

Press Release

MP Double Act for IDS Centenary

Hackney MPs, Diane Abbott and Meg Hillier, welcomed former and current residents in the celebrations marking the 100-year Centenary of Navarino Mansions in Stoke Newington.

Originally built in 1905 by a group of Jewish philanthropists to relieve the overcrowded housing conditions faced by new immigrants, the estate remains a flagship development for IDS and is a well-known landmark in East London.

The Victorian estate originally housed 300 people and families. Having undergone a £15m refurbishment programme in the 1990s, for which IDS won a community architecture commendation, Navarino Mansions now has 250 one-, two-, and three-bedroom flats and maisonettes, as well as a sheltered scheme for 37 residents. A number of elderly residents on the estate have lived there since the earliest days, including Vera Noyes, who was born at Navarino in 1923 and whose story is detailed below.

Over 200 people enjoyed the Centenary celebrations which included an exhibition entitled, 'The Real East Enders', an impressive display of 57 portraits of tenants from the estate, as well as a few famous faces, all drawn by artist Jim Dunkley who has lived on the estate for 23 years. Jim had spent the months in the run-up to the events sketching local people as he could, and the exhibition formed a highly personal centrepiece for the event.

Area Housing Manager, Margaret Pitt, turned the railings at the entrance into a trip down memory lane with a display on the history of Navarino Mansions. Margaret said, "It was fascinating going to the Hackney archives and reading press clippings about the appalling poverty and hardships faced by people around the turn of the century. If people could not support themselves, they ended up in the workhouse. Our display included photographs, archive cuttings from the Hackney Gazette as well as lists of tenants, their occupations and rent levels from the early days."

The IDS "Makin' It Happen" Youth Committee, which recently won an InBiz Race and Diversity award, showed a film, "Living Memories", which they had created from video-taped interviews with older residents about the old days on the estate.

As well as West Indian and English food, guests enjoyed live music performances by local people including 'Bap' Kennedy, an Irish rock musician who lives on the estate, and ex local school teacher Kate Shortt – a cellist, singer and comedienne. Children took part in craft activity for much of the day; and there was a variety of stalls and craft activities. One highlight was when the Hackney Mare De Gras festival paraded past the estate in the afternoon

Both MPs spoke at the event giving birthday greetings to the estate and its residents. Each MP has a strong interest in housing in the borough. Meg Hillier, MP for Hackney South, is a former housing journalist and worked within the sector for many years before becoming an MP. Diane Abbott is a former Board member of IDS and has campaigned on housing issues for many years.

Ends

Low res photos attached. For high res photos and captions please call Marie Page on 01923 285300.

A life lived at Navarino Mansions

I was actually born at home in Navarino Mansions in 1923, the youngest of five children. My parents moved into the flats in about 1911, having then only two children. However, when I was born, they were given one of the large, so-called "attic" flats, of which there were only eight on the estate. We were extremely fortunate as we were never cramped or overcrowded as so many families were at that time. We only had gas installed in the flat - no electricity, hot water, bathrooms, central- heating, lifts, etc. Coalmen had to carry coal up to all floors and were usually given 2 old pence per hundredweight sack for the delivery charge! Even as a baby, my pram had to be carried up 66 stairs to our top floor flat – no pram sheds then.

Growing up, I had plenty of playmates – most families had 3, 4 or 5 children in the early days. We were only allowed to play in the two main avenues but we were never at a loss to amuse ourselves – there were seasons for every game – skipping, marbles, conkers, hopscotch, 5-stones, whips & tops, hide-and-peek, etc. but no ball games or bicycles were allowed. There were far more rules and regulations in those days – you had to be upstairs in your own flat by a certain time each day - if not, the porters came after you! – and never allowed downstairs to play on a Sunday.

Tenants also had to conform to certain rules – each flat taking turns in sweeping and scrubbing their landing and two flights of stairs down to the next landing. Rent also had to be paid to the superintendent in the office on a Monday and, if it wasn't, you had a reminder from the office later the same day.

Looking back, I realise how happy we were as children playing together and not conscious of any differences. When the war came, many of us were evacuated with our various schools. I was only away for a year, having taken the school certificate in 1939. During that year, my parents and one sister still at home moved down a floor to another flat with only two bedrooms which was easier to heat. I certainly missed the spacious flat but it meant fewer steps to go down to the shelters which had been built under the four front lawns. Even in the shelters, the good community spirit among the neighbours continued.

Now at 82, I'm still living in Navarino Mansions and in the same block that I grew up in.

(Note – we have a lovely old photo of Vera with other children on the estate. Please call Deborah Burton on 01494 848411 for a copy)

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For further information please contact Paul Westbrook, on 0208 800 9606.

Editor's notes**IDS**

IDS is more formally known as the Industrial Dwellings Society. It was established by a group of Jewish philanthropists in 1885 in order to relieve the overcrowding in the East End of London where the large population of new immigrants faced very poor housing conditions.

Today, IDS manages over 1,400 properties in Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Redbridge, Barnet, Haringey, Camden and Hertsmere. IDS specialises in providing housing for the Jewish community but its tenants also reflect the general ethnic mix of the communities in which it operates. IDS has an ongoing development programme. Its aim is to provide accommodation to meet the needs of its traditional client group.

IDS employs around 50 staff, many of whom are residentially-based on the Society's estates.