

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society SPRING 2021



Dr Gig will see you through!

Battersea's choirs are zooming towards live performance, says choir director Sam Evans

As a boy growing up in Kingston upon Thames, trips up to London on the train always meant travelling through Clapham Junction, and then seeing the iconic chimneys of Battersea Power Station as we made our way towards Waterloo. These days I have the pleasure of running two choirs in this wonderful and vibrant part of London: Battersea Choral Society, and Battersea Power Station Community Choir.

Before the pandemic struck last year, choirs across the UK were riding a wave of popularity. Around the country, more people than ever were singing in choirs of all types, from the traditional choral society, to gospel choirs, glee clubs, community choirs or chamber choirs. All choirs are the same in one key regard: they are groups of people coming together to share the enjoyment of making music together. How people experience the music-making can vary according to the type of choir they are in.

Classical

Battersea Choral Society began life as a choir for parents of Thomas's Prep School. Like most choirs which call themselves a choral society, we sing classical music spanning several centuries. The choir rehearses on Tuesday evenings at St John Bosco College in Battersea, and the members will usually spend a term working towards a performance. The members sit in four sections, depending on their voice part: soprano, alto, tenor or bass. Everyone has a copy of the piece of music we are working on (this doesn't mean everyone can read music fluently; it is partly convention, and partly that



the music we sing is too long and complex to be learned by ear).

In recent years the choir has performed Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Bach's *St John Passion*, and the Mass In Blue by Will Todd. When the first lockdown was announced last March, we were just days away from performing *The Kingdom* by Elgar. Despite the very high standards which the choir achieves, the members are not auditioned. Anyone is welcome to join. Members come for the music, but also for the social aspect, and the enjoyment of sharing the experience with others.

Those social and wellbeing benefits underpin the ethos of my other Battersea choir: the Battersea Power Station Community Choir (BPSCC). I was invited by Battersea

Power Station Development Company to work with them to start a community choir in 2016, and from the first rehearsal with just a dozen people, the choir has grown to more than 60 active members. Within six weeks, the choir gave their first public performance – just a few uplifting songs, performed to an invited audience of friends. From humble beginnings, the choir has gone on to enjoy some amazing successes – from performing as Gareth Malone's backing choir in performances at Alexandra Palace and the Union Chapel, to collaborating with Sting on a virtual performance during the first lockdown.

When not in lockdown, the choir meets every Thursday evening at
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Don't forget to visit our website:

batterseasociety.org.uk

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

From the editor



First of all, a request. You will find in the envelope, along with *Battersea Matters* and the events list, our new

promotional leaflet. Please would you give it to a friend or neighbour who might be interested in joining the Battersea Society.

The cover of the leaflet shows the jazz band of the World Heart Beat Music Academy, soon to move to Nine Elms. They were playing at the 2019 opening of Happy Street, designer Yinka Ilori's colourful installation in Thessaly Road. If you haven't seen it, do go along.

Spring is in the air, almost round the corner. Crocuses and daffodils are perking up our parks and commons, catkins are decorating the trees and moorhens and coots are squabbling on the ponds. Ever since the beginning of the first lockdown in last year's particularly glorious spring, we have all appreciated nature more than ever before. Some of the articles in this issue demonstrate that love for the natural world and people's awareness of its fragility and the need to protect and conserve it.

The news on the coronavirus is – touch wood – positive. In my postcode in south Battersea only three people tested positive in the last seven days. This compares with 57 in early January. A newly cautious Prime Minister has given us a possible timetable for a return to a more normal life in the summer.

What are you looking forward to most? A drink in a pub, an art gallery, a football match, coffee in a friend's kitchen, Parkrun, hugging your mum or grandchildren? I feel pretty thrilled that I have a hair appointment! My hairdresser has offered me an appointment in mid-April. So in six weeks, government rules permitting, she will have brought some order to my shaggy mop and reinstalled my blue streak.

I expect that some or many of you have joined the happy band of the vaccinated. What should we call ourselves – vaccinees? Vaccinands? Jabbies? I hope that, vaccinated or not, you are all safe and well. And I hope that before the summer is out we will be able to meet our friends and fellow members again in person.

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Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden on the pleasures of tea-drinking, the irritations of unnecessary repetition, and online theatricals.

I like a nice cup of tea in the morning. In fact, I need a nice cup of tea in the morning. Apparently its soothing, yet energising effect comes from the blend of theanine and caffeine. No, I'd never heard of it either but theanine apparently eases anxiety. This magic ingredient is only found in tea, and a species of inedible mushroom. And the first cup that cheers must be accompanied by the mellifluous voice of Petroc Trelawny as he introduces the music on Radio 3's breakfast show.

Radio 3 once had those short and sweet news bulletins which are fine for early morning. To cut down on numbers working in Broadcasting House several stations are sharing bulletins. So now the newsreaders are unfamiliar, and tend to sound like earnest six year olds and every news item is repeated three times. First it appears in the initial headlines, then in a longer piece from the newsreader, finally backed up by the same

information from another six year old reporter.

It's much the same with modern television arts or history shows – you get a long preamble, then the programme itself – which ends with a resume of everything we've just seen. then we're told what we're going to see next week. Maybe I'm getting old (Editor's note: we all are!) but why do we need this repetition? Were the riders who brought the good news from Ghent to Aix forced to repeat it three times?

Exhausted

We watched a live online performance from the Almeida recently: Lolita Chakrabarti's *Hymn* with Adrian Lester and Danny Sapani. It was undeniably a brilliant theatrical experience played without interval for ninety minutes and both actors were sweating profusely and clearly exhausted by the end. Online shows are far from ideal for many, perhaps for the actors most of all. They need a physically present audience, appreciative or not. And these performances will never be the same for those who can only really enjoy theatrical experiences in a theatre. In much the way that gourmet meals

delivered to the door will never have the appeal of dining out with friends for those for whom eating in a restaurant is always a central part of their lives.

Yet to those who find theatres increasingly uncomfortable or expensive, or who don't live in a town with a decent theatre, these shows have helped make life under lockdown a bit more bearable. And they may offer considerable benefits for the venues which survive the pandemic. The Bush Theatre can accommodate no more than 180 people at any show in normal times. Over a few days of online performances a little while back they logged the astonishing total of 5000 viewers round the world. Even when full houses are once again permitted,

it seems to a mere amateur like me that at the very least filming one performance for future showing could be a useful source of additional income.

I shall finish on that hopeful thought. Maybe when I next trouble you with my random ramblings on life, the universe and everything, we'll be heading into the sunlit uplands of a more normal life. Let's hope so. Anyway, mind how you go, and I'll see you next time.



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6.30pm in the Rose Community Centre on Ascalon Street, SW8, and sings a variety of repertoire including pop, jazz, gospel and music theatre songs. Over the past five years the choir has really bonded as a group, and they have a thriving social life together outside the choir now. It really feels like one big happy family.



Choirs everywhere were hit incredibly hard by the pandemic last year. Early on there were stories from the USA of choir rehearsals becoming 'super-spreader' events, and singing quickly gained a reputation as a dangerous activity. Research conducted by Declan Costello's PERFORM study showed that singing is no more dangerous than other activities that require people to gather in a space, but by that time the idea had taken hold. Many choirs across the country have not met in person now for more than a year. This means not only are people without the musical enjoyment they derive from their choir, they also miss the social and wellbeing elements that are particularly crucial at this time. Zoom has proved a lifeline, and both

choirs were swift to move online – indeed BPSCC didn't miss a single week of rehearsals. The lag time online (known as 'latency') means it is impossible for a group to sing together and hear each other, and this has meant that choir directors have had to be very adaptable in how they run their rehearsals.

Camaraderie

Despite its limitations, it has proved a blessing in many ways, beyond just keeping the choir together. Having everyone's names has enabled people to learn the names of people they previously only knew by sight. Randomly-assigned breakout rooms have allowed people to get to know more people in the choir, and there's a camaraderie in exploring this new technology together. One drawback

of the technology is that instead of deriving confidence from hearing people singing all around you, as a singer you are on your own in your living room or wherever – and not everyone enjoys hearing the sound of their own voice!

With the Prime Minister's recent announcement of the roadmap to reopening society, it does seem now like the end is in sight, and choirs everywhere can look forward to singing together in person, and even planning for performances. This is really at the heart of what choirs do, and it will be a huge relief for everyone to get back to normality. For now, rehearsals continue on Zoom, but the hope is that by the summer, both these choirs will be back in a room together, and plans are already being made for performances in the second half of this year. Choir members everywhere will be a little rusty, but as ever, the sheer joy of making music together will help get people back in shape. As we say in the music business, 'Doctor Gig will see you through!' *If you are interested in joining Battersea Choral Society or Battersea Power Station Community Choir contact www.batterseachoralsociety.org/join-us, choir@batterseapowerstation.co.uk*

BATTERSEA SOCIETY EVENTS

All these events will be held online via Zoom

● Wednesday 21 April, 6pm

Rebuilding Battersea Power Station's heritage

Some of the heritage consultants involved in the Power Station restoration will share their experiences.

● Tuesday 27 April, 6pm

A brief social history of Battersea
A talk by local historian Councillor Tony Belton looking back on 200 years of Battersea social history.

● Wednesday 12 May, 6pm

Local Hero: the story of John Buckmaster
Local historian Sue Demont explores the story of Battersea polymath John Charles Buckmaster (1820 – 1908) who led the fight to save Wandsworth Common from developers 150 years ago.

● Thursday 3 June, 7pm

Readings from *London Undercurrents*

A virtual poetry reading from co-authors Joolz Sparkes and Hilaire of extracts from their beautiful *London Undercurrents: The hidden histories of London's unsung heroines, north and south of the river.*

● Friday 4 June, 6pm

Four 18th century houses and their occupants
Local historian Jeanne Rathbone takes us back in time to Elm House, Lavender Sweep House, The Shrubbery and Gilmore House to meet their celebrated residents.

All our events up to the end of June are being held online.

To book, please email events@batterseasociety.org.uk Zoom login details will be sent out 24 hours before the event.

Diary Date: Thursday

● 15 July at 6.30pm

Battersea Society summer party in the grounds of St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, London SW11 3NA

Our annual Summer Party – and our first live event for 18 months!

Come and join us, we look forward to seeing you.

£10 entrance, payable on the door (includes first drink and canapes)

Planning Matters: a complex local plan and a safer junction

Monica Tross and her colleagues have responded to the Council's new plan

WILL THEY NEVER END!

By which I mean the seemingly endless consultations on planning policy. This year has started with a marathon – the Council's Draft Local Plan. This weighs in at over 400 pages with assorted side documents, such as the report on the Urban Design Study, bringing the total to over 900 pages. Between us, I and colleagues on the planning committee have read most of these and, together, we have produced a response considerably below 400 pages. You can find this via the planning page of our website.

It is near on impossible to summarise this draft. It aims to set down policies for planning and development for the next 15 years and to do this in a way which focuses on Area Strategies, on Placemaking and on Smart Growth. The practical outcome will be a single document replacing the four documents making up the current plan. The various Supplementary Planning Guidelines (SPGs) will stand and will no doubt be added to in the future. The next stage is for the Council to pull together all the comments and submit a final document to the Secretary of State for consideration by an Inspector (and yet more comment from us) later in the year. The current Development Management Policy Document works well, with the caveat that many of the policies, admirable in themselves, allow for considerable wiggle room for negotiation.

The plan has a list of the 23 chapters at the start and I suggest that if you are interested you pick the sections of interest, by geographic area such as Nine Elms, Clapham Junction (which includes the Winstanley regeneration area) or specific topics such as Climate Change, Housing or Transport. The consultation closed on 1 March but there will be more consultation to come. Our own response is on the website.

LIFE, THE UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING

As a devoted listener to The

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy I am delighted that Arch 42 under the railway lines at Nine Elms is to be opened up and decorated in a meaningful way. A winning design 'Tunnel Visions' by the architecture practice Projects Office has been chosen following widespread consultation. See www.nineelmslondon.com for full information.

JUNCTION OF BATTERSEA BRIDGE AND THE EMBANKMENT

Many of us know how dangerous it is to cross at this junction with traffic coming from both sides of the Embankment and to and from Beaufort Street. It has taken a recent death finally to get some action but we are delighted that, following a petition and representations from ourselves and many others, TfL and Kensington and Chelsea Council are finally taking some action. TfL will be installing a crossing and other improvements will be made to increase safety at this junction.

FORMER GASHOLDERS SITE AT PRINCE OF WALES DRIVE

Both we and members of our Heritage Committee are supportive of the Cultural Strategy put forward for this development. It will commemorate the work of the Short Brothers as one of three sets of aviators and aircraft manufacturers with Battersea connections (the others being the 'other' Wright brothers and Hilda Hewlett). You can find full details on the Council's planning applications website; the application number is 2020/5080.

PLANNING NEWS AND UPDATES

Battersea Power Station has been consulting on proposals to add flexibility to the approved masterplan for the later stages of its development, broadly to the east. Details are not yet clear but we have sent some suggestion for things we would like to see. These include more affordable housing and community and sports facilities. A public library and a swimming pool for all would be nice (as opposed to the glass-bottomed one at Embassy Gardens).

We have sent in critical objections to two large developments so far this year, the Access Storage site in York Road (2020/4285) and new plans for an office building on the former South London Mail Centre site (2020/5054). When I last checked there had been 234 objections to plans for the Access site.

Sadly the three applications I wrote about in my last planning matters have now been approved, in the case of the Arding & Hobbs building without any change to generally acceptable plans (2020/3421). The other two are plans for 5 Parma Crescent (2020/3505) and 59 Sudbrooke Road (2020/2797). Both we and the Friends of Battersea Park (and others) have objected to plans to add height to St Mary le Park Court on the corner of Albert Bridge and Parkgate Roads (2020/4074).

Feedback appreciated.

We always like to hear from our members so do let us have any comments, on this article, or on planning in general. planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

The new Arch 42 will open in autumn 2021



An Arts and Crafts life in Battersea

Annette Carruthers introduces us to Robert Urand, cabinetmaker

Collectors and dealers are always keen to identify the designers of antique furniture but the names of the actual makers are rarely known. Firms such as Gillows and Heal's often marked their work with the company's brand, but the cabinetmaker – however skilled – remained unacknowledged. Not so in a small enterprise called Kenton & Company, established in 1891 by several idealistic young architects and designers eager to improve the quality of contemporary furniture. They aimed to develop their own original designs and supervise experienced makers employed in their own workshop. Among these was Robert Urand, a Battersea resident from the 1880s until at least 1911.

Curved

Urand is known to have made an impressive rosewood settee, photographed in an exhibition of Kenton & Co.'s work in December 1891 (see photo). Reginald Blomfield, its designer, described in his *Memoirs of an Architect* (1932) how he modelled the curved arms in clay because the form was 'beyond the possibility of demonstration by drawings', and mentioned the pleasure of visiting the workshop to 'see one's design growing into shape in the hands of our skilful cabinet-makers.'

It was their practice to stamp pieces with the names of the firm and maker and the designer's initials, and to credit the maker in exhibition catalogues, a policy promoted by the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society where all the best new work was displayed. This evidence and internet research has enabled us to outline the lives of Kenton & Co's employees, now available on the British & Irish Furniture Makers Online site (British and Irish Furniture Makers Online/ BIFMO/history.ac.uk).



Large rosewood settee made by Robert Urand, as shown in the Kenton & Company exhibition at Barnard's Inn Hall, 1891. Source: Kenton & Co Craftsman file, Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department, V&A

Urand is a rare surname in London but is easily mistranscribed, in addition to which Robert Urand's family was complicated. He was born in Plymouth in 1854, the son of a carpentry journeyman. Aged 18 he was in the census as a cabinetmaker in the household of another young cabinetmaker, Thomas Crystall, whose father was living with Urand's mother in what was probably a bigamous marriage. Crystall came from Lambeth and by 1881 both young men, now married, had moved to London, Crystall to Warren Street and Urand, with his wife Eliza and two children, to Somers Town. Since both were close to Tottenham Court Road, centre of the London furniture trade, this made sense, but by 1891 Urand had moved to Battersea. In the same year he started at Kenton & Co in Brownlow Mews near Gray's Inn, so his journey to work was rather longer than if he had stayed put.

What brought him to Battersea in the first place we don't know, though it may have been employment with a local cabinetmaker. From 1891 he can be tracked from 81 Plough Road to 31 Maysoule Road (1901) and 118 Harbut Road (1911). It appears that the growing Urand family moved up

in the world by transferring from the main thoroughfare to quieter streets nearby.

'Extravagant'

Urand did not have to commute to Gray's Inn for long because Kenton & Co's ambitious intentions gave way to hard reality soon after its exhibition. Sales were encouraging – mainly to the friends and families of the partners and to other designers – and press coverage was good. *The Builder*,

for instance, praised Blomfield's settee as 'of noble proportions and fine in its sweeping curves', though it also criticised the price of £50 as 'somewhat extravagant'. It remained unsold and in the designer's possession until at least 1916, when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy, credited to Kenton & Co. rather than to Urand. In 1996 Christie's auctioned it for £5750. Despite the relative success of the firm, lack of capital and the desire of some partners to focus on their architectural careers caused them regretfully to close only six months later. There is no record of how the cabinetmakers felt about their sudden redundancy.

We know that Urand was listed in subsequent censuses as employed, but not where he worked. By 1911 he was the father of nine children, of whom six were living. His death in 1916 was recorded in the Westminster district, which may mean he had moved again, but if there are still Urands in Battersea it would be good to fill out more of his story. The lives of the designers in Kenton & Co have been studied in depth, but the careers of the skilled craftworkers who converted their complex ideas into solid form, in rich timbers with inlay and carving, remain too little known.

Annette Carruthers is Honorary Senior Lecturer, School of Art History, University of St Andrews

Getting a digital life

Aaron Barbour, Katherine Low Settlement's director, on making Wandsworth a more digital borough

Covid-19 has laid bare the true extent of digital exclusion amongst local residents and communities across the borough. Surveys of our members, at the beginning of the first lockdown, revealed a complete lack of devices, data, money, skills and confidence to fully access our 'virtual' community services. Let alone school or college education online or other community services, like foodbanks, Covid food provision, Council services and GPs, pharmacies and other NHS support.

During lockdown, one in five households referred to Wandsworth Foodbank in severe hardship reported having no internet access whatsoever. Local people have repeatedly told members of the Wandsworth Digital partnership about having no money to buy mobile data or broadband. Others have made difficult choices such as paying for broadband to apply for jobs, which left them without enough income for food and essentials.

Isolation

And so, the telephone, postal service and doorstep visits have been the norm for our members over the last 11 months. Being cut off from the plethora of services and support they could have reached if they'd been online, has led to a decline in health and wellbeing and an increase in mental health issues, isolation and loneliness. For young people particularly, this will have a lasting impact on their education attainment and future life chances.

The question arose, what if we could transform local services to become truly digital, and for our members and other local residents to have the digital capacity and capability to access them? We would be better set up to support local residents in the digital space, helping them become more independent through future shocks and lockdowns, for many years to come.

Over the last 11 months our community teams have been working to make KLS, our services and members, more digital. We've moved



An English language class at KLS. Inset: The happy recipient of a laptop

a lot of our services online, be that Corona Homework Clubs, ESOL (English) classes online, and Elders onto Zoom and online for banking, shopping and GP appointments.

We've secured 156 laptops for refugee children to access their education online. This runs alongside our new laptop lending library of 55 laptops and IT courses.

We have started a pilot project through our Age Well programme (with local older people) to get them online and using Zoom. We hosted the '12 Zooms of Christmas' which was attended by 19 elders new to Zoom. This helped reduce their loneliness and isolation over Christmas, and gave them new skills. In recent weeks, some have been able to attend medical appointments and online art classes by the National Gallery – all on Zoom.

The Ali family, a mother and four children aged between 12 and 21, live in a flat in Battersea. The two older children are at university (studying from home). Mum lost her part-time job in the first lockdown. The family can only afford one laptop between them (which they are still paying for after two years of instalments).

All the children share the laptop. The mother, who is studying English and maths at KLS, has to use her mobile phone to access her lessons during lockdown.

We're making and sharing films on social media. Our Somali ESOL students made a film in Somali, with Wandsworth Council, to raise awareness about the importance of social distancing, wearing masks and washing hands during the pandemic.

We've supported local community groups, particularly Power to Connect, to get up and running, so that they can support more residents to get the computer devices they need.

But all of this is just the tip of the iceberg. With further funding, staff and volunteers, we could achieve much more to support local residents in Battersea lead more digital and independent lives.

Inclusive

Last summer we set up 'Wandsworth Digital' to take a strategic approach to tackling digital inclusion – making the benefits of the internet, smartphones and computers available to everyone, especially those living on low incomes. Wandsworth Digital is a new partnership of 90+ local organisations working together to make Wandsworth the most digitally inclusive borough in London by 2024. It is made up of charities, community organisations, schools and colleges, independent funders, businesses and the Council.

We are working towards enabling our most excluded residents to have

access to affordable devices and data; to have the skills and training to access local goods and services; and the support necessary to incorporate 'digital' into their everyday lives. Our strategy and further information about Wandsworth Digital can be found on our website.

This is a work in progress, so do

join us on this journey. It will take us working together as one community, each playing to our strengths, to make Wandsworth a truly digitally inclusive borough.

If you'd like to join Wandsworth Digital and help our local communities lead more digital lives then please contact Aaron Barbour:

aaron@klsettlement.org.uk
We would be very grateful for donations to help Wandsworth become a more digital community, visit: www.klsettlement.org.uk/donate
To donate an old (but working) laptop or tablet please do so with our partner, Power to Connect:
www.powertoconnect.co.uk

Sid Sporle (contd)

Christine Eccles' article in the Winter 2020 issue of *Battersea Matters* has raised some hackles. Two members who knew Sid Sporle well write:

Cllr Tony Belton:

Christine Eccles' memories of Sid Sporle and Mabel brought back many old memories for me, but I have to protest about the Jag. I remember very well that it was a white Rover 2000, which was briefly a much more hip car than a big old Jag would have been. It was only 20 years after the end of the War; life was fairly tough and people in Battersea, or almost anywhere, just did not have white cars. It was a grey world and then Sid came along.

Patronage

He was always first to the bar, offering drinks all round. He was the boss, at least in the Labour Party; he distributed patronage – if you want to meet the Battersea Borough Council Housing Committee just go and visit the Winstanley Estate – they are all there, Tory, Liberal and Labour councillors – (Harry) Sendall Court, (Nora) Clark Lawrence Court, (Fred) Shaw Court, (Joan) Carmichael Court, John (always Jack) Parker Square, Holliday Square, Henry Newton Court, (Caroline) Ganley Court, Thomas Baines Road, Weekly Square and, of course, dominating them all (Sidney) Sporle Court.

To a young political innocent like me, he was a totally new experience. He ran the Battersea Labour Party with an iron fist. At the 1968 Borough Election count. Labour got beaten badly, much to

Sid's surprise. I was there supporting the three St Mary Park candidates and expected, at the end of the evening, the usual polite concession speech. Not a bit of it! Sid gave us a passionate lecture on how Labour's defeat in Wandsworth was a first step on the road to fascism.

It seemed a bit over the top to me, but I didn't realise back then that his whole life, career and liberty were at risk. In the following three years, there was a struggle in the Battersea Labour Party between Sid and his supporters and the young Turks who Christine alluded to as 'a new slate of young councillors'.

I was part of that new slate of young councillors and had no cause to love Sid but I think Christine's article gives only one version of the truth. He devoted his life to changing the life circumstances of the people of Battersea. He argued passionately that the then overwhelmingly working class people of Battersea deserved to live in homes with inside lavatories, hot and cold running water and (I remember the arguments) even, shock horror, with central heating. He was on the council at a time when councillors were totally unpaid; they relied on personal wealth, or the generosity of their employers, private or public. Sid worked for the Gas Board and like all public sector bodies the Board had relatively

generous public duty leave allowances. By modern standards he was not well paid, but he liked good things and he had access to very large building contracts. The temptation was obvious.

He was not quite a tragic figure as his downfall was his own doing.

Nonetheless, the fact that he was found guilty of accepting a bribe while no one was ever found guilty of offering one would have confirmed his view of where power and influence really reside in our society. He was held in great respect and affection by many Battersea people. Sid Sporle is not someone to be ignored when considering the shape and history of Battersea.

Charles Cronin adds:

The article by Ms Eccles in this month's *Battersea Matters* is one of the most scurrilous I have read for many a day.

I do not deny that Sid Sporle was found guilty of corruption. However in my view it could be because an uneducated man who left school at 14 could be, and was, gulled and flattered by men of influence and power to act against what I feel was his better nature.

Concerns

In the 1960s I personally approached Sid with concerns about a tenant with five children. Sid helped to rehouse them. That visit wasn't at midnight and no roll of fivers nor even a ten shilling note changed hands.

And remember Sid until the end of his life lived not in Spain, or a mansion flat on Prince of Wales Drive, but in a flat on the Peabody Estate. If Sid had been as corrupt as Ms Eccles states then he could have afforded a good lawyer to defend himself as did Dan Smith (who paradoxically was found not guilty of bribing him). And he could have retired to some tax haven after serving his sentence.

Sid was a good man who worked hard for his constituents. The fact that 600 people signed a petition in his favour is surely sign enough that he was a decent hard-working councillor liked and respected for what he did locally.



The real Sporle Court. Park South shown in error last issue

Great Bus Journeys of the World No 28

Mike Roden travels safely (and virtually) on the 188 from North Greenwich to Russell Square



I've long intended to take this bus trip again. I last travelled this route back in 2001 when we were merely tourists staying in London. I was astonished to discover you could take a bus all the way into central London, for just £1. I suspect that was when the Man on the Bus was born! This time I could relive the journey in a safe, virtual way thanks to a YouTube video of the entire route filmed last August from the front of the top deck.

North Greenwich is the Jubilee line's largest station – designed to cope with the large number of visitors expected to the Millennium Dome exhibition. This once marshland area was rapidly industrialised during the nineteenth century. From the 1980s a relentless programme of re-development took place on this peninsula. This continues today as can be seen as we head along Millennium Way. Blackwall Lane is more settled taking us from industrial estates, into a more residential area, blocks of flats to the right with small shops at ground level, lower rise family housing on the left.

Shuttered

On Trafalgar Road smaller shops mingle with the occasional supermarket, takeaways and restaurants, and a brace of betting shops. The shops gradually become more downmarket, many of them shuttered. Suddenly there on the right is the University of Greenwich and the complex of historic buildings related to the town's naval and royal history and on the left the paths through the park leading to the Queens House and the National Maritime Museum.

We're on Romney Road a name dating from 1713 so it can't be related to the artist George Romney,

born in 1742. He had a lucrative line in painting admirals, but also produced over 60 portraits of Horatio Nelson's beloved Emma Hamilton. Fittingly now on Nelson Road we head into the centre of Greenwich dominated by the impressive spire of St Alfege's church.

Cutty Sark

A left turn at the church takes us onto Creek Road and past the Cutty Sark DLR station. If you're quick you'll spot the ship itself down a side-street. In the thirties the 188 started from here (like the tram it replaced) following roughly the same route but carrying on to Chalk Farm.

Passing the unlovely bulk of the Elmix Concrete works, we cross Deptford Creek – once lined with heavy industries, but now home to luxury developments where you can enjoy living in 'Creekside' with wall to wall wifi, 24 hrs gym, and a relaxing waterside location. And for long stretches of road we pass modern apartment blocks or sites waiting for something similar.

Into a predominantly residential district, where post-war housing is mixed with Edwardian terraces, we miss out on the pleasures of Deptford High Street. Evelyn Street offers much the same until we enter a meandering straggle of betting shops, estate agents, a post office, and some beauty salons and nailbars. A couple of barbers bear witness to the recent rise of millennial men's obsession with grooming.

Sayes Court Park is nearby. This was the site of Sayes Court an early home of the diarist John Evelyn – explaining the name of the road mentioned above. The house was demolished in 1729 and replaced

by a workhouse, later converted to almshouses. That building did not survive the Second World War and the park was created in 1952.

The bus stops outside Deptford fire station which was opened in 1904. Reminding me of our own Old Battersea House, the style is clearly inspired by domestic buildings of the seventeenth century, in tribute perhaps to John Evelyn.

Frustrating

We head into Rotherhithe along another residential stretch. It's frustrating to be in an area with such a long maritime history and not to be able to see the river. There were shipyards and docks here from Elizabethan times. The dock closures saw widespread redevelopment along the Thames intensified by the arrival of the Jubilee Line in 1999, and the Overground in 2010 though this particular stretch of Rotherhithe Old Road has a dilapidated, unloved look.

The bus turns into the Surrey Quays shopping centre which in normal times offers shops plus entertainment with a cinema, bowling alley and bingo hall. The centre was built on much of the Surrey Docks site and the nearby Surrey Docks station was renamed Surrey Quays when it became part of the Overground. The change of name has never quite been explained.

Canada Water bus station doubles as a Jubilee line and Overground station and we wait there briefly, before heading off past King George's Fields. This was one of many such recreation grounds created 'for the use and enjoyment of the people' by a Foundation set up after the death of George V in 1936. All the playing fields are managed locally with strict

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



If you wish to take the virtual journey yourself you'll find the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTY8nkd1iGE>
Left to right: University of Greenwich; the Cutty Sark; Surrey Quays station; the Jabez West drinking fountain; Bermondsey Arts Cocktail Club



covenants and conditions to prevent strapped for cash local councils selling them off.

Southwark Park opened in 1869. Here you'll find London's first public memorial to a working class man – a drinking fountain commemorates Jabez West, campaigner and temperance advocate who died in 1874. A local paper observed 'He was content to do lowly work ... so long as progress, social or political, was the watchword'. A lesson for us all, maybe.

Rotherhithe's docklands and Southwark's factories made this area a major target for Luftwaffe bombing raids. Most of the buildings around here date from the 1950s onwards when redevelopment got under way to make good the considerable wartime destruction.

Narrow

After Bermondsey underground station we're on Jamaica Road which was created in the second half of the 18th century. Its name recalls the arrival of goods from Jamaica at the nearby docks. A short trip along Tanner Street takes us to Druid Street which runs along railway arches which have been there since 1836 when the London to Greenwich railway was built. Now we turn left under the railway bridge onto Tower Bridge Road.

It's quite narrow here with trees in full leaf overhanging either side of the road. A woman was killed here in May 2008 when she was hit by branches torn from a tree by a passing 188 bus. Though few pre-20th century buildings survive, we pass one notable exception. The church of St Mary Magdalen was completed in 1690 (though there's been a church on this site since the late 1200s). This

church survived nineteenth-century redevelopment and the Blitz.

At the junction with Bermondsey Street and Grange Lane I spot the entrance to one of those increasingly rare underground public conveniences. In fact this is the Bermondsey Arts Club & Cocktail Bar which is apparently popular in fashionable circles. 'On descending the iron railing clad stairwell, an elegant 1930's style cocktail bar awaits your arrival.' The place to go, clearly.

At the busy Bricklayers Arms roundabout you can look in vain for a pub though for centuries there was an inn with that name. This was where coaches travelling along the Old Kent Road set down or picked up passengers. The land was owned by the City of London, whose sign was the coat of arms of the Worshipful Company of Tylers and Bricklayers, giving the pub its name.

On we go and after passing South Bank University's halls of residence, we arrive at Elephant and Castle. This junction was notorious for London's worst cyclist mortality rate. However, it's now a 'peninsula' called Elephant Square providing safe access to the shopping centre (after years of protest and indecision this closed in September 2020). The futuristic stainless steel box in the centre dates from 1961 and houses a London Underground electrical substation. It is a memorial to locally born electricity pioneer Michael Faraday.

Leaving Elephant and Castle we're soon at St George's Circus which was built in 1771. On the base of the obelisk in the centre is etched the distances from Palace Yard, London Bridge and Fleet Street. (A mile or so in each case).

Onto a very leafy stretch of

Waterloo Road, and there's a boringly average parade of shops, with something different for a change – a fossil and crystal shop. After the HQ of the London Ambulance service we pass Waterloo Millennium Green. This area was once part of the ancient Lambeth Marsh. The park, created on derelict land, was opened in 2001 and is community owned and managed.

And so we arrive alongside the Old Vic. Originally this was the Coburg Theatre but became the Royal Victoria theatre in 1833. By 1871 it had become familiarly known as the 'Old Vic' and when Lilian Bayliss took on the management in 1913, she changed its name officially and it has been The Old Vic ever since.

Three lions

The normally busy bus stops serving Waterloo Station are almost deserted today. Then onto Waterloo Bridge which is 370 metres long (around 1200 feet in old money) and was originally called the Strand Bridge. Over the river and we're on Lancaster Place. No 1 is the headquarters of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Queen is the Duke of Lancaster which is why the duchy flag has the three lions of England on it (not a lot of people know that). We speed along a very leafy Strand, merging into Aldwych and passing the forlornly shuttered Novello and Aldwych theatres which are both hoping to reopen at the end of June.

Kingsway came into being as part of a massive slum clearance programme in the 1900s. At 100ft wide it's one of the broadest streets in central London. The name honours King Edward VII, who opened the street in 1905.

A brief stop at Holborn station then the bus crosses High Holborn and onto Southampton Row. We get a quick glimpse of Bloomsbury Square just before we turn onto Russell Square. This was laid out in 1801 by Humphry Repton and quickly became fashionable. Notable residents have included the poets Cowper and Thomas Gray, the suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst and the theatrical impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte.

The bus comes to a stop and this is journey's end. As this has been a virtual journey I don't even have to move to start researching and writing!

Breweries from Nine Elms to Wandsworth Common

An exploration of local brewing, past and present, by Hilaire

Many readers will know of Sambrook's Brewery and may have sampled their Wandle Best Bitter or Powerhouse Porter. When Sambrook's started brewing in Yelverton Road in 2008, it was one of only a handful of breweries operating in London, and claimed to be the only one in Battersea.

At the end of 2020, Sambrook's relocated to a new site on the other side of the Wandle, in the redeveloped Ram Quarter, once home to Young's Brewery. But the history of brewing in Battersea neither begins nor ends with Sambrook's.

As early as 1645, churchwardens' accounts mention a brewhouse in Nine Elms, and soon after refer to the provision of scales and weights for 'Ayle tasters'. At the other end of Battersea, near today's Lombard Road, sugar houses were operating by the 1670s, refining sugar possibly for brewing. There were also maltings and two distilleries in the area.

Tall chimneys

Samuel Lee's 1829 Panorama of the Thames depicts a brewery consisting of several brick buildings with tall chimneys near the river at Nine Elms, close to Vauxhall Bridge. This is almost certainly the Nine Elms Brewery, which was leased to James Farren and Joseph Till from 1833 to 1841. The brewery was then acquired by John Mills Thorne in 1841. His brother Benjamin joined him in 1861. The brewery occupied a large site south of Nine Elms Lane, near the US Embassy's new location. Like many breweries, it underwent several name changes reflecting changes of ownership.

Henry Simmonds, in his 1882 book *All About Battersea*, mentions that there was a hop garden at the back of Thorne's Brewery, and that the brewery had a 'clock turret at its summit which at night is illuminated with gas so that the passers-by looking at the clock might know the hour.' Nearby were maltings, run by a character named Swonnell. Thorne's Brewery had 52 tied



houses, including now lost Battersea pubs such as the Steam Packet, Southampton Arms and General Havelock. In 1898 the brewery was rebuilt in Queen Anne revival style.

In 1914 the brewery was taken over by Meux's Brewery Company, who owned the large Horseshoe Brewery in Tottenham Court Road. In 1921 Meux's brewing production transferred from central London to Nine Elms, with the brewery there taking on the Horseshoe name. Meux's went into liquidation in 1961, and Nine Elms' Horseshoe Brewery ceased brewing in 1964. The area was cleared by 1975.

Simmonds also mentions a brewery run by Mr. Featherstonhaugh, located near the junction of Thessaly and Battersea Park Roads, as these streets are now named. According to the Brewery History site, this brewery was founded in 1873 and by 1882 was being run by William Featherstonhaugh. Between 1899 and 1906 it was trading as the Battersea Park Brewery Co but had ceased brewing by 1919.

In the 1860s Rawes & Co ran the South Western Brewery, located on Lavender Hill opposite Cedars Road. Thirsty punters could buy a nine-gallon cask (72 pints) of Alexandra Pale Ale for 10 shillings, roughly £31 in today's money.

Another brewery operated in Nine Elms at the turn of this century. Haggards Brewery was set up in 1998 by Tim Haggard, to brew beer for the Imperial Arms on Kings Road, Fulham, which he'd taken over and refurbished. The brewery arm of the business was managed by Tim's

brother Andrew. Two beers were brewed: a pale ale and a best bitter called Haggards Horny Ale. The pub also did a brisk trade in vodka jelly shots. When their supplier went out of business, the brothers started making their own product at the brewery in Nine Elms, under the name Bad Jelly.

In 2000, Greater Manchester Police lodged a complaint about Bad Jelly with the Portman Group, on the grounds that the name, packaging and design of the product did not make it clear that it contained alcohol, and that it appeared to be aimed at children. The complaint was upheld, and Haggards changed the packaging to comply with the Alcohol Marketing code. By 2005 the brewery had ceased operating.

Microbreweries

The good news is that there are now several microbreweries based in Battersea. All of them draw on the American craft beer tradition, and have an onsite tap room or bar (currently closed due to Covid restrictions). The Mondo Brewing Company, founded in 2014, is located at 86 – 92 Stewart's Road, a mere hop, skip and a jump from Battersea Power Station. Nearby, in the shadow of the Power Station on Arches Lane, is Battersea Brewery, which opened a couple of years ago. The Distortion Brewing Company operates from 647 Portslade Road, in an arch beneath Wandsworth Road Overground station.

Founder Andy North, originally from Battersea, started brewing craft beer in a south London garage following a road trip to the States in 2007, before securing the brewery's current site. Right next to Wandsworth Common Station on Jaggard Way you will find the Belleville Brewing Co., set up by a group of dads with children at Belleville Primary School. Restrictions permitting, a summer brewery crawl sounds very appealing!

Hilaire is a member of the Battersea Society's heritage committee.

Harvey Heath 1935 – 2021

Tony Tuck, former chair of the Battersea Society writes:

On 6 January this year COVID-19 claimed the lives of 1,041 individuals. One of these was Harvey Heath, a long-time resident of Battersea and one known and loved for his roles in many local community organisations. Harvey was everyone's favourite uncle: open, warm, accessible, informed, intelligent and a keen participant in affirmative community action. However, a key difference from some other uncles is that Harvey treated those he met as equals, more as cousins than nephews or nieces. With his death a lot of people lost a good friend and companion.

Family man

Above all else, Harvey was a family man. He had a blue plaque in the porch of his large Victorian house overlooking Wandsworth Common celebrating the many years that he and his wife Gillian had lived and brought up their children there. Once through the porch and into the house, the interior was festooned with photos and mementos of many lives well lived.

He was immensely proud of his children and grandchildren, their achievements and their ups and downs. The premature death of his daughter Samantha in 2019 was a grievous blow, as was the slow decline of his wife Gillian. His care for them all was manifest. His way of mourning for such loss was a simple one. He would hire a large public space and have a celebration of their life with family and friends and colleagues.

Harvey was an active member of the Battersea Society and for many years its Secretary. As such, he played a key part in helping to build the work of the Society and to establish its reputation as a serious player in local matters.

He was a great asset in organising the Society and its social events and also chaired the Open Spaces committee for a number of years as well as the Communities and Health committee. He also had a passionate

interest in planning and would spend long hours discussing the intricacies of planning matters in the committee. His passion for community wellbeing found clearest expression in his campaigning over many years for air quality and against air pollution. Many will recall Harvey and his daughter Sam standing at the kerbside measuring air quality. In this Harvey was ahead of his time as his articles in Battersea Matters (BM winter 2013 and summer 2014) illustrate.

While Harvey had concerns for 'the lungs of the city' in all Wandsworth open spaces, he played closer to home in his membership of the Wandsworth Common Management Committee, where he was a fearless campaigner for citizens' rights and against the profit principle of exploitation.

Conversation

Harvey was also a great believer in lunches with friends. Not only was he fastidious in his food, but he believed that much could be sorted out over a meal, as well as the lunch conversation being a good exercise for 'the little grey cells'. Any committee meeting at his house could be assured of fine coffee and a selection of excellent cheeses.

Whatever Harvey's formal roles in his local community organisations, he will be missed by many for his continuing good friendship and engaging company.

Councillor Tony Belton adds: Harvey Heath was a stalwart member of Battersea Labour Party. For many years he was in charge of fund-raising, enthusiastically initiating



Harvey Heath by the Barbara Hepworth sculpture in Battersea Park

sponsored swims, walks and dinners, and organising auctions with guest speakers including Chérie Blair and Keir Starmer.

His love of music was irrepressible, both jazz and opera were passions. He travelled widely to experience opera, with a particular love for Richards Wagner and Strauss.

Councillor Peter Dawson says: 'Though we were political opponents I enjoyed and valued working with him ... also we often saw each other at Clapham Picturehouse for live streamings from the Metropolitan Opera; he was very knowledgeable.'

On Twitter, Mayor Sadiq Khan commented on this 'terribly sad news'. And Councillor Simon Hogg tweeted, 'I'll remember him with a twinkle in his eye and a drink in his hand, ready to make a wry joke and chuckle. He was at the heart of Battersea life for decades. We'll miss him.'

Among many tributes from Battersea Society trustees and members were, 'Harvey made a tremendous contribution to the Society and to Battersea more widely', 'Always so kind and thoughtful – a voice of reason in a sometimes mad world', 'A very decent and lovely man'.

Battersea at war – then and now

As our lives are changed by the pandemic, Sue Demont looks back at the devastation of the Blitz

As we continue to live through the greatest disruption to our lives since the Second World War, it feels timely (and perhaps salutary) to cast our minds back eighty years to the unprecedented scale of upheaval caused by a rather different enemy.

7 September 1940 was a fateful night for London. Having failed to destroy Britain's air bases and ports during the early months of the war, Göring unleashed his programme of *Blitzkrieg* (Lightning War) which saw up to 200 bombers attacking London night after night throughout the autumn. In April the attacks resumed, culminating in the hideous night of 10 May which saw nearly 1,500 Londoners killed and many more seriously injured. By the end of May the capital had lost over 30,000 of its civilian population and more than a million houses. Not for nothing was the Blitz also dubbed the 'Battle of London'.

Battersea sadly experienced the full this battle of an unarmed civilian population against incendiaries and high explosive; the battle of firemen, policemen, nurses and rescue workers against an enemy they could not hurt. At least 280 Battersea civilians died in the Blitz – Rose and Ernest Clarke of 28 Rawson Street

held the melancholy distinction of being the first casualties – and neither the borough's townscape nor its community would ever be the same again.

Commandeered

In another parallel with the current pandemic, though less publicly, the Blitz early on raised questions as to the extent to which 'we are all in this together'. For although the whole of Battersea was affected, there is no doubt that its poorest districts – the notorious 'Island' in Nine Elms, the slums of Orville Road and the streets that pre-dated today's Patmore Estate – were hardest hit. Dominated by Battersea's more noxious industries and sandwiched between multiple rail tracks, the density of the poor-quality housing stock inevitably meant higher casualty rates and greater destruction. The Patmore district was so severely damaged that the army evacuated the handful of remaining residents and commandeered it for street fighting practice.

There are further parallels with 2020 – 21. Battersea lost several landmark buildings to the Blitz, including St Andrew's and St John's churches, the Shakespeare Theatre

on Lavender Hill and Battersea High Street Station. For different reasons, today's pandemic is again depriving Battersea residents of the opportunity to worship collectively, enjoy live theatre or travel freely.

The Blitz played havoc with people's pre-war routines. Battersea Society member Maureen Larkin recalled how her schooling was interrupted as 'you didn't want to walk through the streets to school, not while there were raids on' – corroborated by another local resident who 'hardly ever went to school because of the shelters and the raids.' For the first five months of the pandemic and again since the start of January the majority of Battersea's children have been unable to attend school either.

During the Blitz employees of riverside industries like Morgan's Crucible or Price's Candles had to find alternative ways to get to work after heavy bombing made their usual routes impassable. Disrupted days were followed by fearful and sleepless nights crammed inside Anderson shelters, under the stairs or table, or in hastily built public shelters – themselves no guarantee of safety, as illustrated when eight Battersea civilians, six from Meyrick Street,

Bomb damage in Tennyson Street



perished in a shelter on Wandsworth Common on 29 October.

The children of Battersea, though not immune from fear, experienced events somewhat differently. Bombsites, wrecked and half-demolished houses and mounds of rubble created opportunities not just for play but for collecting and scavenging, which to the authorities' consternation could easily translate into vandalism and looting. Recognising this, a national scheme was launched to harness the energies of young foragers more constructively. Launched as the juvenile arm of the National Salvage Campaign in 1941, the 'Cog Scheme' sought to provide children with 'responsible worthwhile work' to do. Interestingly this national scheme was particularly strong in Battersea, presumably because the scale of bomb damage provided such rich pickings for competitive youngsters. A visiting journalist found that

'Battersea is full of Cogs... I met 600 of them. The Battersea children collect everything from bits of old mangle to wooden cotton reels. Each child is responsible for the condition of the salvage he or she brings in... Some of the cotton reels go back to the manufacturers to be rewound

with thread and silk. Others go to the Army for the Signal Corps... A good market has been found for used torch batteries... and now every Battersea Cog is looking for them... Naturally (Cogs) outdo dustmen and Borough authorities in zest. Collections have risen in every London Borough where the scheme is working...'

The most zealous Cogs could earn the equivalent of a Blue Peter badge, and at their peak they were even given their own song 'There'll always be a dustbin' sung to the well-known Vera Lynn tune.

The 'Baby Blitz'

Eighty years on most people have a mental image of the Blitz. Much less remembered – but devastating for the Battersea its residents knew and loved – is the 'Baby Blitz' of 1944. On 21 January the Luftwaffe began a new series of heavy raids over London, using larger and more destructive bombs with a high proportion of incendiaries in order to disrupt Allied preparations for the invasion of France. In February alone nearly a thousand Londoners were killed in seven major raids and 3,000 houses in Battersea were rendered uninhabitable in just six days, a statistic which earned Battersea

an unenviable reference in Angus Calder's seminal account of *The People's War*. The worst affected area was directly to the west of Battersea Park, where Ethelburga Street School and its Victorian neighbourhood were largely obliterated. It seems almost miraculous that there were only 29 fatalities that week, though many more were injured and thousands lost their homes.

By the end of the war Battersea had lost more than 27,000 houses and the 1951 Census was to confirm one of the major consequences of this – a reduction in population of more than a quarter. The 1950s saw a further decline, leading to the abolition of the historic borough of Battersea and its absorption into Wandsworth in 1965. The former borough has never come close to regaining its pre-war population – though no-one would wish for a return to the appalling levels of overcrowding.

Footnote: In late February 2021, the Borough of Wandsworth has lost 452 residents to Covid 19.

Sue Demont is the author of The Bombing of Battersea: eyewitnesses tell their stories (2018) available for £5 including P&P from warcomeshome@mailwise.co.uk



Lockdown walks around Battersea can reveal some surprises!



Cause for celebration on Wandsworth Common



The Friends unveil the anniversary celebrations

The Friends of Wandsworth Common are planning a number of projects and events to mark this year's 150th Anniversary of the Act of Parliament which saved the Common as you see it today for future generations, keeping it 'at all times open, unenclosed and unbuilt upon'.

In the 19th century it was nearly lost forever to encroaching railways and rapacious developers. Faced with this threat, campaigners took the fight all the way to the Houses of Parliament, culminating in the Wandsworth Common Act of 1871.

Fight

The story of the fight to save the Common is hugely inspiring but not very well known. Even the Friends' Heritage Group – formed in January 2019 – only uncovered it at the end of that year, but immediately decided it had to be celebrated.

We want the Anniversary to leave a legacy and what better way, given the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, than to plant trees – lots of them. Fundraising to plant at least 150 trees across the Common started in November and, with huge support from managers of the Common Enable LC and the Council, this season's planting is now almost complete. It will include a new 'mini-forest' area of dense planting to encourage biodiversity on the Bolingbroke (Battersea) side of the Common. Everyone can enjoy this legacy and we aim to continue planting next year.

Another fantastic project is a book by our Heritage group – *The Wandsworth Common Story* – to be published in May. This describes the fight to save the Common and, in a rich mosaic of 150 tales, celebrates the notable and intriguing people who have lived there, the buildings that have adorned it and the changes it has undergone over the centuries.

Who knew that a third lovely lake once covered Spencer Park; that the 'Scope' was once home to the world's largest refracting telescope; or that prefabs and allotments once bordered the Common?

The Common's inhabitants included renowned gypsies, a famous female racing driver, and our very own Wright Brothers, to name just a few. Even Beatrix Potter gets a mention. The two main protagonists were Lord of the Manor Earl Spencer, the 'baddie' of the story, and John Charles Buckmaster – JCB to his descendants – the hero of the piece, who saved the Common.

The Battersea Society has wholeheartedly embraced the celebrations and is arranging for one of their blue plaques near the site of Buckmaster's Battersea home in Prested Road. Sue Demont, BS Secretary, is a leading member of the five person editorial team which has brought the book to life from the kernel of an idea in the mind of local historian, Philip Boys. We couldn't have done it without her! Sue will be talking to the BS about John Buckmaster on May 12th, on the Friends third birthday and just before the book's launch.

Plaque

A Wandsworth Council green plaque will commemorate JCB and all those who have made the Common what it is today – sited on the Neal's Lodge building in the middle of the Common. We hope that Adrian Buckmaster – great great grandson of JCB, who has written the foreword to the book

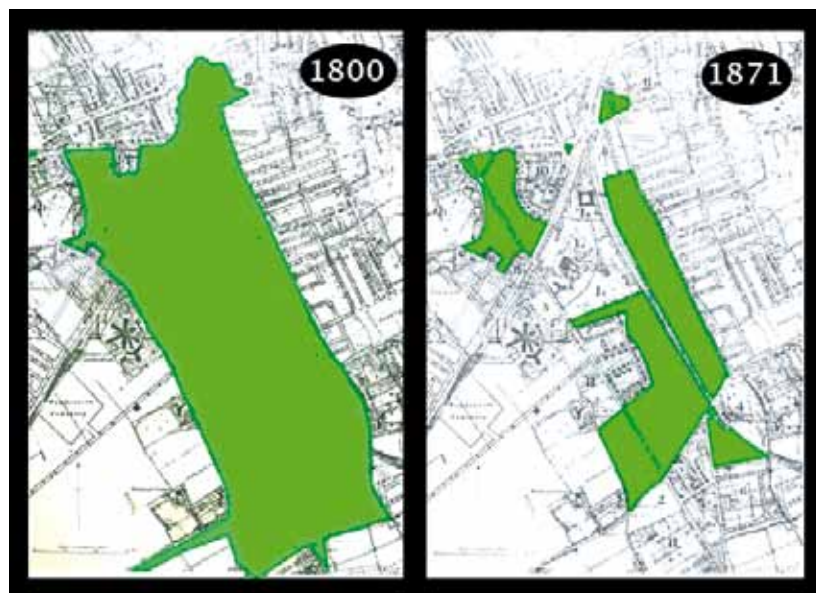
– will attend the plaque unveilings. We're also planning a revamp of the area in front of Neal's Lodge to make it a more natural and inclusive area, in keeping with the Common, a project in collaboration with the Common's Management Advisory Committee (the MAC) who have been supportive throughout.

We've already kicked off this year's 'walks and talks' programme with a virtual account by Philip Boys of the 'carve up' of the Common in the 1800s, which reduced it from almost 400 acres to less than half that now (see picture). From the spring we hope to offer several heritage walks on the Common alongside our usual nature focussed events.

Celebration

In July, government guidance permitting, we hope to have a big celebration on the Common, with opportunities for local schools, businesses and residents to join us in marking this historic occasion.

Visit the Friends website www.wandsworthcommon.org or e mail info@wandsworthcommon.org. Join up to make sure you're the first to know what's happening. Follow us on Instagram and twitter @wwcommon and Facebook @fowandsworthcommon
Julia Bott and Richard Fox, Friends of Wandsworth Common Co-Chairs



The shaded areas laid on today's map show how much of Wandsworth Common has been lost

Mini-golf: fun for the family or an ecological disaster?

Jenny Sheridan meets the campaigners trying to save a corner of Clapham Common.

Tucked away behind the tennis courts in the south-west (Battersea) corner of Clapham Common is – or was – a grassy area with two bowling greens. Now the subject of fierce local debate and a 4,000+ petition, Lambeth Council has let the greens and their pavilion deteriorate.

The controversy arises from Lambeth's agreement to a proposal from Putt in the Park (PitP) to build a mini-golf course and associated pizza café (similar to the one in Battersea Park) on the site. A group of local residents, affiliated to the Friends of Clapham Common (FoCC), set up the Save The Green campaign and raised the petition. They are opposed to the plan on both community and environmental grounds. They say that public consultation was inadequate and that turning common land over to private enterprise is wrong in principle and risks setting a precedent for other communal spaces.

Polluting

The FoCC also argue that the scheme is bad for the environment and biodiversity. The plastic grass used for the course is highly unsustainable, potentially polluting and creates 'dead zones', sterile areas that are unfriendly to wildlife such as bees, beetles and especially earthworms, essential for healthy soil and grass.

Although the site is in Wandsworth, the whole of Clapham Common is managed by Lambeth. In November 2020 WBC refused planning permission for the conversion of the pavilions into a café but PitP is currently appealing this decision. Lambeth has already approved the plans and agreed a 15 year lease, estimated to be about £35,000 per annum.

There were over 150 objections to the planning application, including from the Battersea Society. As the scheme involves building on common land it has to go to the Secretary of State for approval. This process is expected to take about six months.

As well as family-friendly recreation, PitP promise a new toilet block and

the conversion of the pavilion into a café, open until dusk in the winter, till 8 or 9pm in summer. In addition to two putting greens they say that a third of the area would be devoted to planting and would include a pond.

Shirley Kermer is chair of the Friends of Clapham Common, a group passionately opposed to the project. 'Our aims are to protect the integrity of the common and to promote biodiversity,' she says. 'We want to do something community based – a garden on one of the two greens which would be maintained by volunteers and open to all. We're in the middle of these two crises – coronavirus and climate. The pandemic has made us all much more aware of the value of nature for our own welfare and for the good of the planet. A garden would provide a quiet space – there are two residential homes nearby and it would be a lovely place for older people to sit and enjoy. The other green could be used for informal games of croquet or bowls or could be a space for younger children to play in.'

'Putt in the Park are aiming to attract 30,000 people, so it could be noisy for local residents, especially if the café serves alcohol. Our main objections however are ecological. This project would leave this area sterile, with no real wildlife value. While a third of the site would be planted that means that two thirds would be covered with hundreds of tons of hardcore and plastic grass.'

Scruffy

The Clapham Society takes a more nuanced view. They agree that there was insufficient consultation and regret the additional activity on a scruffy but largely peaceful area but they did not believe there were sufficient grounds to object to the planning application.

When I visited the site on a sunny Saturday in February, a group of local teenagers was kicking a ball around in an informal and energetic game of football on one of the greens. On the other, younger children were running around playing while their

mothers sat (distanced) on benches and chatted. I got talking to a passing cyclist, who turned out to be Gareth James, a landscape designer who is on the FoCC Committee. 'You wouldn't see this kind of access here with the mini-golf plans', he said. 'It would no longer be common ground. The area would be fenced off from the rest of the common and you'd have to pay to get in. We have applied for the greens and the pavilion to be registered as assets of community value.'

'We're in a climate crisis. Lambeth was proud to be the first borough in London to proclaim a climate emergency, and now they're ready to accept this. Plastic grass is bad for wildlife, it's made of petrochemicals, it can spread micro-plastics and it's very hard to recycle. I have stopped using it professionally as I think it's so damaging.'

'We're working hard to stop this project going ahead. If it does, other parks and commons should beware.'

savethegreen.uk
www.puttinthepark.com



Extinction Rebellion protesters roosting in a mature black poplar tree in York Gardens. The tree was due to be felled in February as part of the Winstanley/York Gardens regeneration but a vigorous local campaign has so far (2 March) prevented this. Black poplars are quite rare and this one is thought to be over 100 years old.

We're turning grey to green in Southfields

Nina Kowalska celebrates her Front Garden Friendly Neighbourhood

Do you have a front garden? If you do, is it paved or planted with trees or shrubs and flowers? In London, half of all front gardens are paved over and there are five times as many front gardens with no plants as there were ten years ago. All this amounts to London losing a green space the size of two and a half Hyde Parks every year, just from people swapping planting for paving in their gardens.

It was seeing green turning to grey in SW18 that inspired a group of residents to set out to Green the Grid and make the 'Grid' area in Southfields London's first front garden friendly neighbourhood. (The Grid is 12 streets with Revelstoke Road being its southern boundary, and the others being Merton Road, Pirbright Road and the border with Wimbledon Park). A survey of the area showed that only 8% of the Grid's front gardens were fully planted and over 50% were either fully or partially paved, allowing little or no rainwater to flow to the water table. The remaining front gardens were covered in a permeable surface such as soil, gravel or brick, allowing some water to flow through.

Mission

Since spring 2018 Green the Grid has been on a mission to transform our streets and front gardens. The project aims to encourage street and front garden planting in a bid to bring important environmental benefits. These include improving air quality, absorbing more carbon, increasing wildlife, helping to prevent flooding (by letting water drain into the earth and not down the drain) and enhancing our health and wellbeing.

Over the last three years, the project has increased the number of planted front gardens in the area and

raised awareness of the benefits of a greener environment by organising community planting days with plant give-aways, plant and tool swaps and providing gardening advice. The project also co-hosts the annual Front Garden Awards and Spectacular Sunflowers of Southfields event.

At the first event more than 170 residents took to the streets and planted flowerbeds around trees, which they had 'adopted'. We encourage people to plant a mixture of annuals and perennials, but nothing with deep roots which could disturb the tree, no shrubs and no plants that need a great deal of water. The project has grown from strength to strength resulting in over 300 tree bases being planted with thousands of plants and bulbs and a noticeable increase in green front gardens.

Recently we also created a community herb garden and supplied local shops with free planters. All these activities have been possible because of generous donations of plants from organisations including the Rotary Club and Battersea Power Station, as well as grants from Wandsworth Council's Grant Fund, and the Southfields Grid Residents Association.

A local resident who took part in the last planting day said: 'My two little girls loved planting up their patch. It was so nice to see them excited to be outside, learning about flowers and taking pride in the community we live in and wanting to make it better'.

In 2021 Green the Grid is broadening its ambitions and hopes to identify greening opportunities in the wider Southfields area for more tree planting, green walls, parklets and maybe even wildlife corridors.

With the challenge of lockdowns we all appreciate nature more than



ever. On our daily walks, or from our windows, it's often the small things that make us smile and make a difference to our days: the sound of birdsong, a tree in blossom or some newly planted flowers in a window box.

Online campaign

So, although last year the project only managed one (socially distanced) community planting event that did not stop us. We launched a Time for Nature online campaign where we share some of the wonders of nature that we can observe around us as well as practical planting and wildlife activities which all the family could get involved in. And now that spring is on its way, it is a great time to start planting.

We are excited that the project has already inspired others to create Front Garden Friendly Neighbourhoods. We need to play our part to combat climate change and make our borough a greener place to live. We're keen to help and support others to start similar projects so we plan to share a DIY kit in the near future.

Importantly, being Front Garden Friendly does not require a front garden! Whether people have a garden or simply a window sill or a tree outside, there is still so much we can all do to get greening and encourage wildlife. We hope you decide to join us!

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