

SOHO CLARION

Soho Society's Free Newspaper **SUMMER 99** **No. 100**

SOHO FESTIVAL 25TH ANNIVERSARY SUNDAY 11TH JULY AT 12 NOON A GREAT AFTERNOON FOR ALL AGES!

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the world famous Soho Festival, actors Dervla Kirwan and Stephen Tompkinson will be performing the opening ceremony at noon on Sunday 11th July in St. Anne's Gardens (subject to availability). It's a wonderful afternoon out for family and friends and for Soho people to show the real sense of community which exists amongst very diverse groups of people who live or work in Soho.

There's something for everyone - children included - to do, eat and drink. If you would like to help in any way or have ideas for activities (especially money-making ones because the Festival is always for the benefit of charity, this year the Soho

Society itself) please ring the Soho Society on 0207-439 4303 or come to one of the Festival meetings, details from the same number.

Help is always welcome on Saturday 10th July as well as on the day itself.

Music, Competitions, Stalls

As usual, first on the stage will be Fred Rickshaw's Hot Goolies, the Dixieland Jazz Band which has opened proceedings for the last 21 years, and other regular events include the Soho Waiters' Race, the Spaghetti Eating and Alpine Horn Blowing competitions, Children's Corner, children's entertainer Mr. Mojo

(on stage this year), Fortune Telling with Madame Hannah, Tombola, and Grand Raffle, book and bargain stalls, food stalls from around the world, live bands and entertainment, and open-air champagne, Pimms and beer stalls. It never rains at the Soho Festival.

The Usual Favourites

Also appearing - the China Town Calligraphy Stall, the Soho Parish School Stall, Westminster College Stall, Guess the Weight of the Cake, many activities for children and the Soho Society's Stall where you can join the Society and learn more about its other activities in the area. Admission to the Gardens is by

£1 lucky programme at the gate, children under 12 admitted free. It's a great afternoon out for everyone, in (if we say it ourselves) a very worthy cause. You'll be very welcome.



Festival opens Dervla Kirwan and Stephen Tompkinson

The Bomb - A Reflection

The explosion at the Admiral Duncan has been widely covered in the national press. The bomber seems to have been motivated by hatred of those who are in any sense identifiably "different". In Soho where being "different" has been the norm since the 18th century the bomber did not produce the effect he intended. One week after the bombing there was as poignant and sad a gathering as has ever probably assembled in St. Anne's Gardens. As the bell of the Parish Clock slowly tolled the Gardens filled with hundreds of friends and sympathisers. At 6.37pm, the precise time the bomb exploded, the previous week, there were three slow strikes on the bell, one for each of those killed.

Fr. Stephen Glover of St.

Patrick's, the Revd. Clare Herbert of St. Anne's, the Revd. Neil Whitehouse of Kairos, the gay Christian organisation in Old Compton Street and many others led us in an act of remembrance. Readings by Nina Tempia, Chair of the Soho Society and by Professor Garrety of St. Anne's; prayers from Police Supt. Phil Flower; Bryan Burrough, and two children from Soho Parish School with Derek Holbird, the Head Teacher. One of the children was a refugee who came to this country to escape bombing and terrorism in the Balkans...

The crowd was strong and silent. The family of one of those killed spoke. A choir sang. We all sang. Many lit candles and brought them up to the front.

Several of those injured in the

blast were there. The ambulance drivers, paramedics, police, medical teams and fire fighters were all there. The Lord Mayor was there - saying what many of us felt: "I know I can't do anything; I just want the opportunity to express my sympathy and be here as a witness."

The bomb had tragic and terrible consequences for those killed and injured but in another sense it didn't work. In the week after the explosion almost 600 people of all sorts and conditions left prayers and messages of hope, solidarity and sympathy.

The communities of Soho exist in many layers and reflect many different backgrounds. But on that Friday night as the bell tolled all of Soho - gay, straight, visitor, worker or resident - was united.

We were very touched to receive the following letter from Northern Ireland shortly after the Soho explosion.

Dear Mr Burrough,
We wish to express our deep sorrow at the horrific injuries and loss of life experienced by your people. Our daughter Claire is now blind as a result of the bomb which exploded in Omagh, Northern Ireland, last August and we are very aware of the effects of such devastation. Our thoughts are with you as you try to come to terms with what has happened in your community.

Seamus and Marie
Gallagher, Co. Tyrone.

A Hoxton Childhood

A rehearsed reading prepared and directed by Soho resident, actor, director and founder of the Soho Theatre Company (see Clarions passim) Fred Proud was given at the Community Centre on Monday 10th May.

Based on the book 'A Hoxton Childhood' by A.S. Jasper, the four actors brought to life the appalling poverty and splendid spirit of the author's family and neighbourhood in Hoxton around the time of the first World War. "Your story reads like something

out of Dickens", the author was told, and the substantial audience were astonished and moved by the sound pictures painted by Fred's able cast of Janet Amsden, Annie Carpenter, David Hopkins and Peter Marinker.

Congratulations to all concerned and to Soho panto veteran Joan Martyr who was responsible for the designs and costume. Fred aims to try to provide something new and interesting for our entertainment and enjoyment on a more regular basis.

Nature Notes...

Thank you to all those readers who have monitored the surprising variety of Soho life. Wildlife abounds among the empty bottles and beer cans of Soho's gardens.

If you walk through Soho Square early in the day almost every bush has a juvenile blackbird skulking around and 'chinking' nervously. Blackbirds are fledging in gardens in Great Pulteney Street and the St. Anne's tribe are now sitting for the third time this year.

There are bluetits in abundance now taking advantage of the increase in available insect life and we even have the rare house sparrows raising broods in three locations.

The Regent Palace kestrels seem to be dining on pigeon currently so hopefully our Soho sparrows will make it to maturity.

BB

...Confirmed

I saw two kestrel hawks (both juveniles) in our garden/courtyard behind No. 36 Great Pulteney St. I believe that Kestrels nest in the tower unit (Brewer St. side) of the Regent Palace Hotel. For approx. 5 years I have seen adult kestrel activity around the tower. Considering our garden is only about 50 yards from Piccadilly Circus we also have a family (approx. 8) of chattering blue tits and a nesting blackbird which, if not chased off by cats, nests in the same place every year. The blackbird, plus a thrush and sparrows, contribute to our dawn chorus. On the garden side we have 3 apple trees (in pots) which regularly bear fruit and this year we have a greengage tree in full blossom which, we hope, will produce fruit for the first time after 3 years of trying. Every year we grow various vegetables/flowers.

John Edwards

Soho Ramblers

The intrepid SORA members have trekked steadily westward since the last Clarion and have now reached Amberley on the South Downs Way. Members walk one Saturday a month and have found the process so enjoyable they are already planning what to do after they

reach the end of the current trail at Winchester. Favourite so far is the Pilgrims Way to Canterbury. SORA has a moratorium on membership at present but there will probably be room for new members in the Autumn. Interested? Phone the Tower on 0207-439 4303.

Time Trouble in East Soho

Time stopped in Romilly and Dean Streets on 20th April when the more perceptive clock watchers noticed the east dial of the Parish Clock had come to an unscheduled halt. Time continued in all other compass points and hours were struck accurately. Was this an early infestation with millennium bugs? The Victorian technology of the clock made in 1884 suggested this was unlikely - after all it had already ticked both sides of one century. Immediate investigations and detection by Soho's clockmaker and horologist revealed an intriguing sequence. The drive of the dials includes a split pin

linkage; the link is maintained in part by the torque on the transmission; during the fierce overnight gales on 19th April wind blew the five fast hands forward - normally this would make no difference - at the precise point where the pin was in the vertical. No torque, loose pin drops out! Time was quickly restored to the area and no incidents occurred. By the way, the Parish Clock still runs to its original 1884 specifications of having a maximum variation of less than +/- 2 seconds a week. Just remember that next time your clever quartz job stops or needs a new battery!

14th Soho Jazz and Heritage Festival

In spite of the fact that your Editor is a professional jazz musician and has always tried to be supportive of the Soho Jazz and Heritage Festival, once again for the fourth year running he was not invited to the press reception and has received no response to

three phone calls made to the Festival office asking for information, so we are unable to tell you who is appearing where, between 23rd September and 3rd October. Sorry. Details in future issues of Peter Boizot's monthly magazine Boz, at Kettners.

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A Very French Decade or Why We Celebrate Bastille Day

July 14th 1989 - this was the day that Soho bade farewell to Gaston Berlemont, the legendary Soho landlord of the 'French House'. From this day I was to be the new landlady, I stared at the empty champagne bottles which littered the streets and the glorious characters who were 'the regulars' and was filled with an overwhelming desire to run away in terror mixed with an intense feeling of excitement and love for my new home and life.

18th July was my first day behind the bar and in the cold light of day my husband Noel and I faced the daunting fact that The French House was in fact condemned on several floors, the justices gave me a provisional licence and

three months to 'sort the place out'. How could we completely rebuild the much-loved pub without anyone noticing? So followed many weeks of builders working through the night and through the day the bar opened as if nothing was happening. The genuine nicotine patina was exchanged for wallpaper, the windows opened 'the first time since 1965' one customer told me, we re-opened the restaurant. The hardest part was erecting the fire protective wall without which we could not open the restaurant - I tried to pretend nothing was happening - three years acting training was not wasted! The customers played the game, relief on their faces, the juke

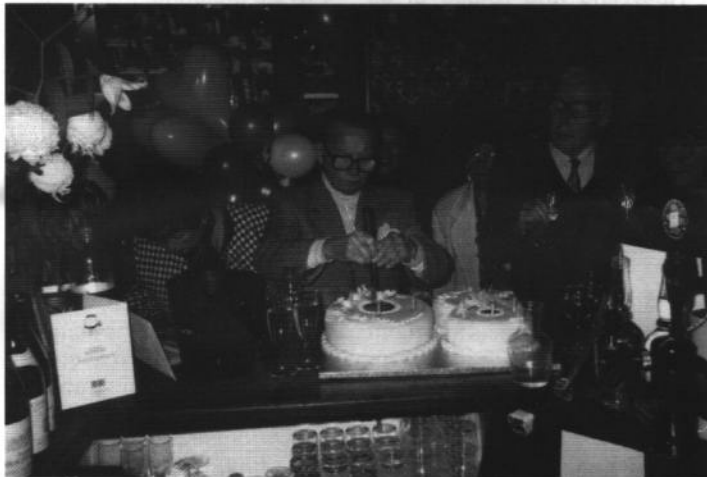
boxes, gaming machines, TVs and hamburgers were not to invade their 'living room'. However I will never forget the horror on the face of my first customer when in a state of nerves I greeted him with a very loud "Hi there!" - I had worked in an American restaurant for many years! Gaston was indeed a very hard act to follow but slowly customers, who swore that they would never darken our doors again, returned to their natural habitat. I have been forgiven, I hope, for the introduction of Coca-Cola, De Gaulle had said it would be the downfall of the French nation and Gaston had never sold it! Over the last ten years we have all shared many

glasses of wine, tales of the war, laughter and heartbreak, sickness, health, success, failure, many deaths, many births, weddings and even Tony Harris's 80th birthday, he had been drinking in the pub for more than 50 years - sadly he died two years ago. I would like to thank all those wonderful people, now I hope as friends rather than customers. Thank you one and all for sharing yourselves with Noel and me and here's to the next ten years!

Lesley Lewis

The French House Story by Sandy Fawkes is available for £3.95 in the French House.

Bastille Day will be celebrated on Wednesday 14th July - our tenth anniversary.



Tony Harris's 80th birthday party at the French



Francis Bacon in the French in the '60s

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Alan Wakeman's Last Green Piece

One day in December 1968 I was forlornly making my way over a spindly pedestrian bridge in Tokyo, a huddled figure crossing a vast concrete wasteland of countless lanes of barely moving traffic, when it finally and belatedly hit me that the whole idea of industrial progress had all been a terrible mistake.

That night in my hotel room I wrote a song called Motor Car Madness and as soon as I got back to London set about forming a band which in no time was performing this and other protest songs at free concerts. In 1972 we released an album which, true to the spirit of the age, said on its sleeve: 'This record is free! If you paid for it you were conned!' It included 'A Song For The System' which began:

You've stolen the sun,
You've stolen the fields and the plains.
You've stolen the smell of the air,
when it rains,
You've stolen the light, you've
stolen the dark,
And the trees, and the flight of
the lark.
Need I Sing These Same Old
Songs?

Thirty-one years later, as a member of the Soho Society Planning Group, I've just read the environment chapter in Westminster City Council's proposed revisions to their Unitary Development Plan (we're being consulted prior to its finalization) and been amazed to discover almost every policy I've ever campaigned for is now part of official future planning. It set me thinking. If even WCC agrees with me, need I sing these same old songs anymore?

A Parting Shot

So when Dick Laurie announced (in the last issue) that he'd decided to hang up his editor's hat, I thought 'Right. I'll do the same.' Dear reader, this is my final Green Piece! Of course I realise that politicians strike environmental attitudes and mouth soothing platitudes with no intention of carrying them out - so it's also my final...

Green Manifesto

The average UK citizen now enjoys security and comforts undreamed of even by royalty in the middle ages. Of course reading the papers or watching television you wouldn't think so. Journalists are far too busy pursuing sensational headlines in their interecine circulation wars to be bothered with conveying the whole truth. (Accurate portraits of society require the unearthing of what is *not* printed as well as what is.) But it's unquestionably true that the majority of people's lives now are healthier, longer and safer than ever before in our history.

99% Have A Good Day!

is a headline you'll never see, of course, but only because contentment doesn't sell newspapers. Furthermore, the endless emphasis on the one in a hundred who *didn't* have a good day sows sad seeds of cynicism and despair. This in turn means that though most agree we can't go on as we are, few are prepared to change their own behaviour. We simply don't believe it will make enough difference, so despite claiming to care, most people leave the lights on all over the house, let their taps run while cleaning their teeth, use redundant cosmetics, fly off for self-indulgent weekends abroad, drive to supermarkets to buy unseasonal produce and eat diets that depend on environmentally-harmful factory-farming. Even parents who might be expected to care about the environment their children will inherit seem indifferent that their own behaviour damages it irrevocably. If our foolishness spreads to the rest of the world - which is exactly what is happening - in another few hundred years or so there might only be termites and cockroaches left on our miraculous planet.

A Planet-Friendly Society

I'll be long gone of course and have no children so why should I care? I don't know but, like the early Stoics, believe we should seek to live in harmony with

nature. So in case you do too I'll leave you with my personal list of the minimum changes needed to make our society *planet-friendly*. I also believe most of the problems we are busily spawning with our unsustainable consumerism could easily be solved *now* - if only our leaders had the political will and live in hope that Deputy Prime Minister Prescott means the promises he's been proclaiming from the rooftops.

1) Lifestyle & Health

An environmentally-friendly government would use grants and tax concessions to *encourage*:

- Labelling of all products and produce to show how damaging to the environment their manufacture has been - so that we all can choose wisely.

- Recycling and re-use of all household, commercial and industrial waste.

- Healthy eating based on seasonal fruits and vegetables and non-animal foods.

- Manufacture of quality (i.e. long-lasting!) environmentally-friendly products.

An environmentally-friendly government would use tax penalties to *discourage*:

- Produce and products that harm the environment and human health. (Including cars!)

- Unnecessary packaging and waste.

- Unseasonal imports and their unnecessary, wasteful, polluting transportation.

2) Local Communities

An environmentally-friendly government would use planning laws to *encourage*:

- Genuinely affordable housing to enable ordinary people to live within walking distance of their work.

- Congenial tree-filled streets and calm, quiet, surroundings.

- Public works - street tidies, conveniences, trees, gardens, fountains etc. funded by developers' profits.

3) Architecture & Building

An environmentally-friendly government would use planning laws and grants to *encourage*:

- Ecologically-friendly, energy-efficient buildings.

- Reuse and rehabilitation of old buildings.

An environmentally-friendly government would use tax penalties to *discourage*:

- Air-conditioning.

- Redevelopment schemes that harm local communities by their inhuman scale.

- Demolition of buildings that contribute to the architectural diversity of the streetscape.

- Light pollution of night skies.

4) Transport

An environmentally-friendly government would use tax concessions and grants to *encourage*:

- Walking, cycling and public transport.

- Bulk deliveries by rail, canals and rivers.

- Traffic-calming.

An environmentally-friendly government would use tax penalties to *discourage*:

- Private motoring.

- Commuting.

- Bulk deliveries by polluting lorries and trucks.

5) Education for Environmental Consciousness

An environmentally-friendly government would include education in the interconnectedness of all living things in the national curriculum so that every citizen could understand that it is the sum total of our individual acts that causes damage to our shared environment and, conversely, learn to take pride in *environmental-consciousness*.

(Most children are already more environmentally aware than their parents but even they fail to see the connection between their personal craving for trendy clothes, junk food, CDs, videos, computers etc. and their environmental impact.)

This is the minimum I believe an environmentally-friendly government must do if we are to halt our present disastrous downward spiral and reinstate human beings in our rightful place in the web of life. And - politicians please note! - the fact that I'm giving up banging this particular drum for the time being doesn't mean I - or any of the other veterans of the Soho Society - have stopped watching; on the contrary; we're still here and - as it says on the back of the Clarion -

- We're Still Watching!

