

# Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society AUTUMN 2019



## Painting the Power Station

Jenny Sheridan meets artist Michael Warren



Left: View from the roof of the Power Station, 2019. Below left: Interior of BPS after demolition of boilers, 1988. Both oil on canvas.



Local artist Michael Warren has been the artist in residence, sometimes officially, sometimes not, at Battersea Power Station since it was owned by John Broome in the 1980s. He has seen it in dereliction and under construction as it has passed through the several developers who have owned the building and its surroundings.

Michael knows the building intimately, inside and out. He has been hoisted high up between its walls in warring buckets, he has stood on narrow platforms at the level of the chimney bases – though now,

he says, the contractors are appropriately devoted to health and safety.

Inside the power station there are complex and ever-changing views to draw. Although the building changes slowly as walls go up and the interior begins to develop there is constant movement of cranes, cherry-pickers and people.

In Michael's drawings you can appreciate both the scale of the huge building and the intricacy of its steelwork and bricks. And the painting currently on his easel outlines the extraordinary view of London to be seen from its roof. *more on page 3*



Don't forget to visit our website:  
[batterseasociety.org.uk](http://batterseasociety.org.uk)

for regular updates on Battersea Society news, events and planning matters

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## From the editor



For a while, it was such a calm autumn. There were some lovely sunny days while the trees began to change

colour in the park. In late October, a grey-haired man lay stretched out on a bench in the Old English Garden, sunning himself in his swimming trunks, his bicycle beside him. And one Sunday I sat on the newly restored coal jetty, drinking a lemon and ginger concoction, gazing alternately at the power station above and the river flowing past and

enjoying the flowers and the people-watching. Then I walked to Battersea Park Road on the temporary road over the building site where the new Frank Gehry buildings are rising wavily up towards the stratospheric price sphere. A fun thing to do when the weather warms up again, and a good way to wow out-of-town visitors. Until then, I hope you enjoy Michael Warren's impressive pictures.

### Hustings

But now autumn has come with a vengeance, and I don't just mean the weather. An election looms on 12 December. The *Evening Standard* has proclaimed Battersea a bell-wether constituency and the number of senior politicians visiting confirms this. No doubt many readers will have

had leaflets pouring through your doors and campaigners pounding upon them. On 28 November you will have your chance to question the candidates: the Battersea Society, together with Katherine Low Settlement, is organising a hustings on 28 November. See page 7 for details.

If you need cheering up after the election – or if you are celebrating – we offer something to look forward to: the Christmas Social. On 18 December we will be waiting to welcome you in the Duke of Cambridge from 7pm. We'll be on the left hand side of the bar. I look forward to seeing you there.

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## Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden ponders prime ministers, ditches, social media across the ages, and concludes there's nothing new under the sun

Just after Hallowe'en there was much talk of ditches. I knew all about ditches this time of year fifty years ago, when I was working temporarily as a labourer for the Manchester Council Parks Department. In a bitterly cold November, I was part of a donkey-jacketed gang clearing roadside drainage ditches in council estates. Lots of rubbish but we never found anybody who had breathed their last in a ditch. It was tedious work so we welcomed any distraction.

It arrived in the shape of a written order to remove a dying tree in a garden in a nearby street. We had a chain saw with us and someone who claimed to be an expert in its use.

There was nobody at home, but there was only one tree in the garden. It looked healthy enough, but what did we know about it? So down came the tree which was duly sawn into logs which we carried to the van, warming up in the process

As we all stood smoking celebratory cigarettes someone idly glanced at the office's order. It happened to be one of those estates which had roads, closes,

and avenues all with the same name and we were in the avenue, when we should have been in the close. I wish I could provide a satisfactory end to this story. The van took away the corpse of a perfectly good tree, and we all kept our heads down and moved to a different road some distance away. I for one never heard any more about it.

### Craze

I suppose nowadays pictures would turn up in Facebook or on Instagram and there would be repercussions. We were saved that. But surprisingly the concept of Facebook isn't entirely new. Back in the early twentieth century 'facebooking' was a craze which briefly swept the country houses of England.

Apparently as well as a conventional visitors' book, you might also be asked to sign your name in a 'Face-book' below your drawing of a face. The drawings which resulted were doubtless a source of much amusement. You could say the same of course about many of the photographs which appear in the 21st century version. As the Book of

Ecclesiastes puts it: 'there is no new thing under the sun...'

After mentioning my decision to call myself Mike rather than Michael, I was asked if I'd ever considered using my second name, which is Alan. I've since discovered that to be a ploy favoured by Prime Ministers. The current incumbent of 10 Downing Street is always called Al by his family (short for Alexander, his second name). Four out of the six Labour prime ministers chose to drop their first name in favour of their second. Ramsay MacDonald, Harold Wilson and Gordon Brown all started out life as James. On the other hand James Callaghan's first name was actually Leonard!

A problem I raised long ago in these pages has only got worse over the years. I refer to the menace of the pedestrian who stares fixedly at their phone, texting as they go, oblivious to those forced to take evasive action. Apparently they are also liable to start walking across a dangerous road. Tel Aviv is the latest city to trial the aptly named 'zombie lights' - an LED strip on busy roads aimed at saving these people from their own folly.

That's either an example of caring local government or the interfering nanny state. The choice, as I'm sure you've been hearing a lot lately, is yours. Anyway, take care, mind how you go, and I'll be back in 2020.

More views through the years

Left: Interior of BPS, 1986. Graphite pencil.

Far left: Battersea Power Station from the Embankment. 1985



## A space for contemplation at St Mary's

The church plans to create a quiet garden, explains Jenny Bailey

As many Battersea Society members know, St Mary's Battersea is a beautiful Georgian Grade 1 listed church. It is a piece of living history, and in the year 2000 celebrated the 1,200th anniversary of Christian worship on the site. It is also a place of inspiration from where Turner painted many scenes of the Thames.

The churchyard is a haven of shade, greenery and wonderful views over the Thames. It was once so verdant and rich in plant life that the celebrated botanist William Curtis carried out much of his botanical study here.

But today St Mary's churchyard sees hundreds of people pass through every day: runners, dog walkers, cyclists; people on their way to work, parents with children, walkers taking in the Thames path. Most barely pause on their passage through.

### Rare

Parishioners and clergy at St Mary's saw the busyness of these lives and contemplated how much better they might be if beautiful places for quiet reflection in nature were accessible to all. Yet such spaces in our city are rare.

A group has been formed with the

inspiration to embark on a project to create a Quiet Garden and give a gift of peace and beauty to the thousands



who come through St Mary's gates in this delightful and much-loved corner of Battersea.

As a church community, St Mary's wanted to reach out to the people of Battersea with an open invitation to all, to pause and contemplate, to drink in the view, to breathe, to rest for a moment, and go on with their day a little lighter in spirit.

The design of the Quiet Garden offers a natural space for contemplation and a relief from the surrounding noise. Quietly observing and listening, a person grows to know and truly value the world – to better appreciate their place within it and their responsibility to protect it.

Beyond the Quiet Garden's primary use as a haven of peace for local people, it is also anticipated that it will

be used for children's learning and storytelling, therapeutic gardening and community projects.

St Mary's is launching 'Friends of the Quiet Garden' and would love those who are inspired by the vision to join and support us in making the Garden a reality.

Visit [stmarysbattersea.org.uk/quietgarden](http://stmarysbattersea.org.uk/quietgarden) or contact Rev Aaron Kennedy at [aaron@stmarysbattersea.org.uk](mailto:aaron@stmarysbattersea.org.uk), to find out more

## BATTERSEA SOCIETY EVENTS

- **WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER**  
Battersea Society Christmas Social from 7pm in the Duke of Cambridge, Battersea Bridge Road
- **MONDAY 6 JANUARY**  
Twelfth Night Supper at Antipasto, 6.30 for 7pm. £27 for three courses
- **THURSDAY 23 JANUARY**  
Talk on Old London Bridge by Dorian Gerhold at Dimson Lodge 6.30pm for 7pm. £5 donation on the door (date to be confirmed)
- **WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY**  
Visit to Keats' House 3pm, £5.
- **THURSDAY 20 FEBRUARY**  
Film Night at the Royal College of Art 6.30 for 7pm, £5 donation of the door
- **SATURDAY 22 FEBRUARY**  
Purcell Singers at Westminster Abbey 7pm £39 (limited availability)

## Open House: the inside view

Angela Roden acts as tour guide

Mike and I have been supporting Open House weekend for about ten years now. It's a great way to get into places you'd otherwise never see. What we've always liked most is getting into recently finished architect-designed developments to see all their great ideas put into practice.

### Perfect office

This year we signed up to help at 78 Sisters Avenue in Battersea, a home/office conversion and extension by Proctor and Shaw. John and Anna Proctor have found a way to build a perfect small office for their architect's practice and a family home for themselves in what appeared from the outside to be a small 1950s post-war in-fill end of terrace. The house had an extension added in 1980 – and this had now become the office with a linking door through into a lovely family room and kitchen.

Mike took up his station at the door to the office to marshal the visitors: 'shoes off please – kids and dogs all welcome'. I positioned myself in the kitchen to make a start on the story for new arrivals while John and Anna explained their ideas to smaller groups at other points in the house.

John had wanted to honour the realities of the 1950s house with its lack of Victorian ornamentation and smaller dimensions. He took as his point of reference the Case Study Houses in Los Angeles, a post-war movement that was tasked with designing inexpensive and efficient modern homes for the thousands

of returning service men. That design vocabulary – floor-to-ceiling glass, horizontal lines, steel frames, uninterrupted floors extending from the interior to the terrace—is the model that John has followed here. He has found clever ways to increase the volume of the main room which extends 3.5m into the garden. Upstairs there was a large kids' room, a spare room and family bathroom. A loft extension, warmed by Anna's careful use of pastel colours, another last-century echo, has created a cosy master bedroom with linked shower room.

In the course of the day, no doubt helped by the good weather, we reckon 150 – 200 people looked round the house and admired their achievement.

### Views

The next day it was another modern adjustment of a development. Our neighbour Malcolm Crayton who runs the Form Studio architects practice had been asked to make better use of an internal water tower topped by a roof terrace in a recently redeveloped 19th century mill on Shad Thames. A cunningly re-designed staircase with beautiful black steel frame and Douglas fir treads led to two clever mezzanine floors and on through a rain-sensitive roof skylight to a large square terrace. The views over



### Family room at 78 Sisters Avenue

to Tower Bridge and beyond were tremendous.

This time it was guided tours of 45 minutes – and the queue was already there at 10am. We took our leave at lunchtime, calling in as we left at the nearby Anise Gallery showcasing architectural artwork – which had a copper kitchen worktop to die for. Another great Open House weekend for us.

Check out next year's plans at [openhouselondon.org.uk](http://openhouselondon.org.uk)



### GIFT MEMBERSHIP

**Christmas is coming! Perhaps you know the person who has everything – enough books, socks, fancy mustard and chocolates to last all year. But what they may not have is membership of the Battersea Society! Now you can give them a year's worth of glittering events and four issues of this inestimable magazine. Not to mention the knowledge that they are supporting our work on planning, heritage and open spaces.**

**Visit our website**

**[www.batterseasociety.org.uk](http://www.batterseasociety.org.uk)**

**For £15 your neighbour will receive a gift certificate with, if you wish, a message from yourself.**

**Christmas sorted!**

### A HORSE BUS TO THE GRAND

Here's a question for a pub quiz: who composed the Cleopatra Waltz, and why? The answer is Wandsworth-based Edward Doughty, in celebration of the safe arrival of Cleopatra's Needle in 1878. An edited transcript of his son's memoirs reveals a world of horse buses and 'gutter boys' selling second-hand theatre programmes at the Grand, Clapham Junction.

In another article, the Autumn 2019 issue of *The Wandsworth Historian* describes a panto at the Shakespeare Theatre on Lavender Hill in which one of the performers was, unusually for 1901, a black American singer, described as having 'a queenly presence.'

The magazine also features a profile of the well-known local historian Sean Creighton.

*The Historian* is produced by Neil Robson 020neil119@gmail.com

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# Planning Matters: Are small and gloomy rooms all we deserve? asks Monica Tross

## HOW MUCH DAYLIGHT DO WE DESERVE?

Much of our time over the past months has been spent reviewing plans for the site originally occupied by the South London Mail depot, now 'Nine Elms Park'. This has necessitated us coming to terms with a number of initials and acronyms – ADF, APSH and NSL for three. The first two are measures of the adequacy of diffuse daylight within a room, or Average Daylight Factor and of the sunlight a given window may expect during a year or Average Probable Sunlight Hours. No Sky Line measures the amount of diffuse lighting within a room and may result in rooms as gloomy as this sounds.

While this may sound very technical we are increasingly concerned about living conditions likely to result for people living in the dense developments planned along the south of Nine Elms Lane and Battersea Park Road. We first became aware that well-lit rooms might not be something that Battersea residents can expect when the response to a Candlemakers residents' objection to the effect of a proposed block next to them was along the lines that 'well you live in a city, what can you expect'. Or as a recent daylight report notes 'the shortfalls can be attributed to the provision of balconies [which cut off the light from rooms below], the face-to-face distances along New Mill Street and Belfour Place as well as obstruction from neighbouring schemes' and are 'comparable with other schemes in the Nine Elms regeneration area'. Check out 2019/2324 for the full text and see our website for all the letters we've been writing in response to South London Mail Centre applications recently.

Vitamin D on the rates, do you think?

## BEDSITS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Or how to perpetuate student living when you leave university. When I first came to London I lived in traditional bedsits in a number of HMOs (houses in multiple occupancy). Some had shared kitchens, all had shared



bathrooms (in one case shared with a neighbour who washed out his bird's cage in the bath) and all were converted rooms in ageing houses with lots of stairs. Later I graduated to flat-sharing, happily with congenial people.

The Collective aims to offer something between flat-sharing and your own studio or small flat and to avoid the problems of living with people you don't like and/or who use much more electricity than you do. Some of you may have visited one of the two exhibitions they staged recently showing plans for their site in Chatfield Road. This will provide 'co-living' rooms in a building with shared spaces, for residents and for visitors. The rooms are designed for single people and have space for a bed, storage, small kitchen area and an ensuite. All costs are included in the rent including bed linen and there is a laundrette area. We visited the existing one in Gospel Oak and although to our eyes the rooms looked tiny we acknowledged that there were lots of spaces for residents to use for working, eating and socialising – or just sitting but in a livelier space than one's room.

The concept is somewhat reminiscent of the buildings in Grant Road for graduate students or the new student accommodation in Vauxhall. There is no specific age barrier but experience suggests it will mostly be used as a staging post for younger people starting out in London. That is fine, but allied to other developments offering rental only space there is a concern that many of Battersea's new residents will be passing through rather than



Far left: Living space at the Collective  
Left: Proposed development at Yelverton Road

making their home here for the long-term. If you have any opinions, do let us know. We will comment on the planning application in due course so check our website, but there is no reference number yet.

## SAMBROOKS IS MOVING TO WANDSWORTH

Their site in Yelverton Road is the subject of a planning application (2019/2295) for a 16 storey building which we consider will sit unhappily within the streetscape and be an over-development of the site. The plans presented are not as clear as they might be but there appear to be a predominance of small units and an odd mix of a lower design 'matching' the buildings alongside with a set-back tower. It may not be too late to comment and you can see our detailed objection on the application website, and on our own.

## DUCKBOATS AND SLIPWAYS

Although we haven't had confirmation we are told that the Golden Tours application to run amphibious vehicles from the slipway alongside St. Mary's Church (2019/2232) will be reviewed at PAC (planning applications committee) on 27 November. We are crossing our fingers, as are the other 444 people (and counting) who have objected.

*We always like to hear from our members so do let us have any comments, on this article, on collective living or on planning in general. [planning@batterseasociety.org.uk](mailto:planning@batterseasociety.org.uk) will find us.*

# Battersea United – what a team!

Aaron Barbour introduces the Big Local SW11 Alliance

The Big Local SW11 Alliance is new and we want to tell you about it. Our aim is to re-build the social fabric of Battersea so that our area becomes stronger and more self-reliant in dealing with issues such as isolation, depression and anxiety. 'We' here means a partnership of five long-standing and trusted local organisations – Caius House, Carney's Community, Katherine Low Settlement, Providence House and St Peter's Church. This Alliance was formed by the Big Local SW11, an independent, resident-led group which has been awarded £1m over 10 years to invest in community projects in the area directly north of Clapham Junction.

## Deprived

Hidden within the affluence of Wandsworth, parts of Battersea are among the most deprived in London and the UK, with high unemployment, overcrowding and relative poverty. These problems are often linked with mental health issues. We are motivated by the belief that stronger, more self-reliant communities can provide answers to these issues. We also believe that building 'social capital' unlocks a community's capacity to address social and economic problems such as unemployment, knife crime, low aspirations and disconnection from the community. This approach is far more effective than institutional or statutory approaches. This is because a strong community is built

on social relations of trust and a deep knowledge of what is happening, to whom and where.

## Bonds

A child who goes to a youth club such as Providence House may be following in family footsteps. His grandfather, mother and aunt may all have done the same, so will his younger sister. The bonds and networks that have been built up are part of the lifeblood of Battersea. Over 50 years, hundreds of children directly, and several thousand people by association, have been part of one small cluster of experience that builds community. And through contact, connection and conversation, through real lived experiences, people can address issues and resolve problems.

Imagine the many threads that weave together towards and away from Providence, multiplied many times through similar experiences from Carney's, Caius, St Peter's and Katherine Low Settlement. Together, these make up social capital: the invisible bonds that tie people, the bridges that connect them and the physical places and spaces where people meet.

The Alliance's members have recognised that they could work much more closely together and have identified a further 50+ local Battersea based charities and community groups that they could work with too. Imagine what more can be achieved if we work better together.

Strengthening a community that has lost some of its cohesiveness is an ambitious task. This is what



we have done so far in 2018 – 19:

- Established a system of inter-agency referrals, so that young people have much more on offer than belonging to just one youth club.
- Ran a highly successful summer programme of activities and events.
- Developed an Urban Arts Festival for local young people.
- Delivered the first Battersea Charity Week (June 2019) with 98 people attending from 61 local organisations.
- Undertook a successful Intergenerational project.
- Participated in the first Wandsworth Voluntary Sector Conference (May 2019).
- Met with Battersea MP Marsha De Cordova, to (amongst other things) lobby on behalf of Battersea Youth Voice (see below).

That's just the start. Over the next three years we plan to kick-start the process of strengthening social capital, starting with involving young people. Our first priority is establishing Battersea Youth Voice. This will be an education, training, mentoring and personal development programme for some of the most disadvantaged young people in Battersea.

## Skills

It will be driven by young people and supported by a professional youth development worker and local mentors. It won't be a talking shop, youth parliament or debating society but practical engagement. Some young people feel disconnected from their community and from society. We hope to help them engage with and find solutions to issues such as depression and anxiety by developing projects that connect with the wider



community. This will also enable them to develop skills useful for future employment and life.

We are also planning to encourage and support more local people to volunteer in our community; and we plan to build on this year's successful Battersea Charities Week to further strengthen the organisational development of local charities, community groups and social enterprises. Stronger groups can give

better support to more volunteers and local residents.

Our three-pronged approach over the next three years then is to build youth engagement, support volunteering and to work with community groups and organisations. We aim to use our resources (not just finance but also people and buildings) to leverage an additional £3m into Battersea by 2021 to effect sustainable community

development. This work should, through preventative measures, 'save' up to £13m in costs. We're talking to a number of funders at the moment to make this happen.

*If you'd like to get involved or to find out more contact David Stone on david@biglocalsw11.co.uk or visit biglocalsw11.co.uk/blsw11-strategic-partnership*

*Aaron Barbour is the director of Katherine Low Settlement*

## Rita Kelly, would-be chimney-climber

Jenny Sheridan meets one of the Power Station alumni

In 1953, when Rita Kelly started work at Battersea Power Station, women worked only in administration. There were no female managers or directors. Rita looks slightly bemused at the thought. 'Clare was the most senior lady. She was the PA to the manager of our floor. She used to sit outside his office, smoking like a trooper. There were lots of other women there too. It was fun, I had a happy time there.'



our lunch. There was a fantastic view up there. Of course there were no cranes and no tall buildings so you could see as far as the City one way and to Chiswick in the other. I was itching to go up the chimneys – I'm not afraid of heights – and one day I just started climbing the ladder up the side of one. Of course someone came and told me to get down and I was reprimanded.

'It was a mundane job, really, typing either from a Dictaphone or from a longhand script. The worst was when we had to spend weeks typing out invoices. Oh, they were boring! But it was a happy atmosphere and I made friends. We used to meet up in Battersea Park after I left.'

### Hierarchy

There was a distinct hierarchy, with separate canteens for different levels of workers, but Rita says it was quite easy-going for its time – 'though I would never have called Mr Seymour, the manager, Ted. He had a nasty manner – Clare would sometimes come out of his room crying.'

Rita is third generation Battersea. She moved between the Burns Estate, Kambala Road, Warriner Gardens and 'a lovely flat near the Patmore Estate. We could have bought a house in Trott Street for £400 after we married,

but it was a bit too much for us.'

She looks wistful when she talks about returning to Battersea. 'I love going back to my roots, but it does make me feel a bit sad. I like walking by the river. The architecture is well thought out and there's that lovely wild pond. But I couldn't afford to live there now. And when I go on the bus I never seem to hear a Battersea accent.'

*Note: Battersea Power Station Development Company has embarked on an alumni programme. They are calling on former employees and their relatives to get in touch. Their memories are an important part of keeping the memory of the Grade 2\* listed building preserved. Rita Kelly is one of the alumni.*

*If you or any relatives worked on the power station, get in touch with Alex Davies ADavies@bpsdc.co.uk or 020 7062 1785.*

### Typist

Rita worked as a typist at the power station for four years, leaving when married and pregnant with her first child. She was single, living with her parents and working in the West End but wanted to work nearer home so she was pleased when her father spotted the power station job. 'I worked in the low building at the side of the power station, down by Kirtling Street. I was on the fourth floor. There was an entrance with a PaBX switchboard and a little window where you got your pay in a brown envelope.'

Rita was recently invited back to tour the building, with a guide. It was the first time she had seen inside the boiler house, which was forbidden to non-essential workers. 'But in the summer we were allowed to go up onto the roof of the building to have

## BATTERSEA QUESTION TIME

Your chance to quiz the 2019 election candidates

Conservative, Green, Labour, Liberal Democrat – all will be there!

Thursday 28 November

6.30 – 8pm (refreshments from 6).

York Gardens Community Centre  
Lavender Road, SW11 2UG

All Battersea residents welcome.

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# Great River Bus Journeys No1

Mike Roden sits back and enjoys the ride from Plantation Wharf to Canary Wharf



This rather different bus journey was a spur of the moment idea when we discovered that the 'Secret Rivers of London' exhibition at the Museum of London Docklands in Canary Wharf was close to finishing and we decided to travel in style on a Thames Clipper. A brisk walk takes us to Plantation Wharf Pier on Battersea Reach, to catch the 10.04 – the final commuter boat of the morning. To set off later you'll need to go to Battersea Power Station, where the service runs all day.

Our boat arrives and we get a coffee from the bar and settle back to enjoy the view. A familiar voice announces that we are approaching Chelsea Harbour Pier. It belongs to Emma Hignett, the voice of TfL since 2006, who does the announcements for the river bus as well as for London Overground and buses.

## Whistler

The Harbour is a former industrial site which since the late 1990s has been an enclave of luxury flats with a central marina. We pick up a few passengers and head downstream past the Lots Road Power Station development where the new 37-storey tower will be joined in a few years by a 27-storey companion. Just before Battersea Bridge is the boatyard from where Walter Greaves used to row Whistler on his painting expeditions. The artist's statue stands near the north end of the bridge.

Now on to Cadogan pier next to Albert Bridge. This was built in 1841 to bring potential buyers to Lord Cadogan's new estate of houses in Chelsea then rebuilt in 1875 when the bridge was constructed. In the past three years, Cadogan Pier Limited together with the Chelsea Society has hosted the finish line of the Doggetts Coat and Badge river race.



We pass Battersea Park on the south side and Chelsea Royal Hospital to the north as the boat approaches Chelsea Bridge. Then we pass beneath Grosvenor Railway Bridge which carries ten lines in and out of Victoria and the boat now pulls alongside Battersea Power Station pier, opened in November 2017.

## Theatre

Circus West Village towers above us. With its growing number of restaurants and the new Turbine Theatre under the arches (formerly the Village Hall) it is gaining the destination status the Power Station developers hoped for.

The Power Station development moves inexorably towards completion despite occasional rumours of impending bankruptcy. Many of the other riverside developments are now complete, the Riverlight complex, and the US Embassy of course, but there is still much building taking place along Nine Elms Lane. It will be a long time before the tangle of cranes is finally dismantled.

Heading to the St George Wharf Pier we pass the 50 storey building which is currently the tallest residential building in the UK. After a brief stop the boat moves forward under Vauxhall Bridge, turning towards the north bank as it does so. Just after Tate Britain is the Millbank Millennium Pier, opened in May 2003 – the fifth and final pier funded by the Millennium Commission as part of the Thames 2000 project. Disembark here to visit the gallery, and if you wish you can take another boat to Tate Modern. We continue under Lambeth Bridge.

Over to the right is the tower of the church of St Mary's at Lambeth, now the Garden Museum. The tomb of John Tradescant the first great English gardener and plant-hunter is



the centrepiece of the churchyard, now the Sackler Garden. Over on the Westminster side there's no hint of the sound and fury in the House of Commons as the Brexit withdrawal bill is debated. Big Ben is still shrouded in scaffolding much to the disappointment of the camera-wielding tourists.

Beyond Westminster Bridge the bronze lions' heads with open mouths that line the side of the Embankment act as a primitive flood warning system: 'When the lions drink, London will sink/When it's up to their manes, we'll go down the drains.' Once rare, it's not uncommon these days for the tide to rise high enough to touch the bronze heads. As our boat is tied up alongside the far end of Westminster Pier we notice that one of the heads is missing – hopefully just for repair and not as some kind of omen...

## County Hall

Across the river is the sprawling building complex which as County Hall served as the HQ of London's local government for 64 years until the abolition of the GLC in 1986. Briefly the first home of the Saatchi Gallery it's now the site of various attractions such as the London Aquarium and the London Dungeon and a couple of hotels.

Embankment Pier is a good place to disembark for the National Gallery or the National Portrait Gallery. And you can cross one of the Golden Jubilee footbridges either side of the Hungerford Railway Bridge to the Festival Hall and Hayward Gallery, and walk to the National Theatre. Waterloo Bridge opened in 1817. A century later the fabric was crumbling, and a new design was commissioned from Giles Gilbert



Left to right: Lots Road Power Station, Battersea; The Turbine Theatre, Circus West Village; lions' heads with mooring rings on Victoria Embankment; The Golden Hinde, Southwark; Blackfriars Bridge



Note: All of the Great Bus Journeys have been cleverly extracted from *Battersea Matters* and can be downloaded from [www.batterseabus.co.uk](http://www.batterseabus.co.uk)



Scott of Battersea Power Station fame. Construction did not actually start until 1939, and then slowed almost to a halt both by enemy action and because most of the male labour force had been called up .

It's long been dubbed the Ladies' Bridge because of claims that mainly women construction workers finished the bridge. This was confirmed in 2015, when some photographs and a documentary interview finally provided proof. The women's work is now officially acknowledged: there are plans to erect a plaque to this effect.

### Peace and quiet

On Victoria Embankment you can still see the Somerset House Watergate which marks the point of the river level before it was fully embanked in the late 19th century. The grounds of the large houses on the Strand used to back on to the river as did those of the legal district known as Temple (after the circular Templars church at its centre). It's well worth walking through there to enjoy peace and quiet quite at odds with the din of the city street outside.

We're in sight now of the 'wobbly' Millennium footbridge and there's a lot to take in with St Paul's on the north side, Tate Modern and the Globe on the other where the boat pauses at Bankside Pier. It's only 10.30, but the tourist numbers fuelled by half-term are building up.

Past Southwark Bridge now and heading to London Bridge. On the way there's the Golden Hinde, a replica of the little ship which Drake captained on the circumnavigation of the world from 1577 – 1580. It's a popular sleepover venue for children as a birthday treat. London Bridge City Pier serves as the main pier for the City and City Hall, headquarters

of the London Assembly since July 2002. This is a good place to halt for visiting Hays Galleria, HMS Belfast or Borough Market.

There's a sudden flurry of movement as passengers crowd by the windows at the front. Everyone wants the perfect shot of Tower Bridge which despite its archaic appearance only dates to 1898. Emma Hignett's dulcet tones announce that 'this bus terminates here'. Clearly someone has forgotten to add 'river' into the sentence. But the message is correct. This service goes no further than Tower Millennium Pier and the boat will now go back the way it came.

Most of those who disembark head for the nearby Tower, but a few of us join the queue for the next RB1 for Canary Wharf and Greenwich. After a brief wait we're on our way into the open water of the Pool of London. There's an announcement warning us to sit down, as the boat – restricted in its speed until now – suddenly feels like it's about to take off.

With Wapping on the north bank we're into dockland where cargo ships from around the world came and went. The shoreline is now dominated with converted warehouses and modern flat developments. The Town of Ramsgate pub dates from 1756 but was built on much earlier foundations so has been quenching the thirsts of watermen, dock workers and sailors for many centuries.

A little further on is Wapping Police Station, the headquarters of the Thames River Police. This is England's oldest police force, founded in 1798 to deal with looting from ships at anchor. The station's old carpenter's shop is the site of a fascinating little museum telling the history of river policing. Visits by appointment only.

On the south side of the river the Brunel Museum is housed in the Engine House which contained the steam-powered pumps used to extract water during the construction of the great engineer's Thames Tunnel. This is far beneath us linking Wapping and Rotherhithe stations – which, oddly, are part of the Overground system.

Just before the entrance to Shadwell Basin is the historic Prospect of Whitby pub. It claims to be the site of the oldest riverside tavern, dating from around 1520. All that remains from the building's earliest period is the 400-year-old stone floor. The site of the notorious Execution Dock is probably near here. The historian and inveterate gossip John Stow recorded in the 1590s that it was 'The usual place for hanging of pirates and sea-rovers, at the low-water mark, and there to remain till three tides had overflowed'.

### Pyramid

There's another tunnel far below us, this time the busy Rotherhithe road tunnel. The boat passes the entrance to the Limehouse Basin, and we see the towers of Canary Wharf's financial district. This is dominated by One Canada Square, apparently the second tallest building in the UK, whose pyramid pinnacle contains a flashing aircraft warning light visible for miles around. Then (after about an hour's travelling) we're at journey's end. Canary Wharf takes its name from No. 32 berth of the West Wood Quay of the Import Dock built in 1936 to receive cargoes of fruit from the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands.

From the pier it's a ten-minute walk to the Docklands Museum. The exhibition didn't detain us for more than an hour. We headed in search of lunch and discovered the nearby Ledger Building, a huge Wetherspoons pub. It occupies a very grand old office building with acres of seating space, and a wonderfully mixed clientele of building workers and those who earn their living in the financial services. And tourists like us, of course. Mellowed by cheap beer, sandwiches and chips we walk briskly to Canary Wharf station and are whisked back to Clapham Junction via the Jubilee line and Waterloo.

# The indefatigable Alf Dubs

Battersea's former MP talks to his friend Penelope J Corfield



Alf Dubs is a livewire, a civic campaigner, a dogged optimist. He has been all his life. In 1938, he first came to England as a child refugee. This journey marked the six-year-old Alf deeply, as he recalled in 2008: 'I always get emotional when I think of how Britain welcomed me and the other Jewish refugee children on the Kindertransport, just before the start of Hitler's War'. He resolved to devote his life to helping others, no matter what their background, and he has stuck to that decision.

From 1979 – 83, Alf was the indefatigable Labour MP for Battersea South and then from 1983 – 87 (following boundary changes) MP for the amalgamated North and South Battersea constituencies. He tells me that he instantly immersed himself in the locality, enjoying the area's rich mix of people. In terms of his political credo, Alf strongly rejects the claim that 'there is no such thing as society'. He believes in an interventionist welfare state and an active public sector. At the same time, he passionately defends civil liberties against an over-mighty state. 'What I seek is a balance between the extremes of an over-centralised top-down power system on the one hand, and a deregulated 'dog-eat-dog' atomised population on the other', he says.

## Threatened

As Battersea's MP Alf specialised in cases relating to housing, social security, and immigration. His assiduity won him many friends. However, he was once threatened

with violence by an angry and troubled constituent. 'I wasn't afraid,' he says, 'although perhaps I should have been. I was offered police protection, but I turned it down as I thought it would isolate me.' The troubled constituent eventually got medical help. But such episodes apart, these were happy years for Alf, in a lively constituency with many political friends and allies. He shuttled regularly between Westminster and Battersea, returning to Parliament each evening in time to vote at 10pm.

Throughout the 1980s Alf often found himself at odds with the policies of the Thatcher government and of the Conservative majority in Wandsworth. He particularly hated the Council's enthusiastic participation in the government's policy of selling off Council housing at a discount, which he considered a squandering of community assets. And he was upset by witnessing at first hand the multiplying housing problems among Battersea's working families. Moreover, he stresses that



the policy in the long term has not spread home-ownership but has rather increased the unregulated private rental sector. 'I was often frustrated; but I always persevered. And I worked hard at keeping up the spirits of my fellow campaigners, because it was tough to keep going.'

Alf's personal resilience was tested in 1987, when he lost the Battersea seat in a shock result; and again at the following general election in 1992, when he was defeated by an even bigger swing. He signed on for the dole; and, when asked caustically why he was unemployed, Alf replied laconically: 'Not enough

votes'. Battersea was gentrifying; and the sociological trends were unfavourable to Labour. (Interestingly, the constituency remains liable to big swings in public opinion. Labour regained the seat in 1997, before losing it to the Conservatives in 2010 and regaining it in 2017).

Unstoppable, Alf then threw himself into civic life outside parliament. He has chaired the Refugee Council, the civil liberties lobby-group Liberty, the Fabians and the Broadcasting Standards Commission. In addition, he has been a trustee of Action Aid, the Immigration Advisory Service and the Open University Foundation. His commitment gained public recognition in 1994, when he was elevated to the House of Lords. In tribute to his former constituency, he chose the title Baron Dubs of Battersea.

The apogee of his official career followed in the years 1997 – 99, when Tony Blair appointed Alf as Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. 'I was responsible for a whole range of domestic policies there and my experiences of Battersea case-work provided good training in coping with bureaucratic systems.' This time, as a government minister, Alf was obliged to accept police protection. But he was delighted to support the negotiations which produced the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

## Refugees

Today Alf's unofficial career continues unabated. He is a patron of Humanists UK, Treasurer of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group and, above all, he is known internationally for his campaign to help child refugees. What, I asked him, is the secret of staying engaged for the long haul in civic life? He replied, 'Keeping faith with those who need help, and with the young activists on the ground who are trying to make a difference.'

I asked him finally what he sees as the most urgent issues confronting the world today. He has no doubt: implementing urgent policies on climate change and helping refugees worldwide. There is much to do; and Alf Dubs is in there, doing it.

*Professor Penelope J. Corfield is a historian and long-time Battersea resident.*

## What has changed, what stayed the same?

Monica Tross takes a celebratory look back at *Battersea Matters* over the years

The newsletter of the Battersea Society re-launched as *Battersea Matters* (*BM* to its friends) in Spring 2009 and I want to start with thanks to three stalwarts of that initiative. Two you will know, Jenny Sheridan who took over as the editor in winter 2007 and Mike Roden who, while busy on our website (launched in December 2007), has been an indefatigable contributor to *Battersea Matters* ever since. You may not know the third of the trio – Suzanne Perkins – but it is as a result of her graphic design skills that *Battersea Matters* is such a pleasure to read.

### Brewery

Local entrepreneurs are regularly featured and the first of these in *BM* was an article on the launch of Sambrooks Brewery in Yelverton Road, with a young Duncan Sambrook proud to tell us that they were producing around 40 barrels a week from two brewings with plans to supply beer in bottles. A lot has changed since then with two brewings a day and millions of pints flowing from over 500 pubs around London. Sambrooks is now established as the oldest independent brewery in London. Sadly another change is coming with the closure of the Yelverton Road site in 2020 and the brewery's move to restored Grade II listed brewery buildings in the Ram Quarter on the site of the old Young's Brewery. While we in Battersea will be sorry to lose Sambrooks there is something of a virtuous circle in that it was the closure of Youngs Brewery which inspired Duncan to set up.

The Spring issue also announced the launch of the John Johnson Foundation (JJF) in memory of Constable John Johnson who had died in July 2008. Many Battersea

people will still remember John's familiar figure and his commitment to our community, not least because of the warm and sometimes slightly eccentric way he went about his work. John had helped set up the Battersea Crime Prevention Panel and the JJF trustees decided to amalgamate the Fund within this, with John Johnson funds ring-fenced for a project within the Foundation's remit. It is entirely fitting that these funds are now being used for the award given to Wandsworth's Young Person of the Year, another of the charitable organisations John helped set up. This award honours young people in Wandsworth who deserve recognition for their achievement, courage, generous attitude or ability to overcome difficult personal circumstances. You can find out more from Wandsworth Council's website.

If you are passing near Battersea Park's Chelsea Gate you might find the bench placed in John's memory (also featured in Spring 2009).

And do take a look back at the article about John Johnson in the Spring 2005 newsletter) and Tony Tuck's tribute in Autumn 2008 (both available on our website).

There have been many building and infrastructure projects trailed, castigated or welcomed in *Battersea*

*Matters* over the years. Articles on three appeared in the Spring 2009 issue: the move of the US embassy to Battersea, the launch of the Royal College of Art Dyson building and the completion of the London Overground.

### Overground

The first two of these moved along relatively swiftly with the US embassy open for business in December 2017

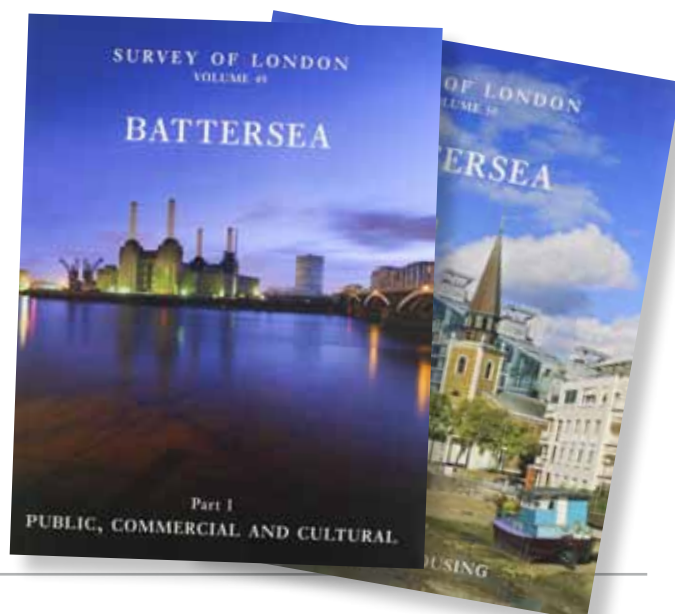
and the Dyson building open in September 2012 and soon to be part of a greatly enlarged Battersea campus. The London Overground was initially promised for completion by 2011 but actually opened on 9 December 2012. It is hard to believe that we are only just coming up to its seventh anniversary as it is such a heavily used link to and from Battersea and seems to have been around much longer.

### Proved right

Battersea Power Station and the surrounding site has featured regularly, not least with an article about Treasury Holdings plans in the Summer 2009 issue including an assertion that 'conversion of the Power Station could be completed by 2014 though other parts of the development would take much longer'. At least part of that statement has been proved right, but despite their plans being approved Treasury Holdings went into receivership at the end of 2011 and the site, with its approved plans, were bought by the Battersea Power Station Development Company in 2012.

Finally ending this current look back on a happier note, Spring 2009 saw an article about the forthcoming *Survey of London* volumes on Battersea. These two magnificent books were published in 2013.

PC John Johnson



## A Midwinter Night's Dream

A short story by Mike Roden

On my way out I took the recycling down to the bin. It's something I do without thinking, which was good because my mind was on Harriet's phone call.

'It's Leo,' she said. 'He's in a very strange mood.' A lot of you will remember my stories about her husband Leo, you may even have met him. He's fairly unforgettable, very thin, over six feet tall with a haunted air about him. A lovely chap, but prone to introspection.

'He's having these dreams,' Harriet had said, 'He thinks he's doomed.'

'We're all doomed in the end,' I muttered as I made my pathetic contribution against the coming climate cataclysm and dumped the bottles and paper in the bin.

I turned and almost collided with a stockily built stranger about my own age. He was carrying a bag of rubbish so I put on my friendly but firm voice. 'Sorry, this bin is for people in these flats.'

'I know,' he replied affably, 'I'm staying with my son. He's just moved in.'

Detecting a faint Scots accent I recalled my wife telling me that the new owner of number seven was from Scotland. I introduced myself.

His name was Brian. 'I've met your wife already,' he said. 'She's maybe told you we used to live in Battersea. Dad's work took him north when I was just a kid. We never came back.'

I didn't remember being told, but I nodded. 'So now your son's moved down here?'

'And I thought I'd come down, and see how the old place has changed.' He disposed of his rubbish. 'Your wife mentioned that the society was having a pre-Christmas drinks session next week. Said it'd be a chance to meet some Battersea folk.'

'Not a bad idea,' I said, 'Some of them were probably here when you were.'

'That's what she said. Someone called Leo?'

'Oh yes. He's been here – on and off – all his life. Actually, I'm just off to see him. Anyway, good to meet you,

Brian. See you next week in the pub if not before.'

As I came into their living room I felt like a prison chaplain visiting a condemned man. Leo sat staring at the fire with a tragic expression.

'So what's this dream you've been having? It can't be that bad, surely?'

'It gives me headaches thinking about it.' He eyed me mournfully. 'I've had it several times. Something's coming for me, I know it. Like a shadow approaching. I'm surrounded by people – maybe in a pub – but I'm alone with this feeling of terrible guilt. I know my time has come. Then something – someone – comes up to me and I know this is it and...'

'Yes?' I urged.

'And I wake up,' he said, 'Shaking and sweating...'

'And then wakes me up too!' said Harriet. There was the sound of post rattling through the letter box, and probably relieved to escape she went to get it.

'And I know it won't be long now,' Leo burst out. 'It's going to happen soon.'

'What's going to happen,' I demanded. 'What on earth have you done in your life to merit pursuing by the furies? You've lived the life of a saint, Leo, compared to some people.'

'Ah,' said Leo darkly, 'We've all done something. You will be found out in the end. Miss Duncan used to say that if you wouldn't own up to something.'

'Who's she?' I said, confused.

'My primary school teacher. She always knew....'

'And you probably felt guilty even if you hadn't done anything. It's anxiety that's all. You're worried about old age creeping up on you, perhaps.'

He shrugged, 'Bit late to worry about that.'

'What are you worrying about now?' said Harriet, putting a couple of letters on the table. She crossly waved the letter she was holding. 'That new postman's always putting things through the wrong door. I'll just take this next door.'

After she'd gone, I stared at my old friend. 'Leo, dreams are not forecasts of the future – they're a distillation of the past. Bits and pieces you've read and seen, all distorted. That's all.'

'So you say...' he grunted.

'Anyway, soon be Christmas. And we've got that drinks session at the Duke in a few days. You always enjoy that.'

'Who knows whether I'll still be here,' he returned glumly.

Well of course he was. He and Harriet arrived in the pub just after us. Only six days to Christmas but there was nothing festive about Leo. And there was something slightly panicky about the way he was staring round. There were quite a lot of people here already. 'People pressing round me.' He hissed. 'It's like the dream. Maybe it's going to happen here.'

I tried to make light of it. 'At least you're among friends,' I said but couldn't help a slight frisson of nervousness myself. If Nemesis really did descend on the Duke of Cambridge what form would it take?

Leo was suddenly distracted as Harriet handed him a letter. 'This is for you. That stupid postman stuck it through the door of number twenty five. I just found it in my bag...' He'd started ripping open the envelope. 'You don't need to open it now!'

He thrust the letter at her. 'I haven't got my glasses.'

'No, you never do,' she said, scanning the letter. Then she laughed. 'So your nightmare has come true. Your time has come, and you must go.'

'What?' he demanded.

'It's from the optician. Another reminder about you needing an eye test. Three years since your last.'

'I don't need an eye test. The glasses I've got...'

'Aren't good enough!' snapped Harriet. 'That's what's been giving you headaches. Eyestrain. Not these dreams.'

Leo looked toward me as if for support, but I shook my head. 'She's right. Like your dream predicted, your day of reckoning has arrived.'

Harriet was less than impressed. 'A lot of fuss about nothing. Sometimes Leo, I despair.'

'And next time you wake up dreaming you're going to be dragged to hell by harpies,' I said, 'Please just turn over and go back to sleep.'

As I spoke someone came up alongside me. It was Brian who I'd met the other morning. And his eyes

narrowed as he fixed Leo with a cold unfriendly stare.

'Could hardly fail to recognise you Leo could I? Bet you never thought you'd see me again.' There was a chill menace in the voice of this burly newcomer and those around us suddenly quietened

'Brian?' said Leo, confused. 'Is it really you?'

'Aye,' growled Brian, 'Your old classmate has returned.' He moved closer, 'It's time to settle our account, Leo. You thought you'd got away with it. But your sins will find you out, as Miss Duncan used to say.'

'What sins?' spluttered Leo. 'We were just little boys. And friends, I thought.'

Brian waited for a moment, 'Friends. Aye, so we were. And I lent

you a shilling for sweets - and you never gave it back.'

'A shilling?' stammered Leo, confused.

'You said you'd give it me back when you got your pocket money!'

'But you never came back. One day you were there, and then.' He paused suddenly realising, 'You went to Scotland?' Brian nodded, then Leo asked hesitantly, 'You've haven't really been holding a grudge about this all these years, have you?'

There was a long silence, then Brian let out a loud guffaw. 'Maybe I should have been an actor! I had you all believing I was some kind of Scots roughneck.' He grinned round at everyone, and the mood relaxed.

'Never gave that shilling a thought till I saw you standing there, Leo, and

it all came back to me.' Brian shook his head, 'Oh dear, you should have seen your face, Leo!'

Peace and goodwill returned to the Duke of Cambridge. If you were there you'll probably remember it. Leo took Brian round introducing him to everyone. Or maybe you don't recall it. It's funny the way the memory works.

I suppose you could say that Leo's premonition had come true. Nemesis had come calling for its pound of flesh, or at least five pence worth of it. These days Leo keeps his dreams to himself, and in case you were wondering, he did get himself a new pair of glasses.

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## Filled with wildlife – not just nightlife!

Sue Demont learns why London is a National Park City

On 22 July 2019 London was officially confirmed as the world's first National Park City, and thanks to the enterprising Friends of Wandsworth Common (FOWC), our borough was right at the heart of the action that week, enjoying a special presentation from the scheme's top promoter, 'guerrilla geographer' Dan Raven-Ellison.

### Stag beetles

It turns out that London, a city of nine million with 14,000 residents per square mile, houses nearly 15,000 species, including eight types of bat, the largest population of stag beetles in England, and hundreds of bird species. The city has 8.3 million trees (almost one per inhabitant) and nearly half of its urban areas are either green (commons, parks and gardens) or blue (rivers, canals and reservoirs). It was not surprising therefore that Dan was happy to kick off proceedings on the Common itself with an informal talk and walk for local councillors, Enable staff and representatives of local amenity societies, including the Battersea Society.

We were eager to hear what a guerrilla geographer did, and Dan's evening presentation on why green city space was so important and

beneficial did not disappoint. As the initiator of the Wild Cities Project he had walked across all 69 UK cities, including a trajectory from south west to north east London which took him right through Battersea.

Using sophisticated technology, Dan recorded his neural activity as he walked, enabling him to chart the rise and fall in his stress levels in relation to the type of environment through which he was walking. Readers may be alarmed to learn that his stress increased markedly as he ploughed through north Battersea (attributed partly to high pollution levels) but our Open Spaces Committee will be reassured by their dramatic reduction as Dan entered the green swathes of Heathbrook Park.

### Paving

Dan was keen to emphasise that despite London being one of the greenest cities of its size in the world, there were no grounds for complacency. Although 3.8 million homes in the cities have gardens, around 45% of these are now covered over with paving or decking, disturbing the water table and increasing the likelihood of flooding. And though London is desperately short of affordable housing, its roads



and car parks occupy more space than its housing stock.

Controversially, although Dan encountered all kinds of wildlife in the course of his walk across London, he reported a total absence of children – even though it was half term week. This observation was vociferously challenged by members of the audience who felt that Wandsworth Common was well used by all age groups, though it was recognised that this may not be typical of all districts of London. A lively Q & A session ensued with all agreeing that Dan's presentation had given considerable food for thought.

*Footnote: co-chairs of the FOWC Julia and Richard were honoured to be at the launch of London as the world's first National Park City, and to sign the charter on behalf of the Friends.*

*Friends of Wandsworth Common wandsworthcommon.org.  
Podcast by Dan from Putney Heath ravenellison.com/tag/walks  
To read the charter visit npc-london-charter.netlify.com*

# The river that made Battersea an island

Sue Demont reviews *The Heathwall: Battersea's Buried River* by Jon Newman

To the uninitiated, the cover of this book depicts an unlikely image. A tree sprouts crazily out of an urban river embankment, dominating a foreshore which recedes into a vaguely 21st century cityscape. But anyone lucky enough to go on one of Jon Newman's Heathwall walks will know that this scene is no work of the imagination. The tree exists, a small alder 'bonsai-ed between the river wall and a half-rotted timber stanchion' just up-river from the outfall of the long invisible Heathwall River at Nine Elms, and was possibly even seeded from an ancient waterside alder grove on the site of today's Queenstown Road.

## Dismal

Newman has a penetrating eye for this kind of detail and the achievement of his book is to bring to life and make interesting an 'inexpressibly dismal' long-forgotten watercourse which barely features in any of the extensive literature on London's lost rivers. Yet without the Heathwall, Battersea in its original incarnation as 'Badric's ieg' ie island, would not have existed. An excellent inside cover map reveals Battersea to have been a semi-rural island as late as 1840, divided from the rest of south London by the Heathwall River which flowed parallel to Lavender Hill and Wandsworth Road from Battersea Creek in the west to just north-east of Nine Elms Railway Station, then London's third railway terminus.

Long before 1840 the Heathwall

had contributed to the renowned fertility of Battersea's farmland – but also to its perennial problems with flooding due to rising river levels, requiring a complex network of defensive walls and sluice gates and generating heated disputes between landowners eager to deny responsibility for the impact of the regular storm surges on one another's land and property.

And things only got worse. As the industrialisation of Battersea gathered pace during the 19th century, the Heathwall's fate was to become nothing short of an open sewer, emitting a 'vile smell' requiring plentiful flushing and the application of chloride of lime to destroy 'offensive gases'. It might be expected that the onset of Joseph Bazalgette's grand sewerage scheme would save the Heathwall from further ignominy, but within a year of completion Battersea was again badly flooded 'from the simple fact of the storm overflows in the Southern Low Level being a greater height than the floors of the places flooded.'

Worse still, the burial of the river for use as an official sewer meant that the content of its flooding was not confined to water! Even the opening of the Heathwall Pumping Station

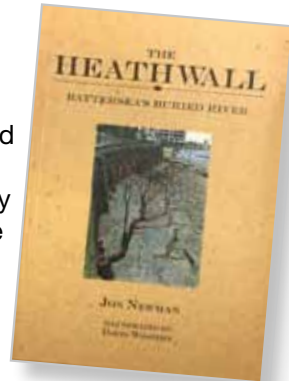
at Mill Pond Bridge in 1898 failed to eradicate the problem caused by storm surges, and Newman brings the Heathwall story bang up to date by explaining how the Thames Tideway project (completion date 2023) is intended to resolve this still ongoing historical problem.

## Walking guide

The above story is complex yet woven into a highly readable narrative, supported by that invaluable map. The rest of the book comprises an excellent walking guide, enabling the reader to follow the exact watercourse of the Heathwall from west to east even though there is almost no physical evidence of the river itself (the exception being the manhole covers by the entrance to Heathbrook Park on St Rule Street, where walkers are invited to listen to, smell and 'just about glimpse' the rushing waters of the Heathwall sewer far below).

Other visual signifiers such as the white willows in Heathbrook Park and place names like Ashley Court and Fount Street are identified, and the walker's experience is further enhanced by a wide range of vignettes of Battersea's rich industrial, social and political history across the decades. The 'overlooked and underloved' Heathwall River has undoubtedly found its champion.

*Footnote: Jon will be leading his Heathwall walk for Battersea Society members on Sunday 19 April 2020. Copies of The Heathwall: Battersea's Buried River by Jon Newman are available from the Clapham Bookshop, Amazon or [info@backwaterbooks.co.uk](mailto:info@backwaterbooks.co.uk)*



**Captioned as 'The Late Overflow of the Thames: Garden Walls Overthrown in Fountain St. Wandsworth Rd.'**



# Memories of war recalled in peacetime

Jenny Sheridan records the War Comes Home project

It started in late 2016, as a desire to celebrate the lives of the approximately 500 civilians whose memorial stands in Christchurch Gardens, and to promote the gardens locally. It grew into a book, an archive, a youth theatre production, a talk, a Friends group and more.

War Comes Home has come to the end of its Heritage Lottery grant and formally to the end of the project, though its legacy continues and more may develop from it.

We – Geraldine Kelly, Carol Rahn, Sue Demont and myself – planned at first to research the lives of the people in Battersea who died in the bombing in the Second World War. This proved more difficult than we had thought, as there are few records available. We then realised that we could instead capture first-hand memories from people who had lived through the period, memories that would otherwise soon be lost.

We had a local history project on our hands! Professor Penny Corfield helped us with protocols for conducting interviews, including guidance on consent. Katherine Low Settlement introduced us to some of their elders, and there were others we knew personally, such as Maureen Larkin, formerly the Battersea Society's membership secretary.

We found 19 individuals who had been young in Battersea during the war. We interviewed them and video-recorded most of these interviews. They were generous with their memories and clearly enjoyed re-living experiences that at the time had been variously exciting, frightening or funny.

## Crosshead

Our first activity was a hugely enjoyable tea party held on a hot June afternoon in Christchurch Gardens, serenaded by singers in 1940s garb (*Battersea Matters* summer 2017) and attended by newly elected MP Marsha de Cordova. The



Bomb damage in Tennyson Street

party was supported by the Battersea Society and by Christ Church and St Stephen's Church.

In 2018 Enable Leisure and Culture came on board. They guided us through the complex process of applying for and managing a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This enabled us to improve the videos, make an introductory film and to produce the book to a high standard.

Our recorded interviews formed the basis of the book *The Bombing of Battersea*, written by Sue Demont and partly supported by the Battersea Society. It has proved remarkably popular, selling over 700 copies to date through street stalls, our talk, Waterstones and the War Comes Home Facebook page. A copy was given to all our participants, many of whom ordered further copies for relatives and friends.

The interviews, and an introductory film, were also the genesis of *Growing up in Wartime Battersea*, the scripted and illustrated talk developed by Carol Rahn in conjunction with Spectacle Films. She has delivered the talk to seven local civic and interest societies (readers may have heard it at the Royal College of Art in June, as a Battersea Society event for the Wandsworth Heritage Festival) and to the Friends of the Museum of London. It has in every case been received with gasps, laughter and enthusiasm. We are looking at possible future audiences across London.

Omnibus Theatre's youth group developed three separate versions for different age groups, based on the videos and a meeting with two of our interviewees. This introduced the topic of childhood in a war-torn modern city to a younger and more diverse group and their families.

One of our original aims was the enhancement of Christchurch Gardens. Geraldine Kelly (now a member of our open spaces committee) has set up a Friends group. Their events so far have included a winter gathering with a mobile wood-fired pizza oven and another successful tea party which showcased the group's cake-making skills. The Gardens now have a group of people who care for them and who enjoy getting together as neighbours. They are in discussion with Enable about a picnic table and other improvements.

## Daffodils

A pleasing aspect of the project has been the involvement of Christchurch Primary School. Children from each class came down to the Gardens and planted daffodils, which make a joyful picture each spring. And this term Carol Rahn delivered a specially designed lesson on the topic to Year 5. She has also delivered it to Year 6 of Honeywell Junior School. She would welcome introductions to other schools.

The project, and the people we interviewed, leave a lasting legacy. The digital archive – audio and visual recordings, transcripts and edited thematic videos as well as the script of Carol's talk – have been given to Wandsworth's Heritage Library Service. The videos are also available on our Facebook page.

We all feel privileged to have met the people we interviewed – our stars. We are delighted that their memories of an independent fun-filled childhood, as well as trauma and tragedy in a bombed Battersea will survive for future generations. And we hope that many of you will take the opportunity to visit the civilian war memorial in Christchurch Gardens. [www.facebook.com/warcomeshome](http://www.facebook.com/warcomeshome) Christchurch Gardens, Battersea Park Road (entrance in Cabul Road).



and into a more public space. The emphasis here is on conceptual art that focuses on craft. Many of his customers were originally drawn by what they saw in the window and have come back repeatedly, while his customer base from farther afield is also growing. His advice

## Buying art: you have to love it

Carol Rahn discovers a surprising number of local galleries

**B**attersea Society members may not realise the richness of contemporary art close at hand, with at least half a dozen galleries within easy reach. Longest established are **Webb's Fine Art Gallery** and **Northcote Gallery** (above left), both of which opened in the 90s. A chance encounter with American artist Paul Crotto in 2003 has made his art and legacy the pride of Lizzie Cranwell-Ward's Webb's Fine Art Gallery. Crotto was a friend of Robert Graves, studied under Fernand Léger and exhibited alongside Picasso, Chagall and Derain. Cranwell-Ward collects and sells his art worldwide. Otherwise, she hunts down artists 'who live next to the subjects they paint, and particularly favours those in remote corners of Cornwall. She describes her gallery as a lighthouse, with paintings on view, day and night, thanks to the large windows on two sides.

### Atmospheric

Diccon Pettit and his sister own Northcote Gallery. Pettit looks for art that 'sings', art that he judges to be special but never aggressive or political. What he likes best about owning a gallery is that 'I love finding beautiful things and I like watching people fall in love with them.' As well as paintings, there are also carefully selected sculptures and occasionally ceramics here. Pettit's customers come from all over the world and many of them he has known for years. His advice to novices and experienced collectors alike is 'Don't be afraid to ask questions; it's as simple as that', and he describes himself as being there to introduce people to art and to encourage them

where they might otherwise feel nervous.

The newest gallery is **Cooke Latham**, on the first floor of what used to be the flour warehouse opposite the former J & B Stevenson bakery on Parkgate Road. The loft-style gallery is an extension of Clemency Cooke's home and enables the slower programme she and her business partner Charlotte Latham have chosen, with longer-running exhibitions, higher quality catalogues and better essays than the more frantic gallery world in which they both trained.

What is the best part of owning a gallery for Cooke? 'It's the artists. It's having the autonomy to look for what you want to show and to do what you believe in.' One of the things they believe in is making art accessible for younger clients. Her advice to collectors: 'Like all art forms, if they're interested, they should immerse themselves in it; take their time; see as much as they can. And find out what it is that they're really interested in ... To bring it home, you actually need to love it. If people think about how much they're willing to spend on a sofa, which in no way accrues value, has no possibility of doing so, with art it has the possibility, but you've just got to love it, want to live with it.' The next exhibition here, opening in March 2020, features the work of Greta Alfaro, an artist with an international pedigree.

### Craft

For Andrew Wenrick, architect, artist and self-described 'serial multi-tasker', opening **The Last Supper** gallery on Webb's Road was the way to move his work out of his home

echoes that of Clemency Cooke, 'Only buy it if you love it. Don't worry about it appreciating or anything like that. You should be buying it because you want to look at it every day and enjoy it.'

Jennifer Guerrini Maraldi also reached the point where she wanted to move her professional life out of her home and in 2017 she opened **JGM Gallery** (above right) on Howie Street, near the RCA. She specialises in Australian Aboriginal art and opened her first gallery in Melbourne at the age of 20. Led by artists who were working for her, she now also showcases contemporary British art. The current exhibition is 'Habitat: Artists Making Furniture or Things That Might be Confused as Furniture.' Contemporary art, she says, 'takes you away from your everyday existence into a world where someone else is giving you their view; an emotional experience, rather like music or any other form of the arts. It touches your spiritual side.' The gallery is a simple light-filled space that she intends to be friendly and welcoming.

Caro Foss, of **Foss Fine Art**, just off the Northcote Road, chooses her artists because 'I fall in love. It's a passion.' Not surprisingly, she would advise collectors to buy on the same basis. 'It has to hit you inside. You have to walk away and it still eats at you. You have to come back. It's an expression of yourself'. The compact gallery has room not only for paintings, for example the expressive landscapes by Robert Newton in a recent exhibition, but also ceramics and a few carefully chosen craft objects.

These contemporary galleries deserve to be better known to Battersea residents. Their owners are ready to share their knowledge and love for the works they represent. Explore.