



**Reopening of the  
Northampton Square Bandstand**

**Saturday 9th July 2011 at 14.00**

# Programme

14:00	Arrival of guests and afternoon tea
14:30	Musical performance: (members of both groups are <i>alumni</i> of the City University London Music Department) <b>Hampstead String Quartet</b> ‘Spring’ from The Four Seasons – Vivaldi. ‘O mio babbino caro’ from Gianni Schicchi – Puccini. ‘Hungarian Dance’ – Brahms.  <b>Somethin’ Else Ensemble</b> ‘Four’ – Vinson/Davis.
14:35	<b>Welcome by Professor Paul Curran,</b> Vice-Chancellor, City University London  <b>Welcome by Councillor Phil Kelly,</b> The Worshipful the Mayor of Islington
14:55	Ribbon cutting by Professor Curran and Councillor Kelly
15:00	Afternoon tea
16:00	Close

# A short history of Northampton Square and the bandstand

**U**ntil the mid seventeenth century, much of the area known today as Northampton Square was fallow grassland forming part of the Compton estate with the Compton family home on St John Street being the most prominent building in the area.

When the family's head, the Marquess of Northampton, moved the family away from the area at the turn of the sixteenth century, the wider Clerkenwell area was still largely rural. The area where the Square would later be established was flanked by St John Street and Goswell Road, major routes from the north to London's historic centre and the River Thames.



*Image:*  
Northampton House,  
early 19th Century



By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the area had become a centre of the meat trade given its strategic location near the Thames and position downwind of Westminster. Butchers would carry out their work in Clerkenwell before disposing of waste material in the nearby River Fleet, which was still at surface level. Meat and offal were sold in nearby markets and skins were tanned and sold locally as leathers. A late eighteenth century map shows a large skin market located in the area that is now Northampton Square which remained largely unoccupied apart from a few houses.

The years of the industrial revolution witnessed rapid expansion in Clerkenwell. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, new streets were laid out between Goswell Road and St John Street, cutting across the grassland that would later form Northampton Square. It was at this time that Spencer Street was introduced and a large Quaker workhouse and orphanage were built along the north east corner of what was soon to become the Square. In 1827, amidst the urban expansion in the area, the remains of dozens of plague victims were unearthed, having been buried along the line of St John Street. During the plague, the Lord Mayor stopped traders entering the City so trade moved to Clerkenwell instead. The Compton family, which had not occupied the area for some time, turned their former residence on St John Street into a school for girls, the Ladies' Manor School, which remained until the mid-nineteenth century. As the area developed residentially, townhouses were erected in a circular formation around an area of open ground.



In 1832 the Square's gardens were laid out by the incumbent Marquess of Northampton and in 1885, William Compton, the fourth Marquess, opened public gardens in honour of his daughter, Lady Margaret and donated the land to the Clerkenwell Vestry. A large stone fountain commemorating her was erected in the centre of the gardens, the remains of which can still be found in Northampton Square, on the west side of the gardens.

The Square gardens appear to have been well-used by the local community throughout this period and even before the Bandstand was erected, musical performances were a regular feature. Photographs from this time show children playing in the grounds and well-attended public exhibitions, most notably of George Baxter's revolutionary colour prints in 1928.

By 1900 the area was primarily occupied by jewellers and horologists and the upper floors of the townhouses were often used as workshops. Large windows were inserted into many of the houses to allow light into work spaces and many of these aesthetically pleasing features remain today.

*Image (opposite left):  
Northampton Square  
Gardens, 1912 c*

*Images (above right):  
Childrens entertainment  
in the Square, 1950 c*



At this time, City University London's College Building was an established neighbour on the north west side of the Square. Planning began in 1891, with the newly-established Charity Commissioner's report indicating that the College should be designed with 'the buildings required for a hall, a swimming bath, a gymnasium, and for technical and industrial classes, and for such other purposes as may be determined upon.'

The founding committee of the Northampton Institute, which later became City University London, included The Worshipful Company of Skinners and The Worshipful Company of Saddlers, both of whom made considerable financial donations. The Marquess of Northampton and his son the Earl of Compton were listed as benefactors for the donation of the 1¼ acres of land upon which the College Building was erected. The architect E W Mountford, best known for his design of Sheffield Town Hall and the Old Bailey, won the competition to design the building. Construction began in 1894 and the College was opened to the local community in 1896.



During the inter-war years, intense urbanisation led to the loss of many green spaces in Clerkenwell and public health and recreation became important political issues. When, in 1930, Finsbury Borough Council began a campaign to improve public open spaces, Northampton Square, already highly-valued by the community, was a natural choice for enhancement. With the aim of creating a public shelter for ‘those people who mainly for health reasons must have fresh air all year round’ and to allow musical performances, the structure, as we recognise it today, was erected in the centre of the Square. The large fountain which served as the original centre of the Square had to be removed, having become a cause of accidents, presumably due to the large number of children playing near it on a regular basis. On the evening of 17th September 1930, the Public Shelter was opened by the Mayor of Finsbury, Alderman W H Martin, in a ceremony with speeches, hymns and a performance by the Band of the Finsbury Rifles.

Today, the public shelter is London’s last remaining historic Bandstand in a residential square (other London bandstands are found in large parks and commercial areas). It has experienced a resurgence of use for popular entertainment, having become an unofficial venue for regular acoustic performances.

Following the refurbishment of the Bandstand, the Square can again become a popular venue for local community events.

*Image (opposite left):  
Northampton Square,  
towards St John Street.  
Early 20th Century.*

*Image (above right):  
Northampton Square  
bandstand in the snow, 2011*

Refurbishment carried out by Grenville Decorators, managed by Islington Council and funded by City University London.

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