

Priory Court (Part 2) The Big Change

The Necessity For Change



By the 1980's it was obvious that the estate was suffering from design and construction problems causing water penetration and massive condensation problems to many flats. Although the flats were of generous standard, they were poorly insulated and the technical shortcomings in design and construction had led to severe condensation problems and to extensive water penetration through leaking roofs and cracking walls

As a result a decision was taken by Waltham Forest Council during the 1990's

to address the many repair problems on the estate.

The picture above shows blocks after completion of works.

Funding

At the end of 1997, Waltham Forest Council did not have sufficient funding to carry out the necessary large capital works to Priory Court. The Government funnelled most of their money for capital housing works through the *Housing Corporation* who preferred to make grants to Local Authorities who were in partnership with outside agencies. In order to attract *Housing Corporation* funds, Waltham Forest Council approached the *Circle 33 Housing Association* to acquire 3 Priory Court blocks and carry out refurbishment to them.. The blocks that were transferred were three of the last seven needing refurbishment but there were not any funds available for the local authority to carry out the work by itself.

The Regeneration Of The Estate

A regeneration scheme started in the late 1990's, involved the redevelopment of some blocks and fourteen of the slab blocks were comprehensively refurbished. This involved the installation of new lifts, internal improvements and the development of unused ground floor space to provide flats for disabled tenants. The technical repair and design problems were addressed by providing an over-cladding system was to provide a rainscreen and insulation to the outside of existing walls. New double glazed windows were built into the new external skin. On top of each block, innovative barrel-vault lightweight roof shells were constructed. These prevented rain from reaching the existing roof covering which were topped with new insulation panels. This scheme ensured that the blocks were given a high level of thermal protection entirely by adding insulation externally. This meant that the improvement work could be done with little disruption to the internal space.

Inevitably, the renovation process was quite disruptive for a number of residents who had to move to temporary accommodation while blocks were refurbished. Some blocks were pulled down and replaced with houses and bungalows, a play area was built for children and the blocks of flats got their own individual closed communal gardens, although there is no longer a public green space for use by everyone.

Estate Management

The estate is now managed by *Circle 33 Housing Trust* working in partnership with *Ascham Homes* (Who act on behalf of *Waltham Forest Council*), the *North London Muslim Housing Trust* and *Kush Housing Trust*.

The Circle 33 Housing Trust

The Circle 33 Housing Trust began life as a traditional housing association in 1968 and is part of the group was formed as *Circle Anglia* when the *Circle 33 Housing Group* and *Anglia Housing Group* merged in 2005. *Circle* owns and manages more than 63,500 homes, including supported and sheltered housing, for more than 200,000 people across the UK, and employs over 2,200 staff.

Its mission is to enhance the life chances of its residents by providing high-quality homes and reliable services, and building sustainable communities. Resident Involvement is essential to everything *Circle 33 Housing Trust* does. It is embedded in every aspect of their work and helps to shape of their services. They offer a number of ways for their residents to get involved in decisions about their homes and the services that they receive.

The *Circle Housing Group* has 12 partners. Nine registered providers: *South Anglia Housing*, *Wherry Housing Association*, *Old Ford Housing Association*, *Circle 33*, *Merton Priory Homes*, *Mole Valley Housing Association*, *Mercian Housing Association*, *Roddons Housing Association* and *Russet Homes*, as well as *Circle Living* for sales and marketing and management of shared ownership, market rent and private sale properties. It has two care and support partners -

Circle Support and *INVICTA Telecare* - one of the largest Telecare providers in England.



. In 2005 it merged with the *Anglia Housing Group*, and is now the largest partner subsidiary in the *Circle Group* (formerly *Circle Anglia*), owning 15,603 homes in and around London in 47 Local Authority areas.

It directly manages 8,300 general needs properties in London, provides maintenance services to 3,300 supported, commercial and leasehold properties, and has a high profile in London as a leading social housing provider and member of the G15 of Housing Associations, whilst enjoying the benefits of being part of a national housing group.

The Circle 33 Housing Trust In Waltham Forest

Next to *Waltham Forest Council*, the *Circle 33* Housing Trust is now the biggest social landlord in the Borough and manages housing properties in Priory Court and the 700 home *Warner Estate* that was transferred to *Circle 33 Housing Trust* in 2001 that has been undergoing a major refurbishment programme to bring the homes on the estate up to decent homes standard.

The New Priory Court Community Centre

A part of the development and upgrade works to Priory Court a new Community Centre was built in 2001. This facility was to provide the base on which to carry out work in accordance with its development vision to improve the quality of life for *Circle 33* residents and the communities in which they live. The priorities for community developments being to develop and facilitate a range of locally delivered projects, programmes and events that will improve the quality of life and life chances for all members of the community. The project aims to work by identifying needs and acting as a catalyst fostering partnerships to tackle these needs. The needs and priorities being:

- **Education & Young People**
- **Healthier Communities and Older People**
- **Safer & Stronger Communities**

Priory Court Residents & Community Association (PCRCA) & Priory Court Community Centre

Very early on after the new Community Centre was built, there was a clash between the voluntary run *PCRCA* and *Circle 33* over their respective roles and use of the Community Centre. By this time, *PCRCA* was very much a social and sports organisation was not now generally involved in community activities. They wanted very much to retain the social life of the estate that they offered through the sports and social club and central to this was the running of the bar and hall.

Circle 33's core values and commitment were to facilitate the development of the local community by developing and running programmes and events to improve and enhance the quality of life for their residents. It has existing formal partnership arrangements with a range of stakeholders working in the area through the Priory Court Community Development Project (PCCDP) to facilitate locally delivered projects, programmes and events for residents.

As a result a compromise was reached where *PCRCA* became the *Priory Court Sports & Social Club Ltd* and rented accommodation from *Circle 33* in the new building to carry on their social activities.

The Centre consists of a foyer, where information on services and activities are displayed, a staffed reception desk, a main hall with subsidiary rooms, kitchen, lounge and lounge area, an ICT suite, office and meeting space. Adjacent to the front entrance of the Centre is an outdoor kick about play area.

The Centre is open from 9:30am to 5:00pm staffed by Circle 33 and volunteers (with periodic late openings for youth programmes, residents meetings and other services) and is available for hire weekdays 9:30am to 10pm as well as Saturdays 12 - 11pm and Sundays 12 - 10:30pm. The Centre is fully accessible for disabled users.

Priory Court Community Centre

The new centre has a main hall, bar lounge, IT room and committee room and a caged sports area. It has a team of 5 workers and a number of volunteers who manage the centre and run the various projects.

The activities include;

Wednesday Luncheon Club (11.30am -1.00pm)



Former members of *PCRCA* run a Wednesday Luncheon Club and this group is organised by local residents Brenda, Joan and Lilly. Joan explained: "The service has been running at Priory Court since 1955 and the catering was originally provided by the local council. Times have changed and now we organise everything ourselves. It is a friendly get together for lunch and social chat. People come from all over the neighbourhood and many use the Dial A Ride Service. The usual menu is fish & chips, side salad, bread & butter, a

dessert and a cup of tea - all for only £2.50. Bargain! Sometimes we prepare a home cooked dinner for a change

Picture above - The Wednesday Luncheon Club

Wednesday Bingo Club (2:00-3:30pm)



This group has been running since 1955 and follows the Luncheon Club. It's organised by local residents Brenda, Grace and Rose. Many people stay for both events to make a full day of it.

Brenda explained how it all works: "It costs 60p for a book of 5 games and all proceeds are spent on prizes. There is a small charge of 20p for tea & biscuits. We also hold a monthly raffle to raise money for our annual Christmas dinner. We welcome newcomers so if you are interested why not give it a try!"

Picture left - Grace calls the numbers!

A range of I.T. courses are provided in conjunction with Waltham Forest adult learning service provider - *CLaSS* (Community Living and Skill Service) These includes free 'Silver Surfers' courses to introduce and assist older people to develop their computer skills.

A Gardening club that is creating a sustainable garden from an area previously covered by flagstones.

Food Growing at Higham Hill Allotment - With local residents from Priory Court and *OrganicLea food growing Cooperative*

Workshops on affordable heat and energy

Art & Crafts Courses in association with Waltham Forest CLaSS. These include a Textile 'taster' course, Floristry and Felt making

The Inspirations Arts & Crafts Club that is organised by local residents - glass painting, sewing & knitting, soft furnishings, flower arranging, jam making & pickles and days out.

The Bees Knees Sewing & Quilt Making Group - Creating art quilts using hand and machine sewing and embroidery, fabric painting, dying, beading and more. For traditionalists hand or machine piecing patchwork quilts.

Gentle Exercise for the Over 50' - A free 10 week taster course for men and women of all ages and abilities who wish to maintain or improve their current level of fitness through exercise to music. Older learners and those with poor levels of fitness are particularly welcomed.

TheCircle 33 Employment Job Club - To help find the right jobs and training with real



prospects. Support with training and job hunting, writing CVs and interviews, sourcing child care and travel costs when attending interviews and training etc

Youth Services that include;
MultiSports (with *Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme*)
A variety of free sports. Promoting physical activity and improving existing skills in a fun and non-competitive environment. Activities include cricket, basket, tennis and football.

Priory Court Youth Club (with DV8 Training and LOCSP)

An opportunity to improve communication skills, build confidence and team working skills whilst having fun. Activities include:

- table tennis / pool / air hockey / football / boxing / fitness training
- PS3 / Nintendo Wii
- computer room with free internet access
- chill out area
- healthy eating cookery lessons
- DJing workshops - 7-8:30pm for 10-15 years

- DV8 Wembley concert rehearsals - 7-9:30pm for 13-25 years

A weekly Karate Club

Weekly StreetChance Cricket (with the Cricket Foundation) for ages 8-19 with trained coaches help youngsters to develop a number of skills such as communication and aggression management.

During term time - **Generation 2012 Sports** (with StreetGames Project & A-Star) Offering a variety of free sports. Promoting physical activity and improving existing skills in a fun and non-competitive environment

Circle 33 Customer Services - to assist residents with tenancy related queries, estate issues and anti social behaviour.

Safer Neighbourhood Police Surgeries (with *Circle 33* and *Ascham Homes*) - Speak up about noise nuisance, fly tipping, graffiti and offensive behaviour in your neighbourhood

Events - Some recent events include; Fun Days and other special events during the school holidays, a celebration of *International Womens Day* and *Black History* month.

Priory Court Today

Present day Priory Court is a diverse and multi-racial community that very much reflects the wider Borough of Waltham Forest community. Over the years, Priory Court has had a reputation as a 'hard' estate and sadly, at present, the estate has a problem with youth gangs. These gangs started to emerge in the 1990's and are known as the *Grey Gangs* from their dress. They consist of a younger members group (*Priory Court Youngers*) a group of older people known as *GMD (Get Money Daily/Gunz Money Drugs)*. Interestingly, these appear to be very unpopular with other Waltham Forest gangs. However, the evidence is that the work being carried out by Circle 33, through the Priory Court Community Centre, together with the work being carried out through Waltham Forest's 'Enough is Enough' campaign and other agencies, is changing the situation.

In an attempt to combat Borough wide gang problems, Waltham Forest Council launched an *Enough Is Enough* campaign at the beginning of 2011, This campaign seeks to target specific gang members and work to resolve their particular issues and draw them away from the gangs. Using this approach, by November 2012, they were reporting a 60% decrease in gang related crime.

Whatever happens to Priory Court in the future, it will never die so long as it lives in the memories and experiences of all the people who have lived there in the last 63 years.

Bill Bayliss

March 2013

Comments & Sources

Owners & Occupants of The Priory Estate

In 1836, it comprised the house, gardens and stabling and several meadows,. It was owned by the Reverend *Dr J Niblick* who lived in Shern Hall House (That was on the corner of Valentin Road) and he ran a private school there. One of his daughters occupied the Priory house.

After the *Rev Niblick* the house was owned by *H P Hughes*, *George Campe* and then by *Henry Casey* who was a wealthy London tradesman. *The Priory Estate* was sold for development at end of the 19th Century.

The 86 acre **Winns Estate** was later sold to the *Warner* family in 1898 and redeveloped as a typical Warner Housing Estate

Green Pond Farm in Higham Hill Road was the headquarters of Hitchmans Dairies until they built purpose modern plant in 1938 at Walthamstow Avenue.

Rectory Manor was originally part of the Manor Of Toni and was situated between Church Hill and Forest Road with outlying fields at Chapel End.

Lord Valentine McEntee was born in Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire) south of Dublin in 1871, the son of a doctor from the Protestant minority, he was orphaned at an early age and was apprenticed as a carpenter. He was an early member of the Irish Socialist Republican Party which had been founded, largely on the initiative of James Connolly, in 1896 as the Irish equivalent of the SDF. In 1899, like many Irish workers, he emigrated to America, to New York, but within a year returned to Europe, but to London not Dublin. He joined the SDF and was also the secretary and chairman of the Walthamstow branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners.

At the inaugural meeting of the SPGB he moved that the name of the new party be "The Socialist Party of Great Britain and Ireland" but his motion only obtained six votes, presumably because the others felt that workers in Ireland should organise their own socialist party. His membership was not to last long since in December 1904 he was nominated by his union as a potential parliamentary candidate, which would have meant him standing for the Labour Representation Committee, the forerunner of the Labour Party. Called to account for this, which would of course have been contrary to the SPGB's principles, he was eventually asked to resign and did so in February 1905.

After that he rejoined the SDF and began his career as a budding Labour politician. In 1908 he was an (unsuccessful) candidate for Walthamstow council. In 1909 he self-published a short pamphlet entitled *Socialism Explained*. This was a general criticism of capitalism but went out of its way to claim that socialism "is neither pro nor anti-Christian" and was supposedly supported by "ministers of the Gospel of all denominations".

In 1920 he was finally elected to Walthamstow Council and was Mayor of the Borough from 1929-30 and 1951-2. He was elected in 1922 as Labour MP for Walthamstow West. Defeated in 1924 he was re-elected in 1929 and remained an MP till he retired in 1950 to make way for ex Prime Minister Clement Attlee. Presumably his reward for this was in 1951 when he was made Baron McEntee of Walthamstow. He died in 1953. There is a fine portrait of him in the vestibule to the Council Chamber at Waltham ForestTown Hall.

Sources

I have used many sources for this article. These include;

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My particular thanks for the memories and reminiscences of *Maureen Shanks neé Penn* and of her friend *Marion Cunningham neé Proudfoot*. The memories' are to be found in the site's 'Personal' stories section.

Although there have been very many people involved with the community life of Priory Court a special mention should be made of the long term contributions of Win, Mike & Joan Earle.

My thanks to Circle 33 Housing Trust who were kind enough to read my comments/information on their work on the estate for 'accuracy'. Nevertheless any mistakes are my own.

I would also record my personal thanks to my wife - Marion - whose memory is ten times better than mine and who always tries to keep me on the straight and narrow. However, any mistakes in this article are mine.

Bill Bayliss
March 2013