Whether or not it is worth fitting a meter depends on the size of your property, and the number of occupants. In broad terms if the number of people living at a property is the same or less than the number of floors then the answer is likely to be “yes”. For example, it would probably be worth installing a meter for a family of 4 living on 4 floors, or one person living on one floor.

## 3. Electricity

We recently saved significantly on our overnight electricity costs? How: by installing a smart meter. If much of your electricity is used at night then it may be worth switching to a dual rate tariff. To do this you will need to have a smart meter installed (that is, if you do not already have a dual rate meter). Using off peak electricity is definitely worthwhile if you charge up an electric car from your domestic supply. One well known supplier is currently offering rates of 31.5 p (day) and 9p (night) per kWh (inclusive of VAT). Even without having a car to charge, it may still be worth switching to a dual rate tariff as it is usually possible to program appliances such as dishwashers, washing machines and dryers to run at night (or else just use a timer on each device).

**Nigel Stokes,**

**November 2023**



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# PADDINGTON: THE CENTRE OF THE EDGE

Paddington is world famous because of a bear, named after the railway station in which he was found. Luckily London does not have a “Grand Central” station because a bear called “Central” does not quite have the same ring to it: I feel a hard stare coming my way even as I entertain the thought... This is because the authorities didn’t want the rail termini to invade the City, hence the orderly row of Euston, St Pancras and Kings Cross along what used to be called the New Road (a road with its origins in Paddington, as we will see...).

But Paddington’s place at the “edge of the centre” has long been fundamental to how it has developed and how it appears now, shaped by many generations trying to get themselves or their goods from A to B. We know nothing about Padda, the Anglo Saxon whose settlement (“ton”) gives us the root of the name: but we can understand that it was a good place to settle, at the Marble Arch junction of two important Roman roads (to Silchester, and Watling Street/Edgware Rd).

For the next few hundred years Paddington’s role was to supply the City with food: the City’s copious volumes of manure (human and horse) rendered the areas at its edge fertile, and we can imagine Paddington as a rural village growing crops and vegetables as well as raising cattle and producing milk. Only on Paddington Green can you conjure up the image of a C18 village: try to block out the traffic noise and enjoy the tall trees, Georgian houses and a most unusual round church.

Here you can sense that Paddington used to offer a rural excursion from the City. A key attraction was the Yorkshire Stingo, a pub and pleasure garden/exhibition grounds opened in the 1600’s. “Stingo” was a type of strong beer: attractions included balloon ascents, a bowling green, tea gardens and musical concerts. The pub was sited on the south side of Marylebone Rd, where Westminster Magistrates’ Court now stands: there is a mural to commemorate it.

It was Paddington’s convenient location for the City which drove its first big transport development: the creation of the New Road across the top of the City, mainly intended as a drove road for herds of livestock headed for Smithfield (the growing City wanted to free Oxford St and Holborn of the nuisance of cattle!).



*Above: Paddington Station.*

Paddington (along with Marylebone and Islington) saw an opportunity for a toll road: landowners along the route saw a chance to develop their land for building as the city grew northwards. So Lord Somers did nicely out of Somerstown: Henry Penton in Pentonville; and Francis and William Goodge (Goodge St and environs). And Paddington was the ideal place to start the road, where the Harrow Rd met the Edgware Rd.

And this “transport first” for Paddington led directly to two more. It inspired George Shillibeer to launch London’s first bus service in 1829, along the New Road to Bank and starting from the Yorkshire Stingo.

About 18 people were transported “in the Parisian style” in a covered carriage, with free newspapers and “highly respectable conductors”.

And thirty years later, with the road ever more congested, it made Paddington the ideal location for London’s first underground railway. In the absence of the technology to build deep tunnels (“tubes”) the railway had to be built via the “cut and cover” method. A deep cutting would be dug, rails laid and a brick arch built over them: then the soil would be put back on top. This was impossible to execute in residential areas: but the New Road provided an ideal, broad space where it could be done, albeit the many traders and shopkeepers along it hated the disruption. Opened in 1863 between Paddington and Farringdon, it was a huge success from the start, even though it must have been an intense sensory experience with steam trains working along the dark tunnels. One interesting historical note: you could have caught an underground train to watch the last public hanging in London (1868).

And Paddington’s place at the head of the New Road also spurred a striking and impactful first for canals: the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union connected London with the Midlands, enabling a step-change in speed, efficiency and low cost for transport of goods. Opened in 1801 this more than any other change eroded the “village feel” of Paddington and spurred urban development, especially around the Basin (sited, obviously, at the end of the New Road). The impetus and focus was industrial and commercial but from the start there was a leisure market for the canal: you could take a leisurely cruise through the (then) rural delights of Harmondsworth and Hayes, the poster proclaiming that you would pass the country seats and villas of many gentlemen. Of course today the canal is all about leisure: you can stroll in Rembrandt Gardens in the Little Venice basin and feel like you are on a rural towpath in Oxfordshire (again provided you block out the traffic noise...).

Right up to the present Paddington continues to evolve and be shaped by people’s needs for transportation.

The Heathrow Express and the Elizabeth line are recent additions: it was one of Queen Elizabeth’s last public engagements to open the latter. I wonder if she knew that her predecessor Victoria had undertaken her first train trip from Windsor to Paddington in 1842? At 44mph it was apparently somewhat scary: Prince Albert asked “a little slower next time, Mr Conductor”. In its time the Westway showcased the latest urban planning philosophy: give the car priority! Given today’s very different priority this is perhaps one of Paddington’s least-loved transport features.

Maybe if today we are standing near or driving on the Paddington roads we are too busy trying to get from A to B to appreciate the rich texture and layers of the area’s history. But ‘twas ever thus, as the area took shape since 1750 via canals, railway, underground and buses. Paddington is, as it always was, at the edge of the centre: and at the centre of the edge.

Andrew Glover,

November 2023



*Andrew Glover runs a Walking Tour business called Who Knew Tours ([www.whoknewtours.com](http://www.whoknewtours.com)).*

*His walk around Paddington is sponsored by Wallacea Living, page 23.*

# 60 SECONDS WITH ALICE

*We spoke with Jane Means, a local wrapping paper guru who works internationally using her skills to help people get creative with wrapping gifts! Jane sat down for 60 seconds with our editor, Alice*

**Name:** Jane Means

**Age:** 54 but certainly don't act it!

**How long have you lived in Maida Vale?** I bought my first flat back in 2002 after visiting friends in Maida Vale. I didn't know much about the area, but fell in love with it straight away with its tree-lined streets, and proximity to the West End.

**Why so long in Maida Vale?** Originally I'm a farmers daughter from Lincolnshire and loved living by water (in a Watermill), so the waterways of Little Venice was a good substitute, plus it was easy getting back to my office in Lincoln both by train and car. When you've had a busy day, working in stores in Oxford Street and Regent Street, I love to escape the hustle and bustle and can be home in 10 minutes on a Boris Bike from Selfridges!



I often travel overseas with my work so the short walk to Paddington is ideal for getting to Heathrow Airport. Maida Vale is so tranquil and is such a hidden gem of London that I can't see myself living anywhere else in London. I have been running gift wrapping services and courses in W9 for over 20 years and have also had a pop up shop at Clifton Nurseries. I also love the variety of cafes and shops with my favourites being Da Daniela (a truly authentic Italian), Clifton Nurseries (love their beetroot latte) and Peppermint Cafe (fantastic breakfasts). You'll also find me perusing the charity shops on Clifton Road and grabbing my veg from Chapel Street Market

**How did you start your business?** I saw a gap in the market in 1995 and had a head full of wrapping ideas so decided to get my teaching qualification and start running gift wrapping courses. The business grew and I now have a wonderful gift wrapping team of around 20. Every single day is different and we now have clients including Tiffany, Dior, Selfridges, Chanel and Cartier to name a few. I never dreamt my hobby would become a global brand.

**What are some of the highlights of your career?** I have met some incredible people and worked for the rich and famous, but sadly my lips are sealed. Recently I was filmed in the USA on TV show as a judge for a Gift Wrapping Competition. The series will be aired on Dec 4th and I can't wait to see the 6 episodes were full of drama, tears and humour. Several years ago I was invited by a BBC Producer to look around the iconic Maida Vale Studios and this was a dream come true. The other place on my bucket list is Abbey Road Studios so hopefully one day I will visit there too. I still pinch myself that I'm travelling the world working for French fashion houses and I am amazed at the distances people travel to attend my courses.

**Any good tips for sustainable wrapping this Christmas?** We're becoming far more eco conscious plus many of us are cost cutting in the current climate so opt for something simple like brown paper which can easily be decorated (think of stamping or writing a pretty calligraphy message on there paper). Personalising gifts can be really easy. You could photocopy some old photos of friends to make personalised wrapping paper. To make your gifts eye catching, accessorise it with natural decorations and foliage which can be picked up on Country walks (think Regents Park or Paddington Rec). My favourite foliage is eucalyptus from local florists as it smells divine and dries really well too. Measuring your paper and ribbon is key so it's easier to manage and you get less waste. I also like to recycle old decorations such as small baubles and cracker embellishments as these make an eye catching feature to any gift. Write on Holly, Ivy and Laurel with a metallic gel pen or a Sharpie and these make great gift tags (or place settings on napkins) Also avoid any paper with glitter, foil or plastic as this can't be recycled. You can get lots more tips from Jane via Instagram [@janemeans](#) or [www.janemeans.com](http://www.janemeans.com). I still pinch myself that I'm travelling the world working for French fashion houses.

**Any hot news?**

Yes! We are providing the Gift Wrapping Service at Bicester Village this year so it's been a very busy time behind the scenes. As well as wrapping gifts for private families (often in W9), luxury brands and stores, we expect Christmas to be really busy this year. On top of the physical wrapping I've been commissioned by brands to make Instagram reels and tutorials so I'm having to learn about tech very quickly too.

You can get lots more tips from Jane via Instagram [@janemeans](#) or [www.janemeans.com](http://www.janemeans.com)

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# LOCAL BUSINESSES

THYME & TAHINI  
AVALON FLOWERS

# THYME & TAHINI

## A Gastronomic Journey with Erkan Aydin

In the heart of London's Little Venice, a culinary haven awaits, where tradition meets innovation, and every dish is a masterpiece. Thyme and Tahini, founded by the passionate Erkan Aydin, is not just a deli-grocery store; it's an ode to the vibrant flavours of the Aegean and Mediterranean, a reflection of Erkan's roots and unwavering dedication to fine food.

### A Culinary Odyssey from Izmir to London

Erkan Aydin's journey begins in Izmir, where he was born into a Georgian family deeply embedded in the rich cultures of the Aegean and Mediterranean. Despite a successful corporate career in textile and fashion manufacturing, Aydin's true calling revealed itself during his time in the UK. Pursuing a master's in management and business, he found solace and joy in the art of cooking, a passion inherited from his family's culinary traditions.

### From Corporate to Culinary

Erkan Aydin's shift from the corporate world to the culinary realm was not just a career change; it was a rediscovery of his roots and a pursuit of genuine happiness. Cooking, a skill honed since childhood, became his creative outlet. Starting as an assistant chef in Canning Town Social Club, it's called "the schvitz", Aydin quickly ascended to the position of head chef. Here, he not only crafted exquisite dishes but also forged connections with notable personalities.

### The Birth of Thyme and Tahini

Inspired and enriched by these experiences, Erkan Aydin ventured into entrepreneurship, establishing a unique concept centred around greengrocery and deli. Thyme and Tahini emerged as a culinary sanctuary in Maida Vale's Little Venice, offering more than just delectable meals. Aydin's vision was to create a space where people could not only enjoy sumptuous dishes but also socialize, relax, engage in conversations, and conveniently do their grocery shopping.

### A Gastronomic Wonderland

Thyme and Tahini is not your average grocery and deli shop; it's a sensory journey. The menu reflects Aydin's commitment to fresh, high-quality ingredients, with each deli food telling a story of heritage and passion. From traditional Aegean and Mediterranean classics to innovative fusions, every bite is an exploration of flavours.



### The Art of Hosting:

Erkan Aydin's commitment to hosting goes beyond the kitchen. Thyme and Tahini is a testament to his desire to create an inviting atmosphere where people can connect over great food and shared experiences. His ability to turn a meal into an event, coupled with the charm of Little Venice, makes Thyme and Tahini a go-to destination for those seeking not just a light fare but an unforgettable culinary experience.

### Community and Connection:

Thyme and Tahini is not just a deli- grocery store; it's a community hub. Erkan Aydin's passion extends beyond the kitchen to building connections with patrons. It's a place where regulars become friends, and every visit feels like coming home. The warmth of the ambience and the genuine smiles from the staff reflect Aydin's belief that food is not just sustenance; it's an expression of love and hospitality.

### Looking Forward:

As Thyme and Tahini continue to thrive in the vibrant neighbourhood of Little Venice, Erkan Aydin envisions it evolving into more than just a culinary destination. He sees it as a cultural hub, a place where people gather to celebrate life, indulge in exceptional food, and create lasting memories. With a commitment to authenticity, quality, and a touch of Mediterranean magic, Thyme and Tahini stand poised as a gastronomic gem in the heart of London.

In Erkan Aydin's culinary realm, every dish tells a story, and Thyme and Tahini invite you to be a part of this extraordinary narrative. Come for the food, stay for the experience, and leave with the warmth of good company and the lingering taste of Mediterranean delights.

Eli Hanan,

November 2023



*Above: Erkan Aydin.*

# AVALON FLOWERS

Avalon Flowers, established in 2003, is a charming gem of a florist on Lauderdale Road, in the heart of Maida Vale.

Liam O'Farrell, our front cover artist, painted Avalon Flowers in 2018. In Liam's words:

*"Another place I am rather drawn to is Lauderdale Road, at the junction of Elgin Avenue, in particular this little lot of small businesses. The first one I am rather keen on is fine fronted flower shop, Avalon Flowers."*

*"It's not a very large shop but I'd say you get more or less everything you want. It's a great local small business. I was admiring it sitting on a bench looking at this view and I decided to paint it."*

You can find out more about Avalon Flowers here:  
<https://www.avalonflowers.co.uk/>

You can read more about Liam's walking and painting tour of Maida Vale here:  
<https://www.liamofarrell.com/2023/06/little-venice-painting-2/>



*Above: Artwork by Liam O'Farrell.*

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# A BIT OF HISTORY

A MAIDA VALE MYSTERY

IDLE WOMEN

THE GREAT AIR RAID OF 1918

# A MAIDA VALE MYSTERY

Looking at the tidy houses in Clarendon Crescent, between Bloomfield Rd and Clifton Rd, it is hard to imagine the scene on the 26th of September 1884 when a young servant girl found a large brown parcel in the garden of number 32 Clarendon Gardens. Suspecting that this was not the 1880s equivalent of an Amazon delivery, she immediately called the police. On opening the parcel, the police discovered the body of a fair haired girl aged between about 8 and 10 years old who had apparently been dead for about three or four days.

The body was naked and partially wrapped with a rough cotton cloth as was typically used for holding the stuffing in in a mattress. The cloth had no identifying marks and yielded no clues as to its origin, allowing no identification to be established.

A Coroner's inquest was ordered to establish the cause and manner of the poor girl's death. No one had come forward to identify her, neither had anyone reported her missing. In the absence of any firm knowledge of her circumstances or background. Press speculation ran wild and reports at first suggested that she had been the victim of *"one of those outrages which are so frequent in our criminal records and are consequently followed by murder"* or alternatively that the child had been starved to death.

Matters were not helped by the fact that the private life of the Coroner, Dr W.W. Westcott was, to put it mildly, far from normal. He was a founder and Supreme Magus of an occult organisation known as the Order of the Golden Dawn. Among its members the notorious Satanist, Aleister Crowley referred to by John Bull as the *"wickedest man in the world"*. In later years he was suspected by the writer Jack London to have been the killer known as Jack the Ripper. Two of his children killed themselves and his wife died falling out of a window.

His career as a coroner almost came to premature end when he left documents referring to his magical powers in a taxi. These were then forwarded to the Home Office and he was severely admonished and told that he *"was paid to sit on corpses and not to raise them"*.



*Above:*

Rumours of starvation were dashed when the post mortem showed that although she had not eaten during the past 24 hours, her body was still well nourished and according to the press: *"Experience shows that while a child in London may sometimes be most brutally treated, and even slowly murdered, without public interference, it cannot be starved without the neighbouring women discovering its condition, and raising loud, sometimes very courageous and self-denying protests. Children are neglected, or maltreated hideously, but seldom deliberately starved."*

So, who was the girl and how did she die? The surgeon's conclusion was that she had died from congestion of the lungs aggravated by heart condition. Dr Westcott seemed very doubtful but the jury concluded that violence would have left some mark and that starvation would have left her emaciated so they found a verdict of death from natural causes.

So, if she died of natural causes why was abandoned in a garden in Maida Vale?

Had she been abducted and consequently died? Had she been the recipient of a small annuity or pension and her death hidden to allow payments to continue? Such a crime was not unknown in the 19th century. Was she perhaps poisoned by means that did not show up in her post mortem examination?

Sadly, we will never know exactly what happened to this unfortunate child.

This tragic story shows us a society where a child, either murdered or who conceivably died of natural causes, was treated as a piece of garbage by persons whom the authorities had no means of discovering, even with the amount of press coverage that this incident generated.

It is significant that only two months after this awful incident the forerunner of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPC) was founded and that in the following year Parliament passed the first Act to protect and prevent cruelty to children. This was of course too late to help the poor girl in our story.

**Julian Futter,**

**November 2023**



*Above: Dr W.W. Westcott*

# IDLE WOMEN

A friend flagged up the Maida Unveiled website with the story of the Idle Women – the wartime women canal trainees on the Grand Union who would have passed through Maida Vale and the tunnel on every trip. And I spotted one of the most common myths about the women, that the nickname ‘Idle Women’ came from the National Service badge they wore, originated during the war and was made up by the working boatmen as a snide comment on their new inexperienced counterparts.

In reality the nickname wasn’t created during the war, it was suggested by Harriet Woolfitt in 1947 when her mother Susan was writing a book based on her experiences and needed a title – ‘why not Idle Women,’ said young Harriet. The trainees (as they were only ever known) were not Idle. Many of those who stayed the course helped, and earned the respect of, the working boaters.

I first encountered the story of the Idle Women after I moved on to a boat in 1999. I was reading Ramlin Rose; the boatwoman’s story by Sheila Stewart. Rose is a fictional character based on interviews Sheila carried out with the last generation of women to be born to the boats, and I was also privileged to have a working boatwoman, Rose Skinner, as a neighbour, and to meet one of the last trainees.

It is also easy to think that the trainees were the whole story of women working on boats, but women had been working on the boats for a hundred years before the second world war. Canals go back to ancient times with the first ‘modern’ locks in this country built in the mid-16th century. Initially they were very profitable but as the railways came (often built with materials carried by the boats) they started to struggle – which is where the women first really come in. Until then the women lived on the bank, men worked the boats – although there were some women as crew and some boats recorded as owned by women (according to the 1841 census). The business declined as competition with the railways intensified and many working the boats were re-employed by one of the carrying companies, an example is the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company (GUCCC) based at Bull’s Bridge in Hayes, West London.

Both world wars provided a brief renaissance to this decline as trains were needed for troops and fuel was limited. The wartime expansion though was limited by a shortage of crews to run the boats in the early 1940s as boating was a reserved occupation for men over 25. In Ramlin Rose, Rose describes the situation as ‘there were plenty of cargo, plenty of empty boats, just not enough good crews’.

The GUCCC took the bold step of starting a training program for women to crew the boats and initiated what then became known as the Women’s Training Scheme had its origins in Worcester at the very start of the war. The March family owned a typical styled working boat they had had built in the early 1930s, the Heather Bell. At the start of the war, their son Christopher joined the Merchant Navy and his sister, Daphne, decided that her war work would be to run the Heather Bell as a working boat, but after her brother left to enter the armed forces the boat needed crew and Daphne took the initiative to advertise in the Times in January 1941 for trainee crew.

Daphne continued to work the Heather Bell to the end of the war, often with her mother Margaret as crew. They were featured in an illustrated article by the Ministry of Defence in 1942.

The four years Daphne spent working on the Heather Bell they carried more than 7,000 tons of cargo. She took slack to Worcester, spam to Nottingham, sugar to Wolverhampton, and flour to Tipton, sauce to Wigan, coal to Oxford, copper and aluminium to Birmingham, shell cases to the Potteries, grain to the Mersey, and RAF stores to the Bristol Channel. Her regular route was flour from Worcester to Tipton, then empty on to Cannock, where she loaded with coal to return to Worcester.

Kit Gayford, one of the original respondents to Daphne’s advertisement, became the principal trainer, taking three trainees at a time on a three week round trip from London to Birmingham with war supplies and returning via the Coventry coal fields with fuel for London. The boat’s base was alongside all the GUCCC boats and families at Bull’s Bridge.





In 1943, aged 19, Olga Kevelos saw an advertisement inviting women to train for work on the canals. “She spent the next two years with all-female volunteer crews which ran the barges carrying vital war materials along the Grand Union Canal between London and the Midlands.”

From there she would take the new recruits on a short trip to introduce them to the boats and work through a lock, usually Cowley to the north. Once they received their orders for a load, it was off the ranks of moored boats, turn right through Bull's Bridge onto the Paddington Arm to Little Venice, on to the Regent's, past Regent's Park, down through the 12 locks to Regent's Dock (Limehouse basin) where they would load, before returning the same way to turn right again at Bull's Bridge and head for Birmingham. Once offloaded at Tyersely on the outskirts of the city they travelled on to the Coventry coalfields.

Two trips and a test, and the women were considered trained and moved on to work a pair of boats in teams of three.

They were certainly a bit of a shock to the working boat families – their independence, willingness to challenge authority as well as wearing trousers, something no boatwoman would have considered at the time. Even smoking cigarettes! My neighbour Rose Skinner was 20 when she encountered the trainees and told me a story of going to the cinema with the crew of a trainee boat. For her, and the other boat girls, this was a night out, something special. You donned your best, did your hair, applied a bit of lippy. She was horrified when they turned up in the clothes they had been working in!

Some 100 women signed up between 1943 and 1945 but many didn't last long. One is reported to have stood in the cabin and said 'where is the accommodation?' – not sure she even lasted to untie the boat! It is also clear from some accounts, especially *Troubled Waters* by Margaret Cornish (who became an assistant trainer) that the work often attracted women who were struggling in some way. Susan Woolfitt, of *Idle Women* fame, was in an increasingly unhappy marriage to Donald Wolfitt, a West End actor/manager. For her it proved the release that she needed to thrive, she went on to write her book and to speak extensively about her experiences. Others didn't find it so easy and left, sometimes creeping out at the crack of dawn or simply not returning from leave.

The GUCCC trainees weren't the only women coming on to the water, there was also a scheme on the Leeds & Liverpool working the much larger Liverpool 'short boats' – 62' x 12' barges. They were known as 'Judies', a common name for working women generally as opposed to anything specific to boats. Only two pairs of women worked for any length of time; one, Nancy Ridgeway later wrote *Memories of a Wartime Canal Boatwoman* describing her experience of life in a predominantly male world. She was very different to the trainees in the south, coming from a working class family in Manchester. Her tales of taking on the men make delightful reading.

Once the war ended, one of the trainees, Sonia South (later Smith and then Rolt), went on to contribute to the restoration of the waterways. Susan Woolfitt, Eily Gayford, Margaret Cornish and Emma Smith (the youngest of the trainees, starting at 19) wrote books. Many contributed to the post war campaigning to save the canals and the early days of the Inland Waterways Association.

The books written by the women are only part of the wonderful resources to explore. There are also recordings, contemporary newsreels, articles and more. We have gathered together everything that we've found in the course of our research and writing our show *Idle Women of the Wartime Waterways*.

<https://alarumproductions.org.uk/portfolios/idle-women-of-the-wartime-waterways/>

You can also see all our other projects and join our mailing list if you'd like to stay in touch with our work.

**Kate Saffin, Alarum Productions,**

**November 2023**

Initially they had to take the much hated 'Bottom Road', the Birmingham and Fazely. All the boaters hated it, the first few miles were heavily polluted, the single locks meant that taking a pair of boats through was hard timeconsuming work involving bowhauling the second, unpowered butty through. The filthy grit laden rope would leave their backs marked with the effort of hauling the boat through. After something of a strike by the boatmen the company finally relented and allowed them to return to Braunston via the much wider Grand Union with its double locks to Braunston and branch off to Coventry from there. Two trips and a test, and the women were considered trained and moved on to work a pair of boats in teams of three.

Some 100 women signed up between 1943 and 1945 but many didn't last long. One is reported to have stood in the cabin and said 'where is the accommodation?' – not sure she even lasted to untie the boat! It is also clear from some accounts, especially *Troubled Waters* by Margaret Cornish (who became an assistant trainer) that the work often attracted women who were struggling in some way. Susan Woolfitt, of *Idle Women* fame, was in an increasingly unhappy marriage to Donald Wolfitt, a West End actor/manager. For her it proved the release that she needed to thrive, she went on the write her book and to speak extensively about her experiences. Others didn't find it so easy and left, sometimes creeping out at the crack of dawn or simply not returning from leave.

Estimates as to the number of pairs of boats crewed by women on the Grand Union Canal vary from 15 to 30 at any one time, with around 44 making a substantial contribution.

They were certainly a bit of a shock to the working boat families – their independence, willingness to challenge authority as well as wearing trousers, something no boatwoman would have considered at the time. Even smoking cigarettes! My neighbour Rose Skinner was about 19 or 20 when she encountered the trainees and told me a story of going to the cinema with the crew of a trainee boat. For her, and the other boat girls, this was a night out, something special.

You donned your best, did your hair, applied a bit of lippy. She was horrified when they turned up in the clothes they had been working in! She was mortified and felt ashamed to be seen with them. At the same time there are accounts of ways in which they helped the boat families – first aid at times of illness and a game based on snakes and ladders to help the children learn to read.

The GUCCC trainees weren't the only women coming on to the water, there was also a scheme on the Leeds & Liverpool working the much larger Liverpool 'short boats' – 62' x 12' barges. They were known as 'Judies', although I think that was a common name for working women generally as opposed to anything specific to boats. Only two pairs of women worked for any length of time; one, Nancy Ridgeway later wrote *Memories of a Wartime Canal Boatwoman* describing her experience of life in a predominantly male world. She was very different to the trainees in the south, coming from a working class family in Manchester. Her tales of taking on the men make delightful reading. Once the war ended their services were no longer needed and they all dispersed to lives various. Once the war ended, one of the trainees, Sonia South (later Smith and then Rolt) went on to contribute to the restoration of the waterways. Susan Woolfitt, Eily Gayford, Margaret Cornish and Emma Smith (the youngest of the trainees, starting at 19) wrote books. Many contributed to the post war campaigning to save the canals and the early days of the Inland Waterways Association.

The books written by the women are only part of the wonderful resources to explore. There are also recordings, contemporary newsreels, articles and more. We have gathered together everything that we've found in the course of our research and writing our show *Idle Women of the Wartime Waterways*.

<https://alarumproductions.org.uk/portfolios/idle-women-of-the-wartime-waterways/>

You can also see all our other projects and join our mailing list if you'd like to stay in touch with our work.

**Kate Saffin, Alarum Productions,**

**November 2023**

# THE GREAT AIR RAID OF 1918

This is the story of what happened on the night of March 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 1918 when the bombers of squadron RF501 bombed Warrington Crescent.

Some of this is going to feel very familiar to stories of the Blitz, 22 years later. Civilians endured the blackout, sheltered in tube stations and died in their houses. All the paraphernalia of air raid defence was already in place – anti-aircraft guns, searchlights, barrage balloons and night fighters. There were even Royal visits.

Altogether, 51 Zeppelin raids and 52 aircraft raids took place. More than 9,000 bombs were dropped causing 1,413 deaths and 3,400 injuries; 670 of these deaths and 1,962 of these injuries occurred in London.

At 10:00 on the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1918, the crowds were leaving some of its 40 theatres, one of which, the Criterion, mindful of the air raids, was advertising itself as being “*built entirely underground*”. At the same time, over in Belgium, squadron RFA 501 was making final preparations to take off from their new base in Scheldewindeke.

They had only occupied it that afternoon and without even time to settle into their new quarters, they were ordered to attack London. Heavily laden, the squadron loaded up their bombs and made their final preparations to take off. One of their number, R39, piloted by Hpt Richard von Bentivegni, was carrying a one ton bomb - only the second time such a payload been carried. The other five aircraft carried a mix of 100 and 300 kg bombs. Their planes were cutting edge technology. Known as Giants they were the brain children of Count von Zeppelin of airship fame and Robert Bosch the industrialist. These aircraft were powered by four 245 hp engines travelling at a speed of 130 km/h and they could fly at a height of 4,000 km for up to 10 hours. Their wingspan was 40m, greater than that of the Lancaster bomber and they weighed 12 tons. They had an enclosed cabin, electrically heated flying suits, extensive instrumentation and wireless telegraphy.

At the same time, at Rochford and at Stow Maries airfields, mechanics had prepared the BE12s, SE5As and Camel fighters for operations as part of the new defence system for London. It had been 3 weeks since the last raid and with the weather overcast and no moon or stars visible no action was expected that night.

Morale was high at squadron RFA 501. In previous operations against England, not a single Giant had been lost to enemy action and results had been good. Seven weeks earlier, R39 had dropped a one ton bomb with devastating effect in Covent Garden, destroying Odhams Press and killing 38 people.

Let one of the squadron, Hptm Schoeller, tell us of the preparations for take off on that March night.

*“Our 6 aircraft are rolled out onto the concrete apron and parked in preparation for take off. We have been ordered to ready the machines for a night attack. There is just time for a frugal supper and dissemination of orders. A last comprehensive study of charts and orientation material with my observer and second pilot then and then at exactly 20.00 Hptm Richard von Bentivegni fires his starting flare and the heavily laden machine rolls over the ground, finally it is airborne”.*

At 10.00 in 56 Warrington Crescent, 10 year old Miss Stevenson had gone to bed with her new gym slip by her bed side, hardly able to wait to wake up and wear it for the first time.

She never would.

At the same time, across the road at no 61, Lena Ford, Ivor Novello’s collaborator on the popular hit of the day “*Keep the Home Fires Burning*” had been working on the lyrics of some new songs and just put them on a pile beside her bed.

In nearby St. Johns Wood, on leave from service in Palestine, Lt Colonel Woolaston was finishing dinner in his hotel opposite Lords cricket ground and talking to his friends about how he would be interested in observing the effects of an air raid at first hand.



Above: Damage outside 61 to 65 Warrington Crescent following the Great Air Raid of 1918.

“At 11.55 precisely, R39  
dropped a one ton bomb onto  
the dividing wall of 63 and 65  
Warrington Crescent...  
It exploded on impact and  
demolished 61, 63, 65 and 67.”

By 10.30 the Germans had been picked up by coastal defences and the Royal Flying Corps had been alerted. Captains Stroud and Kynoch took off on their last missions. With them were 40 other pilots from 10 squadrons including one from Biggin Hill which was to become more famous during the Battle of Britain 22 years later. By 11.00 the Deal anti-aircraft battery had spotted the raiders. One had already turned back due to engine trouble, but the remaining 5 were now well on their way to London. At 11.05 the first of nearly 10,000 shells sent up that night was fired at their formation.

To give an idea of what it was like to fly to their target at 4,000 m we will return to Hauptmann Schoeller in bomber R 27.

*“We approach the coast; the night is so dark that the coastline below is but a mere suggestion. Under us is a black abyss, no waves are seen, no lights of surface vessels flicker as we head for the Thames estuary at Margate. On our right in the distant North is our only light, the weak pulsating glow of the Aurora Borealis. Are we on the correct course? Did we miss the coast?”*

*Suddenly a breath of relief. Directly ahead, the searchlights illuminate the sky in their search for us but they do not spot us. Now we are certainly over England-but where? The enemy has heard us and therefore we are free to request wireless bearings. In a few minutes we receive a message giving our location. Accompanied by searchlights, which seem to guide our way we fly towards the Thames whose dock installations are our target. Can we recognise the docks through the low overcast, across the darkened countryside? All at once, through a hole in the cloud cover the grey band of the Thames momentarily appears. We continue on course, and during the next sighting Oberleutnant Kamps presses the bomb release keys. (Bearing in mind that they probably did not a clue where they were, one wonders what he had sighted). We turn for home along the Thames, whose banks are dotted with anti-aircraft batteries that soon have us under fire. Shell splinters tears through our upper wing without causing any damage. The flaming shells come so close we can almost touch them. Beneath us we spot the exhaust flames of a pursuing night fighter but it does not threaten us. In this manner we reach the open sea at Margate and steer for Ostend where well known signals will guide us home.”*

What, in the meantime, was happening on the ground?

By 11.00 air raid warnings had gone off and R39 was now only 55 mins from its victims.

At 11.55 precisely, R39 dropped a one ton bomb onto the dividing wall of 63 and 65 Warrington Crescent. The houses were well built brick buildings 4 stories high. It exploded on impact and demolished 61, 63, 65 and 67. The great concussion caused by this bomb blew out windows up to 150 metres away and caused considerable damage.

Little Miss Stevenson, living opposite at no 56, was awoken from her sleep.

*“It was the most terrible noise imaginable and it felt as if all the house was falling to pieces. I looked out of the window and saw a mass of flames, the houses across the road having caught fire. I heard the awful cries for help above the roar and crackle of the flames and the noise of the falling masonry”.*

Frank Small, the Vicar and a Special Constable, on duty at Warwick Avenue tube station, saw the bomb fall and ran up the road hearing the shrieks and screams of the injured and terrified people.

Mrs Coxall, a servant remembered, *“I was in the basement and heard a crash and my door came in. I put the door on the bed and crawled underneath it. I heard the house falling and dragged 94 year old Mrs Brown under the bed with me. Then the whole place collapsed, and to my surprise, I was able to crawl out without a scratch. Another maid was blown to the top of the house and when rescued she was found to have only a broken ankle.”*

In another house a clergyman and his wife had just got out of bed when the earth moved for them and their ceiling fell in. According to newspaper reports several people had narrow escapes from falling chandeliers.

Five minutes after the bomb fell at Warrington Crescent, Lt-Col Woolaston achieved his ambition to observe an air raid at first hand. Standing at his window, a bomb exploded in the street opposite, killing him instantly.



Above: Visit of the King and the Queen on Warrington Crescent following the Great Air Raid of 1918.

In her diary Queen Mary writes  
that she saw the “awful havoc”  
done to the “poor houses” in  
Maida Vale.

By now the rescue services had begun to swing into action.

Charles Conroy, who received an MBE for his work that dreadful night, arrived on the scene soon after the bomb went off and left us this report.

*“There was a young girl high up in a shattered house hanging on a beam by her hands who was rescued by the police. At about 1.00 we heard the voice of a man who had been buried in the debris with his children who were dead. Throughout the night we were trying to cheer him up by saying we would soon get him out. We managed to rescue him alive at about 10.00 but he died later in St. Mary’s.”*

*“There was also an Irish girl who was pinned down by a sideboard and the words “Oh begorra” were the only complaint we got from her. Another man fell from the top of a house enveloped in a carpet, which undoubtedly saved him from more serious injury. Furniture fell on him and he was pinned by the legs of the piano you can see in the photo.”*

Mrs Ford was not so lucky. Beside her shattered body were the lyrics for a song called, ironically, “God guard me”. Her disabled son’s body was lying nearby.

Rescue work continued throughout the night and the next day. It was dangerous and unpleasant. Dr Wright, who lived nearby, spent 12 hrs inside the precarious structure administering oxygen and brandy to Mrs Pyke, who died later, and her sister Mrs Rothschild who survived. Though injured and bleeding he would not leave until the women were brought out. Their mother, Mrs Lindo, had been killed instantly when the building fell on her.

The scene is described by Sapper Landryan who worked with him all night tunnelling beneath 15 tons of debris at enormous risk *“I had seen towns and villages in Flanders shelled to pieces but none presented such a scene of desolation as this. Bodies shattered almost beyond recognition were buried wholly or in part beneath the fallen masonry”*.

Meanwhile in the air, R39 had escaped unscathed. Not a single contact had been made with enemy fighters.

Captains Stroud and Kynoch of the RFC were searching the overcast skies for the bombers but in the darkness they collided over Rayleigh and became the only air casualties that night.

The next day, Friday 8 March, while bodies were still being removed, Field Marshall Viscount French, Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria visited the site and then on Saturday 9 March King George V, Queen Mary, wearing a very fetching hat, and David, the future Edward VIII visited Warrington Crescent. In her diary Queen Mary writes that she saw the “awful havoc” done to the “poor houses” in Maida Vale.

This was followed with a visit by the then Minister for Munitions, Winston Churchill, who had just come back from a visit to the front in France.

The crew of R39 survived the war eventually being shot down flying missions in 1919 to the short-lived Republic of Ukraine.

Hauptmann Richard von Bentivegni survived the war and served in the Luftwaffe in the Second World War, dying in captivity in Tblisi, Georgia in 1946.

**Julian Futter,**

**November 2023**



# EDWARD ARDIZZONE WISHES YOU A HAPPY CHRISTMAS SEASON

The artist Edward Ardizzone, known to everyone as Ted, lived at 130 Elgin Avenue for 52 years until 1972, and adored the neighbourhood of Maida Vale. He loved its people, the children all around, and the pubs. In his illustrations and drawings and his hugely popular children's books he portrayed people with joyful humour and warmth. He loved people and they loved him.

So it is no surprise that for many years he produced an annual Christmas card for friends and family. This one, from 1963, is typical. It harks back, as we would see it, to a bygone age. It is of Elgin Avenue and the church spire of St Peter's church, long demolished since.

There was no toy shop nearby but Ardizzone has created one in his imagination. It is his benign face gazing out at the children outside, noses pressed metaphorically to the window, as they look with awe and anticipation at the archetypal presents of a steam engine, a doll, a model yacht for the pond in the park, and a teddy bear.

Christmas Day at the Ardizzone home was a great gathering of the extended family, with umpteen children, of lighting the candles on the Christmas tree, the opening of presents while a great feast was being prepared and then the quiet aftermath later on with children asleep by the tree. His wife once said that it was enchanting:

*'They were just exhausted with too many things all in one day'.*

As an old friend of his concluded:

*'Ardizzone's unselfconscious and spontaneous approach make of these cards an unusual and touching record of Maida Vale and of a London now forever changed by the advance of time'.*

So it is time to tip your hat below where his studio was on the first floor of his Elgin Avenue house and wish his ghost a Merry Christmas as you pass.



*Illustration copyright: The Estate of Edward Ardizzone*

# THE ART OF FOOD

JOHANNA WIKSTEDT

Dear Reader, here we are again – and it's now Autumn.

We last spoke back in May where summery light Tomato salads, Citrusy Salmon Tartars and Asparagus took the lead – whereas now, we're entering into my favourite seasons of the year.

The cosy Dark Autumn and Winter. I know it goes against most people's first choices, but for me, It's my favourite one. It's the cosy "sweater weather" season where I can fully adopt the homebody model. Open fireplaces, stews, soups, sauces, baking, candles (I don't bake the candles), fish-pies, heavy red wines and dinner parties.

For this issue, I thought I'd bring you two Comforting dishes that truly don't require much in terms of "skill", just a bit of love, time and dedication.

*Follow Jo on instagram @itgirllondon*



## Whisky Pasta

*This is a dish my Brother in law introduced to me many moons ago. It's something so utterly delicious and comforting yet you'd never quite be able to put your finger on "what it is" that's making it SO moreish. Its familiar and light yet.. "what is it?!" Which isn't something one often would say about a creamy pasta containing whisky. It's quick and simple. A perfect dish for date night, a solo-comfort night in or when you want to impress a whole table of friends and family.*

### Ingredients

- 300g Fillet Steak (can be replaced with chicken)
- 1 yellow/white onion. Shallots work too.
- 300g Golden Girolles (or chanterelles, button mushroom, shiitake mushroom)
- 20 cl double cream
- 5 tbsp whisky
- Pinch of sugar (or a tsp of blackcurrant jelly)
- Pasta of your choosing

### Method

Dice or cut the Fillet Steak into strips. Finely chop the onion. Clean and cut the mushroom. The girolles can be left whole unless one or two are very large in size. Helps them cook evenly.

Pour a bit of oil in a frying pan. Sear the onion and mushroom until the mushroom has gotten a bit of colour. Add the meat. Cook over medium to high heat in order to brown the steak. Add the whisky, stir until the whisky evaporates. Add salt and fresh black pepper.

Boil your Pasta. Cook as per item's instruction.

Stir in cream. Reduce the heat and simmer, scraping the bits from the bottom of the pan, until the cream thickens and changes to a rich brown colour (cook for about 10-15 min – you don't want to end up with fillet steak rough as shoe soles).

Add a pinch of sugar or a tsp of blackcurrant jelly to just round off the savouriness. Again, add a little whisky if you feel it doesn't quite have the kick you're after. I tend to be quite generous at the "add whisky stage".

Pour your pasta into your sauce or vice versa, mix, and serve! Top with some freshly ground pepper.



## Jo's Chicken Soup

*Who doesn't love a chicken soup? It's warming, soothing, healthy, nurtures any mood out there. This base is frankly so useful. Use the broth for soups, sauces and stews. Add noodles or vegetables to it, add gyozas or other dumplings into it. Spice to your liking or just heat some up in a cup and drink when feeling unwell. It's a superb little recipe this one. One that more or less looks after itself on the stove.*

### Ingredients

- 1 very large pot/pan. And I mean large.
- 2 chicken carcasses (I remove the breast fillets but leave the wings and drumsticks - sometimes I add another few chicken wings into the pot to really maximise flavour)
- 1 whole "heart" of celery (ie the full root and sticks)
- 2 onions halved
- 2 leeks
- 4 carrots
- 5 white peppercorns
- 4 bay leaves
- 1 large chunk of parsley including stems
- salt

### Method

Put the chicken into a large pan and add 4L of water. Bring to a boil. As soon as the water starts to boil, turn the heat down low. Skim off the foam and fat on the top of the surface with a ladle. After about 20 minutes, add in all vegetables, spices and parsley. Half cover with a lid and let the broth simmer slowly for about 4 hours. After 4 hours remove the chicken and vegetables, and let simmer for another 2 hours. If you see any foam, skim it off with the ladle.

After six hours, pour through a sieve into another container. Cool in the fridge overnight so that the fat rises to the surface. Remove the solidified fat with a slotted spoon.

Bring the broth to a boil in a new pan, to give it the flavour you want, add a pinch of salt or alternatively leave to reduce until it is the strength that you want.

Serve with some poached chicken (You can cook the earlier removed chicken breast in the reducing broth. Then slice it up thinly. Add some sliced leek and cooked carrot.





# The Lonely Pet Column

**Name:** Claude (3and a half year's old)

**Species:** Beautiful, black mini-panther

**Owner:** Not applicable

**A day in the life....** I moved to London from Manchester when I was five weeks old and consider myself the consummate rags-to-riches story. Over the years my territory has expanded and I am proud to call Maida Vale mine own.

My days are usually spent managing home security and the well-being of the inhabitants on my estate, which involves some nifty jumping through windows work as well as keeping an ever-vigilant eye out for the odd open door. I don't work alone on this task – I am helped by my stalwart cat companions, Ollie and Phoebe whom I trust with my life. We take mental health very seriously so we ensure everyone who lives here knows who we are in case they want to reach out to us for emotional support or indeed, spiritual guidance.

In my time off, I catch up on my sleep and enjoy bird-watching and hunting for leaves, feathers and even ladybirds.

I regularly pop in to Thyme and Tahini, to satiate my weakness for boiled chestnuts and say hi to my lovely friends who work there, whilst my family stocks up on the delicious groceries and inviting fresh cakes from the counter. When dusk falls, it is time for me to go out and defend my land – alone.

What am I looking for? Being a lover AND a fighter, I am seeking a sleek, gregarious female who would enjoy nightly romantic prowls, exploring the deepest darkest undergrowth of Maida Vale's moonlit parks; and still be able to hold her own in what can sometimes become heated skirmishes with the local foxes, dogs and most treacherously ...potential feline usurpers. Looking for someone who I can make purr. MEOOOW.

*\*\*\* Have you got a pet who you think would like a partner? please email [alice.sinclair@w9w2.co.uk](mailto:alice.sinclair@w9w2.co.uk) if you would like them to feature in our next issue \*\*\**



Paddington Waterways & Maida  
Vale Society W9W2  
Christmas Carols

Wednesday the 6th of December  
2023 at 7pm (Doors 6.30pm)  
St Mary's church, Paddington  
Green.

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# Our W9W2 area...

