

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society AUTUMN 2015



A new townscape for Clapham Junction

Jenny Sheridan looks at Peabody's St John's Hill estate



Behind its high wall fronting onto St John's Hill, the 1930s Peabody Estate seemed (at least to non-residents) to be cut off, a world apart. The estate is now being re-developed and will present a more open aspect with a very welcome clear way all the way through from Clapham Junction Station to Wandsworth Common.

The Battersea Society and many other local organisations recognise the need for more social housing in the borough. Is Peabody providing this?

The old estate comprised 351 homes, the majority at low rent, although Peabody points out that around 30% of tenants were paying market rent. Once the re-development is complete, in 2021, there will be 528 homes. Just 221 of

these will be rented, either at social or affordable levels. Typically, social rents are between 40% and 60% of average private rental prices for the area, affordable are between 60% and 80%. The average commercial rent in Battersea, according to Foxtons, is £2,164 for a two-bedroom flat. So a couple could be paying £1,731 each month for a flat in the Peabody Estate.

Overcrowded

'There is no doubt that the estate needed to be re-built,' says Latchmere ward councillor Simon Hogg. 'When it was built in the 1930s it was a huge improvement on the squalid slums that it replaced. But it isn't up to current standards and many of the flats are very overcrowded. I am particularly

pleased that 30 of the homes for rent will have four bedrooms so they'll be suitable for larger families.

'Only people earning quite a high salary will be able to afford the 'affordable' rents. The problem is that the coalition government reduced the amount they spent on affordable housing and allowed housing associations to make up for some lost income by charging an 'affordable rent'. And the associations need the money to build more housing.'

The 221 new rented homes do not replace the previous number, but were calculated to house approximately the same number of people. All long-term residents have been offered the right to return to a home on the new estate.

There will also be 58 shared

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Don't forget to visit our website: batterseasociety.org.uk for regular updates on Battersea Society news, events and planning matters

From the editor



If there are reasons to be cheerful even about planning (see Monica Tross channelling Ian Dury on page 5) things must be

looking up! While we were putting together the summer issue of *Battersea Matters*, Suzanne Perkins, the designer, said we should change the name of the newsletter to the *Why Oh Why?* as we seemed to complain about everything. So this time we're looking on the bright side.

You have to laugh when you read about the glass swimming pool ten storeys up between two of the new blocks at Nine Elms. Who will laugh louder: the millionaire swimmers in their skyscraping pool or those of us

down on dry land gazing up at their flailing Speedos? Either it's a rather brilliant publicity stunt or the world really has gone barmy.

There is much to welcome in the Peabody scheme for St John's Hill, including opening up the area and new landscaping.

I hope you will be as cheered as I was to hear that Battersea's oak trees will generate forests far away. On Wandsworth Common, near Bolingbroke Academy, a young man was picking acorns. He told me that he is planting woods on two fields that he owns, one in Norfolk and one in Northern Ireland. Our trees, commons and parks are vital homes for wildlife as well as being the city's lungs.

If you have ever seen a stag beetle, you don't forget it. They are impressive creatures. The good news is that while they are very rare in

most of Britain, they are doing well in London, especially south of the river. I had one in my house once. Sadly a friend trod on it while trying not to shut it in the door. So, as the Man on the Bus might say, mind where you go.

At the Northcote Road fete (p16) we were very pleased to welcome five new members to the Battersea Society. We hope they will enjoy their membership.

Significant fact of the day: 70% of all passenger flights are taken by just 15% of UK residents. But all Londoners, particularly those of us in the south-west and west, will suffer if the Heathrow expansion goes ahead.

Sorry, I couldn't keep up the good cheer for long.

Jenny Sheridan
newsletter@batterseasociety.org.uk
020 7350 2749



Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden on tourism, cricket, urban clearance and inclusivity

Being a tourist in London in August seems to be a harrowing affair, when you watch the hordes of visitors thronging the streets and parks. Hardly a smile on anyone's face as they march in search of the next sensation. The city seems to be bulging at the seams but take a detour down a side road, and suddenly peace reigns and London belongs to you again.

Rules of cricket

Of course visitors bring a lot of money into London. Who else would visit a union-jack festooned souvenir shop to buy a plastic police helmet, a Routemaster shaped tin of fudge or a fridge magnet in the shape of a red telephone kiosk? Or those tea-towels explaining the rules of cricket to foreigners: 'When both sides have been in and all the men are out, and both sides have been out twice after all the men have been in, including those who are not out, that is the end of the game!'

Not long ago in Battersea Park on a very warm, sunny Saturday we found a bench in the shade with a cricket match going on in front of us. We were joined by an elegant French lady who got chatting. Though she'd

lived in England for 25 years, nobody had ever explained the rules of the game. Not having a tea-towel to hand, I did my best. She listened, asked a couple of sensible questions, and shrugged 'very like baseball really'. Pretty much the same conclusion reached by American friends.

L P Hartley began *The Go-Between* with: 'The past is another country, they do things differently there.' We felt this after visiting an exhibition at the Photographers' Galley. In the sixties and seventies Shirley Baker recorded the lives of the working class people of Salford and Manchester who were being disrupted and displaced by the juggernaut of urban clearance. The adults usually stare back stoically, while the children strike cheerily defiant poses against the backdrop of crumbling and condemned houses and rubble strewn wastelands.

The poorer areas of London or any other big city at the same time would look much the same. The Clean Air Acts are not yet in force and children's hands and faces are begrimed, clothes filthy. Of course there are still real problems of poverty and exclusion today, but we should celebrate how far we have come since

those days.

We actually visited Manchester recently, and took our grandchildren aged seven and five to the Museum of Science and Technology. Their favourite bits were (naturally) the excellent café and a talk on the history of the bicycle by a couple of 'explainers' – two young ladies who had developed a very funny double act. At one point one of them said to the avidly watching children that they should 'ask their grown-up'. Some might call that political correctness, but it dawned on me that changes like this are all in the name of inclusivity – not leaving out children whose parent might be temporarily or permanently absent. St Mary's Church has adopted this position in the posters for its forthcoming fair* – claiming that there will be 'fun for everyone'. It means essentially the same thing as 'all the family', but so much more. More progress.

That's it for now. Mind how you go...

**Make a note of the date of the fair, Saturday 19 September. Those running the Battersea Society stall could always do with a bit more help!*



ownership homes, in which the occupants buy a share in their home and rent the remainder.

The other 249 homes are for private sale and are being marketed at prices from £530,000 for a one-bedroom flat to over £1million.

The blocks will be mixed tenure. Peabody says, 'By mixing up the tenancies within the scheme we can avoid the current situation of a large socially rented estate being isolated in the centre of a community dominated by private home ownership. There is no difference

in the location or visual appearance of the blocks externally. The greater mix will allow us to cross-subsidise the social rents and to comply with Wandsworth's planning requirements.'

Garden

Some welcome new features include a new road, St John's Way, which will run through the estate. A community centre will be built, with a multi-purpose hall. There will be a new public square, a wildflower garden and play spaces for children. Shops (or at least 'retail units') will enliven the frontage along St John's Hill.

The government has announced that the Right to Buy is to be extended from councils to housing associations. Lord Bob Kerslake, Peabody's new chairman, made clear

his views on the policy in an article in *The Independent* on 2 June:

'These are not the government's assets to sell. The state should not compel private organisations to sell their assets. The policy will also make it even more difficult for economically and socially mixed communities to thrive and survive in inner London. Based on the experience of council house sales, around a third of the properties sold will end up as privately let market rent homes, with higher turnover and less, not more, cohesive communities.'

Phase 1 of the development is due to be completed in summer 2016. It comprises 80 social rented and six shared ownership homes plus 67 for private sale. The whole scheme is due for completion in 2021.

Banana Park to be peeled?

Should there be an all-weather pitch in Falcon Park?

Jenny Sheridan looks at the arguments

Two passionate campaigns are being waged in north Battersea. Roughly, they can be characterised as much-loved local park vs much-loved local sports centre, but of course the story is more complex than that. It goes something like this:

Redeveloped

Wandsworth Council are going to redevelop the Winstanley Estate. They need to move residents out while the building works go on. Battersea Sports Centre, on Hope Street, west of Plough Road, seemed to provide an appropriate site. The council proposed to demolish it and build 90 socially rented flats: the first residents would be tenants decanted from the Winstanley Estate. The Conservative majority on the council argued that alternative sports provision was available at Caius House (*Battersea Matters* summer 2014) and the Latchmere Leisure Centre and that in time a brand new sports centre will be built on the redeveloped estate. They also promised a new all-weather

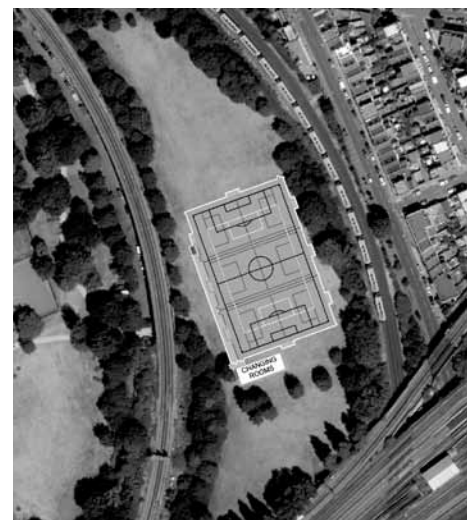
football pitch for Falcon Park.

Labour councillors opposed the closure of the sports centre, which is scheduled for April 2016. Their argument that the sports centre is a well-used facility in one of Battersea's most deprived areas is backed by a Facebook campaign by centre users. Labour also points out that new developments in and around York Road will bring in thousands of new residents and more sports facilities will be needed.

Falcon Park (locally known as Banana Park) was created in the early 1960s after bomb-damaged streets close to the railways were demolished. Unsurprisingly, the proposal to build an all-weather pitch was not greeted with cries of joy by local people. The pitch would be surrounded by a five metre tall chain-link fence, changing rooms would be built and much of the park's open space would be destroyed.

Tightrope

The park consists of a large grass area surrounded by trees, including wild plum and cherry, and blackthorn and hawthorn bushes. Quiet during the day apart from a few joggers and parents pushing buggies, after work it is used by informal groups playing rounders or football or walking their dogs. Angela Grant, one of the protesters, regularly walks her Cairn



The proposed site of the football pitch

terrier there. 'There's even a group that practise a form of tightrope walking here,' she says, 'lots of people come and play kick-about football or rugby and it's all free. They would have to pay to play on the new pitch. Yes, the grass does get waterlogged so they can't play then, but surely it would be better to improve the drainage than to spend £1.3 million on something that will destroy this lovely green space.' The residents of the new flats near the river will want green spaces as well as sports pitches, she points out.

The Council's planning application for the new pitch has been withdrawn while a consultation exercise is carried out.

Bi-planes in Battersea and the woman who built them

Gail Hewlett, her daughter-in-law, discusses the life of Hilda Hewlett (1864-1943)

Born a Victorian, daughter of a clergyman, Hilda B Hewlett broke the rules of her time. Not only did she become the first Englishwoman to gain a pilot's licence (in 1911, at the age of 47), but she established an aircraft manufacturing company in partnership with a Frenchman.

Hilda was one of six daughters and one son born to Louisa and George Herbert. Father Herbert, as he liked to be called, was the first incumbent of St Peter's, Vauxhall, a church that has recently celebrated 150 years in its community. Wealthy himself (his father had been a successful builder and developer), Father Herbert devoted 34 years of his life to his desperately poor parish. The girls of the family were all educated at home by French and German governesses and all were brought up to believe in service and duty.

Tomboy

Hilda was a tomboy. Petite, energetic, quick-spoken and daring, she enchanted Maurice Hewlett the moment he met her. In Mrs Herbert's eyes his prospects as a barrister specialising in antiquarian law did not recommend him as a son-in-law, nevertheless Hilda and Maurice were married in her father's church in January 1888.

Domestic matters bored Hilda most dreadfully, but she was more than happy to use her ingenuity and many artistic talents – painting, needlework, woodwork, copperwork – to decorate their flat. And she encouraged Maurice in his ambition to be a poet. Against all expectations, it was a historical romance called *The Forest Lovers* which made Maurice an overnight success: he became a full-time writer.

The Hewletts had been early and enthusiastic cyclists, but their increased wealth through Maurice's writing allowed Hilda to become a serious motorist. She learnt how an engine worked and could diagnose, if not always cure, a problem, and acted as a mechanic to a Miss Hind driving a Singer tri-car in two long-distance motor trials.

A number of aviation pioneers had first been keen motorists: it seemed a natural progression. Somewhere, sometime (she never explained), Hilda met Gustave Blondeau, a French engineer passionately interested in flying and, in September 1909, they went together to Britain's first International Flying Meeting in Blackpool.

The moment Hilda saw the space between the muddy grass of the flying field and Louis Paulhan's skimpy little machine of wood, canvas and wires grow and grow, as he lifted into the air, she was transfixed. 'I wanted to cry, or laugh, but I could not move or think, I could only look with all my other faculties dead and useless. Something inside me felt it must burst'. From that moment her life changed dramatically, although she could never have foreseen by how much.

Pseudonym

In January 1910, using the pseudonym Mrs Grace Bird to save herself and Maurice from unwanted publicity, Hilda went to the flying school at Camp Mourmelon in France. She had raised enough money to buy a Henry Farman bi-plane on which Blondeau learnt to fly: the rules were only one pupil per machine bought. 'Mrs Bird' did, however, experience flying as a passenger.

Returning to the UK and her married name, Mrs Hewlett and Blondeau opened a flying school in the growing aviation village in the motor-racing track of Brooklands, Weybridge. Two years after she had first dreamed of owning and flying an aircraft, Hilda gained her licence. Three months later her son, Lieutenant F Hewlett RN, who she had taught to fly, also won his licence.

Construction

Now the Battersea stage of her aviation adventure began. The partners decided to go into aircraft construction and managed to find large enough premises in Vardens Road, near Clapham Junction. Hewlett & Blondeau Ltd built a



Hilda Hewlett aka Grace Bird

number of planes during their two years in Battersea, including both monoplanes and biplanes, for customers including the Royal Navy. With the advent of WWI and the need for bigger premises to produce more aircraft, the company moved to Bedfordshire where they produced 800 aircraft for the Ministry of Munitions. Hilda organised and ran a very successful training school within the factory for the women who replaced men called up for duty.

Like so many other aircraft manufacturers after the war, Hewlett & Blondeau eventually went into liquidation; the premises were sold six years later in 1927.

As a widow (Maurice had died in 1923) and without any other ties, Hilda emigrated to New Zealand, where she settled in Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty in the North Island. Her son and daughter also emigrated and Cecco, as her son was always known, was active with Hilda in pioneering aviation in Tauranga. Hewletts Road near the airport was named in recognition of their work.

Further reading:

Old Bird:

The Irrepressible Mrs Hewlett, Gail Hewlett, available from Amazon

A Battersea Society plaque to Hilda Hewlett will be unveiled at 10.30 am, 19 September 2015 at 4 Vardens Road, SW11

The stars come out for war veterans

Simon Callow (pictured), Timothy West and Clive Merrison will commemorate Wandsworth's involvement in the First World War, in a words and music production on Armistice Day.

The Woods Cry Out is a reflection on the borough's part in the war, including the Pals' Battalion. It will

include poems by both British and German poets. Works by Edward Thomas, who lived in Battersea, will be included, along with poems written by patients and staff at the Royal Victoria Patriotic Hospital. Music by Edward Elgar as well as popular music of the period will also feature.

Sue Rolfe, the producer, formerly presented the Putney Debates exhibition and events at St Mary's Putney. She says, 'I am passionate



about the power of poetry and music. I have long been deeply immersed in the poetry of World War One and I felt inspired to present a programme that could shed a new light and compassion on experiences shared by soldiers across the world.'

The event, which will be held in the Wandsworth Civic Suite on 11 and 12 November 2015, is in aid of SSAFA, the charity supporting war veterans and their families.

Tickets available from Tara Arts www.tara-arts.com or 020 8333 4457

Planning Matters: Monica Tross echoes Ian Dury's 'Reasons to be cheerful one two three'

1 It might seem odd to celebrate the **Council's Supplementary Planning Document** about which we are so critical. We consider it reads as a post hoc policy justification for decisions taken over the past two to three years.

However the consultation process did bring some cheer. For one thing, a number of members took the trouble to come to meet us at the exhibition at York Gardens or sent comments by email. This encouraged us at the start of the time-consuming process of compiling our response – which you can see in full on the Battersea Society's website. And we were delighted to see that St Mary's Park councillors share some of our concerns, not least about the traffic pressures – their response is on the Council's consultation portal. We must now wait to see the outcome of the consultation. Given that Linden Homes, the developers, are submitting plans for the Lookers site including buildings up to 17 storeys, we fear that good cheer may evaporate before long.

2 Vista building, Queenstown Road: We have been generally supportive of this development of the site of the former quirky QVC building, apart from the height. We have consistently opposed this right from the very first exhibition of outline plans and the subsequent (approved) application 2011/2089, now being built. We were surprised that the developer thought they might get even more density from the site by adding four storeys to one of the buildings, 2015/1218. The Council's

Planning Application Committee agreed with us and the Friends of Battersea Park (amongst many others) and refused the application.

3 For those of us north of Clapham Junction the **Curzon Chelsea Cinema** in the Kings Road is probably our nearest cinema. We joined with colleagues in the Chelsea Society to oppose plans by Cadogan Estates which would have greatly diminished the size – and the viability – of the cinema. Happily Cadogan have put in revised plans which meet not just concerns about the cinema, but the need to retain the Trafalgar pub and other elements of the frontage onto the King's Road. The Chelsea Society has written to RBK&C to support these plans.

LOCAL PLAN

We submitted comments on the plans to the Inspector and participated in the hearings. You can see these on our website under Planning Consultations. It is with a sinking heart that I read that the Council is now going to revise sections of the Local Plan and there will be a further consultation process, probably in October. We think we should take the trouble to comment but it does seem as if we are painting the Forth Bridge in words. And by the time this plan is finally approved I guess WBC will be consulting on their new Local Plan.

OTHER UPDATES

Tesco at the former Prince of Wales have put in more inappropriate applications, 2015/3533 and 3484

.We have objected to both, as we have to yet further changes proposed to 1 Prince of Wales Drive – 2015/3384. There is an application to demolish the estate agent building at 1 Queens Circus and replace it with a house. We and many others have objected, 2015/1244. The lighting plan for the Salesian School games area has been approved, 2015/3413, without any acknowledgement that we had objected to the lack of information about the impact on neighbours. Finally 2015/3758 is an attempt to shoe-horn a building onto a tiny site backing on to 240 Battersea Bridge Road. We and neighbours have objected.

The implications of Crossrail 2, as forecast in the spring issue of *Battersea Matters*, are now directly affecting Battersea even though its possible construction is many years away. TfL have published maps showing corridors which are safeguarded against major development to protect the likely route. This has had a significant impact on plans for the early redevelopment of the Bramlands area as part of plans to regenerate the Winstanley estate.

Do let us know if you'd like us to check out a planning application. We put our comments on larger applications, and those of particular interest (such as that for 1 Queens Circus), on the Society's website. Any comments to planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

*Lookers/Lombard Road exhibition: 3 October, 10am – 2pm
York Gardens Library*

Levitation on Clapham Common doesn't end well

Janice Morphet introduces us to Barbara Comyns and a 'gothic' book set in Battersea



The Vet's Daughter by Barbara Comyns (1959) is set in Edwardian Battersea and has been described as both a

gothic and a magical realist novel. It was very popular when it was published and Comyns' most successful book. In 1978, the novel formed the basis of a musical *The Clapham Wonder* directed by Sandy Wilson of *The Boyfriend*. The novel has been reprinted a number of times, most recently by Virago in 1981, and has been read on the BBC.

Mongoose

The narrative focuses on a vet who buys a practice in Glenmore Terrace, Battersea with his wife's money after their marriage in north Wales. He had never been to Battersea until he arrived to take up the practice and he is disappointed with what he finds. He takes out his disappointment on his wife and daughter, Alice. Both are badly treated and beaten. Alice is forced to look after the menagerie of animals that is kept at the house from the parrot in the lavatory to the mongoose in the kitchen.

The practice is set close to the railway arches, serving to provide a constricting boundary to Alice's life not a means of escape. After her mother dies of cancer, seventeen year old Alice is subjected to further ignominy by her father as he invites a local barmaid, Rosa, to live with them as a 'housekeeper' and later as her stepmother. In her efforts to remove Alice from the household, Rosa tries to find her a partner from the local pub leading to her near rape and mental breakdown. Alice is described as being in a state of constant fear.

Following this episode Alice finds that she can remove herself from all that is going on around her by levitating at will. Her father and Rosa discover this and eventually attempt to exploit Alice in a public display on Clapham Common. Her journey there along Lavender Hill and Cedars Road is full of trepidation. The event ends badly and concludes the novel.

'hot, ugly streets of red and yellow houses'

Although Comyns wrote about Battersea and knew it well she never lived here. Now she is better known now for her earlier book *Our Spoons Came from Woolworths* (1950). Like Alice, Comyns had a harsh upbringing and a sketchy education that is described in this and her other book *Sisters by a River* (1947) which have both recently been re-published. She eventually won a scholarship to the Heatherley Art School when it was in central London, trained as an artist until her money ran out, became a member of the London group in the thirties and knew Augustus John and Dylan Thomas.

After divorce from her first husband, she rented out residential properties and sold vintage cars. In 1945 she married Richard Comyns Carr, who worked in the same section of MI6 as the spy Kim Philby, and was a good friend of his. Richard and Barbara had their honeymoon in the Philbys' holiday home in Snowdonia. While they were there Barbara got the

idea for *The Vet's Daughter* but did not return to it until much later.

When they were first married the Carrs lived in Kensington but Philby's dismissal from MI6, after the Burgess and Maclean affair in 1951, also led to Carr's dismissal from the service. Barbara described this to fellow writer, Jane Gardam: 'They said that either he must have known and therefore was a traitor or that he hadn't spotted it and therefore must have been a fool'.

Battersea move

As Carr was only a temporary civil servant this left them with few financial resources. The Kensington house was sold and after many attempts to find work and a new house, including one in Battersea (it was 'the wrong side of the river'), the Carrs moved to Spain to reduce their living costs. This period is captured in Comyn's autobiographical book *Out of the Red into the Blue* (1960).

Unsurprisingly Barbara had difficulty in getting some of her books published as prospective publishers perceived them as being too gloomy. Although we do not know why Barbara had the idea for the plot of *The Vet's Daughter* and there is no Glenmore Terrace in Battersea, Gladstone Terrace off Battersea Park Road may have been a model for this street and the location of this strange novel. Were there any vets located there?

Comyn mentions in *The Vet's Daughter* walking in Battersea Park... 'We watched the pleasure-steamers and barges on the river... it was lovely by the water; but too soon it was time to return home through the hot, ugly streets of red and yellow houses'

Fun at George Potter House

The Friends of George Potter Nursing Home was set up by relatives and friends of residents of the nursing home to enhance the environment and activities in the home. We have held table top sales

and provided a chicken coop.

Our next project to provide a wheelchair path and shelter for the garden is under way.

On Saturday 19 September from 2 - 4 pm there will be a Community Fun Day. All are invited. Stall holders are especially welcome. For a free table, contact Mac Downes on 07715131813

We welcome people to join the Friends (no charge). We also welcome donations.

Friends of George Potter
c/o George Potter Nursing Home
130 Battersea High Street
London SW11 3JR
georgepotterfriends.org

Car, bus, bike and foot: how should we travel locally?

Robert Molteno looks at the future of transport in our borough

Facts can be a big turn off, I know. But what about these? The number of road traffic collisions involving injury rose 13% across London in 2014, compared with the previous year. More pedestrians were killed than all other deaths on the city's roads. Traffic congestion is likely to rise 25% in Inner London. In Wandsworth, the number of people injured on our roads rose to 1,124 people last year.

That's the background against which Cllr Jonathan Cook, deputy leader of the Council, spoke at a packed meeting of Wandsworth Living Streets (WLS). He pointed out that the number of people living in the borough will rise to a third of a million in ten years' time. Many of the additional residents will want to bring cars with them, but we simply cannot take much more traffic on our roads. (Two-thirds of the vehicles on Wandsworth roads are private cars.) There are only two ways to go – expand public transport and get more people walking or cycling short trips.

Crossings

Councillor Cook painted an optimistic picture of what Wandsworth is doing – its Road Safety Strategy, its new Cycling Strategy, and its plans to transform stretches of Lavender Hill, Balham High Road and Tooting Broadway. He pointed to the successful changes at Clapham Junction and outside Wandsworth Town Station.

The Wandsworth Gyratory will go by 2019, provided local residents agree to the plans later this year. It will be replaced by a people-friendly and commercially vibrant local town centre.

The Council also wants better street crossings, and is open to residents pointing out where additional crossings are needed. It is all making a difference, he argued. Already we make nearly a third of all our journeys on foot. And the share of trips by bike has crept up to 5%, while

the proportion by car is falling slightly.

Cllr Cook was followed by Dave Irwin, an urban planner and member of Wandsworth Living Streets. His starting point was that today 36% of all trips in Wandsworth are still done in a car (above the London average of only 24%). What's more, the average distance of these car journeys is only 1.5 miles. He then presented WLS's policy proposals on the future of transport in Wandsworth entitled *Can we do better than this?* wandsworthlivingstreets.org.uk/vision-statement

Safer cycling

Three messages for the Council stood out. First, they could be much more active in making life for walkers and cyclists safer, easier and more attractive. They could discourage car ownership and use through various measures, including higher parking charges (a resident's parking permit costs just 44 pence a day!) Dave Irwin also advocated the Council encouraging more mixed use developments providing business near housing, so that fewer people have to travel far for work.

Secondly, the Council should pay serious attention to maximizing the health benefits flowing from a different approach to transport. The potential gains are huge: fewer people killed and injured; less obesity; improved air quality; less noise, a pleasanter street environment. A move away from polluting and noisy diesel vehicles. On this latter point, the Council has already persuaded Transport for London to replace its diesel buses on Putney High Street; we need them phased out on all our borough's roads. The Council could also discourage us from buying diesel cars in future by charging much more for a resident's parking permit for such vehicles.

And thirdly, the Council must bear in mind that some streets do not exist primarily to facilitate movement. They

exist as places – locations where people shop, work, socialise. Just think of how Northcote Road or St John's Hill have been transformed in recent years. Streets like that (and what other streets would you recommend for such a transformation in Battersea?) need to be treated in a wholly different way from other roads – more street trees, wider pavements, occasional benches for people to sit on, more cycle parking, a lower speed limit of 20mph, pavements continuing across side roads where they join the street, and a treatment of the carriageway that signals to everyone that people have priority.

Of course we need to move around our borough and travel to Central London and further out. The real question is how we do it. We are privileged, compared to other cities in Britain, to have a superb public transport system. We can do our health a lot of good walking the short trips, and cycling. What we cannot do is continue to use private cars for short journeys. The congestion caused is unfair to the buses, commercial vehicles and emergency services that have to use the roads.

Urgency

The sheer number of private cars poisons the air we all breathe. And the current tumult of traffic makes the public realm we use for local shopping, socialising, and getting to work noisy, polluted and thoroughly unpleasant. I think the Council has 'got' this. But we residents can help councillors develop a greater sense of urgency and more imagination in transforming our streets. We all value the quality of life in our borough. Changing how we move around it can make a big difference.

Robert Molteno is secretary, Wandsworth Living Streets
www.wandsworthlivingstreets.org



Great Bus Journeys of the World No 15

The G1 from Battersea to Streatham. Mike Roden goes on a very long tour of South London suburbia



The G1 route starts in the middle of the Shaftesbury Estate on Wickersley Road. The bus is waiting to set off as I arrive, and the driver announces that because of roadworks he will be taking a diversion – missing out Lavender Hill and St John’s Road.

The market gardens of the early nineteenth century were replaced by this estate in the 1870s. Designed by William Austin it was built by the ‘Artizans, Labourers and General Dwelling Company’, supported by the philanthropist Lord Shaftesbury who laid the foundation stone in 1872. Eventually around 1,200 houses were completed, providing healthy and affordable housing for working people.

The roadworks mean we see nothing of Lavender Hill as from Latchmere Road the bus heads down to Clapham Common and then back up to Battersea Rise, where it gets back on track by turning left down Northcote Road.

Stained glass

I’d been told by a fellow member how circuitous a route this was, and this becomes clear as reaching the end of Northcote Road, we turn left up the largely residential Broomwood Road. Standing out among the Edwardian villas I spot a corner shop called Stained Glass. Marc and Mary Eady have been here at this former dairy shop since 1980. In the late 1980s things took off for them when interest in Victorian architecture surged with people wanting to replace the original stained glass. The Eadys have always kept the business small, generating just enough work for the two of them, and still remain very much hands on.

Back at the Common, the Avenue takes us in the direction of Clapham South station. This is one of eight London Underground stations with a deep-level air-raid shelter underneath. In 1948, the Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury carrying 492 Jamaicans who had been encouraged to emigrate by the Colonial Office to help with London’s chronic labour shortage. Accommodation was also in short supply and many of these new arrivals were initially housed in this deep-level shelter. A pleasant welcome to England...

Oak Lodge

On Nightingale Lane the bus stops near the entrance to Oak Lodge School a residential and day school for boys and girls aged 11–19 who have hearing, speech, language and communication needs. The school was first established by the LCC in 1905 as a boarding school for deaf girls, and concentrated mostly on preparing the pupils for life as servants and domestic workers. In 1968 a new school was opened on the same site. By now deaf children were taking and passing examinations in academic subjects. Oak Lodge today is very different. Twelve of the twenty-five teachers and nine of the fifteen teaching assistants are themselves deaf, more than in any other school for deaf children in Britain.

Crossing Trinity Road a left turn off Burntwood Road takes us through the grounds of the London Golf Centre and into Springfield Hospital, the headquarters of the South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust. This opened in 1840 as the Surrey County Pauper

Lunatic Asylum. It eventually had 83 acres of farmland where male patients were employed to provide food for the institution. When the hospital joined the NHS, the days of the farm were numbered, and by 1955 the land had been disposed of – the golf centre stands on part of it. At its heyday the hospital had 2000 patients but now has fewer than 300 inpatients, in modern accommodation, and there is a greater emphasis on outpatient clinics and support services. Much of the original hospital building is now disused, and various plans have been proposed for their development. That is another story.

The bus waits briefly near the main hospital building and then we head back to Burntwood Lane and pass Burntwood School, first built in the 1950s on land previously belonging to Springfield Hospital. The school which converted to academy status in 2013, is now housed in new buildings, after the completion of a £40m project. The school was a RIBA London award winner earlier this year. It is an impressive complex (see p16).

After a brief visit to St George’s Grove, through many new apartment buildings, many of which have been developed as affordable housing for those working at nearby St George’s Hospital we find ourselves on Garratt Lane passing Streatham Cemetery. This opened in the late nineteenth century to serve the needs of the expanding Tooting and Streatham. In the early part of the 20th century it is estimated that 20 per cent of South London’s burials took place in Streatham Park Cemetery. I haven’t been able to track down any famous (or indeed notorious) inmates of the



Sights to see: A flowery frontage, Shaftesbury Estate; West Indians in Clapham South deep shelter; Streatham Cemetery; Edward VII, Tooting Broadway; Totterdown Estate when newly built; drinking fountain, Streatham Green

place, other than the singer Dorothy Squires, who was once married to Roger Moore. Several times bankrupted, she died in 1998.

Vast

At Fountain Road we take yet another detour from the main road into the vast complex of St George's University Hospital, now one of the largest teaching hospitals in the country. Founded in 1733, its original site was in Lanesborough House at Hyde Park Corner. In 1948, when it became part of the NHS, plans for a new site in Tooting were eventually agreed upon, and the Grove Hospital became part of St George's. A new medical school opened here in 1976, and the Hyde Park site finally closed its doors in 1980. One of its last patients was the novelist Hilary Mantel who has written movingly of her personally devastating treatment there in 1979 for endometriosis. The building still stands and is now the Lanesborough Hotel on the west side of Hyde Park Corner.

The G in G1 stands for George's and this route was specifically created to bring patients to and from this hospital, and it duly drops off a few as we meander through the massive site, and picks up a couple more, before we join the main road, and head down into Tooting. We have not finished yet!

Tooting Broadway Station, with an imposing statue of Edward VII alongside, is a grade II listed station which opened in 1926 and was designed by Charles Holden as part of the extension of the City and South London Railway from Clapham Common to Morden, built by the Underground Electric Railway

Company of London (UERL). It was Holden's first major project for the Underground. These stations are branded with the roundel which had been adopted by UERL, and later became London Transport's logo.

Turning right into Mitcham Road, a long bustling row of shops, takeaways and the occasional pub gives way to the quiet residential suburbia of the rather narrow Church Lane. After a few hundred yards Lessingham Avenue appears on the left. This is part of the Totterdown Estate, one of the first LCC housing estates and is heavily influenced by the Garden City movement. The houses have many Arts and Craft features – big gables, Tudor style chimneys, single and double storey bay windows and a range of door styles and porch designs. 1,229 houses were built in the period 1903 to 1911, but no places of work were built nearby and residents had to rely on the electric trams which ran along Upper Tooting Road to get them to and from work.

Listed

Eventually we arrive at the main road alongside Tooting Bec Common, passing the Lido on the way. We arrive at Streatham High Road and journey's end approaches as we pass Streatham Green with its distinctive grade II listed drinking fountain designed by William Dyce in 1862.

We reach Streatham Station and though the final stop is another four minutes away I disembark. I have been entertained by south London's suburbs for quite long enough. I started just before ten o'clock, and it is now 11.15. Needless to say I do not use the G1 for my journey home.

I have now travelled the routes of all the buses that have any meaningful connection with Battersea. There is only so much you can say about Lavender Hill, or Falcon Road. However, I am planning a new series of journeys, using (mostly) buses, but sometimes trams or trains. Watch this space.

All the journeys can be found in the online version of *Battersea Matters*.

19 Battersea Bridge – Finsbury Park *Autumn 2011*

49 Battersea Rise – White City *Spring 2012*

344 Clapham Junction – Liverpool Street *Summer 2012*

170 Victoria – Roehampton *Autumn 2012*

345 South Kensington – Peckham *Winter 2012*

87 from Clapham Junction to Aldwych *Spring 2013*

295 Falcon Road – Ladbrooke Grove *Summer 2013*

C3 Falcon Road – Earls Court *Winter 2013*

319 Sloane Square – Streatham Hill *Spring 2014*

137 Streatham Hill – Oxford Street *Summer 2014*

337 Battersea Rise to Richmond *Winter 2014*

35 Battersea Rise – Shoreditch *Spring 2015*

452 Wandsworth Road – Kensal Rise *Summer 2015*

G1 Wickersley Road – Streatham

Autumn 2014 was a trip on the **Overground** between Clapham Junction and Clapham Junction via Willesden and Canary Wharf.

*written by Jenny Sheridan

How clean is your plaice?

Fish that is both sustainable and ultra-fresh is the aim of Faircatch. Jenny Sheridan reports.

Buying fish is a problem for those of us who like to eat ethically as well as deliciously. Over-fishing is a global problem, with dire warnings that the oceans will be empty of fish in a few decades. Despite the successful campaign fronted by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, too many fish are still thrown back into the sea dead. Large-scale fishing by huge trawlers can plough up the sea floor and also frequently catches mammals such as dolphins. Fish-farming depends on the use of myriads of small fry to feed the bigger fish. Recently there have been horrifying stories of Thai fishing fleets using slave labour. According to Greenpeace, Marks and Spencer is the only supermarket reliably selling sustainable fish.

On the edibility front, things are almost as bad. Much supermarket 'fresh' fish may be up to 14 days old by the time it reaches the consumer.

Fresh

What is the answer for fish-lovers? Perhaps it lies in the equivalent of the veg box: the community-supported fishery. The idea is a new one in the UK, but Guy Dorrell and Ilona Stedman, who live in Earlsfield, have brought it to Wandsworth. Faircatch was launched early this year. Members of the scheme commit upfront to buy a certain amount of fish every week or fortnight for a minimum of eight weeks. The fish is sparkling fresh, often having been caught a mere six hours before. Its carbon footprint is far smaller than buying from a supermarket.

Every Friday members pick up their fish from a depot – in Battersea at present it is the Draft House on Northcote Road. Guy hopes to extend the scheme to north Battersea at the Draft House Westbridge, on Battersea Bridge Road. He also hopes to start home delivery in 2016.

Members pay from £50 for a weekly package of 0.75kg of fish over a four-week season (a number

of other options are also available). Usually the fish has been gutted and scaled, though sometimes customers will do this themselves.

Small boats

Guy says, 'We decided on the name Faircatch because fairness is at the heart of the enterprise – a fair price for both members and fishermen, and fair to our local marine resources in the English Channel closest to us – Dover and Wight for those of you who follow the Shipping Forecast.'

The fish is caught by small day boats working out of the traditional fishing ports of Newhaven and Hastings. They use environmentally friendly nets which generate much less waste than factory trawlers. Guy and his family know the fishermen personally and they are part of a profit-sharing agreement.

Members cannot plan in advance what fish they will be eating for supper: as with a veg box, part of the fun is finding new things to eat. The fish box may include gurnard, flounder and huss as well as the better known dover sole, herring and

breem. Part of Faircatch's mission is to persuade people to try different species. Eating a wider range of fish takes pressure off the more popular species such as cod, so can help fish stocks recover.

This method of delivering food avoids waste. Guy points out that Faircatch buys only the exact amount of fish that members have ordered, so no stock is held and there is zero waste in the supply chain, in contrast to the considerable levels of wastage in the traditional retail model. 'If any members forget to pick up their fish, our kids eat it!' he adds.

Faircatch is keen to promote the idea of sustainability and of connecting people to the food they eat. Guy runs interactive workshops for primary schools, in which the children get to handle the fish. He says, 'We really want to help children get a better understanding of how a fish gets to their plate and provide them with a stronger connection with the source of their food. We hope that many primary schools across the borough will sign up to these sessions.'

www.faircatch.co.uk

If anyone in north Battersea is interested, go to the Register your interest section on the website.

**Above: A wider variety of fish
Below: Gutting fish at sea**



Sound and fury

Sara Milne and Jenny Sheridan follow up the Formula E story

Sara Milne, chairman of the Battersea Society, writes: Formula E, love it or hate it, has been the cause of many an emotive email and heated discussion over the past few months. For those of us who lived with it on our doorsteps the build up and take down period seemed to last forever. We looked on helplessly as intimidating steel barricades and high rise fencing were erected and our freedom of movement become more and more restricted. Even those in favour of the event hadn't quite realised the scale of disruption there would be.

Feedback

The next stage in the Formula E story is the Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that takes place on 22 September. It's at this meeting that Wandsworth Borough Council (WBC) will review feedback from parties involved in the event, including representations from community groups such as the Battersea Society and Friends of Battersea Park. Following discussion with members of the Committee a recommendation will be made as to whether WBC should use the break clause to terminate the agreement with Formula E or continue for another four years.

To ensure that our feedback to WBC is a true reflection of our members' feelings and points of views on Formula E, we carried out an online survey after the event.

Over 200 people took part. 40% were Battersea Society members, 23% were Friends of Battersea Park and 12% were members of local community groups or residents

associations.

Initial results show that many people had concerns about the build-up to the event. Access within the park topped the list with 96%, followed by safety for pedestrians 76% and noise and hours of work 60%.

For those that didn't go to Formula E – 68% did not attend the event – helicopter noise affected 89% of locals closely followed by general noise and disruption 64% and litter 42%. For those that did attend 60% thought it was well organised and safe, 50% would think about going again if the event was on next year, 49% thought it was a good day out and 43% thought it great family entertainment.

However, 69% felt that staging such a high profile event was not worth the disruption to the park and 60% saw no benefit at all in holding Formula E in Battersea Park.

These survey results will be included in the Battersea Society's submission to WBC.

Jenny Sheridan sums up some other responses: The Friends of Battersea Park are also committed to continuing their opposition to Formula E, as their members were two to one against the continuation. The main concerns were that the event was inappropriate for a Grade II listed park, the build-up was dangerous and polluting and it was unacceptable to close most of the park for four days in June.

Some other comments to the Battersea Society include: 'We feed those magnificent creatures, the herons, almost every day. On some of the days leading up to and

following the closure we were unable to gain access to the lakeside.'

'I enjoy motor-racing (and have attended Grand Prix in the past), but it is clear to me that the park is not an appropriate place to race.'

'To give preference, during two glorious sunny weeks, not to local park users but to the demands of commercial entertainment and sport is a shocking switch of priorities, away from everything that such a beautiful and much loved park is for.'

'We saw the schools race their electric vehicles – would love to know if they made them themselves, which would be a good project. We joined the relaxed crowd wandering amongst the various alternative energy-themed purveyors. The actual race we did not find terribly interesting. There is constant commentary and loud music with a heavy beat, briefly and intermittently interrupted by the altogether more subtle whoosh of the cars.'

'It was dishonest, indeed hypocritical to sell it under a 'green motoring' banner. There were 300 deliveries before the event, and the barriers were manoeuvred into place by cranes and diesel forklifts. Running such events may contribute to enhanced electronic car technology which will spin off into the car market as a whole, but this will happen whether or not the event takes place in Battersea.'

'I went to the event in the park, and thought it was great. Not much noise from the cars, the area seemed nice and clean, all the stewards were helpful and also respectful of the park. I'd be happy to see it happening again. The only downside was the noise of the helicopters'



Taking Wandsworth's pulse

Hiliwona Soloman describes the work of Healthwatch Wandsworth

Healthwatch Wandsworth is the local consumer champion for health and social care, working to help people shape their own health and social care service commissioning and delivery. What does this mean in practice?

What we do is capture the views and experiences of local people who use health and social care services, and feed these views back to senior managers in health, social care and local government.

We are now in our third year of existence, having taken over the consumer champion role from our predecessor, the Local Involvement Network (LINK).

Vital

Between April and June 2015 we collected the views and experiences of 250 local people at 24 outreach sessions in and around Wandsworth. A very important aspect of our role is making these views known to the service providers and commissioners. In the last three months alone we were able to speak up for patients on the 36 groups, forums and committees that we sit on.

Our Information & Signposting Service and the work of our Enter & View Team are two essential tools that enable us to help people to access services, feedback their experience and monitor the quality of publicly funded services.

An active team of volunteers plays a vital part in our work. We currently have 20 Healthwatch representatives who speak up on behalf of the patients and public in Wandsworth, influencing some of the key bodies involved in the commissioning and delivery of services. These include:

- Health and Wellbeing Board of Wandsworth Council
- St George's Hospital,
- South London Mental Health Trust
- Department of Education and Social Services (DESS)
- Wandsworth Clinical Commissioning Group (WCCG)

Our nine authorised representatives who volunteer as part of our Enter & View Team visit NHS-funded health and social care services. They monitor the quality of services by talking to patients, service users, their families and the staff. Last year the team visited three care homes for older people (those not providing nursing) and seven homes for adults with learning disabilities. Through these visits they identified issues with:

- The accessibility and inclusiveness of social and physical activities
- Poor appearance and inefficient design of some homes
- Meals losing their physical appeal when pureed
- Lack of awareness and response to residents' emotional and behavioural reactions when fellow residents pass away or staff leave.

Based on their findings, the Enter & View team made recommendations to nine provider organisations. As a direct result, they have implemented action plans. We do make a difference!

We're really passionate at Healthwatch Wandsworth about reporting back on what we do with the stories and views we capture. Over the past three months this is some of the work and changes we have helped make happen:

- You told us about cases of poor treatment in health and social care settings. We worked with the Wandsworth council's Safeguarding Team and health and social care managers to make sure these cases were followed up and investigated.
- You said that it would help you if Sheltered Housing Officers (SHOs) and health and social care professionals communicated better. We raised this with both health and social care commissioners. Because of this, more information on the role of SHOs will be made available to GPs, care agencies and other health professionals



- You told us you wanted to know more about the finances of our local hospital, St George's. So we organised a presentation on St. George's financial situation, given at our last public meeting, and we gave you the opportunity to ask questions
- You said our Enter and View team should visit care homes, extra care facilities and GP surgeries. The team are now in the process of setting up Enter & View research projects at GP surgeries and extra-care facilities

Do you have a story or concern about the impact of the current financial crisis at St George's Hospital? We are keeping a close eye on the situation to ensure that the financial crisis does not negatively impact on the services available or their quality. If this is something you are concerned about or if it is having an impact on you, please get in touch.

We want to hear both the good and bad experiences that people have in our local health and social care services.

Anyone who lives, works or uses health and social care services in the borough can become a member of Healthwatch Wandsworth. Members receive invitations to all our events and meetings and a quarterly newsletter of local health and social care service developments. Join in today by contacting the office on 020 8516 7767.

If you need independent information and help with accessing services, do contact me on 020 8516 7767 or email information@healthwatchwandsworth.co.uk

Hiliwona Soloman is Healthwatch Wandsworth's information and signposting officer.

Overture to an operatic career

Future star sopranos, basses and baritones train in Wandsworth, says Faye Hughes

With its museum, theatres and arts centres, Wandsworth is a borough with a strong cultural offering. At the heart of Wandsworth, behind the High Street, sits the National Opera Studio, now resident here for over ten years. Its new chief executive, Emily Gottlieb, has brought an invigorated sense of purpose to this already high-achieving organisation, recently engaging a number of world-class singing coaches and a celebrated opera director.

The NOS plays an essential role in the world of opera. It provides professional training of the highest quality for singers and *repetiteurs* (piano accompanist/singing coach) who have the potential to become the leading artists of their generation.

Intensive

Just a dozen singers and four pianists are accepted onto the Studio's programme out of approximately two hundred and fifty applications each year. For them nine months of intensive training lies ahead. This bespoke programme is led by NOS director and singer Kathryn Harries and conductor Mark Shanahan, NOS's head of music.

During their nine months at the Studio, NOS Young Artists work with leading coaches on an array of disciplines that include languages, movement, vocal technique and stagecraft. Well-known artists such as Susan Bullock, Iain Burnside and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa have all appeared on the Studio's coaching schedule in recent years.

Since Emily's arrival, NOS Young Artists have enjoyed the opportunity of working with international opera director Keith Warner on a production of contemporary scenes, which was performed at Sadler's Wells in June to sell-out audiences. Keith's appointment as director of theatre

studies last November was a major coup for the Studio.

Only the best singers and trainee *repetiteurs* are accepted, purely on the basis of their talent and potential. There are no fees for the course, so the musicians are accepted regardless of their financial position. Most will already have completed many years of education at university and/or music college and may have exhausted their sources of funding.

Free

Despite the international nature of the operatic world, the Studio remains wholeheartedly committed to giving back to the borough it calls home. In May 2015 we presented a selection of scenes from *Hansel and Gretel* in partnership with the Burntwood School Chamber Choir. 'Wandsworth

Wednesdays' are concerts

offered free to local

residents in the

intimate setting of

a Wandsworth

church,

offering the

opportunity

to hear

singers and

pianists who

will grace the

world's stages

in years to

come.

Alumni of the

National Opera Studio

have been engaged by all

the UK's leading opera companies. In

this year's Cardiff Singer of the World

competition alumnus Nico Darmanin

represented Malta and reached the

semi-finals, as did 2015/16 Young

Artist Celine Forrest representing

Wales. Luis Gomes recently sang the

role of Fenton in the ROH production

of *Falstaff*. Glyndebourne Festival

Opera saw the return of NOS alumnus

and conductor Ivor Bolton in their

acclaimed production of Handel's

Saul. Forthcoming performances by

NOS alumni include Gerald Finley

in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von*

Nürnberg at the Opéra Bastille

in Paris, and Anna Devin making



her Welsh National Opera debut as Susanna in their upcoming production of *Le nozze di Figaro*.

The generous financial support from the opera companies and the Arts Council covers just over half of the costs of providing training at the Studio. Consequently, Emily and her team have to raise at least £300,000 each year. We are fortunate to have the help of supporters who are excited by the prospect of helping exceptionally talented young artists at this crucial point in their professional journey. And now the Studio is launching a Friends of the NOS scheme and new individual levels of giving. Higher level donors will have the opportunity to develop an individual relationship with one of our Young Artists. Sometimes our supporters stay in contact with the Young Artists way beyond their time at the Studio. Many follow them as they perform all over the world and have the satisfaction of knowing they contributed towards their success.

Warm

Helen Blumer, a local supporter, says, 'We support the Studio because it is a privilege to have music of such high quality so close to where we live. We derive great pleasure from making a modest grant to one of the trainees each year and following his or her development into a highly polished performer. We have continued warm relationships with some of them afterwards and follow their professional careers with close interest. We greatly enjoy all the recitals and dramatic performances at the Studio and are constantly delighted by the amazing talent and dedication of the young trainees.' Faye Hughes is studio manager at the National Opera Studio.

National Opera Studio
2 Chapel Yard
London SW18 4HZ
www.nationaloperastudio.org.uk

The NOS free concerts are on the first Wednesday of each month, in All Saints Church, SW18, at 1.10pm
Next concerts: 7 October,
4 November and 2 December

For information on the new Friends scheme, contact Alice Clayton on alice@nationaloperastudio.org.uk

‘Why do I write?’

Prize-winning author Marion Molteno talks about living in Battersea and her latest novel, *Uncertain Light*

I’ve lived in Battersea for 38 years. Our daughters grew up here, went to school here, played on the commons. Now our grandchildren come here to see us and do many of the same things. We love how multi-cultural it is, and that people originally from all over the world feel it is their home.

Perhaps one reason we value the continuity of our life here is that we had to move countries twice in early adulthood. We grew up in South Africa and as students were involved in protests against the apartheid government. We worked in Zambia at a time of rapid social change, but once again had to leave after a political crisis at the university where my husband, Robert, taught. Together with a large group of students and a few other lecturers, he was detained without trial. Two months later he was released and deported, and we arrived in the UK with two small children and not much idea what we were going to do.

Classes

Each of the places I have lived in has become the setting for one of my books. My first job in London was organising classes in English for people who had come from other countries, and out of that grew my collection of short stories, *A Language in Common*. In *A Shield of Coolest Air*, my first novel, two mums meet while waiting to collect their children in a Battersea primary school; one is a Somali asylum seeker, and the other gets drawn into her plight. *If You Can Walk, You Can Dance* follows a young woman who has to flee South Africa and ends up moving between London and Zambia, finding a meaning in her restless life through her absorption in the music of each of the cultures she comes into contact with. *Somewhere More Simple* is set on the Isles of Scilly, an idyllic retreat from city life, our favourite place for family holidays - only nothing is as simple as it seems.

By then I had a loyal readership and had won three prizes, but I was



still finding it hard to find a publisher each time - literary fiction is difficult to market unless you’re already famous.

Rather than let my manuscript languish in a bottom drawer, I had set up an independent publisher to produce my books and those of others in a similar situation. I was now working for Save the Children, travelling to countries across Africa and Asia – always to the poorest parts, that tourists never see. It was a life-changing experience, and I knew that one day I would try to share it in fiction.

Civil war

That was the origin of my new novel, *Uncertain Light*. The people in the story work in international development, trying to support people trapped in poverty, or as humanitarian workers responding to crises – wars, earthquakes. The central parts of the story take place in Tajikistan, a land of awesome mountains, an ancient culture, that had made a particularly deep impression on me. At the time I first went there it was trying to recover from the effects of civil war and the economic collapse after the end of the Soviet Union. Whatever the faults of the old system, nothing people were used to could now be relied on. Layers of older ways were re-emerging, alongside new global pressures. The programme Save

the Children supported was staffed almost entirely by women who had lost husbands in the war – women from both sides of the conflict, now working together to prevent children becoming destitute. They were exceptional people – warm, compassionate, competent. They had been educated by the Soviet system, but they wore traditional highly coloured Tajik dress. And they loved poetry. The language is Persian, some of the greatest Persian poets came from here. Here were stories waiting to be told.

Despite its large canvas, *Uncertain Light* is essentially a personal story. It begins when a UN peace negotiator is taken hostage, and it follows those closest to him as hopes for his survival disappear. People who have read it and written to me have used many different words to say what – for them – it is about. It is about love – but of many kinds; grief – and the need to get beyond it; courage, compassion; poetry – and the everyday-ness of life. I’m happy with any of those words. I’m particularly happy when people simply say that they settled in an armchair with it and hardly emerged all weekend.

Marion Molteno won a Commonwealth Writer’s Prize in 1999 for *If You Can Walk, You Can Dance*.

This is the first of a series on local authors.

Is Queens Circus safer?

A walker and a cyclist disagree

Queens Circus, the roundabout by the south-eastern entrance to Battersea Park has been re-modelled at great expense with the aim of making it safer for cyclists and pedestrians. How successful have the changes been?

Sara Milne, cyclist:

If you are a pedestrian, the new Queens Circus roundabout must tick all the boxes – it's safe, with smooth wrinkle free paving stones on the pavement and countdown pelican crossings. It also has some of the widest pavements in London, despite having some of the lowest footfall. If you are a motorist, what used to be a reasonable traffic flow has now ground to a standstill with tailbacks and traffic jams.

If like me you are a cyclist, the new Queens Circus is sadly lacking. The new 'safe' cycle route is very slow due to the cycle traffic lights, hugely

overcrowded during peak commuter times and ultimately unsafe due to the fact that seasoned cyclists don't use the new layout. They opt for the road route instead because it's quicker. Bizarrely, although heralded as safe for all road users, I feel that the new Queens Circus is a cycle accident waiting to happen.



Susan Hoffman, pedestrian:

It seems anomalous that the roadway forming the grand southern entrance to Battersea Park should be a roundabout – a road design which aims to ensure the smooth flow of vehicular traffic but which is possibly the most dangerous of junctions for the pedestrian, or the cyclist, to navigate. Pedestrians travel across

the route of cycle and vehicular traffic exiting or entering the roundabout, they do not travel with it.

The recent introduction of the innovative 'Dutch style' roundabout at Queens Circus, where all modes of transport now have traffic signals, is welcome. For people on foot, the most significant feature is the inclusion of signalised pedestrian crossings on four elements of the roundabout. Our road designers have finally acknowledged that pedestrians are users of this junction too.

Wait times for the Green Man will vary depending on where in the traffic signal 'cycle' the request to cross button is pressed, and on the volume of traffic using the roundabout at the time. Any minor delay is far preferable to the dangerous environment for pedestrians that previously existed here. Once the Green Man shows, pedestrians have approximately 13 seconds to cross the road, which should be sufficient time for most people.

I hope this safer environment will encourage more people of all ages to walk and not feel excluded from Queens Circus.

Water, water everywhere

Jenny Sheridan charts an exciting month for London's rivers

September is the festival month for London's rivers, from the mighty Thames to our own Wandle. We Londoners habitually refer to the Thames as 'the river', as though it were the only river in the world (though we hardly honour it, judging by the architecture along its London banks). But other rivers do exist, and the proof is in the boards displayed along the South Bank, decorated with artwork by schoolchildren from Bangla Desh, the Philippines and Taiwan as well as the UK.

September is Totally Thames month, and the organisation is curating an amazing collection of events, from archaeological walks on the foreshore to the debut of the Empathy Museum. Among them is The Rising Tide (pictured), a

sculpture of four horses and riders on the Vauxhall foreshore, near the MI6 building. The riders' bodies are fully realistic but the horses' heads are modelled on oil well pumps. Jason deCaires Taylor, the sculptor, intends the work to be a comment on climate change, in full view of political decision-makers at Westminster. It can be seen fully for two hours either side of low tide, and then is gradually submerged.

Water wheel

Along the Wandle, seventy community events are being organised. They take place all the way from Carshalton to the magnificently-named Delta where it meets the Thames. Just a few: visit the remains of the chapter house of Merton Priory



Horse-riders stand vigil in the Thames

and see a working 1880s water wheel at Merton Abbey Mills on Open House weekend 19 and 20 September. On 26 September there is a walk along the Wandle Trail from the Thames to Morden Hall Park, starting at Wandsworth Town station.

There are also plenty of fun-sounding volunteering opportunities, from balsam-bashing to recording the Wandle's industrial heritage. www.totallythames.org.uk
livingwandle@wandsworth.gov.uk



Northcote Road Fete 12 July 2015: The Battersea Society stall sold home-made elderflower cordial, jam, pickles and plants. We signed up new members and had fruitful conversations. The picture shows Carol Rahn, Steph Tickner and Jenny Sheridan

Wandsworth school in the running for major architecture award

Burntwood School, on Burntwood Lane just south of Wandsworth Common, is a successful secondary school for girls that has won awards for sustainability, sports and arts. And now it has won a Civic Trust award for its building – and is in the running for the Stirling Prize, the UK’s most prestigious architectural award.

Its new buildings are by AHMM Architects and are added to the original 1950s modernist buildings designed by the LCC’s Leslie Martin. They consist of four teaching blocks, a sports hall and a performing arts space set in a handsome landscape. The original trees have been kept and more planted; there is a new meadow.

learning environment. And its new performing arts building and sports hall, as well as its refurbished swimming pool, are all available for wider community use.’

The *Architects Journal* approves of the building’s concrete cladding, ‘playfully arranged on a rigid grid creating surprising interior spaces – education architecture as it should be’.

Burntwood is one of just six buildings on the shortlist for the Stirling Prize. The final winner will be announced in October.



Like a university

The Civic Trust award comments on the way the green spaces can be appreciated from the heart of the campus, which feels more like a university than a school and encourages student behaviour to suit.

Wandsworth’s education spokesman Cllr Kathy Tracey said: ‘The school has been rebuilt almost from scratch and now boasts really superb new facilities that offer the girls a really modern and high-tech

