

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society SUMMER 2021



Celebrating 70 years: Battersea Park Festival Gardens

This year marks the Festival of Britain's 70th anniversary, but did you know Battersea Festival Gardens played a huge part in the celebrations when it originally opened in 1951?

In the years after World War II, the government wanted to focus on a brighter future by creating a tonic for the nation. The Festival of Britain opened on the South Bank on 4 May 1951 to celebrate all that was great about British science, industry and design with Battersea Park chosen for the light-hearted part of the celebration.



Festival Director-General Gerald Barry declared: "1951 should be a year of fun, fantasy and colour." The Festival Gardens in Battersea Park provided all three. Echoing earlier English Pleasure Gardens, they featured a riverside theatre, dance pavilion, gardens, lakes, fountains, a children's zoo, bars and restaurants as well as a popular funfair and mini-railway.

Despite opposition to the cost, the Festival committee won £30,000 (close to £1 million in today's money) from the Treasury to purchase spectacular new rides from the USA. The Sky Wheel, Moon Rocket, Big Dipper, Flying Cars, Boomerang and many more rides provided thrills and excitement that ensured that the crowds flocked in from Nine Elms, Battersea and further afield.



The mini-railway adopted the style of Punch cartoonist Rowland Emmett, bringing to mind the British characteristics of whimsy and silliness which had raised spirits during the war. Passengers could travel the 500 yds from one side of the gardens to the other for a shilling (5p). Three quaint engines, Nellie, Neptune and Wild Goose hauled carriages between the grandiose Far Tottering Station and Oyster Creek. The mini-railway proved so popular that it covered its costs in just three weeks.

After six months, parliament held a debate to consider the future of the gardens. It was reported that over eight million people had visited, more than 70 per cent of whom were Londoners. It was agreed that the gardens should remain open after the Festival of Britain ended, with the funfair surviving until 1974. Some of the original features can still be seen in Battersea Park today, see if you can spot them!



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

This feature was originally presented on the cultural noticeboards in Nine Elms, in collaboration with Wandsworth Council. It was created by the Battersea Society's Heritage Committee.

From the editor



Everything's opening up, isn't it? Gradually, and more cautiously for some individuals and businesses than for others. I

understand from friends who have ventured out to eat indoors that some Battersea restaurants appear to be ignoring any hint of social distancing. Some people I know are still avoiding public transport and meeting others indoors. Personally, I'm revelling in the new pleasures – a glass of wine in the garden with friends – or even indoors, which feels positively wicked!, a visit to Tate Britain, a pedicure. I'm booking theatre tickets.

We all appreciate so much more the things we used to take for granted. When we meet we talk about our most recent excitements, even

if it's just browsing in a bookshop or taking a train.

Nature of course has been available to us throughout the lockdowns. Our parks and commons have been a lifeline, though our increased use has caused considerable damage. There's that Oscar Wilde line, 'Each man kills the things he loves.' It's not quite that bad, but it is true that our activity has been harmful to many plants and living creatures. We have a thought-provoking article on page 14 about biodiversity and what we as individuals, and importantly the council, should be doing to try to preserve it.

An interesting insight into Londoners' love for nature: In April the London Wildlife Trust set up a crowdfunding page to raise £5,000 for pond-dipping equipment. To their amazement, they raised the whole sum in just one hour!

On page 3 we have another

thought-provoking article. Michael Jubb challenges us to come up with ideas on how the Battersea Society can help to 'build back better' locally. Your thoughts are very welcome.

As I write, the Wandsworth Heritage Festival is coming on a close and very enjoyable it has been. The next borough-wide extravaganza will be the Wandsworth Arts Fringe 25 June – 11 July. It will be live as well as online – hurray! We are promised circus, contemporary dance, historically inaccurate theatre, satire, silent discos and dozens of other thrills. I can't wait!

And on 15 July our summer party – cancelled of course last year – will I hope welcome many members both old and new. I look forward to seeing you there.

Jenny Sheridan

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PS Take a look at our whizzy new website www.batterseasociety.org.uk

Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden celebrates the easing of lockdown, the pleasures of reading and cricket

Angela (that's my wife, for new readers) has recently returned to volunteer reading at a local primary school. It set me recalling the time I realised I could read.

At the age of five (going on six) I played the part of Peter - a little boy who was accompanied everywhere he went by the god Pan. It's quite possible that this primary school epic was one of the pageants celebrating the arrival in 1952 of the New Elizabethan age. I'm not sure whether I had any lines, or much about the plot. I do recall the end of the play when we stood in front of a woodland backdrop and sang *Land of Hope and Glory* along with the audience of proud mums and dads.

During the frequent times I wasn't on stage as Peter the friend of Pan, I sat in a classroom and started to read a book. This was curious as I didn't know I could read, but suddenly all the words made sense.

Today it would be called an epiphany – but I just took it for granted, and it is one of the most enduring memories of that small episode in my life.

Another of those allegedly clever marketing ideas aimed at a 'younger audience' arrives. It's the thrilling new cricket tournament called 'The Hundred' which is launching this summer – much faster and simpler than the traditional game. The director of England cricket thought that it would appeal in particular to 'mums and kids in the summer holidays'. It wouldn't have appealed to my mum who had Test Match Special on the radio all the time. Test cricket was once worth the time expended on watching it on tv. Then Rupert Murdoch poached the rights from the BBC, and I found something else to do.

Nothing happens

A critic once observed that *Waiting for Godot* 'had achieved a theoretical impossibility — a play in which nothing happens (for days), yet keeps audiences glued to their seats.'

Just like a five day test match of course. I don't need to tell you that Samuel Beckett was an avid fan of the game – an obsession shared with his friend Harold Pinter who played cricket

whenever he could. So next time you see *The Caretaker* you'll have a better idea what it's really about.

And that's enough about cricket [It is indeed:Ed (grimly)].

The first week after the May easing of lockdown we managed lunch with friends at their house, and took a visit down to Kent to celebrate our eldest grandson's seventeenth birthday. We received a great welcome – even the dog got excited! – and were staggered to see how tall the birthday boy and his sister had grown since September. On Zoom we only ever see their head and shoulders. No doubt most of you are experiencing, or planning to experience, something similar. Fingers crossed that the worst really is behind us.

Luckily those strange days have gone when toilet rolls vanished from shelves, people were buying flour on the black market, and even eggs were rationed. But our local wine shop continued to serve our needs through the darkest days – thank you Majestic Wine on Queenstown Road (other wine merchants are available!) – and so I often cook with wine now. Occasionally I even add it to the food ...

And with that happy thought I bid you goodbye for now. Mind how you go and I'll see you next time.





After the pandemic, what next for Battersea?

What will change, what may stay the same, asks Michael Jubb

No-one knows what Battersea will be like post-Covid. Will life for its residents return quickly to much like it was, long ago in 2019? I focus here on some of the possible changes, under four headings, all connected: social and behavioural; economic; physical and environmental; and public services and business.

Social and behavioural

The population of the old borough of Battersea has risen by about 15,000 over the past two decades, to an estimated 96,000 in 2019, with a projected rise to over 110,000 by 2030. But reports suggest that the population has actually fallen since early 2020, as EU and other overseas nationals have left post-Brexit, and as UK citizens have moved to other parts of the country. And we don't know how many of those who have left, especially the younger workers, will return. Battersea has the highest concentration in the UK of people in their 20s and early 30s. Will that still be so in 2022?

The biggest change over the past 15 months for many of us, of course, has been staying at home, as work, social life and much else retreated to online. Young people especially have flocked to pubs, bars and restaurants as lockdown restrictions have eased, providing a welcome boost to the local economy. But how many will return to theatres, cinemas, nightclubs, museums and galleries, and how quickly? For those who've been working from home, there's little sign of returning to five-days-a-week commuting. Passenger numbers on railways and tubes are 30-40% of pre-pandemic levels, and buses around 60%. This has huge implications for the future of public transport, and the repeated stand-offs between the Government and the Mayor about TfL's finances do not augur well. Road traffic levels, by contrast, are higher in Wandsworth than before the pandemic, and traffic delays have increased by a third.

Getting people out of their cars must be a key priority. But efforts to encourage cycling and walking have so far had limited effect.

Economic

The economic impact of the pandemic varies hugely by age, by employment sector, and by where you live. People of pensionable age have been the most likely to get Covid, but the pandemic has had the least effect on their income.

Some 20,000 working age people in Battersea – roughly a quarter – have been furloughed at some point, and some of them will become unemployed when the furlough scheme ends in September. Unemployment had been falling since 2012, but forecasts suggest that it will peak again in December this year. Young and ethnic minority workers, and especially those with the lowest levels of qualifications, have been particularly badly-hit, while graduates with professional and IT qualifications have fared much better.

Numbers of people claiming benefits have risen across Battersea, but some areas have been hit much harder than others. In Latchmere ward, claimants rose from 455 (3.8% of the population) in March 2020 to 1,160 (9.8%) in March 2021. In Northcote ward, they rose from 130 (1.1%) to 365 (3.0%). The proportionate increase may be similar, but the numbers involved are very different.

Covid has greatly exacerbated the inequalities between different parts of Battersea. Deprivation in some areas of Latchmere puts them in the worst 10% in the country, while parts of Northcote are among the 10% most prosperous. In this context, the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda risks favouring prosperous parts of the North and the Midlands at the expense of deprived areas in London.

Physical and environmental

Major construction work has continued apace during the pandemic,

sometimes after a short pause. With the reconstruction of the Power Station largely complete, the first residents are moving in. Apple will soon start to fit out office space for its London campus, along with the first retail units. The Power Station itself will be open to the public next, and Battersea will have a new town centre.

The Northern Line Extension will open in September. New blocks of flats will shortly be completed at the Power Station itself, elsewhere in Nine Elms, and along York Road, along with substantial blocks of social housing from Peabody at Clapham Junction and in Sleaford Street. Other major developments are under way though there are signs of weakening demand in Nine Elms, along with some falls in costs for private tenants.

The much-delayed Winstanley regeneration is in its very early stages; but elsewhere at Clapham Junction prospects for major development have receded. Neither CrossRail 2 nor the much-needed redevelopment of the station will proceed for at least a decade, casting a blight on the area, despite the forthcoming redevelopment of Arding and Hobbs.

We can all remember the cleaner, clearer air last Spring, and the reductions in traffic and aircraft noise which meant that we could hear the birds. Things have regressed since then. But the lockdowns have underlined the importance of open spaces, with much-increased use of our parks and commons. Heavier footfall has brought problems, however, exacerbated by the wet autumn and winter, and the driest April on record, drier even than in 1893. Regeneration of the parks and commons will take some time.

Businesses and public services

Many local businesses and other organisations suffered grievously ▶

◀ during the pandemic, and a fair number have not survived. In part this resulted from the rapid acceleration of long-term trends: the move to online shopping; online streaming of films, music and other events; and so on. The proportion of empty shops in Clapham Junction rose from 4% to 11% in the two years to August 2020, although the closure of Debenhams is probably no great loss. But some new businesses have opened too, especially personal services such as beauty and skin care, along with new food outlets, and the number of empty shops has fallen recently.

There is much talk of the need for new and imaginative approaches to revivify high streets, along with 'challenge funds' to support such moves. The weekend pedestrianisation of Northcote Road is one example, but broader initiatives are surely needed. The Junction

BID is one of many organisations promoting 'shop local' and similar schemes; and it may be that higher levels of home working, for even part of the week, will stimulate higher usage of local shops and services. There may also be demands for more local office space, as some people resist the pressure to return to work in the City and West End.

Public services have not been immune from the quickened shift to online, and it is likely that most of us will get used to more remote access to libraries, health, and other services, along with some aspects of online education. The downside, of course, is that those who lack the kit or the skills to operate online become increasingly excluded. But online streaming of Council and committee meetings has certainly brought increased levels of access to local democracy, and there is strong

pressure to retain it so that people can listen from home to discussions on decisions that affect them and their communities.

Conclusion

The pandemic brought greater awareness of our vulnerability and of how much we depend on services provided often by low-paid workers, and indeed on each other. Building Back Better is a good slogan, but positive change does not arise inevitably from a crisis, nor can it be delivered top-down from Westminster. It depends on individuals and communities working together to demand change, and to develop new ideas about how to achieve it. How might the Battersea Society help in that endeavour?

Michael Jubb is a member of the Battersea Society's planning committee

Northcote Road: village high street or tourist destination?

Jenny Sheridan probes changing attitudes to the weekend street closures

Northcote Road: once a thriving market; now, especially at weekends, a continental-style dining and drinking destination.

Long-established residents recall nostalgically the 1970s and 80s when the market stretched the length of the road, which also included six butchers and a hardware store. But in the early 1980s, according to the Survey of London, the road 'had dwindled to a drab streetscape dominated by minor branches of multiples'.

By 1993 there were only fourteen market stalls left and the number has shrunk ever since, although as late as 2007 the council's director of leisure and amenity services described the market as 'an essential feature of Northcote Road' and 'thriving'.

Campaigned

In 2006 – 07 the Northcote Road Action Group campaigned to prevent the street from becoming either a faceless high street lined with chain stores or a noisy bar area like parts of Clapham High Street. At that time Northcote Road boasted several excellent independent food shops, including the still surviving Hamish Johnston. The group had a vision of the area as a sort of mini Borough Market.

Those days are gone. Shopping has changed – the move towards online food shopping existed before

the Coronavirus pandemic but has expanded hugely. The gentrification which was already evident in 1987 has proceeded apace and the slightly sneering name Nappy Valley is evidenced by the many young families with buggies, dogs and money to spend. High streets across the country are dying. They were moribund before Covid – see the dozens of reports, reviews, TV programmes and feature articles about the death of the high street. And the pandemic and its inevitable lockdowns have pushed them further towards the graveyard. More and more, businesses that thrive are those providing experiences that can't be found online, like cafés, vets, barbers or nail bars.

At the end of the first lockdown last summer Wandsworth council made the decision to support the Northcote Road Business Network's



proposal to close the road to traffic at weekends. This year it closed in mid-April and this will continue until mid-October. Many local residents feel they were not properly consulted. While the council did circulate a letter to all in Northcote ward it was not clearly a consultation document. Councillor Aled Richards-Jones, cabinet member for economic development, says that last year the comments were almost universally positive.

I wrote to all the Battersea Society's members who live close to the road and asked for their perceptions. Most were largely enthusiastic, with strong support for local shops and restaurants, especially the independents. Diana wrote, 'We have lived here for 40 years and wouldn't want to live anywhere else. And things have just improved tenfold! The weekend pedestrianisation is such a bonus It gives the road that lovely Paris feel'. Several others also commented on the buzzing, lively atmosphere. 'We support local businesses and don't want to see shuttered shops', says Cathy.

Alongside these positive comments there were many who felt that the road was being allowed or encouraged to become a 'destination' – a place for people from all over London to eat and drink, to the

detriment of small shops and the local people who use them. Several people avoid the street at weekends. Those who live closest to the road commented on the noise levels and there were two complaints of short-lived rowdiness, which Cllr Roberts-Jones put down to post-lockdown exuberance.

Longer walk

The main criticism of the scheme from Society members is the longer walk to and from the bus stops, which are now on Bolingbroke Grove, up the hill from the Falcon Brook valley in which Northcote Road sits. This has an impact on people with walking difficulties or carrying heavy parcels or luggage. 'Robbing those living between the commons of their normal facilities every weekend for six months is frankly outrageous,' says Julia. Cllr Roberts-Jones acknowledged the problem but pointed out that the buses do stop in St John's Road.

The councillor insisted that retail is very important to the council, which promotes local shopping with regular publicity campaigns and offers online workshops to help high street independents to compete in the digital marketplace. He said that while some shops complained that the closures were damaging to their business (*Battersea Matters* Autumn

2020), others had seen an increase in custom. The substantial cost of the closures is met by a combination of the council and the businesses, led by the Northcote Road Business Network. Many cafés and bars have added a surcharge to customers' bills to defray this cost.

In words that will be chilling to some, heart-warming to others, Cllr Roberts-Jones said that the council was open-minded about continuing the experiment into the winter, citing a general post-covid appetite for café culture.

My meeting with Cllr Roberts-Jones took place in mid-May. More recently, several posts on the social network Next Door have reported drunkenness and objectionable behaviour, including public urinating in side streets.

The latest proposal being floated on Next Door by Jonny Dyson, who leads the business network, is for a 'family area' in the middle stretch of the road. Some residents have objected to the idea on the grounds of noise from live music and funfair ride generators.

Whatever your views are on the closures, their possible extension and the addition of a family area, do tell the council at www.wandsworth.gov.uk/consultations/northcote

BATTERSEA SOCIETY EVENTS

● **Thursday 3 June, 7pm**
Poetry reading. Online
Co-authors Joolz Sparkes and Hilaire read extracts from their *London Undercurrents: The hidden histories of London's unsung heroines, north and south of the river*. Part of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival.
To watch a recording, email events@batterseasociety.org.uk

● **Friday 4 June 6pm**
Four 18th Century houses and their occupants. Online
Local historian Jeanne Rathbone takes you back in time to Elm House, Lavender Sweep House, The Shrubbery and Gilmore House to meet their residents and find out about their history. Part of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival.
To watch a recording, email events@batterseasociety.org.uk

● **Thursday 15 July, 6.30pm – 9pm**
Battersea Society Summer Party
Our annual summer party – and our first live event for 18 months!
Great food, wine, music, good company plus stunning river views in the grounds of St Mary's Church. £10 entrance, in advance at www.batterseasociety.org.uk or on the door (includes first drink and canapés)

● **Tuesday 10 August, 11am**
Guided tour round Chelsea Physic Garden
Established in 1673 to grow medicinal plants, this extraordinary garden is a hidden treasure. Join a members' private tour, maximum 20 people.
£15 per person, at www.batterseasociety.org.uk

● **Thursday 16 September, 6pm**
Talk on the Churchyard of St Mary's
Local historian Sean Creighton gives us an insight into the monuments, tombs and gravestones in St Mary's Churchyard.
£5 per person at www.batterseasociety.org.uk or on the door

● **Thursday 30 September**
My Battersea photography award exhibition private view at the RCA
A special private view day for Battersea Society members of the exhibition, showcasing finalists and winners in the Society's first photography competition. In partnership with the Royal College of Art and supported by Wandsworth Arts Fringe
For any event enquiries, contact events@batterseasociety.org.uk

'Demolition would have been kinder'

The Power Station's redevelopment is a travesty, Keith Garner argues

In April, Battersea Society members had an online talk on the ongoing work at Battersea Power Station from team members involved in the project. The talk, entitled 'Restoring the Heritage of Battersea Power Station', was given by Alasdair Young, Inspector at Historic England, Sebastien Ricard of architects Wilkinson Eyre, and David Hills of conservation architects Purcell.

Introducing the talk, Sarah Banham of the Battersea Power Station Development Company (BPSDC) claimed that the company had 'rescued' the building in 2012. I can't imagine that a worse fate was awaiting the Power Station than the one subsequently described in the talk. Demolition would have been kinder.

Mezzanine

The great building that supplied electricity to London through the Blitz is becoming a shopping mall, offices and some flats. Indeed, the famous A Station turbine hall is getting the full Waterloo Station treatment with an extra gallery of shops at mezzanine level. Who cares if this spoils Halliday's magnificent Grecian hall? Not Historic England, it seems.

The lobbies that Wilkinson Eyre has designed in the former boiler house to serve offices on the upper floors do have a certain grandeur that befits the building. But above this are the so-called Villas in the Sky, more flats in new pavilions on the roof that spoil the building's proportions and its distinctive Art Deco silhouette.

It's not enough to talk about the care taken in sourcing and matching bricks for the masonry repairs, although that may be true. It's the wider questions: why have Scott's brick facades been messed around with to such a degree, with new windows punched in just about everywhere BPSDC wanted them? And how on earth was this allowed to happen?

One aspect that particularly grieves me – not mentioned in the talk – is the 'join' visible until a few years ago on the east boiler house wall,

where the different tones of brickwork showed where construction of the B Station stopped in 1940 and resumed again after the war. The east boiler house wall was lost when BPSDC was given consent to take it down because otherwise it would collapse anyway owing to all the new windows they apparently required.

Alasdair Young of Historic England described the regulatory regime, with the heritage protection agency far too close to BPSDC and their consultants in the so-called 'conservation steering group'. Add to that a very narrow definition of what Historic England was there to protect, which pretty much extends only to the physical fabric of the key interiors, and there is effectively nothing BPSDC hasn't been allowed to do. As for protecting the building as a landmark of London, to be seen and enjoyed from the railway viaduct, from Battersea Park and beyond: not a chance.



Views of the Power Station from the railway have been lost

In the nineties and noughties I spent quite a lot of time, together with other members of Battersea Power Station Community Group, campaigning for a better outcome. In particular we put in a great deal of effort persuading the then English Heritage to have the listing status of the building upgraded from Grade II to Grade II*. We succeeded, only to see the building eventually spoiled at the hands of BPSDC. Hence my question at the end of the talk: given that the building

has lost so much of its significance – the things that made it special – shouldn't it now be de-listed?

Exhibition centre

Elsewhere in Battersea, there is a sense of more serious functions and facilities that should have been accommodated at Battersea Power Station but have somehow escaped. One of the most sensible ideas to come up over the years is to have an exhibition centre there. Decent exhibition facilities are something that London certainly needs. Why not at Battersea Power Station? Instead we have the permanent/temporary exhibition building on the British Genius site in Battersea Park commandeering a huge chunk of the park seemingly indefinitely. Further over, the new Royal College of Art building nearing completion glowers over Parkgate Road and Ethelburga Estate on a site that should have been given over to housing.

A famous cultural institution like the RCA is exactly the sort of hook that Battersea Power Station needed. Put that together with an exhibition centre to showcase student work

and you would have a Battersea Power Station actually worth visiting. I can't understand why these basic connections have not been made, although it does seem that someone (Wandsworth Council) hasn't been doing their job. Meanwhile the supposed custodians of Battersea Power Station squander money, pointlessly demolishing and rebuilding the chimneys, and burying the building behind a wall of luxury flats that nobody needs.

Keith Garner is an architect specialising in conservation

Planning Matters: ACRONYMS RULE OK

Monica Tross fights her way through the alphabet jungle

It is not just in relation to LoD* that acronyms play an increasing role in everyday discourse, they are rife in planning as well. I had thought I was on top of these and well able to distinguish my LPA (Local Planning Authority) from my SCI (Statement of Community Involvement), something required from developers of large sites prior to their application going to the PAC (Planning Applications Committee). Unlike PDR (Permitted Development Rights) which allow changes without a full planning application. But this past week I have come across two quite new to me – HVM and MEP. Hostile Vehicle Mitigation is sadly a relatively new requirement for developments other than foreign embassies and something for which the Power Station has recently applied (2021/1740). In this case it means bollards but we have come to be aware of other forms of HVM. MEP – or rather Mechanical, Electrical and Public Health – is more complex and in lay terms means the various pieces of kit including sewage, heating and air-conditioning which form a substantial part at the base of all large buildings

My favourite, and a vital part of our review of all planning applications, was developed in Watford and is BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method), first published in 1990. I am indebted to Wikipedia for telling me that this is ‘the world’s longest established method of assessing, rating, and certifying the sustainability of buildings. More than 550,000 buildings have been BREEAM-certified and over 2 million are registered for certification in more than 50 countries worldwide’. We were delighted to read in the Draft Local Plan that the Council is calling for an Outstanding rating for new developments but delight was moderated because this is only ‘unless it can be demonstrated that this would not be technically feasible.’ Recently it appears that architects find it hard to design buildings which can achieve anything more than



The proposed building for the City Mission

Excellent. We will continue to do all we can to persuade them to try harder.

BATTERSEA DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY QUARTER (BDTQ)

This is an area to the west of the Vauxhall Nine Elms and Battersea Opportunity Area (VNEB OA) consisting of Havelock Terrace, Ingate Place, and Silverthorne Road. This is already an industrial area and the Council has identified it as having the potential to focus on small creative and technology businesses. There is already a strong base of these and the sector is likely to face growing demand when Apple moves into the Power Station. A recent application by Battersea Studios (2021/0641) has caused local controversy but it follows approved policy and we have not commented. To the east there are plans for the development of 16 and 38-48 Havelock Terrace and we had an interesting presentation from the developer and architect. Details can be found at <https://communitystream.co.uk/en/projects/16-38-48-havelock-terrace>. We liked what we saw and will wait for the planning application before making a formal comment. While not part of the BDTQ we see that demolition in relation to the Palmerston Court development has now started (2020/2837).

PLANNING UPDATE

Sadly two different but much disliked schemes are down for approval at the 25 May PAC. The Dominvs Hotel application, 2020/2047, has had 360

very well argued objections but this has not been enough to persuade the planning officers to recommend refusal. Our neighbours across the river in Hammersmith contacted us

to say their council has approved plans for twin hotels by the same developer against equally spirited opposition. It appears that the site owners are now calling for one of the Hammersmith hotels to be converted for use as student accommodation.

5 Parma Crescent, 2021/0408, is much smaller but also an un-neighbourly over-development of its site.

Plans for the redevelopment of the City Mission at 120 Battersea Bridge Road, 2021/1677, have already gained significant opposition. You can find our letter on our own and the application’s website. It is another example of a planned building too large to sit comfortably within the existing streetscape

POCKET PARK AT 101 PRINCE OF WALES DRIVE

To end on a happier note, Liz Walton and I took a walk through the pocket parks at this development on the site of the old gasometer and were pleased to see that the development welcomes the public with attractive planting and seating.

We always like to hear from our members so do let us have any comments on this article, or on planning in general. Or even better, send in your suggestions for alternative descriptions of the acronyms above. planning@batterseasociety.org.uk will find us.

**Line of Duty, as if you didn’t know.*

Battersea Bridge crossing update

After the sad death of a jogger at the northern end of Battersea Bridge in January, a campaign (supported by the Battersea Society) was launched to improve the dangerous crossing at the Chelsea side of the bridge. Transport for London and Kensington & Chelsea council have been working on a solution and work could start this autumn. Watch out for a consultation in the summer.

Great Bus Journeys of the World No 29

Mike Roden travels from Victoria to Willesden on the 52 and encounters GK Chesterton on the way



There is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen; Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green'. I'm at an almost deserted bus stop at Grosvenor Gardens near an eerily quiet Victoria Station. Coincidentally I last took a 'real' bus journey for *Battersea Matters* in January 2020 when I waited here for the 13 to West Finchley. On a cold, miserable day, the bus stop was crowded, and over at the station the crowds seethed and surged. What a difference a pandemic makes ...

Not too long a wait, and I'm soon aboard the 52 passing Buckingham Palace Gardens on the way to Hyde Park Corner. There's more than one building site on this stretch of road with a view. Notable is a gutted building where the long Edwardian façade is supported by a complex series of girders. From 2022 this will be the home of the (very expensive and exclusive) London outpost of the US based Cleveland clinic.

The Lanesborough Hotel facing the park was once the site of St George's Hospital. This stood here from 1733 until the 1970s when it moved to Tooting. The building was eventually renovated and re-opened as a hotel in 1991.

Lost river

The bus turns past Hyde Park – a leafy country landscape devoid of crowds, with just the occasional jogger enjoying the peace – and we head along Knightsbridge. The name probably refers to a bridge crossing the 'lost' (i.e. culverted) River Westbourne.

Sloane Street and Brompton Road are almost deserted. Presumably Harrods is missing its wealthy foreign

customers. Lockdown has just eased and the Paxtons Head is now open for business. There's been a pub here since 1632 but when it was rebuilt in 1851 it was renamed after Sir Joseph Paxton, designer of the Crystal Palace. The current building dates from 1902.

Modernist

Knightsbridge barracks arrived in 1795 as a base for the Horse Guards, and was rebuilt in 1880. Now we have Sir Basil Spence's 1970 modernist version, dominated by its 33-story residential tower. It's now the home of the Household Cavalry which performs ceremonial duties on state and royal occasions.

On Kensington Road we pass Princes Gate, a long terrace of tall, elegant early Victorian mansions, so called because it stands opposite the Prince of Wales' Gate to Hyde Park.

On 30 April 1980, the Iranian Embassy on Princes Gate was stormed by six armed men demanding independence for Iran's Khuzestan Province. They held 26 people hostage for five days until the SAS stormed the embassy. Five of the hostage takers were killed, their captives were freed unharmed and Khuzestan remains part of Iran.

The Royal Geographical Society on the corner of Exhibition Road was founded in 1830. The Society has been here since 1911 when they purchased the current building for £100k.

This is the Royal Albert Hall's 150th anniversary year and everyone concerned is hoping that this year the Proms can have a live audience.

Prince Albert watches from atop his magnificent memorial. The

architect George Gilbert Scott succeeded in embodying the self-satisfied Victorian view of the nobility and necessity of empire in the surrounding statues.

Kensington Gardens was separated from rest of Hyde Park in 1728 at the request of George II's wife Queen Caroline. Fashionable garden designers Henry Wise and Charles Bridgeman created the Round Pond, formal avenues and a sunken Dutch garden.

After a blissfully swift journey so far, traffic suddenly slows to a crawl, as Kensington High Street has returned to the tradition of extensive roadworks.

Hanged

Opposite Palace Avenue stands the Goat Tavern. This is the oldest remaining pub on Kensington High Street. A coffee-house when it arrived in 1695 it soon became an alehouse and was extensively altered in 1880. It's notorious as the meeting place in 1944 of John Haigh the 'Acid Bath Murderer' and the first of his victims. After battering the man to death, he dumped him in a bath of sulphuric acid. At least five more people met the same fate before the law caught up with him. He was hanged on 10 August 1949.

Following a now familiar pattern, the High Street is very quiet. A tangle of almost empty buses waits to turn up Kensington Church Street past St Mary Abbots Church. There has been a church here since the early twelfth century but this building dates from 1872 and was designed by the ubiquitous Sir George Gilbert Scott.

The poet Ezra Pound lived in nearby Kensington Church Walk

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



Left to right: Harrods, Knightsbridge; Prince Albert on his Memorial; the Goat Tavern, Kensington High Street; a mansion in Ladbrooke Grove; Kensal Green Cemetery, with a doomed gasholder



between 1909 and 1914 where he held court to visitors like Ford Madox Ford and DH Lawrence.

This long twisting lane was built to join the Roman roads from Bath and Oxford to the City of London. Leaving the more prosaic shops behind, the bus heads slowly along long stretches of upmarket residential property speckled with an overabundance of high-end antique shops, delicatessens, glitzy boutiques and art galleries.

At last we turn onto Notting Hill Gate. The Gate Cinema has been here since 1911 when it opened as the Electric Palace. A right turn onto Pembridge Road and there is the award-winning Gate Theatre. With just 75 seats, it is the smallest 'off-West End' theatre in London.

Notable on the corner of Kensington Park Road is the impressive bulk of Kensington Temple. This was built in 1849 and was the home of the Hornton Street Congregational church. It now belongs to the Elim Pentecostal Church.

Development of the once rural Notting Hill area began in the early 19th century, with the main landowner and developer being the Ladbrooke family, a name borne – confusingly – by many streets in the area.

Growth took place slowly during the 1840s to 1880s. Now white stucco terraces and large well-maintained garden squares predominate and this is clearly a high-status area. There are no shops to spoil the rather smug tranquility.

Hippodrome

The first of the beautifully maintained areas of greenery is Ladbrooke Square, one of London's largest private

gardens. In 1837 this was briefly part of the site of the Hippodrome racecourse. It was spectacularly unsuccessful thanks to the area's heavy clay soil, which – poorly drained – often became waterlogged. Only a dozen or so meetings were held and the owner soon gave up and sold off the land for development.

The bus continues for some time through this extensive estate. And then we turn onto Ladbrooke Grove and things start to change. There are takeaways and mini-markets and I spot my first betting shop for some time. And a pub appears! The Elgin – built in the nineteenth century – was a noted music venue in the sixties and seventies.

Pardoned

Here we encounter another serial killer! John Christie from 10 Rillington Place was an Elgin regular. He was hanged in 1953 for at least nine murders. Two of these led to the wrongful conviction of his upstairs neighbour Timothy Evans who was himself executed in 1950. Evans has since been pardoned.

Just before we pass under Westway (blighting the landscape since 1970) there's Ladbrooke Grove station. Traders on the nearby Portobello Market are campaigning to get it renamed Portobello station. On we go past Red Planet Pizza, Roosters Piri-Piri and Chicken Cottage. The housing is very mixed here, council blocks and terraces some nicely looked after, others not.

The bus crosses the railway bridge over several lines to and from Paddington. It was down there on 5 October 1999, that 31 people died when two morning rush-hour trains

collided with each other. Turning into the car park of the giant Sainsburys I see the memorial naming all the crash victims.

Leaving the superstore the bus crosses the Union Canal and passes the expanse of Kensal Green cemetery. Opened in 1833 this was inspired by the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. Its Gothic atmosphere has often attracted the makers of horror movies.

My search for a Battersea connection on this trip is rewarded when I learn that this place was immortalised by local resident G.K. Chesterton in *The Rolling English Road*: 'For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen; Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green'.

Nail bars

For some time this area continues with the same pattern we're used to on Ladbrooke Grove – mixed social and private housing, and a lot of convenience stores, takeaways, hairdressers, phone repair and vape shops, nail-bars, charity shops etc. Very few shuttered premises, an indication of how local enterprise has suffered less in lockdown than the centre of London. Near Kensal Rise overground station we begin our journey into London's outer suburbs.

Older Edwardian terraces mixed with small shopping parades give way to an endless succession of interwar semi-detached houses, occasionally mixed with some social housing blocks. Nothing noteworthy to report. On the edge of Brondesbury Park the houses get posher, and bigger before we head down into Willesden.

This was once a sacred place with a holy well which cured blindness. It's hard to get any echoes of that ancient history as we enter into a straggling high street with the usual mix of shops. It has its own air of modest prosperity which fades a bit as we head further downhill towards journey's end.

Which is a bit of an anti-climax to be honest. Willesden Bus Garage is just round the corner, but the bus stops outside a pub called the Crown which has been closed since 2008 and has defeated all attempts to re-open or demolish it. We seem a long way from Hyde Park and Harrods.

An Edwardian childhood

Lorna Twycross-Hills describes her father's childhood in a doctor's home

My grandfather's wedding in 1886 made quite a splash. 'A most interesting and pleasing ceremony', ran the newspaper report, 'was witnessed at Deeping St Nicholas Church on Wednesday morning last, on the occasion of the marriage of Miss L J Holland Fletcher, niece of Mr J W Holland, of the Shrubberies, to Dr Hills of Battersea Park.' There follows a long list of wedding presents from friends and relatives – glass, silver, antiques and jewellery, and a second gift from the labouring classes (sic): toast racks, a tea caddy, a butter dish, salt spoons and the like. After a honeymoon spent reading Lorna Doone to each other, my grandfather took his bride home to Battersea, where he had already been in practice for a decade and where his father had been in practice before him.

His house, Carlton House, is built at the Battersea Bridge Road end of what we now call Prince of Wales Drive. What a lovely place for a child – the river, the park and all the routines of middle class Victorian daily life: the lamp lighter, the horses in the streets, horse-drawn fire engines and hot chestnut sellers, and the pall (my father dimly remembered this) of muffled gloom that hung about the city on the death of Queen Victoria in 1901.

Respendent

A photograph (above right) of my grandmother shows her resplendent in late Victorian clothes, tightly corseted in heavy silk with lace ruffles, leg o' mutton sleeves and an enormous hat. My father, a little boy in a sailor suit, is leaning against her knee. Another photograph (taken, I think, in the garden of Carlton House) shows him in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, a mischievous grin lighting up his face.

His childhood at Carlton House was extremely happy. He was fussed over by the servants and doted on by his parents. A cherished memory was sitting between them in their bed in the mornings while they fed him little pieces of buttered toast. But it was a short childhood; at seven years old



he was sent away to his prep school; at thirteen he won a scholarship to Epsom College and there, while in the sixth form, he enlisted and went to the trenches in France.

Meanwhile my grandfather worked tirelessly among the sick of Battersea. Cholera and typhus were rife. His first child born in December 1886 died of cholera. My father was born eleven years later. Infection spread unchecked in the late nineteenth century – housing was often overcrowded, sanitation poor, refrigeration unknown and food often contaminated by flies. What could a doctor do before the introduction of vaccination, antibiotics, clean water and proper sanitation? Patience, good palliative care, observation and constant attention were demanded, and these my grandfather gave in spades.

What is most memorable about my grandfather was his care and concern for the poor, and the poor people of Battersea loved him for it. On the day of his funeral in 1913 a crowd of these people stood outside Carlton House as the cortège moved off 'Outside St Stephen's Church,' wrote the vicar, 'a large crowd of silent and sad faced people among whom were readily seen some of the poor to whom the deceased doctor had always been a steadfast friend. ... Dr Hills had a kind heart and many among the poor will miss

his unselfish service and generous ministrations.' My grandfather's policy was simple: to those who could not afford to pay he sent no bill. He practised from Carlton House for over thirty years before his early death from heart disease at 57.

During my childhood my father's framed photograph of his old home hung on my bedroom wall. So one day while in London in the early 60s I decided to see if I could find Carlton House.

Search

I did not then know south London and had no A – Z. I knew the house was in Battersea, near the river and in Prince of Wales Drive. I went to Waterloo and began to walk along the river. It took longer than I'd expected; just as I was about to give up the search, I turned round and saw it. Carlton House is a large double-fronted house with an annex to one side, and amazingly there was still, in the 1960s, a doctor's brass plate beside the front door. Feeling both bold and diffident, I rang the doorbell.

The doctor then in practice there and his daughter gave me tea in the drawing room where – as I wrote to tell my father – one wall curved where the road outside turned the corner towards Battersea Bridge. I have rarely seen my father more thrilled than when I told him about it. All sorts of memories of his boyhood came to him as he read my description of his old home: how his dog had sneaked up to his room at the top of the house when he was ill in bed; the speaking tubes fitted on every floor, the parlour games they used to play.

The house has recently had major renovations which I've seen from passing in the bus. In my mind's eye I can see a small boy with a hoop, perhaps, and his dog, skipping along the road to Battersea Park. Is this why, when I moved to Battersea 28 years ago I felt I had come home? *Editor's note: I believe Carlton house is on the corner of Prince of Wales drive and Battersea Bridge Road. It has been covered in scaffolding for several years.*

A bit of a roller coaster

Even in pandemic times, a Battersea Society member appreciates expert care at St George's

I never thought I'd be grateful to the bus driver who stopped suddenly a couple of years ago and wrenched my shoulder. This annoying ache led to the discovery of an unusual lump in my breast in early June last year.

Unlike in previous decades when this suspicion arose, I felt calm, probably due to a long spell of supporting my partner through cancer episodes. Familiar territory; I knew which coffee machines worked in which clinics in nearly every hospital in London.

I rang my GP the next morning to moan about my Long Covid symptoms and mentioned the lump. No sympathy on the former, but immediate action on the latter. I was on the fast track within hours.

One-stop shop

Two weeks later I was at the Rose Centre at St George's hospital, the one-stop shop for breast cancer care, scans and tests, and seen by a breezy surgeon. The lump wasn't caused by the bus incident but by cancer. I came away with two words in my head: 'small' and 'treatable'. It was only later that the word 'aggressive' was used. It's all in the histology. I went home with a jazzy pink folder full of upbeat descriptions of treatments and side effects.

From then on I was told to isolate completely, just as the first lockdown was easing, and I was on the conveyor belt to surgery, and as I later discovered, chemotherapy prior to radiotherapy as well.

A hospital without families or visitors is a strange experience. Luckily I was able to bring my partner to consultations by propping my phone on the oncologist's desk and using Facetime. My partner took notes, and asked questions just as if he was in the room. We could then recap the meeting and make sense of it, and it eased his worry.

Surgery was uneventful, expertly done – life extended, with luck, and

only a day and a night of the usual ward cacophony and dismal food. One woman bellowed out 'Don't have the porridge! It's like wallpaper paste!'. Chemotherapy started in September, once a week for twelve weeks. I decided to take advantage of 'scalp cooling' or 'cold cap', to give me the best chance of keeping my hair. I had it cut as short as possible, which delighted my hairdresser who was bored with my bob. In the cold cap I felt like a woman in one of those old-fashioned dryer hoods which was tuned to freezing, but after the first 10 minutes, numbness set in. Anyway, it worked and helped my morale. My daughter sent a hamper of snacks, and a mohair wrap, which hit the spot.

The chemotherapy day ward is an awe-inspiring place. The team of nurses remain welcoming, kind and cheerful, while performing complicated, highly-skilled tasks and routines to the letter. I must have been asked my identity five times a day, and every dose is double-checked out loud by two nurses.

999

Unfortunately on a couple occasions, a subsequent bad reaction led to a 999 call (the oncologist insisted on this) and in-patient stays of a few days, being stabilised. Again, all done within Covid conditions, kept isolated until tested, then moved to a 'clean' ward, nearly always to a single room and bathroom fit for the Hilton.

Low points were the food, which was meagre and unappetising (often appearing varnished to the plate by the microwave), and hospital transport.

Chemo patients had to travel alone, which led to some long waits. After one exhausting 3-hour wait on a hard chair, I must have finally lost it, as I swore audibly at a non-mask wearer in a corridor. I was immediately surrounded and whisked home, with an escort in the back, presumably for the driver's safety!

High points were finding a print by

Below: A nurse tends a patient on the day care chemotherapy ward at St George's hospital

a dear friend on the wall in my room, and several lifts home by another gallant friend.

Exciting

After Christmas came a week of radiotherapy at the Royal Marsden. It was very exciting to travel on a bus for the first time in nine months, and to explore the deserted back streets of Chelsea. The high drama is over now – five years of drugs and monitoring to come, with the occasional trip back to what now seems the familiar calm of the day ward. I still fall asleep every afternoon due to Long Covid, but these somnolent times are conducive to taking stock of how lucky I have been, and how grateful I am to receive speedy, expert treatment during a worldwide pandemic, thanks to the NHS.



BALHAM TERRORISM AND OLD BATTERSEA HOUSE

What links these events fifty years ago? In Balham, two men were arrested for terrorism offences, in Battersea Sid Sporle was arrested and by the river Old Battersea House was leased for a peppercorn rent to a wealthy American publisher. For an insightful article linking these events and comparing 1971 to 2021, read Neil Robson in the *Wandsworth Historian's* spring 2021 issue. Its illustrations include an advertisement for part-time jobs 'for women' in Sainsbury's in the Arndale centre (now Southside). Pay? Maximum 39p an hour! .

Other interesting articles in this issue of the *WH* include a history of The Grand and a 19th century proposal for a City of Health – an estate of concrete houses between the railway lines off Latchmere Road.

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From immaculate mistake to established novelist

Janice Morphet outlines the career of Battersea-born Paul Bailey



Paul Bailey (b1937) is an actor, novelist and biographer. Born in Battersea as the youngest child of three in his father's second marriage, he was a 'mistake', he says in his autobiography. His father had been

in the First World War and his mother worked as a domestic servant for a range of titled households, including being a vegetable cook at Buckingham Palace during the Second World War. His father grew up in an era of music hall and Bailey remembers visiting the Grand at Clapham Junction with his parents to see Kate Carney, 'the Cockney Coster Comedienne' when she was in her seventies. They also liked Maggy Brown's pie and eel shop and the ice cream parlour in Battersea High Street, run by Neapolitans.

Doodlebug

Bailey lived in Gwynne Road, moving after one house was bombed and then able to see Price's Candle Factory from his window. Before one air raid, Bailey and his mother dashed into to a neighbour's air raid shelter, emerging into 'the sunshine, and to a street that had changed. I saw beyond the smoke and dust that the church had gone'. It was a second bomb – a V1 or doodlebug – that damaged the house he was living in and after it was declared unsafe, Bailey was moved to stay with wider family in Hampshire and Sussex. His father was a road sweeper – his mother told Bailey to say that he

worked for the council if anyone asked. Bailey was christened Peter but invented a twin brother Paul when he was a child and subsequently changed his name. After the war, he was able to play in the street and Battersea Park. The house his family lived in had no bath and a toilet in the yard and he went to the public baths in Wandsworth High Street at the weekend. Eventually, after the war, the house was demolished and his mother and sister were moved to a 'brand new council flat'.

Talent

Bailey discovered his talent for acting when he attended Sir Walter St Johns Grammar School in Battersea High Street, winning the school's elocution prize and reading Milton in St Mary's Church, following which he won a scholarship to the Central School of Speech and Drama. In his autobiography, Bailey recounts his first acting job, obtained by giving a soliloquy from Richard II in order to play Baby Bear. An early role after drama school was playing the lead in *The Sport of my Mad Mother* by Ann Jellicoe at the Royal Court. It was to have made his reputation, but was greeted with poor reviews and low audiences .

Bailey's ambition was always to be a great Shakespearean actor. He had learned Hamlet by heart but only ever played a courtier. He recalls being on stage in Hamlet at Stratford with nothing to say, night after night, saying that he left the stage feeling shame and humiliation. After a while he became disillusioned with these small parts he played

in large companies and turned his hand to writing. Similarly, the younger novelist David Nicholls recalled his monosyllabic and non-speaking parts on stage when living about a shop in Battersea in his first novel *The Understudy*.

When out of work as an actor, Bailey spent periods working in Harrods. In 1967, he turned to writing and has since had a successful career. His first novel, *At The Jerusalem* (1967), which is set in an old people's home, won a Somerset

Maugham Award and an Arts Council Writers' Award and two later novels, *Peter Smart's Confessions* (1977) and *Gabriel's Lament* (1986), were both shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction. Among

other books he has published a biography of Cynthia Payne, the Streatham madam, and he has also written a large number of plays and literary criticism.



Changes

More recently, Bailey has recounted how he has found it hard to make a living as a consequence of the changes in the publishing industry, with small or no advances. Writing in 2010, he described the changes in his fortunes, alongside those of many other writers. The era of large advances had gone. Since then, Bailey received support from the Royal Literary Fund and then later received an advance for his next novel. From his Battersea beginnings, Bailey has entered the literary establishment and suffered its uncertainties. His autobiography recalls how he made this journey.

Power Station welcomes first residents

In May the first residents moved into Battersea Power Station. Switch House West is the first part of the building to be completed. The Boiler House and Switch House East will follow later.

The handover of the keys was celebrated with a performance by the London Symphony Orchestra and the Power Station Community Choir.

The aim is for the power station to open to the public in 2022. Before then, Apple will fit out its office space and shops, bars and restaurants will start preparing their spaces.

The Northern Line extension, which links to Kennington, is due to open this autumn.

A one-bedroom apartment in Switch House West with a view over the neighbouring Circus West development is for sale at £1,650,000..

The Wandsworth Common Story

Camilla Ween reviews a new book celebrating the common's 150th anniversary

This book charts the long history of Wandsworth Common, its fortunes and misfortunes and many of the notable residents who loved, destroyed or fought for it.

The book is full of revelations, showing how the Common was central to Battersea life for hundreds of years. It is packed with facts, historic maps documenting the tragic encroachment of the Common and its gradual halving in size, and how it was safeguarded 150 years ago. It chronicles the history from pre-bronze age occupation; tells how it ended up in the hands of local gentry, including the St John and Spencer families; how it later came to be protected; and its role in local life in the 20th Century. It's a book you can dip in and out of, a collection of well researched and written essays from experts, including a foreword by Adrian Buckmaster, the great-great-grandson of the Common's saviour, John Charles Buckmaster.

Livestock

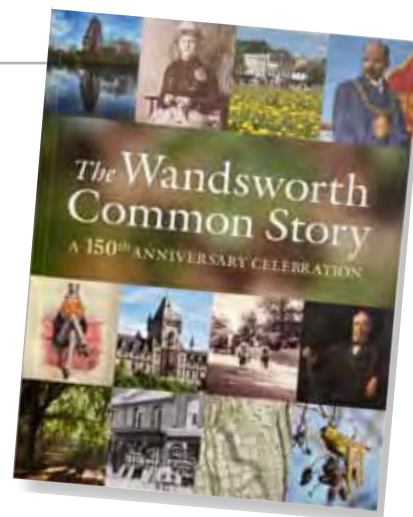
Originally used by the local poor to graze livestock and grow some crops, it was often cited as the most 'rural landscape' close to the filth of London, but during the 1800s its exploitation and neglect had rendered 'one of the most beautiful, healthful and romantic of all our suburban wild land' to a 'morass'... 'the Common was fast melting away'. Slowly but steadily it was being shrunk, firstly by 'tolerated' enclosures by the gentry, then later it came under pressure for housing and eventually it was mutilated by the railways in the mid 1800s. Local social and political protests, led by John Buckmaster, eventually put a stop to land grabbing through an Act of Parliament, The Wandsworth Common Act. Were it not for his skill and diplomacy, the Common may well have vanished 150 years ago.

Among the book's dozens of interesting facts:

- What is left of the windmill near Spencer Park was for pumping water to the Black Sea, after the railway cut off its stream.
- Charles Darwin collected sticklebacks on the Common as a boy.
- On land west of Trinity Road once stood the world's largest refracting telescope (at that time).
- Mount Nod, the Huguenot burial ground (originally part of the Common) is a testament to Battersea's tolerance of the French Protestant refugees, who were given freedom to 'worship God after their own manner'.

Many grand buildings once stood around the Common, now mostly demolished and forgotten, but the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building (RVPB) remains. During WW2 it was used for MI5 interrogations of suspected enemy agents. (I have a personal connection: my Norwegian father escaped from the Nazis during the occupation of Norway and landed in Scotland, where he and his comrades were arrested and brought to the RVPB to be interrogated.) The RVPB was sold for £1 in 1980.

- Spencer Park sits on the filled-in 'Black Sea', once a renowned beauty spot and lake.



Having lived in Battersea for over 30 years I had no idea that Wandsworth Common has such a rich history. In some ways this is an intensely depressing book, a chronicle of greed, loss and destruction, but at the same time it is hugely inspiring; it reminds us how so much of what we take for granted has been hard won.

This is a lovely book. Definitely one to have and keep for all Battersea folks.

Published by The Friends of Wandsworth Common.

For information or to purchase for £12.50, visit

wandsworthcommon.org.

Click and Collect from Skylark Café on the common.

Can be posted for £16.

Camilla Ween is an architect. She is a member of the Battersea Society's open spaces committee.

Launched! MY BATTERSEA photographic competition

Our photography competition is back at last! Interrupted in March 2020 by the pandemic, the My Battersea award re-launches in June.

Its aim is to celebrate what our area means to the people who work and live here, as well as promoting a sense of local pride.

There are three entry categories – ten years and under, 11-17 years and 18 and older. Ten photographs in each age category will be shortlisted and displayed at the Royal College of Art, the Society's partner in the award. A winner from each category will be selected and there will be an overall winner. Winners will receive a cash prize and will also receive a framed print of their image.

The winners will be presented with their prizes at a ceremony on 29 September 2021. There will be a chance to see all the shortlisted photographs in an exhibition at the RCA's Dyson Gallery 1 - 3 October. To submit your photographs, send them to www.batterseasociety.org.uk where you will also find further information, terms and conditions and key dates.

Closing date 31 August 2021



Greening our borough

Lois Davis explores Wandsworth's new biodiversity strategy and finds it wanting

Bigger, Better and More – those are the key principles of Wandsworth's new Biodiversity Strategy, but can these aims be achieved with no additional financial resources? The Strategy, agreed in February 2021, pulls together approaches and priorities into one document for the first time to 'demonstrate what will be done within the borough to protect and enhance biodiversity and to make nature accessible to all'. Wandsworth's Director of Resources, however, felt bound to specify, before the strategy was discussed, that there were 'no direct financial implications arising from this report'. We may wonder how such extensive aims may be achieved with no budget. However the Council has stated its vision for biodiversity to be 'recognised, valued, conserved, enhanced and wisely used'. It has made a commitment to contribute towards sustaining a healthy planet and the wellbeing of our communities. One more box in the Wandsworth Environment and Sustainability Strategy 2019 has been ticked and with this milestone reached we are all set to draw up a Biodiversity Action Plan.

Priority species

To find out more about what the strategy means I spoke to Valerie Selby, Enable's Parks Development and Biodiversity Manager, who has been working on biodiversity in the borough since 1997. Evidence of priority species activity is vital when it comes to getting developers to stop and check if their plans could pose a biodiversity risk or fail to comply with relevant legislation, policy and guidance. Valerie is currently looking at priority species and working

on maps showing where they are in conjunction with Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) with whom Wandsworth has an SLA (service level agreement).

But it's not just developers who need to be mindful of the creatures who share our city life. High on the Biodiversity Strategy list of priority species is the swift, an 'amber listed' species that saw a decline of more than 50% in the UK between 1995 and 2015. In Battersea, looking after our swifts is down to residents so putting up swift boxes is an important contribution any home-owner can make. The boxes are also popular with house sparrows, another priority species. See the RSPB for boxes to make or buy.

Helpful

Bats are on the priority list too and here it's more a question of what you don't do rather than what you do. It's important to know that all bats and their roosts are fully protected by law. If you think you have bats and need to replace soffits and fascia you should write to Valerie vselby@enablelc.org for advice and to make sure your plans don't break the law. Fortunately for bats and for nesting birds we can call the super-helpful Wildlife Crime Unit in Vauxhall on 020 7230 8898 to report wildlife persecution.

Swift decline is largely due loss of habitat as the buildings they nest in have been renovated or knocked down and replaced with sealed blocks devoid of nesting opportunities. In an attempt to combat the worrying decline of swifts, Hackney Council has used the planning process. Permanent swift nests are built into all suitable



new council housing developments and there is a register of existing council-owned housing and buildings where swift boxes can be fitted retrospectively. It's doing a lot better than Wandsworth.

The Biodiversity Strategy asserts that a strong emphasis will be put on the role of the community in protecting and enhancing biodiversity, but community involvement is hardly a new direction locally. A wonderful example of this can be seen in the work of the Friends of Wandsworth Common. Working with the Wandsworth Common MAC (Management Advisory Committee) and Enable LC, who manage the Common, the Friends are celebrating the 150th anniversary of saving Wandsworth Common by planting 150 trees. The project was started in November 2020 when they planted 50 seven-year-old saplings across the Common, along with 100 square metres of mini-forest, complete with an understorey of shrubs and wildflowers.

Volunteer butterfly recorder Ian Cunningham has done us proud when it comes to collecting data on biodiversity. At regular intervals Ian follows a set route through the Common on a sunny day, carefully observing butterfly activity which he reports to Valerie who passes the data to GiGL. In the 20 years that Ian has been monitoring Wandsworth Common he has found no fewer than twenty-eight species.

The Friends have noted a clear correlation between rewilding and the number of butterflies on the Common, so this year the conventional selection for the flowerbeds near the Skylark Café has been replaced with wildflowers including red campion



and the rare blue champion. It's hard to say whether WBC's Biodiversity Strategy will help to deliver more than what is already here.

Maintaining an up to date and accurate evidence base is an important part of conservation work and the Biodiversity Strategy proposes ways to support this by conducting surveys on local wildlife sites and training volunteer biological recorders. Sadly, Covid has delayed some of their efforts so the planned Wandsworth Wildlife and Nature Conservation group is yet to be established and a 'biodiversity champion' within each greenspace Friends Group is still to be identified. But recording and collecting continues apace nevertheless.

Native plants

Local botanist Roy Vickery assembled a list of over seventy native plants spotted in St Mary's Park ward this spring, with careful notes on how long they have been here. Hedge mustard and ivy-leaved speedwell, Roy tells me, have been with us since the end of the last Ice Age, while the Mediterranean nettle he found was first recorded in the UK (in Warwick) in 2006 and is now becoming widespread in London. Much of Roy's work has been lodged with the South London Botanical Institute where nature enthusiasts will find a wealth of data as well as a charming botanical garden and an enticing programme of activities for young and old.

In spite of Covid the business of enriching lives with nature has been advancing across Battersea's end of Wandsworth. A thirst for greenery and community engagement during lockdown inspired a group of Balham residents who took to the streets for further opportunities to encourage nature and planting. Beautify Balham began as a small street gardening team planting flowers in a patch of land in front of Balham Health Centre, the triangle at the bottom of Elmfield Road and in tree pits on their doorsteps. They are supported by Wandsworth Tree Wardens, local businesses and the Council and their aim is to create green corridors to encourage pollinators, increase biodiversity and create stronger communities through tree



Previous page: A comma butterfly and a fenced-off area for new saplings to establish

Left: A tree is lost from Palmerston Court

important role in soaking up carbon and provide protection from flooding by absorbing run-off water. Yet local news reports and community chat rooms show mounting concerns over the numbers of trees being felled to make way for new developments.

The Biodiversity Strategy offers potential mitigation here with Biodiversity Net Gain. This emerging development planning tool is designed to minimise negative impacts on biodiversity caused by development and regeneration planning. But there's a catch; this new policy depends on the faltering Environment Bill which has been delayed several times due to lack of Parliamentary time and which, campaigners say, falls far short of the landmark legislation that was promised by the government.

One can only hope that the Tree Strategy, which is intended to complement the Biodiversity Strategy but has not yet been developed, will find ways to afford our precious trees the protection they so urgently need in the Local Plan.

planting, gardening, litter picking and campaigning for a greener, cleaner and more beautiful Balham. This June sees their Balham in Bloom event, a competition designed to encourage the residents and businesses of Balham to be actively responsible for their shared outdoor environment.

The communities in Battersea clearly recognise and value biodiversity in the borough but the Council still has some way to go, judging from the new Local Plan. Wandsworth has lost many trees of amenity value to development and the Council needs bigger ambitions in its requirements to design around mature trees rather than over them.

Tree planting has been much trumpeted as a major element of Wandsworth's aim of becoming the greenest borough in London and the Biodiversity Strategy acknowledges the important role trees play. Not only do they provide habitats for birds, bats and insects but they play an

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The healing power of gardens

St George's Hospital's head gardener talks to Jenny Sheridan

Many of us know and most of us love St George's Hospital. But nobody would claim that its buildings are things of beauty. Its gardens however are a joy, and according to John Greco, head gardener, for some people they are a joy forever. 'We get lovely feedback from patients and relatives – really tear-jerking stuff', he says. 'The gardens mean a lot to people. Some will remember them all their lives.'

During the hard early days of the Covid crisis, tired nurses and doctors came to sit in the gardens in their break times. 'It was very moving. It's was good that they had some space where they could re-charge.'

John leads a staff of six, five of them full-time. They look after 12 gardens and two major and five minor internal courtyards, as well as being responsible for clearing rubbish and litter in the hospital grounds. There are also two volunteers and John would welcome a few more.

There always seems to be something in flower right through the year. Some plants are raised from cuttings in the well-hidden greenhouse while many are bought in as tiny plug plants and carefully nurtured until they are big enough to plant out. Funding for plants comes

from a number of sources, including the hospital trust itself and its many charities.

The tulips near the main entrance always put on a terrific show in spring. Every year the bulbs are funded by St George's Hospital Charity and planted by the gardeners. Some of the previous year's bulbs will also flower and add to the display – 'the more the merrier' John says.

I comment that the plants are all particularly well chosen. Where there's a dry sunny corner, you see succulents, under the entrance canopies indestructible ornamental grasses are grown. John nods. 'We take care to match plants to places. We don't have much time for maintenance so we have to make sure they are both beautiful and easy'.

Bird boxes

The team has a keen interest in biodiversity. The deputy head gardener is a bird-lover and there

A quiet seating area, tulips near the main entrance, and the water garden

are ten bird boxes on site. Four are in the gardeners' growing area and John and his colleagues delight in robins eating from their hands. They have created bee highways by leaving part of the lawns unmown and have planted wild flowers like cow parsley throughout the site – not only beautiful but good for a variety of insects.

John's favourite gardens are the two courtyards. 'They're both close to my heart. They're quite different. The water garden has a big pond with koi carp and an Asian tropical feel. Everyone gets joy from the fish and the water is very calming. We've recently upgraded the Walk on the Wild Side garden with almost 1,000 perennials which the hospital charity funded. It'll start to look good this summer and by next year it'll be as good as any royal park.'

John clearly considers himself a lucky man. 'I feel very supported. The trust is supportive of my ideas and the hospital charity and all the other charities are generous (by the way, you can donate specifically to the gardens through the website!). We put in a lot of effort and we get a lot of appreciation back.'

