

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society WINTER 2015



Carols, rap, mulled wine and kebabs

Battersea Square switches on its Christmas lights



Left: BAC's Beatbox Academy wow the crowd in Battersea Square on 28 November; below last-minute gifts from Battersea shops

Shop late, shop local!

Are you one of those super-efficient people who has already bought all their Christmas presents? No, neither am I. But it's not too late to find reasonably priced gifts in independently-owned small local shops. I have tracked down a few for you.

Wander down (or take the 319) to the southern end of Northcote Road. In Northcote Music you can find

stocking-fillers for music-obsessed kids – a piano-shaped tin of mints (£2.99) or a musical box playing Bach (£7.99). Loads of instruments

– triangles, kazoos, ocarinas – will delight the little ones and appal their parents for under a fiver. A slightly older child could make a silent but impressive miniature grand piano from nano-blocks (like

mini-Lego) for £8.99. Up in Webbs Road Lizzie's sells pretty Beatrix Potter ceramic letters for £7.95 or a make-a-fairy set – Lizzie had fun making this with her small god-daughter. Or there's the Meccano Eiffel Tower in a tin for under £13.

Exotica

Across Webbs Road at number 48 is Tierra Verde, a deli/café specialising in organic Spanish food. Elegant half-litre bottles of fine olive oil cost £9.95; extravagant saffron from Navarra in a small glass bottle is £7.95 – think how many crocuses died for that, and think of the divine risotto that will result! Sea salt flavoured with ginger or rosemary is the kind of exotica one would never buy for oneself. Turrón (nougat) from Cordoba comes in an attractive box for £4.95. The shop also sells really beautiful Moroccan hand-painted

bowls, from olive size at under £3 to the full couscous royale at £45.

Back down the hill to Northcote Road and the Antique Market, where any number of original and individual presents can be found. Perhaps a silver teaspoon engraved with your beloved's initial? Or a print of the town where they grew up?

Battersea Park Road is home to the Flower Station. A plant can make a Christmas gift which will last for years. Three pretty pink cyclamen will set you back under £9 and will brighten a shady patch in a garden – and they'll spread. Or a sophisticated Kew ceramic pot can be planted up, perhaps with an azalea or a group of sempervivums (houseleeks).

Gluttony

For children, Marmalade at 250 Battersea Park Road has a wide choice of inexpensive stocking-fillers as well as a cinema torch with slides or a table tennis set, both at £12.99.

Back to gluttony, I was taken with a flamboyant box of amaretti

biscuits and the numerous sizes and flavours of panettone at Paglia e Fieno at 295 Battersea Park Road, not to mention the bars of soft white nougat set with jewel-like glaze fruits.

So there's no need to resort to the internet or the West End. Support your local shops!



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, I'd like to offer congratulations to Burntwood School (last issue, back page) on winning the Stirling Prize: it's good to have the UK's best building of 2015 in our borough.

I have been thinking about Robert Molteno's piece – also in our last issue – about the importance of streets as places to have a life in rather than just to pass through. There is much that makes me grind my teeth about my local high street, Northcote Road – the buggies, the expensive shops that sell little that is actually useful, the conspicuous wealth, the general blondeness. But

it remains a space where neighbours stop to chat, where shopkeepers know each other. I rarely walk down it without seeing someone I know. And that is to be valued.

Noisy

Largely this is due to the way traffic is managed, with limited access for cars and lorries. I appreciate it even more in contrast to a street like Putney High Street, polluted, noisy and with no invitations to stop and chat. Battersea High Street, also with limited traffic access, has the potential to be a 'place' road, and perhaps it will be one day. Though whether such streets are possible without undue gentrification is a moot point.

Basement digging is not such a massive problem here as in Westminster or Kensington & Chelsea, though some roads suffer (including

Suzanne Perkins' street: see p 7).

In Barnes recently a Georgian house collapsed when the billionaire owners were enlarging the basement to include a cinema, gym and wine cellar. In Kensington, the founder of Foxtons is building a double-height tennis court under his infinity pool. Perhaps we should feel sorry for these individuals – are they so frightened of their fellow Londoners that they won't risk going to their local park or pool?

Whether you plan to spend your Christmas in Battersea Park, your basement multiplex or just at home, I wish you a very happy time and a good new year.

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

Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden ponders sprouts and storms and saints

Who hasn't dreamed of hanging a sprout wreath on their front door to herald the coming of Christmas? The one in the picture will set you back just £39. The connoisseur of such things will be disappointed to hear that the sprouts are made of papier-mâché. You can also hang sprout baubles on your tree if you're so minded.

Once upon a time of course festive decorations were simpler. You went into the forest, hacked a few branches off the nearest evergreen, and brought in holly boughs brimming with berries. In my childhood the multi-coloured concertina paper garland held sway, carefully folded flat on Twelfth Night for use again year after year. There is a website which will sell you one of those for just £5.50. I noticed that the same site had a 1970 tin of Elastoplast (with some of the original contents) on offer for £7.50. Look deep in your cupboards friends. There's gold on them thar shelves.

The Big Day is just over a month away as I write, and stores are already urging me to reserve my turkey. I wondered if that might involve going to the farm and pointing out your favourite, but apparently not. Usually



at the end of November we'd be starting to shiver as the chill east wind takes hold and the thermometer starts to drop towards freezing, and I'd be trying to avoid making the very old joke about 'winter draws on...'

Ghengis

Not so far this year, though. Despite the British and Irish Met Offices' idea of giving our storms personalities by naming them, Abigail and Barney haven't done much more than soak us, though I gather things were a bit rougher up north. Currently we're waiting for Clodagh to arrive but I'm not expecting much from a weather system named after a 1970s pop singer. Why not give them names which might give us really interesting weather, like Storm Attila or Storm Ghengis? Up till now it's been perversely mild, and there's no excuse for my favourite winter sport of huddling inside with the central heating running full blast.

We all remember that Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast

of Stephen and saw a poor man gathering winter fuel. He was inspired to burden his luckless page with meat and wine and pine logs and go out into the snow in search of the poor man's dwelling. A saint he might have been but the king might have carried something himself. Anyway, to get to the point, this year those of us of a certain age once again get a payment towards our own winter fuel.

If you're among those lucky enough not to have immediate need of it don't send it back to the government, there are plenty of others whose need is greater than theirs – local, national and international. I say it every year, but it's always worth saying – it's better to give than receive (though it's a bad idea to present last year's gift socks to the person who gave them to you).

If you're short of ideas about worthy recipients, I'll just say that we're passing our windfall onto Save the Children (www.savethechildren.org.uk)

Anyway, have a good Christmas, and no talking to strange reindeer. Mind how you go, and see you next year.

Planning Matters: Transport

Concerns around transport are the headline issue, says Monica Tross

It is (almost) all about transport this time. Plans for Vauxhall and Wandsworth Town are likely to affect travel into and out of Battersea, and the revised plans for Crossrail 2 include proposals for a ventilation shaft on Wandsworth Common affecting Battersea residents and another in the Westbridge Road area. TfL promise 'Sub-Regional Transport Plans' which we think will include their belated response to concerns about traffic problems likely to be caused by the many developments proposed for the Lombard Road and York Road area as they come to be built – let alone the knock-on effect of traffic to and from Vauxhall and Nine Elms which those of us living near Battersea Park Road are already experiencing.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

We on the planning committee will be greatly encouraged if you can find the time to check out the schemes I am reporting on here. You can do this either via the websites or the public exhibitions and follow this up by letting us know what you think. You will find us on planning@batterseasociety.org.uk and your feedback will be immensely valuable, preferably before the end of December to give us time to meet the various consultation deadlines.

VAUXHALL CROSS – WILL THE BUS STATION BE DIMINISHED?

Many people will welcome TfL's ambition to remove the existing one-way road system, provide more cycle and pedestrian crossings and improve existing public spaces while also providing new spaces. A new central bus station is not necessarily a bad thing providing it contains all the current bus stops. TfL have only just announced their plans and the map of bus stops is not clear – my first impression is that they will be scattered so that the excellently efficient current pattern of the bus station will go.

We have written to TfL to say that there needs to be consultation in Battersea as well as the three drop-

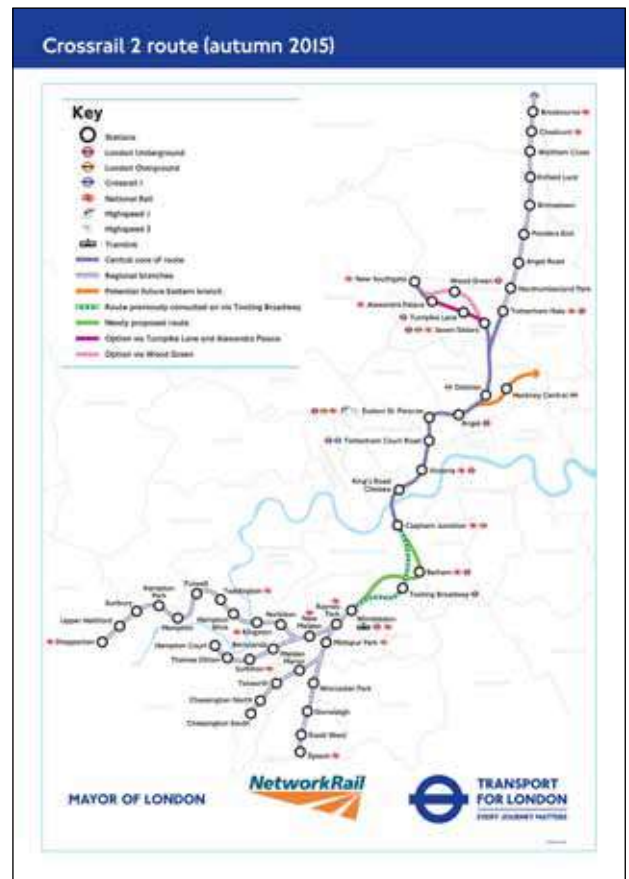
in sessions in Lambeth. I am not holding my breath for a favourable response so if you can make it to Lambeth, please do – or take a look at the website and see what you can make of it. Details of the Lambeth events are right at the end of the consultation documentation. You'll find this at: www.consultations.tfl.gov.uk/roads/vauxhall-cross

WANDSWORTH TOWN CENTRE

More plans for major change with details on the TfL website – www.tfl.gov.uk/Wandsworth-town-centre. We will be liaising with our colleagues in the Wandsworth Society regarding these plans but take a look and see what you think. There are drop-in sessions at the Wandsworth Town Library in Garratt Lane on 4 and 12 December (11.00 – 15.00 or 16.00) and the Civic Centre Robing Room on 9 December from 18.00 – 20.00.

CROSSRAIL 2

The proposed start date for this is 2030 but with current rail infrastructure projects subject to delay and cost over-runs this looks optimistic. Nonetheless unless the project is scrapped the need to safeguard proposed sites will affect us much sooner than that. The new plans propose Balham rather than Tooting Broadway as the station beyond Clapham Junction with Wandsworth Council objecting to the change and many Battersea residents protesting at the likelihood of a large ventilation shaft on Wandsworth Common. Another is proposed for the Westbridge Road area. Chelsea residents are equally exercised at the thought of a station in the King's Road. There are two road shows at York Gardens Library, both from 12.00



– 20.00 on Wednesday and Thursday 9 and 10 December. Check out the Crossrail 2 website for more details.

A GOOD DAY TO BURY BAD NEWS?

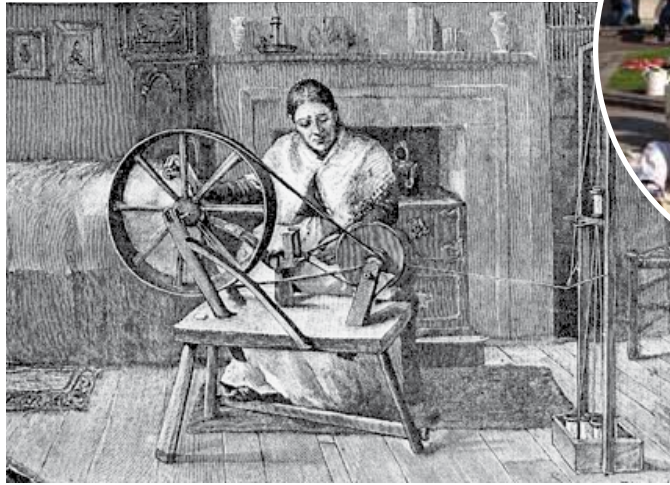
You will see a report on p9 of the lively Council meeting which agreed that FE racing will continue to be held in Battersea Park. There were 21 items on the agenda of the Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 November of which number 15 was a proposal that the Lombard Road/Riverside SPD be approved. We assume it was, as were the only slightly revised plans for the Looker's site at 98 York Road at the November Planning Applications Committee. You will see our views on the Planning Consultations and the Applications section of the Society's website. We wonder why we bothered to spend so much time on our considered response to each of these.

planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

Refugees and migrants: plus ça change?

Jenny Sheridan walks in Huguenot footsteps

Where else could we meet? The Huguenot Rendezvous café on Huguenot Place, was where 30 or so local people and possible Huguenot descendants gathered for a guided walk focusing on the Huguenots in Wandsworth. Our walk guide, Tim, needed his best voice-projection skills to overcome the traffic roaring along East Hill, so he led us to a quieter spot, Huguenot Mansions on nearby Melody Road. Drawing



clear parallels and contrasts with the current situation with asylum-seekers and economic migrants, he told us that these Calvinist families fled religious persecution in France in the 16th and 17th centuries. They were warmly welcomed by the government and by King William III, as they brought high-level skills and industry to the country.

Families with silk-weaving skills tended to settle in Spitalfields, already a textile centre. Jewellers and watchmakers went to Soho, where property was cheap and rooms small but it was conveniently near the centre of luxury at St James's Palace.

Extravagant

Another key Huguenot skill was hat-making, and hatters were drawn to Wandsworth, where they could use the fast-flowing Wandle to power mills for making felt for their extravagant hats. There's a theory that they confused Wandsworth with Windsor; a picture in the National Portrait

Gallery shows a family of wealthy Huguenot industrialists in the garden of their grand house in Putney – with Windsor Castle in the background!

We crossed busy East Hill cautiously and stopped on the other side of Mount Nod cemetery for Tim to strain his voice again – motor bikes and souped-up rally cars this time. The burial ground was needed when All Saints, Wandsworth's parish church, ran out of space in the 18th century, by which time the French immigrants had become longtime local residents. We peered in to see the Huguenot gravestones – the cemetery is closed to the public. Some anglicised their names, as many Jewish refugees did later, but others are commemorated in local streets such as Barchard Street.

On Geraldine Road Tim stopped outside the probation office, built on the site of a Huguenot mansion. The men who owned the mills and factories by the Wandle built their own houses on the hill, high above the noise and stink of the industrialised and filthy river.

Relatives

The best-known influx of French refugees came after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, when Louis XIV made it illegal for Protestants to practise their faith and simultaneously forbade them to leave France. At that time the Roman Catholic James II was king of England but in 1688 when William and Mary took the throne, the



Left: A Huguenot weaver; above: refurbishing Wandsworth Town Hall's cannon

way was clear to emigrate to Britain. However even before that there was a substantial

Huguenot population in London, so the Huguenots, like today's migrants, may have been joining friends and relatives.

The National Opera Studio behind Wandsworth High Street stands on the site of a French chapel, built as early as 1573. A plaque commemorates the building and pays tribute to its worshippers, who 'brought to the country of their adoption skill and energy that had a most important influence in improving its industrial greatness.' As Catherine Rawlinson pointed out in the summer issue of *Battersea Matters*, the great engineer Brunel was also of French origin.

Cannon

Our next stop was outside the Town Hall, with Tim competing with the traffic again. The cannon in the garden commemorates Wandsworth's heavy industry, including arms manufacture; guns for HM Victory were made here. On the fascinating frieze on the Town Hall are a couple dressed in Huguenot finery: see if you can spot them.

Finally, past the Georgian sundial on a house on Wandsworth Plain (similar to a Huguenot sundial in Spitalfields), to the mighty Wandsworth delta. No Huguenot link here, but the UK's first public railway, the Surrey Iron Railway, started from here to take goods to Croydon. Was it because of the lack of Huguenot savvy that it was a financial failure? www.huguenotsofspitalfields.org

ADVERTISEMENT

Big Yellow Storage Company Ltd
Units 1-2 York Road Business Centre
55 Lombard Street
Battersea, London SW11 3RX
T 0207801 0280
F 020 7801 1239
battersea@bigyellow.co.uk
bigyellow.co.uk



Get some space in your life™

It doesn't feel like doing good!

Volunteering is the lifeblood of local organisations – and of many residents, says Jenny Sheridan

'Why would you work for nothing?' 'A bit of a do-gooder, are you?' 'I couldn't do it – I get so tired.' Just a few of the comments people may get when they mention they are volunteers. But over 25% of people across the country do some sort of voluntary work at least once a month. All Wandsworth's charities rely heavily on people giving up their time for no pay. So why do they do it, and what do they get out of it?

Mel James volunteers for Thrive, the centre for therapeutic gardening where people with learning, physical or mental disabilities can go to mix socially and learn practical skills. Mel works one day a week in the Herb Garden in Battersea Park. She has also been responsible for watering the contents of the glasshouse – 'enjoyable except when we arrived to find the water supply had dried up and Thrive's entire stock for Chelsea Flower Show was wilting!'

Friendly

Mel says, 'I have limited space for growing anything at home so being able to grow delicious vegetables and fruit in a space as splendid as the Herb Garden is brilliant. But while I came for the gardening, I stayed for the people. Thrive staff, the other volunteers and of course the clients are wonderfully diverse and friendly.'

'Some special people come to mind, like a group for adults with early onset dementia – the development of their focus and capacity to grasp tasks was amazing.'

Working with children is motivating for many volunteers. Angela Roden reads with children at St Mary's RC primary school opposite Battersea Dogs Home. She says, 'The thing I really value about this role is the relationship that builds over time with the children as you share books and games together.' Angela volunteers for Beanstalk, a national charity that provides support to children who are struggling or reluctant readers. 'The Beanstalk format is 15 minutes of reading followed by 15 minutes of Snap, Hangman or whatever. It creates a period of concentrated

one-to-one work which really builds a bond.

'I'm at the school from 9 – 10.30 twice a week, seeing three children each time.

They range from a very early reader who speaks Spanish at home, to an improving reader recently arrived from Africa to a quiet but clever nine-year-old who is really enjoying the shared work on a book.

'There are 25 of us volunteers at St Mary's. We are welcomed by the staff as a full part of the school and we enjoy watching school assemblies and sometimes helping on school trips. It is immensely rewarding for me and does not feel a bit like just doing good!'

Angela says that Beanstalk is keen to recruit more volunteers in Wandsworth to meet the rising demand from local schools.

Aaron Barbour, director of Battersea's Katherine Low Settlement, says, 'Volunteers are our lifeblood; they are integral to everything we do. We have 23 staff (only two of whom are full-time) and over 100 volunteers. They do anything from being learning mentors in the homework club to driving the minibus. We encourage people who use our services to help others. It's about reciprocity – helping a peer to get to the toilet or an older child supporting one who is newly arrived. For some it's a route into paid work, and we support them with this.'

New people

Volunteer Hannah Green says, 'I help some of the older people to get to KLS on a Thursday morning ready for chair exercises. I originally volunteered to try and give a little back to the community but I enjoy being involved even more than I could have imagined. KLS is an incredible place to meet new people and the diversity of the stories you can hear just from sitting in the reception area is extraordinary.'

Janet Montgomery, another KLS volunteer, helps with the Contact Club for lonely or isolated older people. 'It's once a fortnight, I help with anything they want me to do. I set the place up



Volunteers making Christmas dinner at KLS

and make sure people are welcomed and make them a cup of tea. When we go on trips I help people to get on and off the coach. I just love it. The people are so nice and there's a lovely atmosphere. And when I go out now I often bump into someone I know and we stop and have a chat. I have made friends from different places and different walks of life, people I would never have met otherwise.'

Some volunteering activities have concrete advantages. At Battersea Arts Centre for example, people who volunteer as ushers can see a show for free. Jessie Wyld, BAC's heritage officer, says there are over 200 active volunteers. Most come via the website, or through organisations such as Wandsworth U3A (*Battersea Matters Autumn 2014*). 'They have been involved in a project with primary schools about the evacuation of children from the borough during the Blitz. In some cases the volunteers themselves or someone in their family had been evacuated, so they can share their personal stories with the kids.'

Many people facing retirement fear that they will lose a sense of purpose in their lives. This is one of the things that volunteering gives. As the local residents quoted above show, it feels worthwhile, that they are making a positive difference – as well as making new friends. Research by the NCVO shows that it can raise confidence and self-esteem through giving a sense of personal agency and control. And it's life-affirming to do something that is both useful to others and enjoyable. And as Angela Roden says, 'After all, having a couple of days a week when you have to set the alarm clock is good for the soul!'

www.thrive.org.uk

www.beanstalkcharity.org.uk

www.katherinelowsettlement.org.uk

www.bac.org.uk

Was Wandsworth built from the profits of slavery?

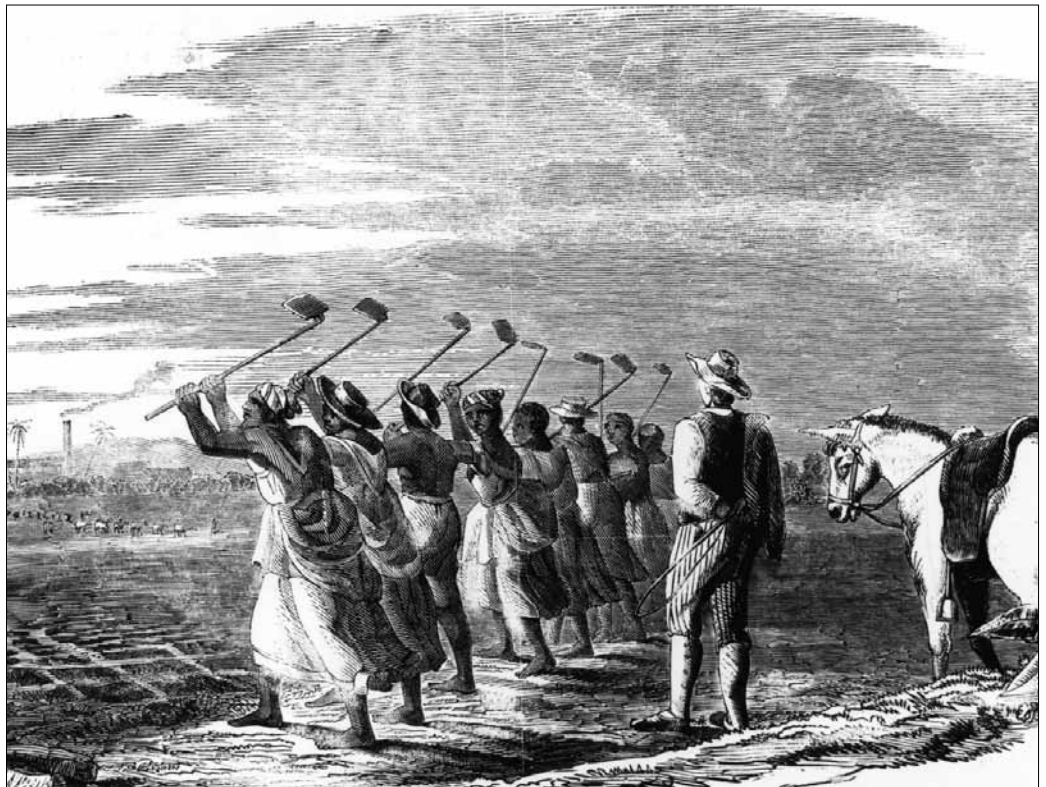
Dr Nick Draper reveals the legacy of slave-ownership in the borough

In general when we think of Britain and slavery, we think of abolition, of the Clapham 'Saints', of William Wilberforce. This was certainly the tradition invoked by David Cameron in his speeches at the G20 summit in 2013 and at the Conservative Party Conference in 2014, when he spoke of Britain's moral leadership in the world. Behind abolition, of course, stands 200 years of British colonial slavery, of Britain's deep and enduring involvement both in the slave-trade and in the Atlantic slave economy. These two hundred years are often forgotten.

Even when Britain's historical commitment to slavery is remembered, its significance to the formation of modern Britain is contested. Many historians argue that its role in Britain's history was marginal, but others argue that it was central, that Britain was built on the blood of slaves. Recent work by a team of historians in the Legacies of British Slave-ownership at UCL represents an attempt to supply new evidence for this debate about the importance of slavery.

Compensation

Our research focuses on one aspect of the slave-system – the men and women who owned enslaved people. We know who these people were because under the 1833 Act that abolished slavery in the British colonies (the abolition of the slave-trade in 1807 had left the institution of slavery intact) the British government paid £20 million in compensation to the slave-owners (the enslaved people received nothing). Distributing this money (worth about £17 billion today) to the slave-owners created a unique census not just of the slave-owners themselves but of those with loans secured on the enslaved people, and of the widows and orphans who depended on annual payments from the estates and the



labour of enslaved people in the Caribbean. There were some 45,000 people awarded compensation for 800,000 enslaved people in the British colonies covered by the Act. We have found that about 3,500 of these awardees, owning half of the enslaved people, lived in Britain as 'absentees', and we have studied this group to trace their 'legacies' - the imprints of all kinds they made - in Britain. We have published our data on our searchable website, www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs: on it, you can find slave-estates in the Caribbean called Tooting, Roehampton and Battersea.

You can also find local connections to slave-ownership. Slave-owners lived throughout Britain. Almost no city, town or rural area is without some local linkage, sometimes immediate, sometimes remote; sometimes important for local development, sometimes not. Wandsworth is no exception.

Villas

In the early 19th century, the area moving south from the river was predominantly rural, with villages interspersed with suburban villas

on the main routes north to London across the Thames: these villas attracted people returned from the Caribbean, such as the slave-trader and slave-owner Alexander Lindo who lived at Putney Park between 1802 and 1808 and was an ancestor of Chris Blackwell, the founder of Bob Marley's international record label Island Records. Lindo's house was demolished in the 1820s and rebuilt by Francis Seymour Larpent, and is now the HQ of the Roehampton Estate Tenants Association.

Annuities

William Vassall 'of Battersea' died in 1800 leaving his Green River estate and the enslaved people on it to his son, charged with annuities for his children of £2000 p.a. (now worth £1.7 million). Born in Jamaica, Vassall leased a house at Clapham 1775 – c.1800 from Thomas Bond, called Front Hall or Maisonette, now 81 – 84 Clapham Common Westside. He has a memorial in St Mary's Battersea made by sculptor Samuel Joseph, whose most famous work is that of William Wilberforce, in Westminster Abbey, underscoring that slave-

owners and abolitionists inhabited the same milieu in London, attending the same churches, living in the same streets.



Slaves working on plantations in the West Indies were supporting many 'respectable' families in Wandsworth

Edward Hyde East, who lived at Sherwood Lodge (at the south end of Lombard Road, near the junction with York Road, demolished in the early 1850s and previously occupied by the royal mistress Mrs Fitzherbert), was a Jamaica slave-owner, MP and judge in India, and was awarded compensation for 1200 enslaved people in Jamaica. Archibald Cochran, a slave-owner in Antigua, was owner/occupier of North House on Putney Hill 1804 – 1814.

Scandal

The pioneering hydrotherapist James Manby Gully, who treated Carlyle, Darwin and Tennyson, was born in Jamaica, the son of a coffee planter. Gully left Jamaica as a child, became a fashionable doctor, instrumental in the development of Malvern including the school and was late in life drawn into a scandal over the murder of Charles Bravo: Gully died at Orwell Lodge, Bedford Hill Road, Balham in 1883. His son became speaker of the House of Commons. J A Hankey, who lived at The Cedars (site of Cedars Road) 1846 – 1852, owned hundreds of enslaved people on Grenada jointly with the family of the great liberal historian G.M. Trevelyan.

By no means all slave-owners were men. Frances Lyle of '7 Lombard Street,' Great Chelsea, received £50 after claiming for a total of 11 enslaved people in Kingston Jamaica. Ann Newell Hill, who died in Putney leaving

£100,000 in 1892 was the daughter of Ann Launce Hill, who was awarded compensation for the 194 enslaved people on the Hermitage estate that she had inherited from her mother.

Physical continuities most visibly link the present to the past, but are sometimes hidden in plain sight. John Anthony Rucker, who died in 1806, left Melrose Hall, the house he had built on West Hill, and his estates and slaves in West Indies to his nephew Daniel Henry Rucker, who employed Repton to develop further the West Hill estate. I followed the secondary material in assuming Melrose Hall was demolished: in fact, it was the original home of the Royal Hospital for Neurodisability and remains incorporated in the existing building.*

I believe that we are all beneficiaries of slavery, because the country we all live in, with its beauty, its wealth, its modernity, its technical achievements, is in some degree the legacy of slavery and of slave-ownership. You can look at our evidence and decide for yourselves: but it's hard to argue that we owe nothing to slavery, or that Wandsworth itself owes nothing to slavery. The debate is over how much, and whether there are implications for the present of our past history.

Thanks are due to Sean Creighton and Dorian Gerhold for their help with this article.

**I am grateful to Claudine Boothe for pressing me on this point.*

HISTORY COMES TO LIFE – AND DEATH

Cholera today is a disease of the developing world. But in 1866 it was rife in Battersea. While Bazalgette was building his life-saving sewage system, Dr John Crosse Richardson wrote to the *South London Press* wanting to know how many had died in the borough, and to see 'whether defective drainage, pig-keeping or personal carelessness in diet had had the most to do with these deaths'.

This insight into our Victorian past comes from the 100th edition of the always interesting *Wandsworth Historian*.

It also includes an article by Professor Penelope Corfield on the working class origins of John



Bazalgette's sewers: Mike Deere, Professional Photographer of The Year awards, 2013

Burns, Battersea's celebrated radical MP (1892 – 1918).

The Historian can be obtained from the editor, Neil Robson ngrobson@tiscali.co.uk. Neil can also provide DVDs of the journal's digital archive from issue one in 1971 to 2015.

BASEMENTS: THE LATEST

Suzanne Perkins writes:

I am eagerly following the progress of the Planning (Subterranean Development) Bill (House of Lords), which had its Second Reading in the early hours of 21 November.

Moved by Lord Dubs, formerly a Battersea MP, the Bill aims to give planning officers powers for presumption against subterranean development (basements to you and me), in more circumstances than at present, such as flood plains, terrace housing, and in my view, not before time, *significant local opposition and unreasonable disruption to neighbours.*

Watch this space!



Traffic and trains can't compete with woodpecker and wren

Wandsworth Common preserves a sense of mystery and offers a home to countless birds, says Sue Demont

It all started with the green woodpecker...

Striding briskly towards Clapham Junction alongside the tiny severed triangle of Wandsworth Common that abuts Battersea Rise and the deep cutting carrying the London to Brighton line, I was stopped in my tracks one March morning by the sight of an unusually colourful bird amongst the daffodils. Barely a dozen yards from the idling 49 bus and its coffee-swilling driver stood a green woodpecker, its red head and yellow rump vivid in the early spring sunshine. I watched it tiptoe about for a while, examining the ground for grubs; then it flew up and perched in a nearby tree for several minutes while the bus driver finished his coffee and the traffic stuttered and started below. Naturally, I missed my bus!

It felt a bit like a sign to this recently retired Battersea resident. I have always loved the outdoors and its wildlife and take enormous pleasure in every bird that comes to feed in our small garden; a wren, a jay and a pair of long-tailed tits have been our most exciting recent visitors. I love, and frequently visit, Battersea Park, but

following 'Woodpecker Day' I made a conscious effort to start spending more 'slow time' on Wandsworth Common, Battersea's largest and wildest open space despite its fragmentation by road and rail.

Wilderness

The Common is incredibly well used for a multitude of activities and it is a tribute to those who manage it that there are still areas that preserve a genuine feeling of wilderness. Though you can never fully escape the noise of traffic, trains or planes it is possible, particularly around the ponds, to enter a hushed and watery world, dominated by mallard and moorhen rather than buggy and bike. And if you sneak off-piste into the undergrowth you encounter a kind of mangrove swamp, all tree roots and sluggish murky backwaters—Battersea's very own Everglades, only yards behind the fitness trail.

These ponds are a great place to observe wildlife; dragonfly and damselfly illuminate the reed beds, snow-white gulls and swans glide across the water, chaffinches, robins, magpies and blackbirds abound in

the trees above. Heron of varying degrees of maturity can be observed throughout the year, the younger ones hunched and peering, the adults taut and gracious – each characterised by such extraordinary stillness that some passers-by assume they're 'not real.' The cormorants keep watch from two tall trees, in pairs, trios or more recently quartets, spending hours aloft, creating speculation as to how they manage to fish from such a height (and being identified as vultures by one family on account of their sinister silhouettes). At the stock pond on Bolingbroke Grove I have watched a lone cormorant, poised right on the edge of the island, alert to every splash and ripple, hanging out its wings to dry following a successful lunge into the water.

Woodland

The ponds have been successfully managed without being manicured, creating a wildlife habitat responsive to and attractive in all seasons, with numerous vantage points from which no buildings or traffic can be seen. And there is more to the Common's wildlife. The Director of Conservation at the London Wildlife Trust (LWT), Matthew Frith, explains its significance as follows. 'Habitats include a mosaic of woodland, acidic and neutral grassland... The secondary oak and birch woodland has developed since the area was cleared in the late 1800s and now

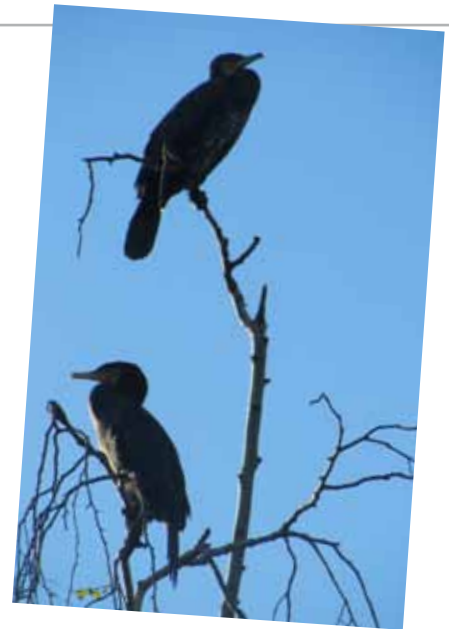
features an understorey of elder, hawthorn and more exotic planted trees and shrubs ... important foraging and nesting areas for wren, chaffinch, blackbird, robin and great tit, as well as (I was of course excited to learn) the occasional spotted woodpecker.'

The wildest remaining area – albeit furthest from downtown Battersea – is the Scope (originally, and bizarrely, the site of the world's largest telescope when constructed in 1852) which notwithstanding the roar of adjacent Trinity Road is an extraordinarily dense and quite spooky thicket of woodland. It's the kind of area you could almost get lost in and probably the closest you can get to forest bathing (derived from the Japanese concept of 'shinrin-yoku' – strolling in ancient woodland as a form of preventative medicine) within touching distance of SW11.



An amateur nature lover can get a huge amount of variety and pleasure from observing the seasonal rhythm of the life of the Common. But there are also opportunities to learn from experts. Wandsworth Council has its own official bird recorder, Peter White, who conducts regular bird walks for the public as well as for reporting purposes. In July alone Peter identified no fewer than 42 species of bird and waterfowl, the most unusual of which were grey wagtail, kestrel and nuthatch, and which included a green woodpecker – possibly mine? – on the Scope. Peter's handwritten and scanned reports are a joy to read, my favourite example this year being his sighting of 'a very peculiar hybrid mallard in the lake associating with the pure mallard ... It looked slightly bigger and its head pattern seemed to me to have crossed with a bar-headed goose of all things'.

While the LWT has no specific role with regard to the Common, Matthew Frith observing that 'it has to meet many demands, especially recreational, which is why its wildlife value is not as high as it could be' it remains a Site of Borough Importance (Grade 1) for Nature Conservation. And there is no better



Left: Not a house in sight; above two cormorants (photos by Sue Demont); below left: a green woodpecker

place to sit and reflect than the big log opposite the island, guarded by its heron, bracken rich in the autumn sunshine and alive with the sound of quacking and birdsong. If you haven't done so already – do try it!

London Wildlife Trust www.wildlondon.org.uk
Wandsworth Council bird walks www.wandsworth.gov.uk/parks

Formula E: the Council wins despite strong opposition

Jenny Sheridan reports

On 24 November 2015, the Council agreed that Formula E races should take place in Battersea Park for the next two years. The vote was seven votes to four, with the Labour opposition voting against.

On a chilly night, protesters held banners outside the town hall while inside, the committee listened to fierce condemnation of the event from deputations from the Battersea Society, the Friends of Battersea Park, the Formula E Action Group and several other organisations.

David Lewis, representing the Battersea Society, pointed out that 69% of our survey believed that the high profile of the event was not worth the disruption to the park. He reminded councillors of their moral and legal obligations to protect the

Grade 2* listed park: in the Society's view it is an inherently inappropriate place for the races. In addition, future electric racing cars are likely to become speedier, requiring more extensive tracks and larger safety barriers, with the risk of cumulative damage to the park.

Opposed

Other organisations also objected to the lengthy and disruptive set-up and removal periods, the noisy and polluting lorries, the closure of large parts of the park for several days in high summer and the noise from helicopters.

The Council's view was that the disruption had been less than protesters had anticipated and that next year further attempts will be



made to reduce the races' impact. The Council claimed that 55,000 people had attended the event (a figure disputed by many) including 9,000 Wandsworth residents.

The sum paid to the Council by the organisers is confidential – and not even available to elected councillors apart from those on the relevant committee. The finance director said that the money would be used to avoid cuts to frontline services. £200,000 per year will be allocated to Battersea Park.

The Council's decision has been met with fury on local social media.

How Battersea has changed

Steph Tickner gives a personal view, which may resound with many members

I have lived in a tiny flat in North Battersea (a street away from the river) for 25 years, arriving via Wandsworth, from the North End Road, Fulham, where I was born in the early 1950's. Like other long-time residents of those areas, I have watched the change from grimy-fronted houses and shabby rubbish-strewn streets full of kids playing in the gutter, and using lampposts as swings (as I did), into the estate agents' dream of newly-cleaned brick and brightly painted front doors. All of course with added basement/attic chic and essential recreational facilities nearby – baby yoga, anyone?

Smell

In the early 1970s I worked for a magazine whose subscription office was located at 78 York Road, just off Lombard Road. I remember one day having to call the council to complain that we couldn't see out of the windows at all, due to the smoke and the sickly stink of the nearby Garton's Sugar Factory, and being reassured that the factory would close soon anyway. An old lady I knew a couple of streets away told me, 'That's nothing, love – there has always been a famous "Battersea Smell" of some sort'.

Much has changed for the better, of course, and improvements of all

sorts have made these areas attractive to the up-and-coming affluent. As an early supporter of the Battersea Power Station Action Group in the 1980s under the tireless local campaigner Brian Barnes OBE, I feel it is better to see some development, after decades of neglect and dereliction. Despite concerns over the dense and controversial scale of the apartment blocks the development will include some facilities for community use. The estate agent parlance for the Power Station site is 'super prime'.

But all over London there is growing disquiet from groups and individuals who think that what makes London a vibrant, creative city is in danger of being lost because of the seeming unstoppable march of the high-end developer. A recent example is Shoreditch, where affordable living/working space is being forced out due to massive rent increases.

With dozens of super-high apartment tower blocks being given the green light and with apparently no overall aesthetic planning, my heart sinks with every new report of yet more financially out-of-reach



Cartoon: Grizelda Grizlingham, first published in *The Spectator*

flats/apartments being 'showcased' by developers. The 'Boomerang' in construction at Blackfriars Bridge, Southwark, will be 50 stories tall and the top apartment will cost £23million.

In Battersea, two highly publicised houses in Albert Bridge Road owned by a French-Lebanese investor/developer are 'achieving' (estate agent-ese again) the £15 million mark. It is not surprising that there are ever-louder voices being raised about 'where will it all end?'

Need

The Battersea Society hosted a pre-election Q&A meeting in York Gardens Library, with local political candidates showcasing their policies. The number one concern, unsurprisingly, of the full-house local turnout, was the need for housing for families and young people who do not have the sort of income needed to compete in the private market, at the levels currently being seen in Battersea. I watch my hard-working nephews struggle with the ever more expensive rental market and I hope for a solution. Does anyone have one?

Steph Tickner is a Blue Badge London guide.

20/20 vision

Robert Molteno explains why reducing the speed limit matters

Next spring Wandsworth Council is going to engage in an unprecedented consultation of all its residents. For years and years, residents in particular streets have petitioned the Council to lower the speed limit from 30mph to 20mph. The process has been slow, the Council sometimes taking two years or more to respond and undertake its own formal consultation. And every time it has, a large majority of residents have said they want 20mph on their street. So we now have a patchwork of streets, or parts of a street, that are 20mph,

totalling a bit over a quarter of all our roads. Now the Council has agreed to an on-line consultation on whether we want 20mph as the speed limit on all our residential streets (but not other roads).

Two worrying facts about road accidents have helped drive this change in Council policy. First, cycling: over the past 14 years, cyclists have constituted a rising proportion of road casualties in our borough – the figure has risen from 12% to 29% of the total. The actual number of cyclist casualties has risen

in this period from 170 to 290 a year. Second, pedestrians: in 2014, 200 of those injured on our roads were on foot, an increase of 23% on the previous year.

In our next issue, once the dates of the consultation are known, *Battersea Matters* will let you know how you can respond. We will point you to information which Wandsworth Living Streets has prepared on questions people may have about changing the speed limit.

In the meantime, have a couple of minutes of fun this Christmas testing how much you know about the issue by going to wandsworthlivingstreets.org.uk and clicking on 20 MPH Quiz.

I can't imagine surviving without it

Mike Roden looks at the latest report from Wandsworth Foodbank.

In the autumn 2014 edition of *Battersea Matters*, Carol Rahn reviewed the report of the first seven months of operation of the Wandsworth Foodbank. As she pointed out, the findings highlighted the importance of the lifeline offered by foodbanks in times of crisis and also raised the question of whether too much of the primary safety net was shifting from government to charitable organisations.

The report of the Foodbank's first full year of operation covering the twelve months up till March 2015 is now available. In this short article it is only possible to summarise a few of the points raised in this detailed report.

Lifeline

What is most disturbing at first glance is the realisation that real, grinding poverty still exists in Wandsworth, perceived as one of London's richer boroughs. There are areas of very real deprivation in the Battersea wards of Latchmere and Queenstown, which have higher levels of child poverty than the national average, and lower life expectancy for both men and woman, and thus many people needing the lifeline offered by the Foodbank. Almost half of those receiving help were children, with most parents reporting that they or their partner had gone without food in the previous year so that their children could eat.

It's clear from the interviews with users, and from information supplied by those partner agencies who refer their clients to the foodbank that those who need emergency food have often exhausted their usual coping mechanisms, and there is simply no, or very little, money left each week after the costs of rent, utilities, travel and food are met.

There are of course a range of reasons why people reach this point, but the report cites that problems with benefits – delays, changes or sanctions (as in 2013-14) remain the single most common reason for someone being referred to the Wandsworth Foodbank (accounting



for 41% of people). Around three-quarters of those interviewed for this report were on benefits at the time.

Navigating the benefits system is the main hurdle for most people, whose situation is made worse by an inability to find the right person to deal with their problem, and a lack of knowledge of how to progress a claim.

Hardship

One practice which causes particular hardship is the way in which one or all of someone's benefits are stopped while a change of circumstance is reassessed, leaving some families on little or no income. It was also noted that while stopping a benefit is done very quickly, reinstating it when the assessment has been made often takes much longer, with delays of up to several months in a few cases.

'Increasingly I am seeing clients who have been in stable long-term employment, with disposable income and well able to manage but who are now out of work and have no resources to fall back on. The recession is continuing, people are being made redundant and the benefit system is no longer the safety net that it once was. It's hard to get benefits and easy to unwittingly fall foul of the rules.'

Whether this will improve in the foreseeable future remains to be seen, and it will be instructive to see the report of this current year's operation.

The partner agencies were asked what they felt would happen if the foodbank did not exist. Almost half said that their clients would go hungry or skip meals – a situation that could persist for long periods as their clients struggled to pay other bills or were forced to increase their debt.

Users of the service were asked where they would go for help if there was no Foodbank. Most said they didn't know, or that there wasn't anywhere else that they could go to for help. Asking friends or family was rarely an option, as they were usually struggling as well.

'I can't imagine what it would be like if there was no foodbank, we would be totally stuck.'

The main recommendations of the report naturally focus on ways in which the benefit system might be improved, stressing the need to reduce to a minimum any delays in payments being made or reinstated. It calls for benefit recipients to be kept properly informed both about the process of claims, and about other statutory crisis provisions that are available. It also asks Wandsworth Council to improve access to its Discretionary Social Fund to help those in crisis.

The recommendations end with a call for a general rejection of the notion of the 'undeserving poor' which fails to understand the reality of poverty and inequality and can make the experience of poverty even harder for those who are struggling.

You can read the full report on the Foodbank's website (wandsworth.foodbank.org.uk) where you can also find out what food is currently required. There are also now permanent collection points at Waitrose stores in Clapham Junction, Southside and Putney Exchange, as well as the Co-op Battersea Bridge store. Donations can be left there during store opening times, and will all come to Wandsworth foodbank.

From ancient Carthage to Battersea

Diplomat turned novelist Ivor Rawlinson reveals the link between his two lives

To be effective as a diplomat, you really have to get to know the country in which you are serving. You have to go a bit native. You need to meet as many people as you possibly can and travel the country widely. Yet you have to be objective and detached too. It's the same for the novelist. Turning from one activity to the other seemed fairly natural for me.

My novel *Tunisian Dreams* was conceived in Tunisia but born in Battersea where my wife and I have lived since moving from Balham nearly ten years ago. Two thirds of our working lives were spent abroad in the Diplomatic Service. My last post was as ambassador to Tunisia and this is where my novel opens in 2009, a year before the so-called Arab Spring. The beautiful country is still ruled with an iron fist by Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Dissidents are jailed and often tortured. Nepotism and corruption are widespread. There is no free speech. This is the place where an English film maker and her celebrity archaeologist boyfriend are enmeshed in two dramas embracing two very topical themes.

Slaves

The first is the steady flow of illegal migrants from sub-Saharan Africa arriving in Tunisia and trying to get across the Mediterranean to the Italian island of Lampedusa. I encountered the issue in a curious way. I was closely involved with Tunis's Anglican Church. Migrants knew they would not be harassed if

they rested in the historic churchyard which had once been a place of refuge for escaping slaves when Tunis was a notorious slave market in the seventeenth century. I found this was a problem no Tunisian wanted to talk about. The book throws it into relief and hints at solutions. I believe that nothing short of a massive transfer of resources from Europe to Africa will stem the flow.

The other theme of *Tunisian Dreams* is also headline news: how should the priceless Roman archaeological heritage in North Africa be preserved? I could not help but become fascinated by Roman archaeology because the ambassador's residence in Tunisia, a gift to the Crown over a hundred and fifty years ago, is on the edge of ancient Carthage. The Romans turned Phoenician Carthage, now a suburb of Tunis, into a rich but decadent Mediterranean city. The stunning Arab house is blessed with a twelve acre garden where olives, oranges, pomegranates and peaches flourish and gardeners regularly found Roman artefacts. Weekend excursions were often to the ruins of Roman towns.

Even before the barbaric, craven desecration of Roman sites by Islamic fundamentalists elsewhere in the Middle East, I had been worried about the future of North Africa's sites for want of funds and the political will to maintain them.

One site takes centre stage in my story and shows the excitement, potential and sheer fascination of

10 – 15 year-olds and £18 for 'junior Tarzans' over one metre tall.

The existing adventure playground, suitable mainly for younger children, remains free of charge thanks to energetic local campaigning.

If any readers of *Battersea Matters* dare to take the thrilling test, please get in touch.

We would love a review.



these magical places. It might seem odd that a ruined Roman town can be emotional, but I defy anyone to stand alone in one of the streets of say, Leptis Magna in Libya and not be moved.

Mosaics

A hugely talented Battersea artist, Val Archer, makes meticulously beautiful paintings of Roman mosaics such as one finds everywhere in Tunisia and she allowed me to use part of one of her paintings for the cover of *Tunisian Dreams*. The title itself hints at the peaceful democratic future modern Tunisia is trying to forge for itself. It had agreed a new constitution and held free elections – but then came the awful attacks by crazed terrorists at the Bardo Museum in Tunis and on the beach in Sousse, both of which have had a disastrous effect on Tunisia's all-important tourist industry. I hope my short book renews interest in the country.

Tunisian Dreams is published by Matador at £8.99 and as an e-book, both via Amazon.

Go Ape

The delayed opening of Go Ape in Battersea Park will happen on 10 December. The company describes it as 'a new forest adventure in the centre of London'. It includes zip wires and 'wobbly and challenging' obstacle crossings and is 'a thrilling test of nerves'. The cost for adults (over-16 year-olds) is £33, £25 for



The Weeping Woman

Mile Roden

The house had been built sometime in the 1880s or early nineties, an elegant double-fronted villa designed as a home for a well-do-do Battersea businessman and his family. Now of course it was it was sub-divided into flats, two on the ground floor, two above and just one large flat on the top floor. As an estate agent would say. ideal for a couple of busy young professionals. More bars and restaurants than you could shake a stick at.

My friend Leo and I walked up the steps and he rang the doorbell. 'I just want you to listen to Greg again.'

'Is this all about things that go bump in the night in their flat?' I asked.

'You've been talking about finding something to write about,' returned Leo 'I'm just trying to help.' The door opened then and his son Greg stood there. He towered above me as he shook hands, and looked quizzically at his father. 'I thought you were going to the house with mum and Julie?'

Haunting

'We are, later,' said Leo. 'Though I thought we'd go for a drink first. I just want you to tell our friend the latest about your — haunting experience.'

Greg shook his head and gave me a sympathetic look. 'OK. Come on in.'

We followed him up the ornate central staircase to the first floor flat where he and his wife had lived for the last eighteen months. I'd been here once before, after they'd been living here for a couple of months. I'd been dragged along rather reluctantly by Leo who insisted that Julie and Greg might benefit from getting my 'expert' views on some strange occurrences. Leo's wife Harriet and my own better half had come along to offer support.

Greg led us inside now. 'I've just been having a last scout round, see if we've left anything.'

'Have they found new tenants yet?'

'Not absolutely sure, dad,' he said, 'Not our problem, anyway. We're in the land of mortgage hell now rather than rental misery.'

'You'll be glad to leave, I suppose.'

He looked at me easily enough. 'To be honest, we'd got used to the occasional unexplained noise, or voice. It wasn't really frightening.' He shrugged. 'Could all have been our imagination anyway.'

That first time I'd heard about it, I'd listened to tales of being woken up by loud voices suddenly sounding from their living room with nobody there. Footsteps along the hall outside their bedroom, or the noise of doors slamming when every door in the place was firmly closed.

Music

Once Julie woke up to hear piano music playing. Thinking she might have left the tv on she came into the sitting room and turned on the light, 'The music stopped.' She told me 'And just for a moment I could smell cigarette smoke.' She paused, 'And neither of us smoke!'

Then one day Greg thought he saw a stranger in the kitchen. 'Only for a moment, very briefly. A dark haired woman who turned to stare at me. She was very pale...' He'd laughed. 'Then she wasn't there. As presumably she never was!'

It became clear to me that these two sensible young people were already taking these odd noises, or occurrences in their stride. They never felt threatened in any way, and there could be perfectly rational explanations for everything that had happened, even the pale visitor Greg thought he'd seen.

Now Greg looked at me, 'For the last week or so,' he said, 'It's been getting worse. We've heard a lot more noise. Never for very long, but different. We've heard shouting – a loud argument. Then there was what sounded like angry hammering on a door. And a few times Julie thought she heard a woman crying – weeping bitterly. I thought I heard someone scream. It was starting to get rather unsettling.' He shrugged. 'And well, I thought I saw the woman again.'

'In the kitchen?' I asked

He shook his head, 'No I was coming in from outside, when I heard a door slam. I started to come upstairs and then she was at the top by our front door. She just stared down at me then. Huge eyes in a pale, terrified face.' He laughed unconvincingly. 'Only for a second

or two. And then there was no-one there.'

Leo turned on me. 'Well what about that?'

'I presume it was getting dark Greg,' I said, 'You were tired after a day at work...'

'Precisely,' said Greg firmly. 'All easily explainable, as these things always are. We've been on edge, waiting to move, not sleeping well, having bad dreams. It's hardly supernatural.'

Greg's mobile rang and he moved away to take the call.

Tragedy

Leo glared at me in frustration. 'For someone who writes stories about weird events, you seem remarkably unimpressed by all this,' he said, 'Greg and Julie have been seeing and hearing traces of a real drama - a tragedy even - that happened in the past. And you just don't seem interested.'

Greg was still talking to the caller. 'Ten minutes? Ok, I'll stay here.'

Ending the call he turned back to us. 'The estate agent is bringing some potential tenants round. He wants to have a quick word with me, so I'll stay here.'

'Well we'll go off to the Northcote and wait for you,' said Leo.

'OK, see you in a few minutes.'

We went off down the stairs. 'I'm sorry to be such a disappointment Leo,' I said, 'But a story needs an end. And this one just doesn't have one. Maybe something bad did happen in this house, but we don't know what it was. Probably never will. Greg and Julie will go and make a new life in their new house, and everyone will forget about this.'

He glanced back up the stairs as if hoping to see the pale woman, then grunted unwillingly, 'S'pose you're right.'

He'd cheered up by the time we were settled with a drink. 'Anyway, we're really pleased that they've got their own place now. Like a story really, Julie inherited some money from an old aunt she hadn't seen when she was a child. Meant they had enough for a deposit.'

'Maybe I should write that story,' I said, 'There is a weird event – two young people managing to afford a deposit on their own place.' ▶ p14

◀ p13 'No need to mock me,' he said, 'I have your best interests at heart. Oh here he is.' His son had come in through the door looking round for us. He came over and it was suddenly clear to both of us that something was wrong.

'What's up?' said Leo, 'You're as white as a sheet. Problems with the estate agent?'

For a moment he stared at us wordlessly. 'It was her,' he said shakily, 'The woman. The woman I

saw in the kitchen and on the stairs.

I realised what he meant. 'The new tenant?' I asked. He nodded. 'Her and her boyfriend.' He shivered. 'I didn't really take to him.' He was calming down now, and Leo fetched him a drink. 'She was so happy,' he said, 'Really excited about moving in. Not pale and drawn like when I saw her... thought I saw her.'

'You're sure it was the same woman?' I asked

'Well I'm pretty sure.' said Greg.

A thought suddenly occurred to him. 'Have Julie and I really been seeing the future? Is something going to happen in the flat... can we do something to prevent it happening?'

I had no answer to any of those questions. I still don't. I do hope it's all been in Greg's imagination but that hasn't stopped me reading the *Wandsworth Guardian* very carefully lately.

© Mike Roden 2015

Restaurant review: The Clink

No porridge – but Carol Rahn enjoys lunch in Brixton Prison

No parking available. Bring photo ID. No more than £50 in cash. No sharp objects, chewing gum or aerosols. Any mobile phones, cameras, keys, maps or make-up must be left in one of the small lockers available.

In other words, not your usual restaurant checklist. But then The Clink isn't your usual restaurant. It is an oasis of chic contemporary design inside the predictably gloomy, aging Brixton prison. The waiters and kitchen staff are all serving prisoners. Fellow Battersea Society member Jenny Sheridan and I went to try the restaurant garnering very favourable reviews, including five stars on Trip Adviser.

Drawings

After all the security and a walk through the rain-spattered yard, we are through the door into a completely different world. One wall is textured by narrow stone tiles; the others are a calming shade of grey, enlivened by charcoal drawings by prisoners. Their subjects range from a thatched cottage in the woods to portraits of Malcolm X. Taupe leather banquettes and chairs surround black glass-topped tables set with sparkling glasses, fan-folded heavy paper napkins – and black plastic cutlery.

Our waiters wear stylish waistcoats in a subtle plaid. They are attentive, charming and focused on ensuring that everything goes well. Drinks orders are taken, but the list is short – no alcoholic beverages are on offer. Still, the lightly sparking cucumber-flavoured water proves to be a winner. My starter is a simple but



A modern menu in a 19th century fortress

tasty whipped brie, artfully presented with a few carefully arranged leaves and cranberries that are a perfect foil for the soft, rich cheese. Jenny's rabbit terrine is competent if not outstanding. Much more agreeable is her main course, an Indian-spiced risotto. My cod is perfectly cooked and sits on a delicious bed of potato and cabbage, even if the vanilla in the accompanying vanilla butter sauce is perhaps more adventurous than effective. I've rarely met a chocolate dessert I didn't like, and the chocolate with peanut butter tart is no exception. The peanut butter does not at all overwhelm. And Jenny is still fondly remembering her fig with cinnamon ice cream, topped by a gorgeous spun sugar confection.

In fact, all the food is beautifully presented and very much in the mould of today's modern restaurants. Service is not speedy for the 70 or so of us who arrived more or less

simultaneously, but it is professional and engaged.

In 1999, Alberto Crisci, who was catering manager at HMP Down, recognized the potential of some of the prisoners assigned to the kitchens and introduced City & Guilds NVQ training. By 2005, he had larger ambitions for what prisoners could do and in 2009 the first Clink restaurant opened in HMP Down. The Clink Charity was formed in 2010 to further the work.

Today there are four Clink Restaurants – Down, Cardiff, Brixton and most recently Cheshire. There is also Clink Gardens at women's prison HMP Send, with horticulture-related NVQ qualifications. The fruit, vegetables and herbs supply Clink Down and Brixton, as do eggs from their flock of Rhode Island Reds.

Catering

In 2013, Clink Events was launched to provide experience in catering. There is now even a line of Clink merchandise and a just-launched canape cookbook.

The Clink 5 Step programme—recruit, train, audit, employ and mentor—seems to be working. While the overall rate of recidivism for adult ex-offenders is a daunting 46.9% in the first year, among Clink graduates it was only 12.5% as of September last year, and appears to be falling further. Prisoners in the last 6 to 18 months of their term can apply to the Clink. If accepted, they work a 40 hour week while pursuing their NVQ qualifications in food preparation, front-of-house service and industrial cleaning.

To learn more, or book for breakfast or lunch: thelinkcharity.org/the-clink-restaurants/brixton-london

An encouraging word and a listening ear

Hayel Wartemberg outlines FAST, a new charity in east Battersea

When was the last time you felt truly happy?’ This was a question that I posed to one of our most vibrant yet also discouraged young people. He deliberated for all of 10 seconds before concluding, ‘When I was last in the (FAST) youth space.’

His response was a testament to the impact and importance of FAST’s presence on the Patmore Estate.

If one were to take a stroll through the often forgotten turf of one of Battersea’s most multicultural communities, you might think that it was like any other residential area. There are schoolchildren playing in large green spaces and playgrounds. Residents smile and greet each other amicably to and fro their daily activities, and exuberant teenagers attempt to re-create the skills of Cristiano Ronaldo in the football pen. On its surface, the Patmore Estate is a normal urban area of London replete with hardworking people. Indeed, it is this sense of solidarity that six years ago seduced our founder, Kerry Astin, into staying here.

‘Coming from “up north” I was used to living in a close knit community where everyone knows each other and really “does life” together’, Kerry says. ‘Patmore Estate is the only place I have found that resembles that kind of great community feel. Everyone knows everyone and they really look out for one another.’

Nevertheless, below the veneer of community cohesion was a worrying, toxic underbelly, and the reason for FAST’s existence. The Patmore languishes in the bottom 10% in the country for income deprivation, with an unemployment rate of one in three and a notorious gang culture that

often coexists with issues of drugs and violence. The estate was in need of an organization which would offer not lip service or quick fixes, but would rather equip local people with the tools to help positively transform not only their own lives, but those of their family and whole community. Enter FAST.

Shunned

I grew up in a very similar estate about ten minutes up the road, so I was aware of the challenges I would face in the youth work sector. However, I didn’t realise just how sizeable an influence a charity like FAST could have on re-shaping the lives and lifestyles of the disaffected. For those from troubled backgrounds who are continuously shunned by society’s blind and ruthless eye, FAST embraces. For those who are seeking to express their creativity, make new friends and enjoy new activities, our new youth space provides a place. For those who have been dejected in the search for employment and training opportunities, FAST provides the networks. This has been made evident in the last month when two of our brightest and most engaged young people have found employment through a combination of their hard work and ours.

Our relationship with Battersea Power Station, just across Nine Elms Lane, has been integral to this. The redevelopment of one of London’s most iconic locations means there is a pressing need for staff, and thus an opportunity for local people to gain employment. The connection between the Patmore and Battersea has never been stronger; indeed it was the financial muscle and

manpower of the people at the power station who worked together to help build FAST’s new home on the estate, opened in August 2015.

The redevelopment was projected to create 25,000 new jobs; a handful of people on the Patmore have already benefited from this. We can help more to do so through employment training, help with writing CVs and tips on job interviews – all are now on the doorstep of residents. Job opportunities are no longer a distant dream. There is a renewed energy and vigour in the area.

Our volunteers are also a testament to the mission. Joel Catchatoor, a young civil servant, spends his Thursday evenings hanging out in our space with some of our young people, because he understands the value of the project.

‘I volunteer with FAST because I have a passion for its vision to see the young people in and around the Patmore estate transforming their lives and community. I’m not here to do, or to tell – I’m here to listen, to encourage, support and enable these young people so they can fulfill the huge potential that I see in each one of them.’

And after years of neglect, that’s exactly what the Patmore needed – an encouraging tongue and a listening ear. Yet in spite of all the successes, many challenges remain. Whilst the lives and livelihoods of a subset of residents have been improved by FAST’s existence, only a fraction of the work we hope to carry out can be achieved with current financial constraints. If FAST is to reach more people, transform more lives and enable more people to fulfill the potential we incessantly see in them – we’ll need more funding to do it. *Hayel Wartemberg is a youth worker with FAST which merged this year with the Yorkshire-based youth charity e:merge. www.emergeonline.org.uk*

Messing about on the river

Jenny Sheridan meets some inhabitants of the Thames

You walk, slightly gingerly, down a metal gangplank, then onto a wider, more street-like pontoon. On either side of you is a row of boats moving slightly as the tide lifts them. These

are the houseboats at Chelsea Reach looking across the river at Battersea. Who lives on them, I wondered?

At the end of the row of boats, on the Embankment side, sits Arequipa,

the home of Pam and Roddy Mullin. Until 2013 they had lived for 28 years in a flat in Chelsea, and before that they were on Albert Bridge Road. Why did they leave dry land? ‘We’ve always loved the river,’ says Pam. ‘Living here is like being on holiday.’ Pam and Roddy moved into Arequipa before Christmas 2013, ► p16



Messing about on the river *continued from previous page*

just in time for a huge storm which set the boat rocking madly. With rain hammering on the metal roof and three grandchildren to keep amused they briefly wondered whether they had made a mistake. But they have no regrets, and the grandchildren think it's really cool.

One of the joys of living on the river is the birdlife. Their aquatic neighbours include cormorants, herons, gulls, ducks, terns and swans as well as Egyptian, Canadian and greylag geese. 'We had a goose and eight goslings on the boat,' says Pam. The goslings were in a large flower pot and were struggling to get out. Roddy fished them out one by one. Mum then unceremoniously chucked them over the side six feet down into the water.' Roddy adds that you realise the harsh side of nature. 'I saw a swan kill a gosling by drowning it. And a duck swam round and round in circles with nine ducklings until only four were left.'

The grandchildren love watching the planes and helicopters following the river, and the trains on Cremorne bridge as well as tug-led barges from the waste station and occasional kayaks and sailing boats.

'We have marvellous skies, particularly at dawn and sunset,' says Pam. 'The reflections on the water are beautiful.'

How practical is living on a boat? They have three bedrooms and two shower rooms and a spacious living room as well as a garden/deck. There is room for Roddy's model railway. Electricity is via the grid, the toilets are drained by vacuum, as in a plane, and the waste goes into the main drains.

They pay a moorings fee which, says Pam, is the equivalent of the service charge on a rather smart flat. Are there any other disadvantages? Pam thinks for a bit: 'Well, you might not want to wear high heels on the pontoons.'

In another of the 60 boats along Cheyne Walk lives Stefanie Harwood, who belongs to the Battersea Society (she used to take her daughter pony-riding in Battersea Park and commuted to her job as a children's book editor from Clapham Junction). 'I designed the interior of Mallard and had her built in 1967. I adore the water. I wouldn't want to live on a canal because it doesn't change, but here the view changes all the time. There can be a seven metre difference between low and high tides at spring tide. We on the outer line of boats spend about 6 hours afloat and six on mud each tide.'

Skull

This part of the river has been used and occupied since pre-historic times. From her vine-clad deck at low tide Stefanie can see two lines of wooden posts in the mud. 'They are an Anglo-Saxon fish trap, sunk on a diagonal to catch fish on a rising tide. And a trepanned skull was found from 2000 BC. Life on the river goes back a long way' she says. (trepanning, or boring a hole in the skull, may have been used to 'cure' epilepsy or psychosis).

When Stefanie arrived in the mid-1960s, 'the sewage was emptied into the river twice a week by Taffy' and water tanks were filled every day. 'It's much more civilised now'.



Stunning river views and friendly herons are part of everyday life. Photos: Roddy Mullin

Is there a downside to living here? 'Well, the mooring and maintenance charges are very steep, at over £1,000 a month. It's mostly older and richer people living here now.'

Over on the Battersea side of the river, boats are moored by St Mary's Church and at Albion Quay, near the Cremorne railway bridge. Alison Barnes and her family live aboard Gideon, a 30 metre Dutch barge, one of ten boats at Albion Quay. Alison explains that Gideon was built in 1927 in Holland to take cargoes of sweets along the Dutch canals. When her working days were done, her skipper bought her and refurbished the boat with loving care, lining the cabin with polished timber.

Unlike the purpose-built houseboats at Cheyne Walk, Gideon has the potential to sail away, but 'the engine is massive and we would have to collapse the deckhouse to get the boat under the bridge. We have a small boat which we take down to Barnes and Chiswick in the summer.'

Gideon is more spacious than the houseboats. There are four bedrooms and a large kitchen/dining/living room. Light comes from portholes high in the walls so there are no views except from the deck and the compact, cosy deckhouse, where the skipper and his wife used to live.

Paddling

But Alison loves seeing the swans and herons and – twice in 20 years – kingfishers. 'We once rescued five ducklings and kept them in a crate overnight because of the foxes. They had a paddling pool on the deck in the daytime. On our previous boat we rescued a gosling, which then adopted us. Billy used to sit on the sofa with us, watching TV, with the cat on the back behind us. Billy used to get terribly distressed if we left him and would honk loudly.'

Asked about disadvantages, Alison can only think of one: 'Our previous boat, the Anna Maria, used to slope at low tide. If I made a cake, it would be much thinner at one end than the other.'

That seems to me like quite a small price to pay in exchange for the mild, soothing motion and the endless fascination of life on the river!