



# Clocking on

The Caledonian Park Clock is ticking again. Mark Smulian talks to Alfie Dennen about how his Stopped Clocks Project got it going

aims to bring public clocks back into use.

The “Cally clock”, as it is known, was built in 1855 by Clerkenwell clockmaker Morris and Sons, when the area now occupied by Caledonian Park and the Market Estate was developed as a livestock market.

Pubs were built on each corner – three of which still stand, though none is in use – and the 151ft clock tower was erected as both a focal point and a means of letting people at the market know the time.

The tower was built from Portland stone with a slate roof to a design by John Bunstone Bunning, architect to the City of London.

The clock survived the wartime bombing that damaged the market and remained ticking off the minutes after the livestock market closed in the postwar years and its bric-a-brac successor shut in 1963. It was grade II\* listed in 1972.

In the mid 1990s, a local



Alfie Dennen: “Public clocks are a symbol of the disconnections between ourselves and our recent past when they served a communal function”

Below: the grade II\* listed clock tower and view from it; opposite page, clockwise from top left: the works; pendulum (in box); setting the time; the weight rises; bell in the tower; steep steps and gears; bevel gears in the clock face room; getting the pendulum moving

An unusual sound will be heard around the Caledonian Road area this summer at the Queen’s diamond jubilee and again when the Olympic games begin.

All being well, the bells of Caledonian Park Clock will ring out as the small group of volunteers who keep the mechanism wound finally get their chance to ring the bells too.

Not long ago, the clock was not merely silent but also failed to tell the right time.

It has been restored to life by artist Alfie Dennen of the Stopped Clocks project, which

volunteer named Jim Burrows took on the task of winding it. When he became unable to continue, winding duties were taken over by officers at a nearby council office but, when their workplace moved, no one was available to take on the task and the clock stopped.

There was nothing wrong the clock itself, which had been restored in 1993 by clock repairer John Smith & Sons, but could anyone be persuaded to ascend a series of steep stairs and ladders once a week and then turn a heavy drum to wind the clock?

This is when Mr Dennen became involved. He is interested in links between art, technology and society and admits he knows little about the mechanics of clocks.

He says: “I think because I run Stopped Clocks people have a notion I am a real horologist, but I’m not.

“My interest is a societal one, as the clocks are objects that reflect the change in culture and





society and are quite a potent symbol of the disconnections between ourselves and our recent past when public clocks served a communal function."

Morris and Sons made the clock sufficiently well that it will run on time for a week after each winding and, beyond "greasing every two or three years", needs little maintenance, Mr Dennen says.

Having convinced the council he could do the job, Mr Dennen became the Cally clock's winder, and makes a weekly visit to do so.

It was an attractive project for Stopped Clocks because, he says: "In majority of cases where clocks have stopped, there is a problem with the mechanism or with the

this clock only needed someone to wind it, which is quite rare."

Health and safety rules mean someone cannot be in the clock tower alone. The *Journal's* visit to accompany Mr Dennen saw the editor and I don high-visibility vests and hard hats and climb up.

Go up a few flights of wooden staircases, and one reaches the clock chamber. Here sits a mid-Victorian turret clock, which looks like three round drums laid next to each other horizontally fixed to a metal frame that bristles with levers and ropes.

Winding the clock involves fitting a large metal handle to a protruding rod then turning the heavy mechanism vigorously until the clock's weight completes its ascent from the ground to the clock chamber.

That done, and the time and pendulum checked, the weight can be left to make its week-long journey back to the ground.

There is more to see, though. Steep wooden steps lead into a chamber between the four clock faces, then an even steeper one goes out onto a terrace that, on a clear day, offers views as far as Alexandra Palace, Docklands, the Crystal Palace transmitter and the Wembley Arch.

The steep stairs mean that, while the tower is occasionally open for events, it cannot generally be opened to the public for safety reasons.

Mr Dennen explains his enthusiasm for the clock: "It is the sense of the clock tower becoming a living thing, an avatar of London itself, that we want to explore.

"Clocks are fascinating not just in their mechanical nature but in how they regulate our understanding of the world, and embody time and memory.

"We're very pleased to have this clock running again." ■

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