



York Gardens library saved

York Gardens library has had a stay of execution. In 2010, as part of the Council's requirement to save £55 million over the next four years, councillors proposed closing it along with reducing hours at all the borough's libraries. York Gardens, as the Council's equality impact assessment acknowledged, is in an area with high levels of deprivation and the library is well used by children from the Kambala and Winstanley estates.

There was an outcry at news of the proposed closure. There were several petitions, including one from a local primary school's pupils that told how 'the staff always brighten our day with a big smile.' There were features in the national as well as local press. A video was made. At one well-attended public meeting a ninety-year-old spoke

passionately of the importance for elderly people of the bridge club that meets in the community hall. Actors, comedians, journalists got involved. Actor Sam West gave a speech in its defence, pointing out the importance of libraries for children both for homework and for reading for enjoyment and inspiration. The mother of a severely disabled child spoke of the way the librarians made it possible for her boy to read.

Homework club

The Council listened. At a meeting in February they agreed an option that had not been put forward earlier. This Big Society initiative would see the library staying open, with substantial support from volunteers for a reduced professional staff. The focus would be on the children's service, with a homework club

supported by volunteer parents from nearby Thomas's prep school. Space in the building would be leased to an independent faith school and some would be used by the Council's children's service. Space would need to be rented out for private and community events to enable sufficient savings to be made.

Reduced opening hours

Local residents are delighted that their children will continue to benefit from the library, though some have concerns about the availability and staying power of volunteers.

Elsewhere in Battersea, libraries opening hours will be reduced, leading to reductions in staffing levels. But our libraries will stay open, unlike in many other boroughs.

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

From the Editor



It's a strange world we live in. There's a house advertised for sale near Wandsworth Common for £4.2 million, with several others for over £2 million. Who can afford prices like these?

Meanwhile people – especially workers in the voluntary and public sectors – wait anxiously to hear if their jobs will be cut and they may have to lose the roof over their head.

I have tried in this issue of *Battersea Matters* to look at some of the important issues facing us today. Below you will find the views of some in the retail sector, a vital part of Battersea's economy. Our MP gives her view of how national policies will impact on local affairs. And the voluntary sector explains the challenges it faces.

How is the retail sector faring?

Jenny Sheridan enquires

We are constantly told how difficult times are for consumers, with the risk to jobs, rising inflation and the increase in VAT. If it's tough for consumers, presumably it's tough for retailers too. So what is it like for business and the retail sector? In some parts of east and north-east London, high streets present a very depressing picture, with row after row of shuttered shops. Is it as bad here?

On Lavender Hill I counted 21 shops that had closed down. Then I spoke to Anthony Laban, chair of the Lavender Hill Business Association. Mr Laban, who owns a large hairdressing salon, was upbeat. "Two years or 18 months ago there was a dramatic change: people stopped spending. Now they have re-surfaced, and there's money around again. Customers are

It is wonderful news that York Gardens Library will remain open. The Council has listened to the community's passionate defence of the library and has introduced a new 'Big Society' option, using volunteers. I am sure councillors are aware that the use of volunteers is not necessarily a cheap, and certainly not an easy option. As Andrew Smith points out on page 4, volunteers need to be actively recruited, trained and managed.

An article on page 8 offers a guide to food-related courses. My leaving present from my last job was a voucher for a cooking class at Books for Cooks. It was a great present, and I have returned often, the most recent workshop being on the rather esoteric topic of Italian Jewish food.

Winter garden

On a chilly day in early March I attended the opening of the winter garden in the park. This is a magnificent achievement by the Friends of Battersea Park, who had a vision of the garden in 2004 and have raised the huge sum of

more aware of what they're spending their cash on. The whole experience matters more. A lot of businesses are flourishing, especially the ones that are specialist and interesting and make shopping a pleasant experience. Look at the fabric shop – they're amazing. It's because they engage with customers, they're helpful. The Drum Shack has enlarged and sells lots of other instruments."

What about all those shuttered shops, I ask. "Well, most of them closed down some time ago. Some landlords seem happy to leave a shop empty for years.

Proactive

"It's easy to be gloomy, and you can't be sure how it's going to play out, but talking to our members, what has happened is that they have changed their businesses. You have to be proactive, go out and find the customers. Things have got better from what they were two years ago

£150,000 (with support from the Council and many others) to make it a reality. It will be wonderful to see how it changes through the winter months and how it develops through the years. According to the FoBP, it 'celebrates winter with plants that provide vibrant colour from leaf fall to bud burst.' How exciting that sounds!

Apart from herons and the ubiquitous shrieking parakeets, there is a wide variety of bird life in the park. I wish there were guided bird walks to help us see and identify them. Are there sparrows in the park? I play host to a noisy crowd of them in my garden, enjoying the shelter of shrubs and ivy and eating at the feeder. Once they were as much a feature of London life as scarlet buses and the Changing of the Guard. On page ? the London Wildlife Trust offers ideas for encouraging them back.

There's no Man on the Bus this month. Hopefully normal service will be resumed in the next issue.

Jenny Sheridan
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but it's not as good as it was four years ago. "Take-aways are doing well, perhaps because people are going out to restaurants less. And coffee shops, the small non-chain ones like the Cake Boutique down the road. You go in for a quick coffee and because you have a good time and you get a really personal service you come out with a cake."

Mr Laban is enthusiastic about the Lavender Hill festival. "Last year there was a lovely atmosphere. It brings out the village in people. And it was incredibly diverse, especially the food – Turkish, Thai, Indian, Italian. We had 10,000 visitors and I hope we get a good turn-out this June too."

So the message from Lavender Hill, at least, is that the retail sector is surviving and even in some respects thriving. Let's hope our local shops and shopping centres continue to do well. And don't forget: Shop Local!

Benefits beyond austerity

Jane Ellison MP gives her view of the year ahead for Battersea



The dire state of our country's finances casts a long shadow over most political debate, both local and national, and inevitably much of this year will be

dominated by economics. However, there are radical reforms underway in many areas of Government activity and one of the tasks for me, as Battersea's MP, is to look at the challenges and opportunities these present for my constituents.

Whether you love it or loathe it – and I am firmly in the 'love it' camp – The Big Society is a concept we are all talking about and one that potentially has real resonance in Battersea, with its proud history of activist civil society. Look no further than the Battersea Society itself.

Although the timing of this debate means it sometimes gets reduced to an argument about 'cuts' it remains an important discussion. Many local people, churches and community groups are joining in, giving me their take on the Big Society and the role they see themselves playing in it.

The Localism Bill offers such groups new rights including the Community Right to Buy, which gives communities powers to save local assets threatened with closure, such as shops and pubs. Greater transparency and accountability is

a big part of the Coalition's agenda and here in Wandsworth we see the immediate impact of this as the Council has responded positively to new duties of financial disclosure. The Council now publishes all expenditure over £500 online, and is in the process of publishing information about all staff salaries. These changes will create 'an army of armchair auditors' looking at how public money is spent.

Flexibility

Another part of the Localism Bill that could directly benefit our local businesses is the new discretionary Business Rate discounts. This will give the Council greater flexibility to set lower business rates, with the aim of reducing the tax burden on small businesses. I want to see our local shopkeepers and small businesses benefiting from local low-tax policies in the way that Battersea's residents do.

There is, of course, much discussion in Battersea about changes to our local NHS services. The national NHS budget was ring-fenced by the Coalition Government, but I am under no illusions that there will still be difficult decisions to be taken. However, there are also opportunities and one of the most exciting is the responsibility being devolved to councils for public health. Health and Wellbeing Boards will be closer to the communities

they serve and democratically accountable.

I am pleased that Wandsworth are off the mark early, with a shadow Board already being set up. I see so many families who have complex problems and the Council is newly empowered to bring together all the relevant agencies – such as housing, social services, the NHS – to try and help these families make progress.

Free school

Battersea is likely to have one of the first free schools in the country if the proposed Bolingbroke Academy goes ahead this year. I was proud to vote for the enabling legislation last summer and I am a firm believer in the potential of this new state school to be a force for good in our area. Many Battersea residents joined the fight to keep the former hospital building in public use. I hope they, like me, will take pleasure in the new school's motto; *Fortiter ubique* (which means 'bravely everywhere'). It is based on the motto of the Bolingbroke & St John's League of Friends. It came from the family coat of arms of Canon John Erskine Clarke, a founder of the Bolingbroke Hospital.

There is no doubt that this year will bring considerable challenges for many people in Battersea, I know that from my email inbox and my surgeries. However, beyond austerity, I believe that many of the Coalition Government's reforms will deliver real long-term benefits for our area.

Creative opportunity

Do you paint, sculpt, take photographs, make prints or ceramics or engage in any other type of visual art or craft? Have you considered exhibiting or selling your work?

If so, the Wandsworth Artists' Open House weekends are the perfect opportunity to show your work, network with other artists and meet local people, while enriching the cultural scene in Battersea.

The Artists' Open House weekends are an annual event, organized by Wandsworth Council.

They attracted over 90 venues and 200 artists in 2010. Last year, each venue saw an average of 150 visitors during the two weekends and sold 20 works. In terms of participating artists, Battersea is poorly represented relative to other areas such as Tooting or Putney. Local artist Louise Gillard is keen to redress the balance by encouraging more Battersea artists to participate, as well as boosting the profile of the Open House through linked activities with local schools and businesses. Louise says, 'It's not just for experienced exhibitors. Anyone

engaged in arts and crafts can take part. If you don't have enough work to exhibit solo, we can put you in touch with other artists who wish to share a venue. It's not just about painting and sculpture – jewellery-makers, potters, knitters, glass-engravers and digital artists – all are welcome.'

This year's Artists' Open House takes place over the weekends of 1–2 and 8–9 October. Deadline for registration is 10 June.

Could you support Open House by offering exhibition space or sponsoring local publicity? Contact Louise Gillard info@louisegillardart.com

Braced for cuts

Andrew Smith of the Wandsworth Voluntary Sector Development Agency looks to the future

There is a lot of debate at the moment about The Big Society. In Parliament, in the media and also within the voluntary and community sector in Wandsworth.

In February the Wandsworth Voluntary Sector Development Agency held a discussion forum for local organisations to explore the issues they face in these challenging times. There are many changes affecting voluntary and community groups at the moment including personalisation, the Big Society and dwindling funding opportunities. Organisations are finding themselves in new and changing environments where they are competing against each other for resources.

No service spared

Mike Brook and Chris Blyth from Wandsworth Council's Economic Development Office gave an overview of the Council's position in the current harsh economic climate that will require the Council to reduce spending by £55 million over the next four years. Mike Brook explained that while no service or department will be spared from cuts, the Council is looking for new ways of promoting local action and volunteering, potentially through two new grants schemes for 2011-2012:

Transition Fund: to help organisations that are going through major financial change (experiencing significant reductions in funding).

Big Society Fund: aims to promote local projects and initiatives and to stimulate local volunteering.

The sums suggested from each fund were £2,500 per project on average.

Concern was expressed that the Big Society Fund would allocate money only to new volunteering initiatives, leaving those that work with existing volunteers unfunded. The council officers said that existing initiatives could apply if they seek to involve new volunteers.

Members observed that £2,500 would not be enough to sustain many organisations. They suggested that £5,000 was more realistic in order to enable them to have a genuine impact on communities. They also suggested that community groups be actively involved in decisions about funding. Mike Brook and Chris Blyth assured those present that these ideas will be taken back to the Council.

Quality v cost

Questions were raised about the limited emphasis the Council places on quality as opposed to cost when commissioning services. Linked to this were concerns about the transfer of public health to local authorities. Some organisations are delivering health-related services for the Primary Care Trust, which places the emphasis firmly on quality over price. Some groups were concerned that this will change and that cheaper commercial providers will

take the place of local community groups.

There was a general debate about the practical challenges around volunteering, both in light of the new emphasis on voluntary action in the Big Society as well as issues connected with unemployment and the shifting motivations that people have for volunteering.

The argument was made that organisations working with volunteers find it challenging to take on people who are primarily looking for a training facility or a short-term placement to enhance their CVs. On the other hand, unemployed people often have to show evidence that they are seeking employment or actively volunteering.

It was agreed that volunteering work placements are challenging, often requiring Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checking, management and supervision, training etc. Increasingly, funders require organisations to involve volunteers in funded projects. Many groups at the meeting raised the view that while there are increasing demands on the role of volunteers in society, the support mechanisms for those volunteers (often organisations in the voluntary and community sector) are facing a future of reduced resources.

If you are part of an organisation that would like to be involved and share your views at the next Voluntary and Community Sector Forum please contact Wandsworth Voluntary Sector development Agency to find out more.

0208 875 2846, info@wvda.org.uk
www.wvda.org.uk

Innovations and archaeology

The next meeting of the **Wandsworth Historical Society** will look at the impact of the Thames Tunnel project on local archaeology. It will be on Friday 25th March at 8pm at Friends Meeting house, Wandsworth High Street. Everyone is welcome.

The **West London Local History Conference** focuses this year on science and innovators. Price's Candles of Battersea are one of the topics, along with pioneering gardeners and pharmaceuticals. The conference takes

place in Hounslow on Saturday 26th March. *For more information, contact Neil Robson, 119 Heythrop Street, SW18 5BT.* ngrobson@tiscali.co.uk

Wandsworth Environmental Forum

The next meeting of the WEF will take place on Wednesday 18th April at 7pm.

Venue: Wandsworth Town Hall, room 145.

This is an opportunity for local residents to discuss with each other and with representatives of the council, local and national environmental issues.

www.wandsworthef.org.uk

The 'Big Society' and the Battersea Society

Chair Tony Tuck reflects on the times we live in

At this time of year, we in community organisations are writing our annual reviews, seeking to be accountable to our membership for the past year's actions and decisions. We also try to look ahead, to the coming year and beyond.

This year many local voluntary organisations and charities will be assessing whether drastic cuts to their core funding will force them to close or whether they can reorganise to meet the changed world of decimated funding. It is extraordinary that the three largest such bodies in Wandsworth, namely Age Concern Wandsworth, the Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the Wandsworth Voluntary Service Development Agency, are facing dramatic cuts in their funding for 2011/12.

Empty

The image that resonates with me is the E H Shepard illustration of Eeyore's Birthday, looking at a burst balloon and an empty honey jar. Its caption could read, 'So this is what they mean by The Big Society'.

It is a wonderful thing to be self-sufficient and self-financing, as is the Battersea Society. We employ no-one so have no staff costs. We have no premises on which to pay rent and outgoings. We are supremely lucky to have in Mike

Roden an outstanding web designer and in Jenny Sheridan an editor of our excellent *Battersea Matters* newsletter.

Subscriptions

We can afford the costs of production because our almost 300-strong members pay an annual fee of £10, which underwrites our running costs. So, dear reader, provided you keep up your membership subscriptions, the Battersea Society can keep going (so long as we on the committee don't wear out and do manage to recruit new members!)

As our members know, our events committee put on an extraordinarily diverse and interesting range of events. Some of these we charge for and some are free. Where we make a charge we add a small overhead to the basic cost. Over time, this accrues and your committee has agreed to make small donations to local charities to support their community activities. These are



reported to the membership and any member can write to me and suggest a deserving local group that would benefit from a donation.

But we want too to make a difference in the longer term. We have agreed to put some of our resources towards two medium to long term projects.

Green plaque scheme

We wish to establish a Battersea green plaque scheme to commemorate notable people, events, or establishments. The Wandsworth Society has done this for some years and provides an excellent working template. We have sufficient resources but we lack time.

We also intend to design a series of signposts for the Thames riverside walk. We have had preliminary discussions with officers at the Council. We have exchanged views with the Wandsworth Historical Society. We have spent a merry morning at the Battersea historical library researching the history of the reach between Wandsworth and Battersea Bridges. But again, other demands on time have forced us to put this project on a back burner.

So, dear reader, if you have an interest in the history of Battersea, its people, properties and industries, and would be prepared to give some time and energy to our working group do please get in touch with me.

Tony Tuck

chair@batterseasociety.org.uk

Clapham Sect green plaque unveiled

Should the Clapham Sect have been named the Battersea sect? Certainly they attended Holy Trinity Church on Clapham Common, but William Wilberforce lived in Broomfield Road, Battersea. In December 2010 a Wandsworth Council green plaque was erected to the sect's memory at 5 Canford Road (just off Clapham Common West Side), near the site of Battersea Rise House, where they met. The house was demolished in 1906 and residential streets were built on the 22 acre site. There is a plaque to William Wilberforce on a house in Wroughton Road.



Strengthening one's inner core

Jenny Sheridan talks to Jenny Dennis, a local Pilates teacher. This is the first of a series of articles on physical activity

suitable for the gym-averse 'My husband has been doing Pilates for a while now,' says Jenny Dennis. 'He's an aerobically fit 45-year-old, but he couldn't stand on one leg to put a sock on before he started. He can now.' Balance and stability are two of the benefits that the system confers, she says.

Jenny is an American physiotherapist who came to England in 1993 on a work visa, married an Englishman and stayed. They have lived in Battersea for 15 years. She first came across Pilates when working in general rehab at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. "I learnt it as an adjunct to physiotherapy and did a part-time training course over 18 months with APPI, the Australian Physiotherapy and Pilates Institute."

With her hospital patients, Jenny used the system to help people regain strength and balance after surgery. She decided to move into public classes because of the evidence for its usefulness in improving low back pain, shoulder and hip problems and pelvic floor weakness, especially in women who have had several children.

'The basic idea of Pilates is developing strength in the centre of the body. Having a strong core takes the pressure off the joints. The most important muscle for stability is the transversus abdominus, the

deep muscle that runs from hip to hip just above the pubic bone. The gluteal muscles in the bottom and the muscles in the low back are also vital – that whole area round the centre needs to be strong.' Jenny's exercises also include a focus on strengthening the arms, shoulders and legs.

Jenny sees the system as beneficial for older people. 'Balance, flexibility, strength and stability – these are things that start to deteriorate as we get older. Some people have chronic back or hip pain which Pilates can alleviate. You do need to be able-bodied enough to get on and off the floor, unless you go to a studio that has special machines – but that's very expensive.'

Small groups

Most of Jenny's classes (11 groups and five small group classes each week) are run in blocks of eight or ten sessions. She also runs a drop-in group at Broomwood Methodist Church on the second Monday of each month. This is aimed mainly at people over 60, with several members over 80. Here the exercises are mostly chair-based.

Pilates (pronounced 'Pillahtees') was developed by Joseph Pilates, a German working in England who was interned as an enemy alien in the First World War. Already a body-builder, he used his time in the internment camp to develop his series of mat-based exercises.



Popular at first in the world of dance, Pilates did not gain general public recognition until the 1980s.

What are Pilates exercises like? As an example, Jenny describes the shoulder bridge: 'Lie on your back, with your knees flat on the floor. Flatten your spine into the floor, then slowly curl your back off the floor, lifting your hips as high as you can. At the top there should be a diagonal from knees to shoulders. Gradually sink the breastbone and replace your spine slowly on the floor, one section at a time. It's not strenuous, but it has to be done correctly.'

All Jenny's day and evening classes take place in south Battersea, between the commons. Her clients are local and many are mothers who work full or part-time. The few men in the classes mostly join due to back problems.

Emma Coppleson has been going to Jenny's classes for seven years and says, 'It has completely changed my life. I had severe back pain after my son was born, and it has made a big difference to that. It has strengthened my stomach muscles. I know now how to use my body properly. It focuses on the whole body not just parts of it, like running or gym work.'

"The best way to find a well qualified teacher is through either APPI or Body Control," says Jenny. "It's important to have a certified instructor who will make sure you do the exercises safely."

*Jenny Dennis runs Pilates for Posture. Tel 07966 017294
www.pilatesforposture.com
Body Control 020 7636 8900
www.bodycontrol.co.uk
APPI 020 7372 3606
www.ausphysio.com*

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Planning Matters

Good and bad news, says
Monica Tross

I can start with some good news about the site of the former Employment Centre in Beechmore Road. Having had two previous applications refused on the grounds of over-development, Shanley Homes have now put in a new application for a 'smaller scale, lower density scheme responsive to its environment.' Plans have been drawn up following workshop meetings with neighbours, 150 of whom are being consulted. Look up application reference 2011/0316 to see what you think. Don't forget to let me know at planning@batterseasociety.org/uk if you think my optimism is misplaced.

An application for demolition and new building at 119 Chatham Road is a far less happy proposal. The plans are for a modern block, taller than the surrounding buildings and obtruding onto the streetscape at the front. There is no sense of response to the largely nineteenth-century architecture of much of the building in Chatham Road. We do hope that many of you will comment on the proposals (2011/0024) and also let your local councillors know your views. The owners of this site have a real opportunity to make a very positive contribution to Chatham

Road and we hope they will think again about their plans.

The council has been consulting on their Local Implementation Plan (LIP) for Transport in Wandsworth. There is not very much detail given at this stage and in our response we stressed the need for widespread local consultation both to inform detailed plans as they are developed and to comment on final proposals.

Shameful

We took the opportunity to repeat our many concerns about Clapham Junction station even though we fear that the council will say (probably rightly) that it is not they who are really to blame. However it does sometimes seem that they have been too accepting of the lack of action by those who are responsible: Network Rail, South West Trains and Transport for London. I am sure we would all support Wandsworth Council in a campaign for improvements, even within the existing spatial constraints. It is quite shameful that facilities have been allowed to deteriorate at a time when there are over 17 million entries and exits to the station each year and 16 million interchanges. As some of you have pointed out lack of cleanliness and everyday maintenance makes this worse. Opening up Brighton Yard will help those with luggage or mobility problems coming from the

west or using the 344 or 156 bus routes from the east, but we really need step-free access from Grant Road too, especially with the likely extension of the East London Line and the heavy usage of the new service to Willesden. Decent bus-rail interchange facilities wouldn't go amiss either. These issues won't be solved in the short-term and we are grateful to those of you who gave us your views on the station and its surroundings. Your input helps us do better in raising awareness of the need for action with all who should be concerned with the station.

Activity in Nine Elms continues with the Tideway Development given planning permission and plans for the site of the Marco Polo building exhibited prior to a planning application later this year. Some of us will be sorry to see the Marco Polo building go, not necessarily the best building ever but adding to the gaiety of the streetscape.

The Travis Perkins site is up for demolition and we are concerned that the design of the frontage along Battersea Park Road is out of keeping with the streetscape and that the block behind will overshadow its surroundings. Reference 2011/0185.

Let us have your views on this or any other planning or transport issue. Contact us at planning@batterseasociety.org/uk

Mayor opens Winter Garden

Jenny Sheridan celebrates the new addition to Battersea Park

It has taken five years and cost £150,000 but on 3 March the Friends of Battersea Park achieved their dream. The winter garden in the south-west corner of the park was opened by the Mayor of London.

On an appropriately cold day, with Battersea Park School's steel band playing, 'With a little help from my Friends', Boris Johnson spoke of city residents' yearning for green space. He praised the park for its beauty – before, in a somehow typical gaffe, complimenting 'the Friends of the Olympic Park'.

Dan Pearson, the garden's

designer, rushed in late having been delayed on a plane from Japan. He looked pleased at the garden's transformation – over 60,000 bulbs and perennials have been planted in the last few months to complement the 300 trees and shrubs and trees planted last autumn. He commented, "The winter garden has been planted to ensure that there's always something happening in the darkest months."

The earth is still bare (but beautifully mulched) – to allow space for the plants to expand. Already large clumps of hellebores, pale pink

Jimmy Burns, Boris Johnson and Rosie Boycott at the opening of the Winter Garden



cherry blossom and sweet-scented sarcococca give an idea of the glories to come in future winters.

Learn to cook up a storm

Cookery classes are useful, educational and fun, says Jenny Sheridan

Why go to a cookery class? There are several reasons – you may be an unconfident cook, you may want to learn the secrets of a different cuisine or discover how to use exotic ingredients, or you may just want to spend a fun morning followed by a delicious lunch. While many such classes are located in central London, we can boast a number locally, including some interesting food-related classes such as bee-keeping and butchery. Most of the organisations listed here offer gift vouchers, which make an excellent present.

The Honey Shop's beginners' beekeeping courses don't take place on site in Battersea but at the owners' apiary and orchard in Surrey. Weekend courses cost £230 and provide a practical and theoretical introduction to bees and beekeeping. They have provided several Battersea garden-owners with enough information to get started on keeping bees and making their own honey. Protective clothing is supplied and the course includes chocolate croissants for breakfast and a home-made lunch. The next course will be in late June.
The Hive Honey Shop, 93 Northcote Road. 020 7924 6233 www.thehivehoneyshop.co.uk

Hennessy's is a family butcher's business that has done well from the growing interest in traceable and rare-breed meat. This year they are going to offer butchery classes, starting in May or June. Each class will focus on a different meat, such as lamb, pork and beef as well as sausage-making. Students will learn about the various breeds of animal and different cuts and how to cut, cook and carve them. They will enjoy a snack supper with drinks and will take away a joint they have prepared themselves. Classes will take place behind the shop in the evening and

will cost around £85.
Hennessy's, 80 Northcote Road.

The Eagle has acquired a field in Sussex, where it grazes eight Dexter cattle (known for the excellence of their beef) and six hairy pigs. Eagle landlords Simon Clarke and Dave Law are planning to organise foraging days in Sussex and butchery workshops in the Eagle. Initially these will be for pub regulars. Simon is interested in smoking hams and possibly mackerel and they already make their own sausages.
Eagle Alehouse, Chatham Road.

Recipease is the cooking school branch of Jamie Oliver's empire. The classes are largely for beginners though filleting fish and making bouillabaisse sound quite challenging. There are four hands-on classes on most days of the week, with up to ten students per class. This is clearly a successful formula; weekend courses are fully booked three to four weeks ahead. Risotto and cooking the perfect steak are among the most popular classes. After cooking a dish, students can either enjoy it there and then or take it home. Cost: between £30 and £60.
Recipease, 48 St Johns Road. www.recipease.com

Authentic Ethnic runs classes on Mexican, Thai, Indian, and Afghan food, among other cuisines. These are hands-on classes, described as small and informal (up to ten students) but extremely informative. Ingredients are organic and seasonal and a recipe booklet is provided. Students eat a meal they have prepared with appropriate wine or beer. Classes are on Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings and cost £75.
Authentic Ethnic, The Studio House, 165 Battersea Rise. 020 7223 6236. www.authenticethnic.co.uk

Cake Boy is TV patissier Eric Lanlard's luxurious cake shop in the rather incongruous surroundings of Battersea Reach. All-day classes range from the chocolate master class to French country baking and

cost £250 per person. Slightly more affordable are the afternoon cupcake classes at £95, which includes a champagne tea.

Cake Boy, Unit 2, Kingfisher House, Juniper Drive, Battersea Reach

www.cakeboy.co.uk

Mosimann's Cooking Academy, started by the distinguished chef Anton Mosimann, offers only two classes. At £240, an introduction to molecular gastronomy is presumably designed for the ambitious professional cook. An introduction to Malaysian cooking offers an opportunity to learn about the spices used in this exotic cuisine. The cost is £140 including lunch; this course is often used for team-building days and corporate entertainment.

Mosimann's Cooking Academy, 5 William Blake House, Bridge Lane. 020 7326 8330. www.mosimann.com

The patisserie and boulangerie chain **Paul** has opened a branch in Battersea. They advertise bread-making master-classes which take place in Covent Garden on Tuesday afternoons. These cost £75 and include tea with cakes.
Paul, 13 Northcote Road. www.paul-uk.com

Finally, not in Battersea but the only classes I can personally vouch for, **Books for Cooks** runs a series of workshops in Notting Hill. These are mostly not hands-on but it's fun to spend a morning watching a chef prepare several dishes in the demonstration kitchen, ask questions and discuss techniques, eat the usually delicious results with a glass of wine and take away a recipe leaflet. Classes range from the flavours of Baghdad through Chinese dim sum to one-pot winter meals. The cost is £40.

Books for Cooks, 4 Blenheim Crescent, W11. 020 7221 1992 www.booksforcooks.com. For these and other cooking courses in London and further afield, see www.lookingtocook.co.uk



A Fishing Expedition

Angela Roden and friends catch a great dinner

The special offer caught my eye at once: 'Come and eat at the Fish Place – and pay only what you think the food is worth'. The fun-loving Battersea Four promptly booked a Friday night in the new riverside restaurant, in the shadow of the new Verta Hotel and the heliport.

We'd looked at the menu outside since it opened in November. The set menu for lunch looked bearable at £15 for two courses – but the dinner prices were a bit beyond what we normally pay, ranging from £18.50–£25.50 for a main course. So this promotional week in January gave us a great chance to try it out without breaking the bank.

Welcomed warmly on arrival, we were shown up to the dining room on the first floor with its panoramic views of the river. In daylight you'd see the Fulham Sainsbury's and the derelict building adjoining the cement wharf. But at night, with the tide high, all you could see was

waves sweeping in to the curve of Plantation Wharf and the distant blue vista of an illuminated Wandsworth bridge spanning the shining river. Stunning.

Our dinner more than lived up to expectations. My starter of sautéed River Dart mussels was served with delicious artisan breads to soak up the wine, cream, chilli and coriander sauce. The sea bream was perfectly cooked and flawlessly presented. My chocolate fondant hazelnut ice cream dessert was a treat to beat all treats. My three fellow diners were equally impressed, with choices ranging from seafood *pot au feu* to Marseillaise bouillabaisse and roast fillet of cod. The enticing mains menu also includes meat to tempt those not fancying fish.

The service was impeccable and we enjoyed talking to our Croatian waiter, who'd lived in London for twice as long as we have! One welcome discovery was that the

wine list had a few bottles only slightly more expensive than in our other local eateries.

So what happened when it came to paying? Did we offer them 50p a course and tell them it was all rubbish? No of course not. We stumped up as near as dammit the price on the menu outside. And will we be going again? I fancy trying one of their mid-week specials: mussels or bouillabaisse and a glass of wine for £12, for example. As for their special tasting menu at £50 a head – birthdays come round every year, don't they?

A final thought: the loo is stunning and must be the best restaurant comfort station in Battersea. And as far as I'm concerned the Fish Place has my vote as the best restaurant.

*The Fish Place, Vicentia Court, Bridges Court Road, 020 7095 0410
www.thefishplace.co.uk
Directions: 170 or 44 bus to York Gardens. Follow Bridges Court to the river and you will see the signs to The Fish Place.*

Twixt The Commons by Timothy Walker £20

Review: Jenny Sheridan



The subtitle of this book is 'The development of a South London suburb.' Suburban? Cool, urban Battersea? The author doesn't define what he means by a suburb

but I assume it's anywhere outside the West End and the City.

Walker devotes 400 pages to the small area between Wandsworth and Clapham Commons, bounded on the south by Nightingale Lane and the north by Battersea Rise. His aim is to answer the question "How did large areas of London get to look like they do now?"

The area round Clapham Common was fashionable in the 18th century due to its healthy position above London's grime and stink. As

now, it was a haunt of bankers, with five former governors of the Bank of England living in Clapham. The area remained countrified until the mid to late 19th century, when the big estates were broken up and sold to developers for housing.

Damp

Although he focuses mainly on his chosen area, Walker does describe Battersea more widely. Battersea Fields, near the river, were described in the 1840s as 'low, flat, damp and treeless ... in winter they were inexpressibly dismal.' The gentry still lived on Battersea Rise (see *Battersea Matters* Winter 2010 for The Shrubbery, the last remaining mansion) and drove their carriages down to St Mary's Church.

There is little coverage of the railway development that affected north and central Battersea so profoundly, though railway workers may have lived in the south as well.

In the early 20th century houses were subdivided, with tenants subletting and taking lodgers.

A house on Salcott Road housed six adults and ten children.

The only major slum clearance in the area was between Northcote Road and Wandsworth Common. But slums existed: in 1949 the area around Clapham Junction was described as one of the most depressed areas in south London.

Walker discusses gentrification, with the dramatic rise in house prices over the last thirty years. Battersea is now the youngest constituency in the country, and the fifth richest, demonstrating the social flexibility of cities.

Is this book of interest to anyone living beyond its tiny immediate area? It has good illustrations and maps, though some are too small to read easily. Walker is excellent on details of the 19th century houses that cover much of south London. The book's focus on the social factors affecting middle class lifestyles through the last two centuries also applies widely. Certainly, I will be using the book both for reference and enjoyment.

Restoring Wandsworth's past

Ken Barbour took over as director of Wandsworth Museum in 2010 after Andrew Leitch's retirement. Here he offers his insights into the museum's future

This year your Museum will learn from our past successes and challenges to build a sustainable organisation to delight our visitors and provide learning opportunities for everyone. Since opening in September 2010, we have seen a steady increase in visitor numbers, although there is a need for better promotion through marketing and communications. We will be working with the professional teams at the Museum of London to increase our profile and raise our visitor numbers. We will also be enhancing our volunteer opportunities to offer more variety and take advantage of all the skills and experience our volunteers bring to the Museum. This will be rolled out over the course of the year along with a new fund-raising campaign with the support of the teams from the Museum of London.

Excellent programmes

Our education programme has 15 subscribed schools and we have bookings every week until the end of the school year. We have two very dedicated team members who deliver excellent programmes to Wandsworth students, largely aimed at key stage 1, but their goal for the

year is to broaden the programme to reach students in key stages 2 and 3 as well. Going forward, we hope that every child in Wandsworth will have made a visit with their school at least once.

Our exhibitions have been well received and visitors return regularly to have another look. Our plan is to mount three temporary exhibitions in the large gallery, with the next one themed on the English Arts and Crafts Movement. We have recently been offered a large William Morris reredos made at Merton Abbey, from Whitelands College at Roehampton University. It was originally installed in the Whitelands College Chapel in Chelsea, but moved with them to their present location in Roehampton. It requires conservation and restoration, and our aim is to carry out this work in the gallery so that our visitors can watch the progress.

Prison

We are also in discussions with the De Morgan Centre about their re-opening to coincide with the new exhibition at the end of March. After that, we will likely install an exhibition featuring local artists and students from the arts colleges, an exhibition about Wandsworth Prison coinciding with the 160th anniversary of the prison, followed by a sports themed exhibition in the run up to the 2012 Olympics.

In December, we held a piano recital of the Louis von Esch concerto *Retour de Wandsworth* played admirably by Julian Black

from the National Opera Studio, accompanied by mezzo-soprano Maire Flavin. It was a well-attended and extremely enjoyable evening, and we hope to be able to have more musical evenings in future.

Among our recent acquisitions are a full set of the *Wandsworth Guardian* going back to the 1860s generously given to us by Newsquest. These are currently being assessed for conservation needs and will be incorporated into our archive collections and available to view by appointment once assessed. We are also soon to receive the school records from the Royal Patriotic Buildings from the Royal Patriotic Fund. These are especially interesting and present a snapshot of life at the school, including medical records.

We have just announced a garden design competition open to students and recent graduates from the local landscape and garden design schools to redevelop our front lawn and side gardens. The area in front of our classrooms will be designed as a children's garden and incorporated into our school programmes. This project is generously funded by the Friends of the Wandsworth Museum and we are very grateful to them for their assistance.

It will be an exciting and busy year for the Museum as we develop and grow to position Wandsworth Museum at the cultural centre of the borough and help our communities to develop a sense of pride in Wandsworth – its past, present and future.



George Shearing

The jazz musician George Shearing died on 14 February 2011. He was 91. Born in Battersea, he was educated at Linden Lodge School for blind children. His first job as a pianist was at the Mason's Arms in Battersea Park Road. He played and recorded with many famous musicians, including Stephane Grapelli and Bert Ambrose. After emigrating to the United

States in 1947, Shearing found great success as a pianist and bandleader. He recorded copiously and toured all the best jazz clubs across the States. The most well known of his many compositions is Lullaby of Birdland.

Shearing was knighted in 2007. He returned regularly to Britain and was deeply touched by the naming of the George Shearing Centre for disabled people in Este Road.

Cycle superhighways – are they really super?

Susie Morrow, a frequent user of a superhighway by bicycle and bus, looks at the issues

Bicycles are human-powered, so cycling is distance-sensitive and we cyclists prefer direct routes. This applies especially to commuting cyclists who, like all commuters, are in a hurry. The new cycle superhighways give potential for red routes and other heavily trafficked roads to be humanised and civilised. Launched in July 2010 as part of the Mayor’s ‘cycling revolution’, they aim to provide clearly marked, direct and continuous cycle routes into central London. Twelve radial routes are planned, with numbers corresponding to clockface numerals. CS8 is ours, linking Wandsworth and Lambeth Bridge via Chelsea Bridge.

Conflicting priorities

There appear to be conflicting priorities within TfL (Transport for London), with a worrying tendency for designs to be hobbled by concerns for motor vehicle capacity, sometimes at the expense of cyclists and pedestrians. For example, on CS8 there is a welcome introduction of cycle lanes on Grosvenor Road, north of the river. Unfortunately this will entail removing pedestrian signals near the junction with Lupus Road in order to ‘maintain junction capacity’. Wandsworth Cycling Campaign objected, arguing that road space and time should be taken away from motorists rather than pedestrians.

These routes don’t seem ‘super’, or revolutionary but are about incremental change. Linked initiatives such as cycle training and encouraging people at workplaces near routes are also successful ways of promoting cycling.

Mirrors

The superhighways have encouraged some innovation, such as cyclehoops, which make use of existing lamp-posts, bollards or railings to fix bikes securely.

right A ‘tube map’ approach to encourage more cycle commuting

These require no digging and are cheap to install. They are ideal for short-term parking such as when shopping, so are good for local businesses. Several can be seen on Lavender Hill. ‘Trixi’ mirrors are convex mirrors fixed to traffic lights that aim to improve lorry drivers’ views of cyclists. They are being installed experimentally along cycle superhighways to see if they improve safety at junctions. The aim is to address the fact that most of the people killed while cycling in London died as a result of being hit by a lorry.

User-friendly map

Public realm improvements benefit everyone: CS8 examples include a new public space on Grosvenor Road riverside and way-finding totems. These are poles with a user-friendly map of the locality on one side with cycling times to destinations on the other.

There are concerns around road surface quality and maintenance (a particular issue for all two-wheeled vehicles) and route design that is not integrated with cycle training. TfL appears reluctant to implement the national hierarchy of provision for cycling, which prioritises reducing motor traffic volume and speed. CS8 should surely have a 20mph speed limit. TfL’s unwillingness to use this hierarchy has also resulted in their



emphasis on off-road provision at Queens Circus (Queenstown Road/Chelsea Bridge) rather than making the roundabout more cyclist-friendly.

TfL’s latest statistics show that cyclists now form 36% of northbound vehicles on Chelsea Bridge in the morning peak. Is this in spite of, or because of, the highway authority’s efforts?

Susie Morrow is campaigns co-ordinator for the Wandsworth Cycling Campaign. She writes here in a personal capacity.

Suzanne Perkins says: As a local cyclist I am very grateful to Wandsworth Council and Wandsworth Cycling Campaign for the creation of a shared cycle/pedestrian path at the north end of Bolingbroke Grove.

The nerve-wracking daily problem of trying to reach the Advance Stop Line by overtaking nine or ten stationary vehicles on a narrow road has been solved by this neat solution.

Just a late talker or a cause for concern?

Speech and language therapist Jo Hardman outlines how children can be helped to talk

2011 is the National Year of Communication, drawing attention to the fact that more than 1 million children and young people in the UK have some form of speech, language and communication need. In some areas more than 50% of children start school with delayed language skills.

This is supposedly a communication friendly world but it's actually never been tougher for young children to learn good communication skills. There are so many pulls on our time and attention – computers, huge televisions, mobile phones, i-pods and so on. We need to go back to basics – talking to young children in small sentences, pointing out the world around us. Children's brains are 'wired' to learn language but they need our help. On top of this 50% of Wandsworth's children are talking more than one language. That is a fantastic skill but they need time and patience to help their communication skills thrive.

Children develop communication skills at different rates and comparing children, even in the same family, is not always helpful. When does a late talker become a worry? In Wandsworth any parent or



other carer can drop in to a Talkshop at a local children's centre (Somerset Nursery and Chesterton) for help and advice from a speech and language therapist about any aspect of their child's development from speech and language development to dummy and TV use.

Talkshop

As an example of a child who went to Talkshop, Ira is 2 years old. He is cared for mainly during the week by his grandparents here in Battersea. Ira's grandmother brought him to Talkshop (with his mother's permission) because she was worried that he wasn't saying very much at all. The therapist saw him and advised that he should stop using the dummy because he was using it even when awake and happy and this seemed to make him quiet during play. He was gesturing and pointing a lot and the therapist advised giving him a verbal choice when possible ('apple or pear?') so he was hearing clear,

single words and shown the value of his communication. He was also referred for a hearing test to make sure he was hearing everything especially as he had a history of lots of coughs and colds and ear infections. When he did say a word Ira's grandparents were advised to repeat it back and add a word so 'bu!' from Ira was responded to by 'yes, bus...red bus' by his carers.

Ira made significant progress and was beginning to link two words together at a telephone review six weeks later. If he hadn't made progress he could have quickly been linked into the referral system to ensure he received some direct speech therapy to work on his language skills.

Communication is at the heart of everything – problems with communication imprison the individual, severely limit their participation in family life, the community, education and the world of work. Speech and language therapists tackle communication difficulties which can lead to serious problems for the individual and to cost to the NHS, local authorities, the criminal justice system (a high proportion of youth offenders have unresolved communication problems) and the wider economy. *For further information please contact Jo Hardman, Co-ordinator of the Promotion and Prevention Team, Speech and Language Therapy, Joanna.hardman@stgeorges.nhs.uk or 020 8812 4033*

'More involved now'

A new service in Wandsworth supports people who struggle with language after stroke. Wasi Daniju, service co-ordinator, explains what a difference this service can make.

Communication. We use it all the time – sharing ideas, information, and interests and to express who we are. We use it in practical ways – in shops, on transport and in relationships.

Imagine your life without the

ability to communicate. Not being able to find the words to say what you mean. This is the challenge faced by the 250,000 people living with aphasia across the UK.

Isolation

Aphasia, which often occurs after stroke, means people struggle to communicate. Some people can't speak at all, some just have a few words. It can lead to depression and isolation. 'It's a unique experience' said one person with aphasia.

People in Wandsworth who have communication disability after stroke

can now take advantage of services especially designed for them. The services, provided by Connect – the communication disability network, offer support, and a way to relieve the frustration and isolation that aphasia can bring. They also provide an opportunity to meet others, increase confidence, gain a new role and regain a real purpose in life.

One service on offer is 'Befriending' which means people with aphasia visit other people with aphasia at home or in hospital. As they have experienced aphasia themselves, they are in the best

position to support others, share tips, and become a friend to people who suddenly find themselves unable to speak.

Another service offers a 'Conversation Partner' – a volunteer who has been trained about aphasia and communication support, who visits people in their own home.

People can join an 'Aphasia Hub', a group of active citizens which will advise local services on the best services and opportunities for people with aphasia.

Chance to chat

The Wandsworth conversation group offers a chance to chat within a supported environment. People can attend as an ordinary member, or get more involved as a group facilitator, all with support from specially trained volunteers.

The concept has been tried out in other areas with great success. Carol Fletcher, who was involved in Befriending in Cornwall, says 'My life would have been completely different without the Connect service. It's just brilliant!'

And the final word comes from a person deeply involved in the scheme. Ms J is a long-term member of the conversation group.

Share your skills

She has trained as a conversation skills trainer and group co-facilitator; has represented Connect in publicity meetings with other organisations, and also joined the Aphasia Hub.

With regards to her involvement with Connect, she says, 'More involved now because there's lots more interest. You've been looked upon as somebody. You can share your skills with other people –



you've been useful. People like me, I think we are much happier. The interest in Connect is much better for people with aphasia – we have different interests and ideas, and it's appreciated. We can show our skills, and really get on; we're not just put aside. I like it, I like it. I think I speak for a lot of people like me. With Connect, we have self-confidence. I think it's gone very well for us since you've been there – I think we're happy.'

Connect is a charity for people living with aphasia, a communication disability which usually occurs after stroke. We aim to improve the lives of people living with aphasia and communication disability, equipping them to re-connect with life.

*To find out more or apply for any of these services, call Wasi Daniju on 020 7367 0844
www.ukconnect.org/wandsworth.aspx*

The Wandsworth Aphasia support service is funded by Wandsworth Primary Care Trust and Wandsworth Borough Council

Community orchards in Wandsworth?

Valerie Selby introduces the Grow Active scheme

In 2011 the Parks Service is embarking upon an exciting new venture to encourage borough residents to 'grow active' and participate in greening the borough. There has been an increasing demand from people who want to know how to do things such as grow vegetables or plant a wildlife garden. In response we will be providing a series of workshops throughout the year. We hope people who are shown how and why to do something in a workshop will feel enthused to put it into practice when they get back to their garden.

We are still in the early planning stages for this new venture. We aim to cover a diverse range of topics, in the hope that we can provide something for everyone. Topics could include food growing; wildlife

gardening; gardening in school grounds; how to plant a hanging basket; how to manage a community orchard; how to plant a window box etc. We are keen to hear from people regarding which topics they would find interesting to learn more about as we begin devising the programme.

Workshops

We plan to hold the workshops in different parts of the borough – so if you live in Battersea there will be two or three workshops close to home throughout the year. This will also give us a chance to work in partnership with other organisations who wish to provide training opportunities in the borough, for example Capital Growth.

We aim to involve people

and groups who are not already brightening the borough or those who wish to do so, but lack skills and confidence. We also want to encourage people to make links with each other which can extend beyond the classroom and to encourage people to take their new skills back to their community and share them more widely.

We will keep in touch with your newsletter editor as our plans progress so that you can all be kept up to date and we will also post details locally for each workshop on the Council's website. *If you have a suggestion for a workshop you would like to see please contact us at parks@wandsworth.gov.uk Valerie Selby is principal officer for biodiversity and parks development, Wandsworth Council.*

Bring back our Cockney sparrows!

The London Wildlife Trust's Mark Pearson aims to support London's iconic bird

House sparrows have lived alongside Londoners for many hundreds of years, and as neighbours they could hardly be better – sociable, vociferous, full of character and seemingly perpetually cheerful. There was a time, not so long ago, when their early morning chorus of jovial chirruping was the standard wake-up call across the capital – and yet for many today, it's becoming an increasingly distant memory.

There's no straightforward answer as to why 'Cockney sparrows' are disappearing from our streets in Battersea, Wandsworth and elsewhere. Research continues, but several factors, when taken together, go some way to explaining why our oldest neighbours have fallen on hard times.

And these reasons apply not just to house sparrows, but to a whole range of birds, many of which rely on us. For example, swifts – iconic, scythe-winged summer visitors who arrive back from Africa every spring – are suffering similar declines, and the swirling clouds of innumerable starlings are now all but confined to urban London's history books.

Perhaps the most obvious reason is loss of nest sites. All the above species depend on the small holes, cracks and crevices in our

- Put up a cluster of nest boxes near where you can hear or see sparrows. They should have a 32mm diameter entry hole and should not face due south.

- Encourage shrubs and creepers such as hawthorn, blackthorn, ivy and honeysuckle.

- Provide food and water all year round.

- Leave a corner of your garden wild for the insects and seeds that birds need.

- Spread the word among your neighbours.



houses and along our streets; 'improvement' for us means instant eviction for them. And the lack of nest sites in new buildings serves to compound the problem and give the birds little opportunity to move back in.

Other factors include the loss of so-called wasteland / brownfield sites, so valuable as a year-round habitat and food source; similarly, many semi-wild areas in gardens and communal areas have been sacrificed for decking, driveways and lawns. Thick shrubs and wall creepers for security, roosting, feeding and breeding have also been lost.

There's no quick fix that will bring sparrows back but some wildlife gardening measures will really help, especially where there are colonies close by.

At London Wildlife Trust, we're doing what we can to address the problems, and arming Londoners with the knowledge and skills to make a difference. As the Trust's Cockney Sparrow Project Officer over the last couple of years, I've had the privilege of working with local communities, housing estate residents, primary school kids, elderly people's groups, youth clubs and many others in working together to improve urban areas for sparrows and other wildlife.

Through community-based activities and events, galvanising Londoners on the ground has been a successful and enjoyable way to improve the lot of familiar yet fast-disappearing species. Wildlife fairs on estates, practical conservation days, trips to urban nature reserves, wild bird 'road-shows' are just some of the methods we've employed. It's heartening to see that, given the opportunity, the vast majority of participants (from two to 97 years old) jump at the chance to help birds and wildlife on their doorsteps.

Mark Pearson is London Wildlife Trust's Cockney Sparrow Project Officer and Expert Birder London Wildlife Trust, 200 Union Street, London SE1 0LX www.wildlondon.org.uk

Obituary Dr Raymond (Jimmy) Winston FRCGP

Jimmy Winston was a GP in Battersea for 40 years. Sadly he died on 13 February at Meadbank Nursing Home at the age of 98.

Jimmy was born in Japan and educated in England. He intended to study English but was persuaded by a friend to apply to medical school. Jimmy was called up in 1943 and served as a captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps in India and Burma. He began his peacetime career at the very beginning of the

National Health Service.

Despite opposition from the medical profession, the NHS began in 1948. Jimmy found this new approach to medical care most exciting.

As Dr Harry Dawson said on the occasion of Jimmy's retirement, 'For forty years Jimmy embodied the ideal of a GP working from his own home, constantly available, always even-tempered, ready to provide a good service for his patients. This

was in partnership with his wife Lilli who opened the doors of the waiting room, filed the hospital reports and undertook the office work.'

Dr Winston was a cultivated man, speaking at least three languages, widely read and deeply appreciative of the arts. He was always interested in current events and eager to engage with everyone he met.

He saw huge changes in his long life and left a big gap in the lives of so many who came to know and love him.

Cynthia Newman

Uniting for the common good

Citizens working together can make genuine and powerful change, says Jonathan Cox

What do David Cameron, David Miliband, Boris Johnson and Barack Obama have in common? And what does that have to do with Battersea?

Obviously they are all serious politicians – but they are also all from very different political traditions who share the belief that our democratic way of life needs to be revitalised by ‘community organising’.

Democracy is derived from the Greek meaning “the people rule”. However, if you were to survey the opinion of the average Battersea resident, very few of them would feel that they and their fellow citizens really do rule. In fact, one of the most damaging problems for our democracy is the extent to which so many people feel that, beyond voting, there is very little that they can do to address the injustices and irritations of modern life.

Active participation

In ancient Greece, democracy was not founded not just on the process of voting, but on the active participation of ordinary people in the civic life of the city. And this is what the politicians who are calling for greater community organising in modern Britain have observed. The real crisis in our democracy is not the falling turnout at elections, it is the increasing gap between the elected rulers and the ruled, the belief that the activity of politics is the responsibility only of professional politicians and not the ordinary people, and that citizens cannot bring about change for themselves.

Community organising is the method by which local institutions – churches, mosques, schools, trades union branches and other civil society organisations – agree to form an alliance and work together for the common good of their community. The alliance is not interested in service delivery or charity – its member institutions do much good work in that regard already. Neither do they have a political ideology.

Engaging local figures

Their purpose is to form a power alliance that is capable of engaging with powerful local figures in the public and private sector to bring about change for justice and the common good. To this end, they pay dues to employ a professional community organiser to train and develop leaders for action.

Barack Obama was one such community organiser in Chicago before he became a politician. In the USA they have about 10,000 community organisers and a broad-based community alliance in most metropolitan areas. In this country, we have about 25 community organisers and one major broad-based alliance: London Citizens.

South London Citizens is a powerful alliance of 50 civil society organisations working with local people for the common good of their communities. We train people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds to take action together for change on the issues that affect them. The Living Wage campaign has put £40 million

into the back pockets of some of the poorest paid people in London by convincing employers to pay a just wage to their cleaners.

Transformed

The City Safe campaign has transformed the street where young Jimmy Mizen was murdered into one of the safest streets in London. The *Citizens for Sanctuary* campaign has transformed the ‘cattleshed’ at Lunar House in Croydon into a ‘Welcome Centre’ for people seeking sanctuary from persecution. In Wandsworth we have been working to tackle overcrowding of families living in social housing.

And now South London Citizens is seeking to develop a stronger presence in the borough of Wandsworth. We hope to have a Founding Assembly of Wandsworth Citizens in the summer of 2011 and anticipate that at least ten civil society organisations will be present as founding members. A programme of training and listening to the wider community will follow, before we begin to take action as a local alliance to demand change where there is injustice and hold the powerful to account.

Community organising may be promoted by the Prime Minister and the Mayor, but ultimately it has to come from the bottom-up, from ordinary citizens working together for change and the common good – so that the people really do rule.

You can find out more about London Citizens at www.citizensuk.org. You can contact the Borough Organiser for Wandsworth, Jonathan Cox: jonathancox@cof.org.uk or 07919 484066.

Hellebore heaven in Hillier Road

Catharine Infield tells the inspiring story of the greening of her road.

Photos by Jenny Browne

Spring came early to Hillier Road. To be precise, spring arrived on Saturday 16th January, when our first snowdrop opened. On that morning I opened our curtains, and stood in the window, ruminating on the grey day ... and there it was; just across the pavement, alert and upright, our first snowdrop! Alongside it was a sweet little viola, lilac and

yellow, blousy and round. I clapped my hands in delight and ran to the kitchen to tell my bemused husband.

Since the second week in January more and more snowdrops have opened, gradually filling the earth at the bottom of our trees. Some of the early crocus have come and gone, but the snowdrops



Primroses, crocuses and miniature daffodils heralding spring

Hellebore heaven cont.

are still there, brightening our street and our hearts. As the evenings have gradually lightened I have returned home in the gloaming to pearlescent opals sprinkled in the darkness of the street.

Although many of Battersea's roads have street trees, none of them are quite as splendid as ours in Hillier Road. I may be biased, but we have the most beautiful street trees in the whole borough, glorious cherries with fluffy pink blossoms in the late spring. In contrast to the trees our 'tree pits' were indeed the pits: awful dog latrines, sprayed by the council to keep them weed free but filled with excrement and odd bits of litter.

Hardy souls

I asked our neighbours if they liked the street as it was, or if they would prefer to have some spring bulbs planted at the base of our trees. Overwhelmingly the answer was in favour of bulbs. Some were sceptical about the possibility of anything surviving but most were willing to give it a go. We had a communal planting day in early December 2009, when a dozen or more hardy souls braved the bitter weather to plant bulbs. Some daffodils were donated by Wandsworth Council, others we had bought ourselves.

Later, in February 2010, we planted snowdrops in the green. Early one Saturday morning I parcelled up the plants that people had ordered and paid for and delivered them. As if by magic, by the evening the street was full of bobbing little snowdrops. It was a raw, gusty day, and they bounced like little ships on a turbulent sea. It felt like a turning point, we had brought our street back into our own control.

You may wonder how all this was funded. An anonymous donor kindly bought cyclamen bulbs for the whole street and we planted them in September, fuelled by wine provided by another neighbour. Apart from the council's donated daffodils, people paid for plants and I ordered them



or else they bought their own seeds and plants: Lidl, Homebase and the 99p shop in Balham are remarkably cheap. Lots of the plants come from seed or cuttings from my garden, like the dead nettle and the violets. Alyssum and foxgloves self-seed in the street.

Some people are very active gardeners and I make sure I leave the plots near their houses alone. Others will pop the odd thing in when they feel like it and I may tidy up weeds and try to

complement their ideas with ground cover.

The key thing is to know the neighbours (and when you use your trowel on the street they all stop to say hello). I particularly asked one person not to plant daffodils on the other side of 'his' tree as I know the neighbour on that side prefers smaller plants.

Street gardeners

So now the residents of Hillier Road may choose to be street gardeners! There is no obligation, but if you like to plant and tend the ground by the base of the tree near your house you can do so, and you may delight both neighbours and passers-by.

In early March we can see hellebores (Christmas roses), primroses and primulas, bugle, carex, small pale blue irises, dead nettles, thymes and oregano and a whole range of bulbs. I hope that the planting will become well established and not need much seasonal work. The summer will need bulking up with some annual planting; last year nasturtiums, busy lizzies and lobelia all featured. Then in the autumn there'll be the cyclamen. Dwarf sunflowers were quite successful. If I was weeding and a child passed by, I asked if they would like to plant one of the nice big seeds. I hope that children walked down the street later, looking for 'their' sunflower.