

Dear readers,

A warm welcome to 2019, even though, without mentioning the B word, it does feel like yet more political uncertainty. But Cedric Christie was a very definite hit when he talked to us at last year's AGM, so many thanks to him and to Briony Bridge, who played him in on the flute.

Last year's Christmas Fair was another great success, giving our chosen charity, The Crib,

a well-earned early Christmas present of £1775.

This year we'll be keeping an eye on the proposals for a homeless hostel at 337–359 Kingsland Road (see pages 6–8 for the view of our local councillors). And developments are also afoot on the De Beauvoir Estate (see pages 2–3). For fun, there's the return of our famous Tabletop Sale (see page 5), and the Party in the Park has been fixed for 6 July. So save the dates.

Hilary Mandleberg

Around the town

The De Beauvoir WI

We meet from 7:30 to 9:30pm on the first Thursday of the month in the St Peter's Church Crypt Café. We offer a safe space, where all women are welcome. Meetings are free for members, £5 if you come as a guest. Tea, coffee and cake are included, and wine is available for a suggested donation.

7 March: Hackney Herbal join us to talk herbs for health. They will also run a teabag-making workshop.

4 April: Solace Women's Aid will run a Bystander Awareness workshop. More details on our website nearer the time.

2 May: It's our fifth birthday and our AGM, so there will be birthday cake as well as a talk about self-care for mental wellbeing.

6 June: There will be a craft workshop, details to be finalised.

We also run a book club, knitting club, walking group and other special-interest groups, and we organise trips and events. Follow us at www.debeauvoirwi.com, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for all the latest news.

De Beauvoir Gardeners

We usually meet on the first Tuesday of the month in the St Peter's Church Crypt Café. Annual membership is £20 for an individual; £30 for a couple at the same address; £15 individual concession rate for over 60s; £20 couple concession rate; £10 for individuals living on benefit or exclusively on a state pension.

5 March: AGM. Election of new organising committee, plus a talk.

2 April: Talk on climate change.

8 May: Visit to Middle Temple Gardens. Speaker TBC.

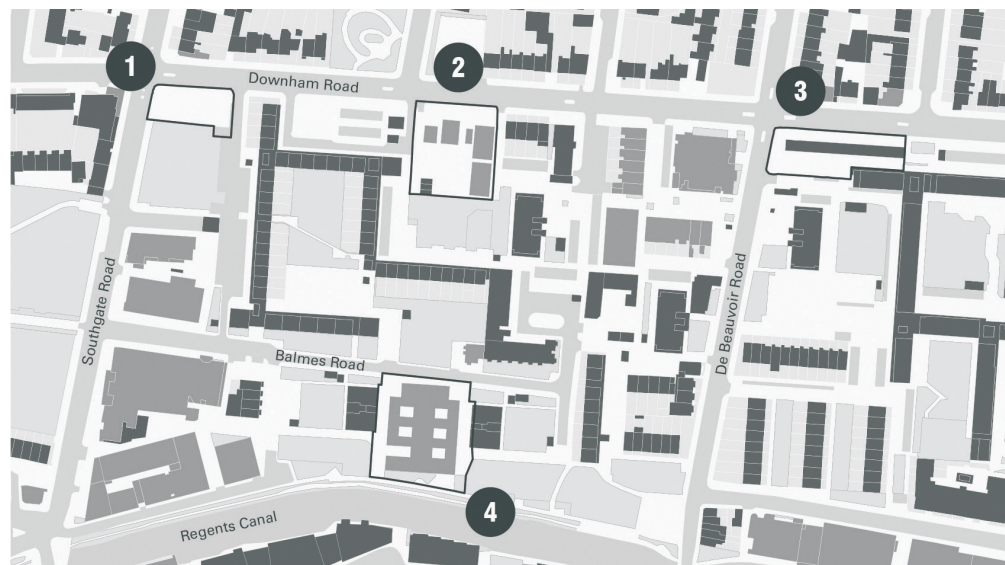
14 May: Plant sale

Follow us at <https://debeauvoirgardeners.wordpress.com>

The Rosemary Branch Theatre

We are marking International Women's Month with Shri!l Voices. Celebrate this launch at one of our free sharings of new work by up-and-coming female playwrights on **24, 25, 30 and 31 March**. For more info, visit www.rosemarybranch.co.uk.

New homes on the De Beauvoir



Location of the four sites where development of new housing is planned

At an inception meeting in May 2018, Cec Darker volunteered to join the Steering Group for the De Beauvoir Estate Regeneration Project. She was formally elected to it in September. Cec lives opposite the proposed development so is keen to play her part as the development unfolds. Here she tells us what's been going on and what her first impressions are.

Our Steering Group has met once a month since September and is chaired by Councillors James Peters and Polly Billington. We comprise about 16 people; half are residents on the Estate and some of these are also on the Tenants Residents Association (TRA). Three of the Steering Group live opposite or very close to the proposed sites.

So what happens at our meetings? Well, the project manager and project officer from Hackney's Housing Supply Programme lead us through the complex development process. They answer our questions, listen to our concerns, arrange visits, set the agendas for and

organise our meetings, and circulate all the documents we need.

They also work closely with award-winning lead architects Henley Halebrown, who are heading the design team. Henley Halebrown designed part of Phase 1 of King's Crescent Estate, opposite Clissold Park in Green Lanes, and they continue to contribute to Phase 2. The Steering Group will be visiting this development in February.

Our meetings are packed with information. We're learning about consultation procedure, local and UK legislation, the stages in the planning process, and about the London Borough of Hackney's (LBH) policies and practice.

We also have ongoing design training, including jargon busting and how to read plans, and we've been introduced to planning and design consultants as well as to Employers' Agents, Stace, who are construction and property consultants. These have all outlined their roles, which include monitoring the budget and ensuring the contractors do what they say they'll do in the allotted time, and that they adhere to Health and Safety requirements and professional standards.

Estate

Meanwhile, the Steering Group has been asked how it views the Estate, how the Estate currently sits in the community, how we use the access roads and how the sites could be made attractive to the whole community as well as to potential residents. Before Christmas, we did a marathon two days of door-knocking to reach the people who live closest to the proposed sites. A total of 453 doors were knocked, resulting in 168 conversations and 117 completed feedback forms. Though many people were out or chose not to open their door, we left each household with an informative calling card.

In brief, most people we spoke to were in favour of new housing, especially social housing, and acknowledged that there are far too many people in Hackney who are desperate for a place to live. A significant number said they're fond of the Estate – two families said they'd lived there happily since it was built in 1970 – and that they feel safe there, despite poor maintenance and pockets of anti-social behaviour.

Just about everyone was very concerned about the possible loss of green space, especially the allotments by the canal, plus they were adamant they didn't want any tower blocks built anywhere.

We haven't yet been shown any actual plans – we're hoping to see initial drafts in March – but the architects have reassured us that nothing will be built directly between Corbiere House and Granville Court, and that all the new buildings will be respectful of the existing surroundings.

In addition, the LBH is committed to constructing buildings that far exceed the minimum requirements, with landscaping, lighting and ecology consultants playing key roles in the design. All four new sites will be free of parking except for those flats planned for people with disabilities. What's more, local residents with housing needs will be first in line for a new home in the development.

As things progress, there will be opportunities for everyone in our neighbourhood to give their views; they'll be able to look at models and discuss the plans long before the first foundations are dug in February 2021.

I've lived in Hackney for over 40 years and it's changed a lot in the last 15. For a start, the LBH is very aware of the current social and economic pressures it faces and is determined to create – and maintain – a fresh new image of Hackney as a great place for everyone.

I'm very confident about the professionals I've met so far; they're approachable and they listen. They take affordability, consultation and feedback very seriously. All in all, I'm really looking forward to having lovely new neighbours across the road from me in 2023.



Benyon Estate tenants enjoy their tea party

Party time!

Carole Rowley has been a tenant of the Benyon Estate for over 50 years. She thinks it's about time the Estate, and in particular Edward Benyon, were thanked publicly for the Christmas tea parties they arrange for long-term tenants. So here goes!

As Carole says, speaking on behalf of the other guests: 'It was a very pleasant couple of hours, which we all appreciated and enjoyed.' The tea was served at the De Beauvoir Block and was accompanied by scones and nibbles, followed by mulled wine. As the photo shows, everyone was obviously having a great time.

Compassion in action



Compassionate Neighbours coffee morning at St Peter's Crypt Café

Richard Julian is the Project Manager of Compassionate Neighbours, an award-winning social movement developed by St Joseph's Hospice on Mare Street in Hackney. Here Richard explains what a social movement is and the very valuable work the Hospice and the Compassionate Neighbours do.

If you didn't already know, a social movement is owned and shaped by the people who run it, in this case, our Compassionate Neighbours: the movement truly belongs to them. They provide community-led support for anyone living with a long-term or terminal illness, is elderly or frail, socially isolated or nearing the end of life through age or illness. Thanks to the Compassionate Neighbours, those people can live life to the full as best they can. The growing army of Compassionate Neighbours is, in turn, helped by the Compassionate Neighbours team based at St Joseph's Hospice. With their help, they learn to harness their skills and experience in order to offer social and emotional support to people who have a life-limiting illness and are experiencing loneliness or social isolation. They do this by:

Visiting regularly • Offering friendship, emotional support and a listening ear • Helping the people they visit do the things they like doing • Helping them stay connected to the community and to family and friends.

The hospice receives referrals for people in the community who would like a Compassionate Neighbour. These are then introduced to and matched with someone who shares similar interests. Many community members who are referred would like someone to come and visit them but many more would also like the opportunity to get out of their home and socialise.

Compassionate Neighbours in De Beauvoir

Since 2014, we've trained over 320 Compassionate Neighbours, including some in De Beauvoir. There, we're delighted to have partnered with St Peter's Church to provide an informal coffee morning every Wednesday in St Peter's Crypt Café, Northchurch Terrace, N1 4DA, from 10am to 12 noon, though church volunteers run the café until 4pm. Tea, coffee and cake are provided free of charge. Whether you'd like to become a Compassionate Neighbour, want to be matched to one or simply fancy coming to enjoy a drink with like-minded people in a relaxed atmosphere, you're most welcome to stop by.

Kito and Joseph's story

Kito is a Compassionate Neighbour and regularly attends the social hub in De Beauvoir. In 2015 he decided he wanted to get out and meet people. He picked up a leaflet about the Compassionate Neighbours project and signed up for the training course. He admits at first he didn't say anything; he was shy and worried he'd say something silly. But he soon gained confidence and by the end of the training, he felt the group were a family; they all still keep in touch.

Kito was matched with Joseph, who, apart from attending day hospice and the neuro group at St Joseph's, rarely had company. Kito and Joseph met twice at the hospice and decided they liked each other. Now Kito visits Joseph every week and also pops in if he's shopping nearby.

They've become firm friends, talking about everything and anything from politics and news to films and sport. Kito says becoming a Compassionate Neighbour has changed his life.

'I've so much confidence now. I've learnt to really listen to people and let them do the talking. The Compassionate Neighbour training is not only great fun but it's helped my relationship with my son, too. With my new-found confidence I've even done some cookery teaching, have delivered some assemblies at my son's school and have helped train other Compassionate Neighbours. Telling them about my journey really seems to help them and I enjoy it too.'

Joseph is also very positive. 'When they asked me if I wanted a Compassionate Neighbour, I thought "why not?" I'd tell anyone thinking about becoming a Compassionate Neighbour to go ahead, it's a great idea. Kito is really good fun and I always look forward to seeing him. He tells me stories that make me laugh and we talk about absolutely everything. I hope he'll always be my friend. Last year we spent Christmas Day together; he took me to the park and he cooked for me. It was the best Christmas I've ever had.'



A successful cohort of Compassionate Neighbours

The training

If you'd like to become a Compassionate Neighbour, we'll be hosting some training at St Peter's Church on Wednesday 27 February and Wednesday 6 March from 9:30am to 5pm. Training takes two days and consists of fun, informal sessions designed to help you understand the project a little better. But more importantly, you'll also be exploring how you can best support people in your local community. The sessions are inspirational and are sure to be unlike any other training you've had before. Training is free and lunch and refreshments are provided. To find out more, visit www.stjh.org.uk/neighbours or contact cn@stjh.org.uk / 0208 525 6058.

Diary date

**DBA Tabletop Sale, Sunday 24 March
12:00am–5:00pm, St Peter's Crypt**

Admission free. Refreshments and Easter Hamper Raffle

Sellers of antiques, bric-à-brac, vintage clothes, toys, jewellery, accessories, kitchen goods, records, DVDs, books and all things fascinating, are welcome to book a table. Or, donate good quality articles to the DBA table, where any unsold items will be given to charity shops.

Tables will cost between £15 and £22, and priority will be given to local residents. Stallholders will have from 11am to 12am to set up to avoid disturbing the church service. To bag a table, email: debeauvoirassociation@gmail.com

Homeless hostel plans: our councillors' views



Our councillors James Peters (left), Polly Billington (centre) and Hackney Mayor, Philip Glanville (right)

Polly Billington and James Peters are councillors in De Beauvoir ward and have grave concerns about the plans for a 292-place hostel at 337–359 Kingsland Road. A significant amount of their casework comes from the Metropolitan and St Peter's Way hostels, which they understand are owned/managed by the same people who are applying to build this one. They say they can't stand by and allow unacceptable conditions to be reproduced in the new, larger hostel.

We all know that the housing market in Hackney is failing many who've grown up and live in the borough. Every week, we councillors see the impact on people – including very many young children and teenagers – of

long stays in unsuitable conditions in homeless hostels around De Beauvoir.

They are ordinary people, most with small and growing families. The majority of adults living in our hostels are in work, just as most people who go to food banks have a job and most who claim benefits are employed. But government welfare changes are pushing many in Hackney into deprivation.

So even if you're in employment and come from Hackney, that no longer means that you can necessarily afford to rent a home here (let alone buy one). Rents are rocketing. Foxtons estimates that the average weekly rent in Hackney is £579 a week – far more than the average local weekly wage.

Meanwhile, landlords seeking higher rents exploit the law so that people have short-term, insecure tenancies. Worse still, they're evicted. People don't choose to be in this situation.

When people are evicted, the Council has an obligation to house them and it's a duty that we should be proud to deliver. But the situation the Council finds itself in hasn't appeared by accident. We believe it's the consequence of this Conservative government's policies and its lack of action around housing.

No one would choose hotel accommodation as a solution to the shortage of affordable housing in our borough. The length of time Hackney residents end up in 'temporary accommodation' ensures that it's far from 'temporary'. Which means it's all the more important for the Council to make life as bearable as possible for hostel residents, both directly and through the services it commissions – and especially because many of those people are children.

Welfare for residents

Our primary concern is for the welfare of the people who'll be staying in the proposed hostel. Conditions in this 'temporary accommodation' must allow for a decent quality of life and for residents' dignity to be assured.

If the conditions in the existing hostel were to be replicated in the new hostel, we'd be worried for the health and well-being of the people living in the hostel and the implications for those living nearby. So, will the planned facilities meet the needs of the residents of the proposed hostel and those of the Metropolitan and St Peter's Way hostels – a total of 360 rooms? It would mean having adequate laundry facilities, proper internet access, a safe visitors policy, communal areas to relieve the cramped rooms, and a building that's accessible for those using pushchairs, prams and wheelchairs.

Having several hundred people, including many children, living in cramped accommodation that's wholly unsuitable for their needs will put tremendous strain on those people. It's unfair for them and it creates a real risk of problems that will spill over into the wider community.

Our other main concern is about the high concentration of this kind of accommodation in one place; in this, we share the worries of De Beauvoir residents, particularly the people living on Enfield Road and St Peter's Way. The application says the proposal is 'designed to complement and will help to alleviate those pressures around the existing hostel'. Both as citizens and as Labour councillors, we believe this to be crucial. What we want to avoid is a private party making very

considerable profits from the misfortune of our fellow citizens, while not ensuring decent living conditions for the people who'll live in the hostel. It's an outcome that the Council cannot allow.

Why not build permanent social housing?

This is a question we're often asked, but the planning application isn't for flats. It's to build a hostel on privately owned land. If the application complies with the relevant planning law and guidance, the Council's Planning Department will have to recommend granting the permission. It's unlikely to be within the planning authority's powers to reject the application out of hand.

Also, though the Council must discharge its legal duty to provide housing for people who genuinely have nowhere to live, there are more of these people than there are available homes.

In addition, the Council is obliged to provide suitable

(continued overleaf)



The old Metropolitan Hospital: the proposed new hostel will be to its left

accommodation for homeless households accepted as being in priority need – such as families with children and households that include someone who is vulnerable, for example because of pregnancy, old age, or physical or mental disability – provided they are eligible for assistance and are unintentionally homeless. Hence, the Council needs more ‘temporary accommodation’, even if people end up living there for some years because of the current crisis.

The Council’s preference is always to keep people in Hackney, close to jobs, friends and family. The alternative is to look outside of Hackney, probably far outside. Moving people a long way from their families, jobs, schools and support networks, can be highly disruptive for them and could increase the burden on public finances.

Why isn’t the Council building homes for everyone who needs them?

We’d rather be building long-term, quality homes for Hackney people and to that end we’re currently

delivering one of the biggest programmes of council house building in the country. And with almost no help from the Conservative Government.

This programme includes plans to build 150 new homes on the De Beauvoir Estate (see pages 2–3), two-thirds of which will be affordable (either for social rent or for shared ownership). In the absence of Government funding, the rest will be for private sale to pay for the affordable two-thirds.

These new homes will go first to those in housing need in the local area or to those living in overcrowded conditions on the Estate.

Over the next five years, Hackney plans to build, directly or with our partners, over 3000 new homes across the borough, including 800 new council and social rented homes, and 700 council shared-ownership homes.

Unfortunately, without a change of government and a radical change in housing policy, we’ll have to continue living with this crisis of unaffordable housing.

Having talked to Metropolitan hostel residents, we’ve come up with this list of specific things that the Council should insist be part of any application for new hostel accommodation on this site.

Laundry facilities: This is all the more important because there will be families living in the new hostel. For a rent of £256 per week, residents should be able to wash their clothes in a machine and not by hand in the sink.

Internet: The existing hostels have no access to the internet, except via a mobile phone, and we feel that this is unsatisfactory. We can’t expect residents to bid regularly for a permanent Council home and to participate fully in society and the job market without being able to use the internet.

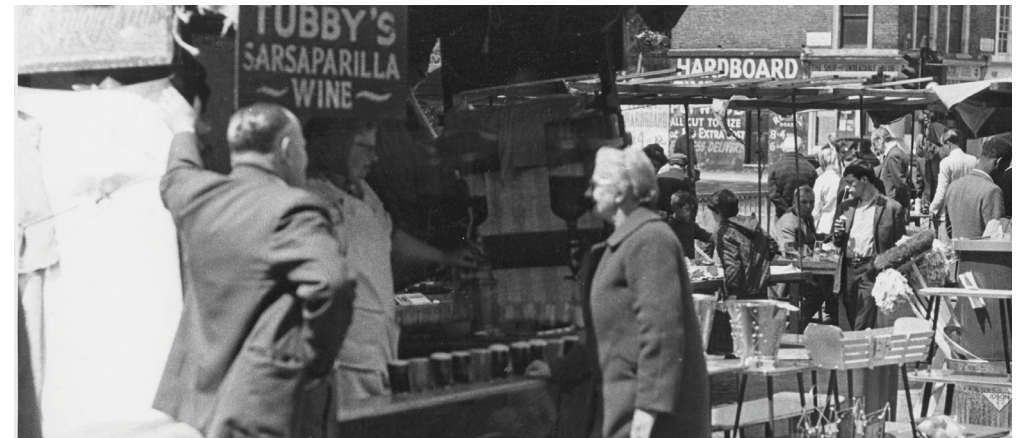
Communal facilities: Cramped accommodation such as that in the existing hostels puts considerable strain on young families and is likely to do real harm to children’s development. We understand that the planned new hostel will include communal facilities for residents. But how will they be managed?

Visitors: The existing hostels are subject to restrictive visitors’ policies. We think that families with small children should be supported by their wider family, who often live nearby, or by other babysitters. The hostel management must therefore have a system to allow relatives, friends and babysitters to visit.

Signposting and accessibility: There should be signposting for Children’s Services and Housing Support, and proper accessibility for those using pushchairs, prams and wheelchairs, especially since the hostel is expected to house families. The existing hostel isn’t accessible, which makes life very difficult for many residents.

Separate floors for families: Mothers and children feel unsafe when they’re housed in areas of the existing hostels where there are residents with mental health and/or dependency problems. It can be frightening for children and very noisy. We welcome the fact that there will be separate floors in the new hostel for people with such problems, but we’d like to know how they will be managed.

A post-war childhood



Kingsland Waste market stalls, 1969, (courtesy of the London Borough of Hackney Archives)

Ken Day was born in 1943 at Long Whatton Maternity Hospital, Castle Donnington, Leicester. His mother, who was living at 142 Culford Road, was one of the over 2000 expectant mothers living in bomb-prone areas who were evacuated during the war. Here Ken share fond memories of his De Beauvoir childhood. You can see that he loves local history!

Culford Road was a genteel place in the post-war years. Number 142 looked much the same then as when I last saw it in the 1990s, though I suspect it was very different internally. In the 1940s it was occupied by three families. My parents, younger brother and I lived in two rooms on the top floor. We had a kitchen-cum-everything area at the back, while at the front, overlooking the road, was the one bedroom for the four of us.

The middle floor was occupied by the landlady, Mrs Tempest and her husband. They had a glorious front room on the middle floor, filled with Victoriana and a cuckoo clock, of which I was in awe. The middle room was their bedroom and behind that was a kitchen leading to the scullery. The scullery door opened onto the garden, which housed the only loo – a polished pine bench with a hole in it and a high-up cast-iron

cistern with a long chain. At the rear of the garden was Mr Tempest’s chicken coop.

I don’t remember venturing into the basement but I used to think an elderly woman lived there on her own.

Even by the standards of the time, we were quite poor. My father was an epileptic and had a brain tumour from which he died at the age of 35 in 1950. He was a piece-work upholsterer and met my mother, who was a machinist, through his work. Sadly, he couldn’t really manage to bring home a decent wage.

Yet life in Culford Road always seemed comfortable. Mother had wonderful neighbours in Mrs Newell, who lived next door at 140, and Harry, at 144. Between Mrs Tempest, who became my ‘Nana’, and the neighbours, there was always someone to keep an eye on us boys. Many a time we dined with Mrs Tempest, whose speciality was rabbit stew.

The street was our playground. Even at the tender age of four or five, I would wander as far as the bomb sites in Tottenham Road, where the remains of an air-raid shelter, with its sloping roof, made an ideal slide.

Just near Englefield Road, I recall a small grocers that you got to by descending a flight of steps, but Mum did most of her shopping in Ridley Road, Kingsland Road

(continued overleaf)

and Kingland High Street. Here she favoured Sainsbury's, where I can recollect being mesmerised as slabs of butter were cut and patted down with wooden paddles before being wrapped into half-pound parcels.

Milk was delivered by horse-drawn cart from the dairy at the corner of Culford and Balls Pond Roads. My favourite store was Lodge's 'oil shop' on Kingsland Road, where the man behind the counter always wore a brown dustcoat. On the left as you went in were garden canes, which were ideal for making bows and arrows, while in front of the counter was a ledge with a row of tins containing an assortment of broken biscuits, which were cheaper than buying whole biscuits. Lodge's was also where you went to re-charge the accumulators that were needed to warm the valves for wireless sets.

As my father was a practising Catholic, I went to St Joseph's School. We were mainly taught by nuns, who were very kind. Punishment, generally in the form of harsh whacks on the backside with a plimsoll, was meted out by a male teacher.

At school we spent hours copying letters and words, while playtime usually involved flicking cigarette cards at the playground walls. If your card landed on top of the pile, you won all of them.

One memory that sticks out was in 1952, when, with our teacher Miss Farmer, we went to St Joseph's Church (the priest then was Father Dempsey) to pray for King George VI, whose death had just been announced. In those days it was compulsory to attend Sunday service and the church used to be so full that there was standing room only.

From Culford Road to Tottenham Road

Around 1950 we moved to a prefab at 38 Tottenham Road. We still didn't have an inside toilet, and for our weekly bath, the tin bath was brought in from the garden shed and placed in front of the fire. Mum and Dad used the public baths in Englefield Road, which was a Vietnamese restaurant the last time I passed by.

Life in Tottenham Road was one big adventure. Our end of the street was full of children.

In particular, there was the Martin family, whose house I was in and out of all the time. David Martin was a few years older than me and together we made scooters and go-carts from scrap we found on the bomb site immediately behind the Odeon cinema. We decorated

these with the metal caps from sterilised milk bottles.

Saturday morning picture club was the magnet for us all, and I can still hear our screams of delight as the cowboys chased the Indians. With the end of sweet rationing came sweet-buying visits to the 'blue shop' in Buckingham Road – so named as its frontage was decorated with blue tiles.

Kingland Waste was a major attraction on Saturdays. It was full of pitches selling second-hand goods of all kinds, including a sarsaparilla stand and a stamp dealer (see picture, previous page). But my eyes were nearly always glued to the window of 'the Train Shop'.

The long summer holidays saw us wandering as far as Clissold Park to catch tiddlers in the New River. The school kitchens in Tottenham Road School (now De Beauvoir School) stayed open during the summer and if I wanted, Mum gave me the money for lunch there, even though I was from the school 'across the road'!

Shortly after Dad died, Mum got a job as an upholsteress at W.J. Richards and Son at 41A Stamford Road. They made bespoke suites but later had a contract with the Tan-Sad Chair Company of Clerkenwell to upholster office chairs. As I got older, I used to help out in the shop, often having lunch with Mum in Arthur's Cafe. As for my little brother, he was either being looked after by neighbours or was at the nursery in Dalston Lane near Lebons Corner.

In 1953 we left Tottenham Road for a flat at Powell House, Clapton but I have very fond memories of my early years. Everyone got on and was willing to lend a hand when needed. There didn't seem to be any rivalry or jealousy – there was nothing to be jealous about as we all had very little in the way of luxuries. I can even remember going to a birthday party and taking a small, broken Bakelite aeroplane as a gift as we didn't have enough money to buy a present.

I later had a successful career in the Metropolitan Police. From 1990 to 1993, I was Chief Inspector at Hackney Police Station, which gave me the opportunity to revisit my childhood haunts.

My wife and I are now very happily settled in a sixteenth-century farmhouse on the edge of the Lake District National Park, where, among other interests, I am Chairman of the Duddon Valley Local History Group (www.duddonhistory.org.uk). But I'm really hoping to make a trip back to De Beauvoir soon!

A dog's life



Alex walks a trio of pooches in De Beauvoir Square

Avril Broadley has been helping to organise the dog show as part of the De Beauvoir Gardener's Flower and Produce Show every September since 2012. We caught her during a break from that to ask her about life with a dog and to interview local dog walker Alex.

Our little corner of London has gone dog crazy. There used to be about 30 entries to the dog show but now we have to cap it at 50 to prevent it taking over the whole afternoon. What's interesting is that it's not just families and pensioners who love having a pet around. More young people are working from home and a dog brings companionship and structure to their day.

A happy dog needs regular exercise and stimulation – The Dogs Trust recommends not leaving them on their own for longer than four hours. It all depends on the dog of course, and some require more contact with humans than others. Get it wrong and dogs can develop behaviour problems or separation anxiety, and you risk annoying your neighbours. In response, a host of businesses have sprung up to take care of our precious pooches when we can't.

At one end of the spectrum there's full-time licensed doggie day care and boarding – at the other you can get someone to borrow your dog for the odd extra walk. Somewhere in between are the professional dog walkers, who offer regular walks at a time to suit you; this can be a great way of breaking up your dog's

day when work takes over yours. I'm lucky enough to take my dog Ricci to work with me but I know that five days in the studio are a bit much for her, so I have a dog walker pick her up every Wednesday for a trip to the marshes with some furry friends. Ricci loves it and when I get a text at 11am to say the van is waiting outside, she knows exactly who it is and runs excitedly to the door. It breaks up the monotony, has massively improved Ricci's confidence around other dogs and gives me one day when I can go to meetings or work straight through without feeling guilty.

I met up with local dog walker, Alex Dykes to get some more insight into these newish doggy trends.

Alex started walking dogs about seven years ago when her children were young and she got her terrier-cross, Raisin. It started with one dog and, over time, evolved into a business, the De Beauvoir Pack. It's always been an easy fit around the routine of her family life.

Walking two or three dogs at a time is what Alex prefers as it gives her more control if something goes wrong. Larger groups can be intimidating for other people. Dogs have different needs, and limiting the group size means she can be flexible about which dogs she collects to walk together. Some older dogs don't want a long walk for instance, while the more playful pups have a lot of energy to work off. Alex organises her day around each client's needs so no two days are the same.

This also ensures that Alex doesn't get bored, which is helped by the fact that our area is blessed with lots of parks and green spaces, plus there's the canal and Alex's own large garden.

I asked about how difficult it is being out in all weathers and discovered that Alex is happiest when outside. She grew up on a farm and spent most of her childhood outdoors – it's what she thrives on. The cold and the wet are actually easier to deal with than the intense heat we experienced last summer. The pavements were too hot to safely walk dogs in the heat of the day so she became super-adept at plotting routes on the shady side of the street.

It is obvious to me that Alex genuinely loves her job and has the sort of naturally calm personality that dogs need to feel safe and secure. If you love your pet like I do, you'll want to be confident that your pup is having the best of times with and without you.

For more information, contact Alex: debeauvoirpack@gmail.com

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