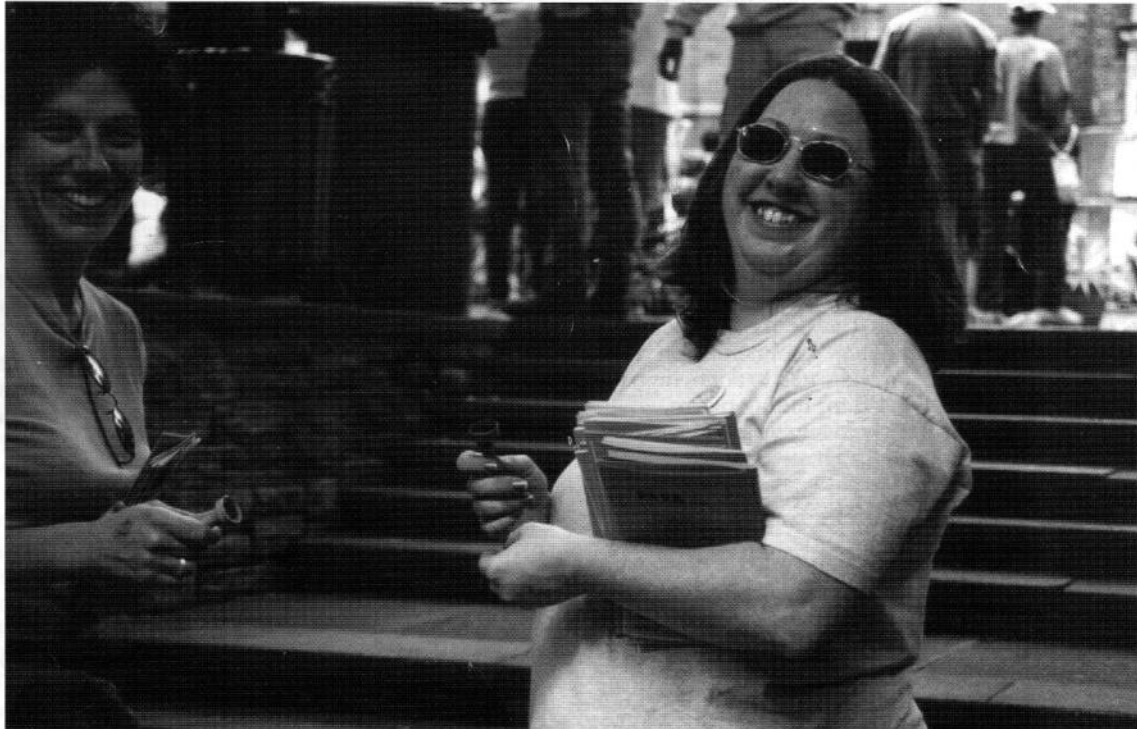


# SOHO CLARION

*Soho Society's Free Newspaper Autumn/Winter No.107*

*'Thanks girls ... for one of the best Soho Festivals of recent times!*



*The Soho Society's Christine McCormack and Nina Tempia at the entrance to The 27th Annual Soho Festival on July 15th this year.*

*And thanks to everyone who made it such a great community event.*

*There are more Festival Pictures inside.*

As you'll see from this issue those old chestnuts **Licensing, Policing and Enforcement** are still the hottest issues around. We at The Society who are involved in the debate and the week to week activities would welcome the input of anyone sympathetic to the concerns of local residents and the interests of Soho's responsible businesses. If you have knowledge of the issues involved or office/keyboard skills *and* a willingness to tackle the problems do please get in touch with us. We'd love to hear from you. Initially you could email us at [mailsoho@aol.com](mailto:mailsoho@aol.com)

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## **Children's Christmas Party**

Saturday 8th December, 2001 3.00 - 5.15 pm at The Soho Parish School. All kids welcome. Entertainment of all kinds. Presents. Prizes and tea party. Tiny tots please with parent(s) Free for local kids. Enq. 020 7437 2736.

### **IF YOU ONLY SEE ONE PIECE OF THEATRE A YEAR DON'T MISS TWO FANTASTIC SHOWS**

1. (For grown-ups in 2001) The Return of 'Rita, Sue and Bob Too' & 'A State Affair' at The Soho Theatre. From 28th November. Fantastic! But strong stuff. Best scripts and production seen for years. (See P.15.)
2. (For All the Family in 2002) Dick Whittington. It promises to be a complete riot! (See P.13.)

# The Secret Gardener

by Jenny DeSouza

*Meard Street's Midas Graphics have for years been supporters of The Soho Society. They have printed The Clarion in the past and Jenny herself has overseen production of our annual Festival Programme for a very long time indeed. She has been a staunch, committed Soho-ite and in this piece offers us something of surprisingly great value.*

## LIFT OF SPIRITS

After working in Soho for almost 34 years and owning Midas Graphics for 25 of those years, before recently selling up .... I thought it was about time I contributed to the Soho Clarion. With all the sadness, strife and terror that is going on throughout the world at this moment, I thought I would tell you this story, in the hope that you print it, and that for some of your readers, it may restore their faith in human nature. In return for this 'lift of spirits', I hope that your readers will help me solve the wonderful mystery that went on in Meard Street for the past four years.

Five years ago, Midas Graphics had three big window boxes outside the shop. I used to fill them with all kinds of flowers throughout the seasons. They looked so lovely and everybody who went past the shop, commented on them. Unfortunately, when the drugs returned to Soho, my window boxes were constantly used for hiding places, where the pushers hid their 'stash.' My lovely flowers were dug-up each night, and didn't stand a chance.

## TEARS OF JOY.

I did not give up for a long time and kept the flowers going for a further year, but eventually I gave in and left the window boxes empty. They were left bare for many months, but one Monday morning I arrived at work and just couldn't believe my eyes. My window boxes had been filled with a huge selection of bedding flowers and the colours blinded me. They were beautifully arranged and planted out in order of size and colour. I was so happy. There were tears of joy were running down my face. I opened the shop and when my staff arrived, I asked them, which one of them had given me such a lovely gift. They all looked dumfounded. Nobody knew a thing.

I soon realised that they were as surprised as I was. I started to ask around because I wanted to thank the person who did this. I asked the neighbours, the postmen, Vic from the Hobbit and everyone else who I could think of, but not a soul had seen anyone planting them. It was a mystery. I put a thank you notice in the window and continually asked around, but drew a blank all the time. I left the problem unsolved and just felt very fortunate that somebody liked me enough to do such a lovely act, which not only me, but the whole neighbourhood enjoyed.

The winter followed and my plants eventually died, but I promised myself that in the spring, I would plant the boxes out, because they gave such pleasure to everyone around and I wanted to show the mystery gardener that I was so grateful, and that I would not give up on the flowers again. Spring soon came and when the frost had gone, I decided to buy bedding plants for the window boxes. However, when I arrived at work the next day, my window boxes had again been filled with the most beautiful flowers of all colours. I was so happy, but I didn't feel right, that I had not thanked the person who had made such lovely gesture. I again asked nearly everyone in Soho, but nobody had seen a thing. I found it very strange, because the window boxes could not have been planted out in two minutes. It would have taken someone quite a time to make

such a wonderful display, yet there wasn't even a clue. Again I gave up looking and thanked God that there were still such thoughtful, kind spiritual people living in Soho. The same thing happened the following Summer and Spring.

## SELLING MIDAS

The 9th June 2001 arrived and that particular day I was feeling very low. As many of you know I had major brain surgery and had to sell Midas as I was not well enough to cope. I was just there for a couple of days each week fulfilling my contract to the new owner. Apart from feeling sad about leaving the little shop that I had borne, the surgery had left me with severe depression, which I coped with some days much better than others. This day was a bad day and as I neared the shop, I looked up the street and saw a beautiful shock of pink in front of me. My mystery gardener had not only hung two beautiful baskets of fuchsias outside the shop, they had even put little padlocks on the baskets, so that they were safe. My depression suddenly vanished and I immediately felt much better inside. For that moment, I was completely back to my old self.

Sadly, I have left Midas completely, but often sit and wonder who that secret gardener was. In this world of turmoil, where most people have become so selfish, it is very comforting to know that there are still people who give of themselves unconditionally. At times, when I am feeling sad at the fact that I had to leave Midas, I think of the person who brought the flowers to 13 Meard Street in secret, and it inspires me to keep my faith in human nature.

Can you ask your readers to help me. I would like to write this person a letter of thanks. Then again, perhaps the meaning behind this gesture would be spoiled. If the secret gardener reads this story I would like to say thank you for doing such a lovely thing and for bringing such sunshine into Meard Street. I want them to know how happy and grateful I was, especially at a time in my life when I was feeling so low. This is now, one of my most treasured memories. See you at the next Soho Fair!

*(Jenny, I think you may already have thanked them! Ed.)*

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# Westminster Property Owners Association

## Managing the Balance – the quality of life in the West End

*(This was the letter sent to The Clarion by Westminster Property Owners Association. The report itself is far too long to reproduce here or for that matter to upload onto our website but a precis of ten point plan follows. Ed.)*

I have pleasure in sending you a copy of our report into the management of the late night economy in the West End along with our 10 Point Plan for action.

This sector is vital for the economic well-being of our Capital, especially in these difficult times. Restaurants, bars and clubs create many thousands of jobs and contribute greatly to maintaining London's position as a major world city. However the growth in late night activity does cause concerns for certain residents through the increase in noise, rubbish and anti-social behaviour.

It is in everyone's interest that the right balance is struck between a thriving economy and a thriving community in the West End and it is incumbent on us all – the private sector, local authorities and other providers of public services – to make sure that this happens. We applaud Westminster City Council's more recent initiatives to manage the late night economy in the West End. We look forward to working in partnership to help deliver yet more innovative ideas and practical solutions.

As a contribution to the current debate we have commissioned Tony Travers from the LSE to compile an independent report into the key aspects of this issue. We wanted to assess the extent of the problem and to see what lessons might be learnt from other world cities. His report combines the results of a MORI opinion poll into the quality of life in the West End with original research into other world cities with thriving late night economies. The report concludes that whilst the excesses of the late night economy are not the major concerns for most residents, they do cause problems that need to be managed. It also shows that other world cities do not feel that there is such a problem associated with their late night economies, but that they have a higher level of management of late night activities (e.g. enforcement, policing, public transport).

Based on these findings and our wider experience, we have drawn-up a 10 point plan to help address the management of the West End more effectively. We wanted this plan to be comprehensive and so we have included elements that may not be achievable in the short term. We believe that all of our proposals are practical and many can be implemented in the short term. We have been encouraged by WCC's positive response to these issues. Over the coming months we look forward to working constructively with the City Council, local residents, the police, Transport for London and other partners to help strike the right balance.

We would appreciate your comments and views on these reports. Douglas McCreadie, the Director of WPOA, can be contacted on:

020 7630 1782 or e-mail [DMcCreadie@bpf.org.uk](mailto:DMcCreadie@bpf.org.uk)

Best wishes Martin Moore

Chairman October 12<sup>th</sup> 2001

The management of the late night entertainment industry in the West End and its effect on the local quality of life is of great interest to the Westminster Property Owners Association.

WPOA has therefore commissioned original research, including the report 'Managing the Balance' and various in-depth interviews with interested parties, in order to fill some of the gaps in information and analysis of this area. This research has provided the foundation for a range of practical proposals for action which are outlined in this 10 point plan. This plan is meant to be a constructive and practical contribution to the debate about the future of the West End.

Our proposals look at ways of focusing resources from a number of different sources to manage late night activity in the West End and allow a more peaceful co-existence between residents and visitors. These points specifically refer to East Soho and Covent Garden although we believe that they can be helpful in the management of other centres of late night activity.

1. Have a clear and realistic vision for the future of the West End so that everyone can work towards it.
2. Focus resources where and when they are needed to manage the late night economy successfully
3. Create a local planning system that allows the vision to be achieved by being flexible and encouraging partnerships
4. Encourage policing that focuses resources where and when they are needed and which supplements the existing force with resources to deal with anti-social (rather than criminal) behaviour
5. Provide transport to disperse crowds when they are at their peak through better night bus services and the extended running of tubes on Friday and Saturday nights
6. Provide a cleaner environment by more sensitive and focused waste collection and through targeted street cleaning at weekends in the busiest places
7. Ensure that existing powers to control late night activity are properly enforced
8. Encourage better management of premises to control excessive anti-social behaviour
9. Establish practical ways to finance management schemes in partnership with the private sector
10. Create an effective forum for discussion, progress and the resolution of disputes

*(See on our website <URL below> for the full point by point, background to these key headings. By no means does the Soho Society agree with every recommendation made therein - though it is encouraged to see the purposeful move towards a fuller debate of the issues involved. Ed)*

<http://www.thesohosociety.org.uk/present/newsitem.cfm?newsID=191>

## Night flights into and out of Heathrow Knock-on effects in Soho?

...could soon be banned after the European Court of Human Rights ruled they infringed residents' rights. The court decided flights between 11pm and 6am 'infringe a person's right to have a good night's sleep.' Airlines and airports across the country are likely to be affected by the decision, although it is not clear what short-term action the UK Government will take. The case, brought against the Department of Transport by a group of residents living under the flight path, is also likely to have an impact on other airports within the EU. Members of the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (Hacan) say their sleep is badly affected by about 16 aircraft which arrive at Heathrow between four and six o'clock in the morning.

### Nightly noise

A ban at Heathrow would stop all aircraft from taking off and landing in the night period and could be followed by challenges by anti-noise groups at other UK airports. Hacan chairman John Stewart celebrated with champagne as he described the ruling as "great news" for everybody under the flightpath. "A small group of residents has taken on the UK Government and won. The government may appeal, but I don't think it will: within 18 months we could see an end to overnight flights at Heathrow." Mr Stewart added: "This ruling has opened the way for residents' groups across Europe to challenge night flying. "The ban at Heathrow could be the first of many in the UK and Europe.

"East Midlands airport residents will particularly welcome this ruling as they suffer from a lot of overnight freight traffic." A spokesman for airport operator BAA at Heathrow said it would continue working to find improvements.

### Difficult balance

"We must wait and see how the government responds to understand what the impact may be for Heathrow. "We have always recognised there is a difficult balance for government to strike on night flights between passengers' demand to fly, airlines' operational requirements, and the impact on local communities."

One resident living under the flight path, Virginia Godfrey, described the nightly noise from aircraft as intolerable. She told the BBC: "It's loud enough to wake you up, and loud enough that you don't get back to sleep again once you've been woken up."

The landmark European Court ruling over noise from night flights could have a significant impact on the Government's proposals for licensing reform, Westminster Council Leader Simon Milton warned after the ruling. The City Council's lawyers are investigating the judgement, which supports local residents' right to a good night's sleep, as they believe it has serious implications for the late-night entertainment industry.

Councillor Milton said: "While London's late-night economy has grown hugely over the last few years, so has the problem of excessive noise from pubs and clubs. As a council, we are already facing the threat of legal challenge from residents alleging that our licensing policies have led to breaches of their human rights. This ruling will only increase the possibility of legal challenge."

"In particular, it will have implications for the proposed liberalization of licensing laws which has raised the spectre of 24 hour drinking. If the Government intends to push ahead with its licensing reforms without risking a similar ruling, it will need to strike a balance between the needs of the entertainment industry and the rights of residents and users in order to achieve an outcome which modernises licensing laws without jeopardising community safety or the quality of life for everyone."

"Soho's residential community has long complained about noise nuisance through the early hours of the morning, and we have introduced a number of measures to crack down on clubs and restaurants that act irresponsibly and ignore the needs of our residential and business communities.

"Through our Civic Renewal Programme, we are determined to provide quality of life guarantees to the people who live in the centre of our city."

David Bieda, of the Soho Society, said: "The right to a good night's sleep applies to us all, and while blaring music from nightclubs may not be in the same league as aircraft noise, the end result is the same." We have been watching the developments on the Heathrow case with interest, and this ruling has finally opened the way for residents' groups across the country to tackle the issue of noise nuisance."

*(There are 263 late night licences in Soho and Covent Garden and 86 venues are licensed to be open at 4am. There is one bar for every four residents in Soho!)*



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*"Na beiste mor ag itheadh nam beiste  
beag, na baiste beag a deanamh mar  
dh'fhaodas iad."*

'My family just can't see it! They scratch their heads as the sun sets over the rolling fields and woodland around their home in the rural west of Scotland, their gasps loud and clear in the near silence of an autumn evening - "but don't you live next door to a strip joint?" Is their reply. "Yes" I say, "but Soho still has more in common with this village than anywhere else I have lived".

But that's not why I chose Soho. I arrived here a few short months ago, after five years doing the commuter thing to one or other London suburb, and a short period working in Edinburgh in the new Scottish Parliament. I thought I knew London, and in choosing Soho as our new home, my partner and I were making a statement. We wanted the buzz, the crowds, the anonymity - after beautiful, worthy but ultimately dull Edinburgh, we wanted, in the words of Edinburgh's "Trainspotters", "to choose life".

Six months on, the things that attracted me to Soho, are not the things that will keep me here - I will always love the buzz of anonymous, ever-changing faces, and the ability Soho offers me to dip my toe back into the swirl of bars, clubs and restaurants. My heart and mind, however, have been won by a deeper and far more rewarding side to Soho - I don't have to say any more, because I can tell from those knowing smiles, that residents recognize the collection of moments which turn Soho into home. It is a community like no other - and unlike that village of my childhood which has merged more and more into the seamless suburbia of west central Scotland - it is a community that knows it needs to work hard to protect all that we find precious about it.

I am only beginning to realize the scale of that task. It is unfortunate that so many of the people who have the power to make the decisions about Soho, do not live here. They know little and care less - it seems - about *our* Soho. They have bought into it - and see opportunities to gain from that Soho swirl. Whether it is politicians living Cool Britannia or businesses seeing the opportunity for big bucks - they work off Soho, rather than working with it.

I come to Soho with some baggage - as a Scottish Nationalist I have spent my working life trying to build on Scotland's identity and turn that identity into real power. One of the totems of the nationalist movement in Scotland (and the wider centre-left) has been the land struggle. Many of you will have read of the efforts of the islanders of Eigg to take control of their land in the face of 'development' by generations of remote landlords - development (or indeed sometimes neglect) that directly threatened the very nature of the place they loved. So they took control. Their method was purchase, but their real motivation was to have the power implement the changes that they as residents knew were essential to retain and promote their locality.

I cannot help but see parallels between their struggle and our own. That does not mean that I want to see the Soho Society passing round the collection tin to begin a buyout of the bad landowners here in Soho. Rather it is a statement of belief that if the residents of Soho decide what sort of place we want to live in, we have the power, as people living in the showcase heart of London, in the profit making center of the West End, to flex our muscles a little more (and in more focused manner) than we do at present.

We can, like previous generations of unsuccessful land rights campaigners in Scotland, fight on the barricades and try to hold back a tide of profit and remote indifference - focusing our efforts on a policy of 'this far, but no further' - or we can take a lesson from the Islanders of Eigg, or today, the islanders of Gigha, who tried a new approach.

Why not use the collective brains of this area to create our

own vision of what Soho should be - and then use our powers - as lawyers, publicists, politicians, voters ... to start moving the debate onto *our* ground. Are we really unhappy about more people coming to Soho - or do we just hate the blare of mini-cab horns, the early morning glass crushing collections, the dealers, pimps and crowds of drunks? What is it we are really opposed to? If it is the paraphernalia of the crowds, rather than the crowds themselves, then would our efforts not be better served forcing the police and authorities into an effective and visible presence in late-night Soho.

Police officers keeping an eye on the crowds, moving on the taxis blasting their horns outside your window, and displacing the pimps and dealers. If it is the piles of rubbish and the roar of collection trucks that get you annoyed - then can we not come up with our own proposals for resident-friendly collection points and collection times. Whether it is better zoning of businesses to keep the noise away from the residential heart, a bit more thought on the position of mini-cab ranks, traffic control measures or specific initiatives to encourage the good businesses and get them on our side in the battle against the bad - the key is having a positive and inclusive vision for this area which the community can then put its undoubted and as yet unwielded power behind.

The Soho Society has been central in the battle to protect much of what we love about Soho. We can see the evidence of its success all around us. And that success in holding back the tides - in resisting pressures from people who have a different vision for Soho - convinces me that the Society and residents can and will have more success if we decide to go on the offensive, by setting out a Soho vision for the future.

It may be my arrogance of youth, but if the islanders of Eigg can turn around their lives and take control over where they live, then surely, working together and with a plan, the people of Soho can do the same, otherwise we will continue in the tradition of too many displaced residents. In the words of the 18th Century Highland land campaigners:

*"Na beiste mor ag itheadh nam beiste beag, na baiste beag a deanamh mar dh'fhaodas iad"*

(in rough translation: *the big are devouring the small, and the small are acting as though they can!*)

Stephen Noon.

*(The problem, I gather, is that Policemen can no longer afford to live here or else don't want to, that's why 'more police presence' is presently dubious/wishful thinking. Ed)*

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