

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society WINTER 2020



Distanced music in the dusk

Clarinetist Anthony Friend tells Jenny Sheridan about the Bandstand Chamber Festival

Moments of joy have been hard to find since March. But sitting around the bandstand in Battersea Park on a mild September evening listening to sublime music – live, at last! – was certainly one. Shrieking parakeets flying to roost and the occasional helicopter couldn't dent the pleasure of hearing Brahms and Mozart played by first class chamber groups.

The Bandstand Festival was founded by Anthony Friend, clarinetist and concert promoter. 'I got the idea while going for a walk in the park,' he says. 'I had looked at other venues to perform in a corona-safe outdoor venue but this one seemed ideal. The bandstand is surrounded by trees, so there wouldn't be noisy parties and there's the huge advantage of an events team, Enable, who have the staff and the logistics to make it all safe. They were brilliant. And Wandsworth Council were enthusiastic and enabled us to offer the concerts for free.'

Love Parks

'The council generously funded us with £10,000 as part of the Love Parks programme. I also had to raise £15,000 in little over a month. I'd had the idea in April and started programming but there was no certainty that it would happen. Lockdown ended on 4 July and there was a race against the weather. With some hugely generous donors, we made it and the first concert, by the Doric Quartet, took place on 1 September. We had an audience of about 250 for each of the four concerts. Interestingly, the Doric played at the Wigmore Hall the next night to an audience of just 50!'



The Bandstand Festival brought Brahms to Battersea Park

What does a musician do when all concerts are cancelled, as they were under lockdown between 23 March and 4 July? Anthony had worked mostly as a freelance clarinetist in orchestras so his income dried up. 'In normal times there's always work, but the whole ecosystem in London has collapsed. Being a freelancer doesn't feel precarious until suddenly it is. For all the musicians in the festival it was their first experience of playing

to an audience since March. It's quite different to playing just for enjoyment – you're very aware of the listeners' attention. And of course you get paid!'

Grateful

Although it is not his usual work, Anthony has always enjoyed the opportunity to play chamber music – 'joyous one-offs.' He explains the normal life of a chamber musician: 'It's the 8am train to a village you've never heard of in a county you've never been to, to be met by kind people and given soup and quiche – always quiche. And then in the evening you play to a very grateful audience of 100 people. There's this wonderful network of subscription music societies all over the country and that's how most string quartets make their bread and butter.'

Anthony is not new to organising festivals He has run the chamber concert series Camerata Musica

continued on p3



STOP PRESS
The Society's new booklet of walks is now available. For details, see back page



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

From the editor



Ah! That flash of cold fresh air on my face as I rip off my mask when I step off the bus. The pandemic has introduced

some completely new – unprecedented, indeed – pleasures. Another is tree bark. I'd never taken much notice of it before, but with so much walking, much of it on Wandsworth Common and in Battersea Park, trees are playing a more important part in my life. When you really look at tree bark its smooth greyness or whorled brown striations are as beautiful as the leaves.

Something else I have noticed

recently is the increase in doggy life. Here in Nappy Valley dogs have taken over from babies as the accessory of choice. An adorable cavapoo puppy in arms or cavorting at the heels attracts coos of admiration and requests for petting rights (including from me).

Walking

My social life now consists entirely of going for walks with friends – one at a time of course. I have walkdates in the way that children have playdates. Walking side by side is not only covid-safe but also conducive to conversation, even quite serious ones sometimes. And companionable silences are more natural in that situation than when sitting down with someone at home or in a café.

The combination of friends and being in nature has kept me positive

through the pandemic. We have all, particularly perhaps those of us living alone, become more than ever aware of the vital importance of friendship in these difficult times. I see the Battersea Society as one of the threads that hold us together, and as a potential and actual source of friendship. I hope that in the not too distant future we will be able to get together again in real life and continue forging and maintaining friendships.

I don't know about you, but I haven't been feeling very Christmassy recently. But that has changed: I have been sent a rather snazzy sequined Santa hat (see photo). I wish you all as merry a Christmas as possible.

Jenny Sheridan

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Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden considers risk, concern for others, and the sounds of summer

Perhaps you remember me talking in my last piece about how risk averse I am. Well, that particular philosophy did not stop me and my wife catching the virus. Don't know how don't know when ... Friends and family were astonished since both of us were so ultra-careful. Very luckily we escaped the nastiest effects. The continuing fatigue was and still is the worst thing but (touch wood) that's slowly receding at the time of writing. But over a month after it started we sense that there's still a long way to go. Anyway, don't cry for us dear readers just please Be Careful Out There as the station sergeant used to say in the tv show *Hill Street Blues*. Although the recent arrival of Lockdown 2 has considerably diminished what is out there to be careful in.

Does anyone still eat jam sandwiches? My question from last time was answered when two readers pointed out – very politely, of course – that there was nothing they enjoyed more than a jam sandwich. Apologies, and many thanks for the kind comments about my contributions to this journal. I should say that a particular favourite of mine is peanut

butter and Marmite mixed together on buttered toast. Before you all make disgusted noises I must remind you that Marmite is now selling those two things together blended in one jar. But you certainly will either love it or hate it!

Risking starting a similar sort of controversy I turn to an article from the *Times* recently brought to my attention by a member currently living with family in Scotland. One of their Scots correspondents writes of the growing trend for trainers to replace traditional leather shoes. I last wore such shoes at a wedding more than ten years ago and have never felt the need since. I wonder if leather footwear is really on the way out though. I get the feeling that there are plenty of gentlemen (and ladies) who shine up their shoes regularly every morning with Cherry Blossom or Kiwi polish much as my dad used to do. Let me know.

Not having travelled on a London Underground train since January I have missed one of the small pleasures that can accompany a trip. I'm talking about those handwritten Information Services that frequently stand near the station entrance.



They generally confine themselves to more or less redundant pieces of information such as 'Delays on the Circle Line'. Occasionally they contain a bit of home-produced humour.

Another of my correspondents (thanks Steph) has sent me a picture of such a notice from Dollis Hill (above):

There are echoes there of the BBC My Word game that Frank Muir and Denis Norden used to play. Hands up if you remember the story about the two Eskimoes (I mean Inuits of course) who while sitting in their canoe on a fishing trip got a bit chilly. They lit a fire in the craft and unsurprisingly it sank, which just goes to prove that you can't have your kayak and heat it

And that must be it for now. Thanks for listening. So mind how you go, be careful out there, and I'll see you next time.

continued from p1

Cambridge for several years. 'I'm following in illustrious footsteps,' he says. 'Liszt, Handel, Mozart – they all travelled from town to town raising funds, organising publicity, hiring the hall.' He believes that chamber music is growing in popularity, as well as being suited to the current times. 'There is a real interest in smaller, more intimate experiences. I think people find them more fulfilling. And there are many great musicians who would normally be flying off to play all over the world, with diaries booked up three years ahead, but who are now stuck here, with many concerts cancelled or uncertain. So, as some politician said, in every crisis there is an opportunity.'

Anthony is seizing the opportunity by organising his next festival, the Spotlight Chamber Concerts, originally scheduled to run from 28 November to 19 December in St John's Church, Waterloo. The dates have now been changed to start on



Anthony Friend introduces a concert at the bandstand

7 December and will run throughout December, government restrictions permitting. If not, Anthony has back-up dates for January and February.

'St John's is a big space, with no pews, so all the chairs are moveable. We're going to use the same ticketing and social distancing system that Enable used in Battersea Park – you book for a set number of people and the chairs are arranged to suit – groups of two or three, with plenty of space between groups. Unlike in the park, the audience will be paying, but a generous trust is subsidising tickets for local residents of Waterloo.' There are some starry names

playing in the concerts, including cellist Stephen Isserlis and baritone Roderick Williams. 'The concerts will be dramatically lit, with the audience in the dark and all the light on the musicians. They'll start at 6.30 and last about an hour, so there'll be plenty of time for a drink or supper afterwards, if we're allowed to do such things.'

Unique

Will there be another Bandstand Festival in Battersea Park next year? 'I'd love to do it. The park is wonderful, with its unique position on the river. And it was lovely bringing classical music to people who wouldn't necessarily think of going to a concert. Runners would stop and pull out their headphones and people stood by the barriers to listen. And organisationally it was a really good example of how a promoter and a venue and a council can work together. So, I hope so.'

www.spotlightchamberconcerts.com

When terror came to Battersea

Thirty years ago, Jenny Sheridan was told Northcote Road was dangerous. This is why.

When I moved to Northcote Road over 30 years ago, I was told to be careful – 'it's a haunt of terrorists'. It is hard now to imagine that this well-heeled and peaceful thoroughfare at the heart of Nappy Valley once harboured a bomb-making factory.

The discovery was made on 21 December 1988, not through months of careful detective work but through the chance shooting of a local youth. Eighteen-year-old Lewis Barratt was making his way back from the nearby Bolingbroke pub (now sadly demolished) when he spotted a car parked outside Staplehurst Court on Northcote Road. He smashed a window (perhaps looking for something to steal) and was astonished to be shot in the stomach by a man who had been sleeping on the back seat. Barratt managed to chase the man into the block of flats before collapsing.

Neighbours in the block heard the commotion and spotted two men driving off in a Rover, which was later

discovered abandoned at Rayners Lane station. When the police broke into the flat to investigate the shooting, they discovered a huge quantity of Semtex explosives and several semi-automatic weapons, as well as a list of potential targets and the handgun used to shoot Lewis Barratt. The bomb squad and anti-terrorist units were called in and almost 100 local residents were evacuated.

Evacuees

Among the evacuees was Harry Nicoll, who still lives nearby. He recounted how residents in their nightclothes were woken at 4am to be taken by bus to Lavender Hill police station for safety. 'It's the last place you'd expect something like this to happen,' he said at the time. 'It's like a cross between East-Enders and Coronation Street.'

A terrorist branch police commander said the next day

that it bore all the signs of being an IRA bomb factory and 'we have to accept that terrorism is here all the time.' He warned the public to be extra vigilant.

The discovery took place during a period of high tension in the 30-year Northern Ireland conflict. Ten years later the Good Friday Agreement was signed.

The Battersea bomb factory might have received more extensive press coverage if it had not occurred on the same night as the Lockerbie disaster, which killed 270 people. The Pan Am bomber used 450 grams of Semtex. Over 6,000 grams were found in Northcote Road. The teenager Lewis Barratt may have unwittingly foiled a massive IRA Christmas bombing campaign.





Good for developers, not so good for all of us

Michael Jubb outlines the Government's White Paper on planning

It is hard to find anyone who thinks that the planning system in England works well. Developers, and the Government, complain of complex bureaucracy and delays; and trust in the system is almost non-existent. When it comes to planning for large-scale development, just 2% of the public trust developers, only 7% trust local authorities, and there is no evidence that they trust central Government any more than that. But the Government intends to introduce major changes, set out in its White Paper, *Planning for the Future*. This article discusses the proposed changes and how they will affect everyone in Battersea and the rest of the country.

The current system

The planning system has evolved significantly since in 1947 the Town and Country Planning Act introduced a requirement that all development proposals have to secure planning permission from local authorities. In parallel, authorities were required to produce Local Plans on a regular basis to set strategies for development, and to outline the kinds of development permitted in each part of their areas. Three levels of plans affect us in Battersea:

- central Government policies;
- the London Plan produced by the Mayor and the Greater London Authority; and
- the Local Plan produced by Wandsworth Council.

Together, these set out the policies which determine whether or

not development proposals are acceptable. Because the London Plan and Local Plans form the statutory basis for decision-making, local people must be given the opportunity to influence the detailed policies and specific proposals for the development and use of land in their area. But the last two decades have seen increasing central Government involvement in local planning, with extremely limited consultation, for example by extending the kinds of development that do not require any planning permission, and through the creation of a National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to which all Local Plans must conform.

Before Local Plans can be adopted, they must be approved by the Secretary of State. A draft of the latest London Plan has been awaiting his approval for over a year. Wandsworth's current Local Plan was adopted in 2016, and in 2019 the Council began consultations for a new plan to be adopted in 2022. The Society's Planning Committee has been actively involved, along with other local societies, in those discussions. And we work with the London Forum of Civic Societies and others in seeking to influence the London Plan.

Wandsworth Council handles some five thousand planning applications each year. They range from proposals for major developments at Nine Elms, or the regeneration of the Winstanley Estate, to extensions and alterations to 19th century terraced houses. The Society's Planning Committee meets developers to discuss proposals for

large-scale developments, and we submit detailed comments on well over a hundred applications a year, focusing on the larger developments and on those affecting Battersea's twelve Conservation Areas. While we are by no means always successful, we have helped to bring significant changes in development proposals both large and small, and sometimes to stop the most damaging ones altogether.

The proposed new system

The White Paper proposals will massively reduce the influence that both we and Wandsworth Council have on what is built in Battersea for the future.

The Government's key aims are to speed up all aspects of the planning process, from the development of Local Plans to decision-making on individual proposals; and to provide greater certainty for developers. Local Plans will be reduced essentially to a digital map indicating what can be built where. All planning policies will be set at national level, to cover former mill towns in Yorkshire and Lancashire, rural areas from the Lake District to East Anglia, and major cities such as Birmingham and Bristol, as well as London.

Wandsworth's current Local Plan sets out 55 detailed policies on issues including housing, town centres and shopping, industry and employment, open spaces and recreation, the natural environment, community facilities, and transport. Some policies, such as those dealing with flood risk, may well be best



covered at national level, and the Local Plan refers at several points to the NPPF. But it is very difficult to see how many other policies can in any appropriate sense be developed and implemented at other than local level:

- the protection of front and back gardens;
- the development of community and cultural facilities;
- the siting and use of waste management facilities;
- changes of use for offices, pubs, and shops in protected frontages in town centres; or
- affordable housing and the appropriate mix of units of different sizes.

In these and many other cases, what will be appropriate in Kensington and Chelsea, let alone rural Cornwall, may not be appropriate for Battersea.

The White Paper emphasises the importance of ‘best in class’ engagement with local communities, and no-one could disagree with that; but it says little about how it is to be achieved. It also stresses the need to exploit new technologies to accelerate the planning process, make it more efficient, and to facilitate consultation; but again it says little about how this is to be achieved, and nothing at all about how those without ready access to the internet can participate in the process.

In the future, Local Plans will divide all the land under each local authority into one of three zones

- Growth zones suitable for ‘substantial’ development or regeneration, for which the Council will have to prepare outline masterplans and site-specific design codes. Once

adopted, these will automatically confer outline permission for the principle of development.

- Renewal zones where smaller-scale development is appropriate, including ‘gentle densification’ and infill. These are likely to cover much of Battersea, and again there will be a statutory presumption in favour of development and increasing densities. If proposals conform to standard building types and rules set out in ‘pattern books’ to be produced by the Government, they will receive automatic approval. Local authorities might be able to modify the standard types for specific areas, based on options popular in the local community. But it is wholly unclear how the provisions for Renewal zones might apply to intensely built-up areas such as Battersea, where conversion is much more common than new-build.
- Protected zones including ‘important’ green spaces and Conservation Areas. These will be the only zones in which planning applications will be required in all cases, and they will be judged against planning policies set by central Government, not locally.

The White Paper is unclear and contradictory on how these zones are to be defined, and how large they are to be. In areas such as Battersea with a dense urban fabric, the areas to be covered by Growth, Renewal and Protected zones may often be quite small, and highly-variable in nature, use and needs. Moreover, in both Growth and Renewal zones the scope for local community engagement will be limited to sketchy

masterplans and design codes. Any consultation on fully-detailed proposals, once they are produced, will be extremely limited. Full planning applications will be required only if proposals do not conform to the outline plans and codes – which the White Paper expects to occur only exceptionally.

The Society is joining with many other bodies in objecting strongly to these and many other aspects of the Government’s proposals. At present, large-scale developers pay a sum towards the infrastructure their buildings need, such as affordable housing, schools, health centres and traffic management. The government proposes to replace these contributions with a single infrastructure charge, set nationally. It also proposes to limit the conditions, such as those covering environmental protection and improvements, that can be attached to developers’ permission to build. And it fails to acknowledge that local authority planning departments are under-funded to take on the new tasks of preparing masterplans and design codes.

The current, imperfect, system at least provides us with a framework to influence what is built in Battersea and to protect its heritage. The new system will prioritise efficiency, speed and certainty for developers at the cost of local decision-making, democracy and accountability. The proposed moves towards central Government control are wholly unacceptable.

Michael Jubb is a trustee of the Battersea Society and is on its planning committee.

Dismantling dens, re-growing grasslands

Restoring parks and commons after heavy use will be complex. Annabel Osborn explains

As we enter autumn, we say goodbye to the long, hot summer days we've had and welcome the cooler, wetter weather into our parks and commons. We hope that this weather will provide a much-needed rest for our wildlife and habitats, providing them with life-giving water and less disturbance, allowing them naturally to return to some form of homeostasis. However, there is no doubt that the lasting effects of lockdown and such prolonged, high public usage will be felt for some time. This article will explore some of the ways we hope to help wildlife recover, and what you can expect to see over the coming months.

Regrowth

The full impacts of the compaction caused during lockdown on our grasslands are yet to be seen in our parks and commons, but we know resolving the damage will not be easy. On Wandsworth Common and Tooting Common we will be attempting to restore some areas of long grass by chain harrowing, which will de-compact the top soil, and also create some bare ground to give the finer grasses and flowers a chance to germinate. These areas will have signage and some fencing to keep the public informed of the work and to protect the plants' regrowth.

In the previous issue (*BM Autumn 2020*), Valerie Selby described the ways our woodlands are being explored and dissected with new routes branching through the undergrowth. This winter we will create 'dead wood barriers', which have multiple functions; they guide footfall, encouraging people to stick to main paths and keep certain areas undisturbed, and they also provide habitat in themselves to invertebrates that need dead, rotting wood to survive. This includes insects like the magnificent stag beetle, which we have records for across the Borough. An example of what these look like can be seen in The Scope on Wandsworth Common

On a similar note, the dens which relentlessly appeared in our

woodlands during lockdown will need to be dismantled to return the deadwood to the floor where it belongs, and where it is needed for the completion of the life cycle of certain invertebrates. Some of these wood piles will need to be pinned in place to prevent people from re-erecting dens, and we will use engaging signage to try and teach people more about the importance of this deadwood habitat.

The lake islands are some of the few areas where wildlife has managed to remain relatively undisturbed as there is no access to people. Here, we will be continuing with our regular rotational bramble management, which includes cutting back one third of the bramble on each island. A different section is tackled each year and this activity ensures we retain a mixture of different bramble ages, providing more varied habitat to wildlife, and also reinvigorates the bramble so it produces more leafy cover for birds, mammals and invertebrates, and more flowers and fruits in the years after cutting. This will help maintain the islands as a refuge for wildlife while our parks remain busy with people.

In the woodlands we will build on the work from last winter and continue to tackle the invasive non-native species, such as rhodo-

dendron and snowberry, which can dominate the understory. The purpose of this is to open up areas of the woodland floor for native species to grow up – many of these are already in the seed bank and need the space cleared to come through.

Butterflies

We will also continue keeping the 'glades' open where there are gaps in the tree canopy and plants such as wild parsnip, nettles and garlic mustard grow. These plants are particularly important as they are the larval food for Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Red Admiral and Orange Tip butterflies. These common plants are often overlooked by the public and considered 'weeds', but they are crucial for the survival of so many species and should be cherished.

Large portions of Battersea Park and Wandsworth Common are kept as amenity grass to provide the public with space to play sports, picnic, and to gather and these areas have been especially hard hit during the summer. With Government restrictions still in place on large gatherings, the decision to cancel Battersea Fireworks in 2020 was made. While this is disappointing for the thousands of people who gather to watch the spectacle, a silver lining is that the grassland will be spared that additional trampling and concentrated damage. I think it's important to take positives from things wherever we can these days!

Annabel Osborn is biodiversity officer for Enable.

A slightly different version of this article appeared in Battersea Park Review Autumn/winter 2020.

Congratulations to Wandsworth Common, which was awarded a Green Flag for the first time. These awards recognise good management in terms of safety, biodiversity, community involvement and quality of maintenance.

Happily, Battersea Park retained its Green Flag for another year.



Our dirty air and how to clean it

We can all work to improve air quality, says Jemima Hartshorn, founder of campaign group Mums for Lungs

Let's start with a stark statement: London's air pollution is a public health crisis and not enough is being done to tackle it.

Nearly every week research is published showing fresh links between breathing polluted air and numerous physical and mental health conditions including heart and lung disease, respiratory problems, dementia, miscarriage, stunted lung growth, teenage psychotic episodes and reduced cognitive ability. Children and babies are particularly vulnerable, and the effects may last for the rest of their lives. That's the reality that Mums for Lungs was set up to challenge.

Toxic

We are a network of parents campaigning to improve air quality across the capital and further afield. The group was founded three years ago by a group of mums in Lambeth who saw first-hand the effect of toxic levels of air pollution on their young children. Since then we have expanded into several other London boroughs, including Wandsworth, where we raise awareness, challenge politicians, respond to consultations and run provocative campaigns. These days we're not just mums, and we don't just care about children's health; this is a problem that affects everyone.

The two pollutants of most concern are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM_{2.5} or 10). Other dangerous pollutants include ozone and sulphur dioxide. Levels of these pollutants are far higher than legal limits in parts of London, and have been for many years.

Road transport is the single biggest cause of air pollution in cities. Diesel engines - once promoted as more environmentally-friendly alternatives to petrol - in particular have contributed to the high levels of NO₂ in London, but petrol engines are also a serious problem. Electric cars don't emit



A Mums for Lungs street party

pollutants from their tailpipes but they do contribute to particulate matter from brake and tyre wear, and making them is environmentally damaging too.

Wandsworth has high levels of traffic and therefore high levels of air pollution, even though only 45% of households in the borough have access to a car.

There's no doubt that the best way of tackling the problem is to get people out of their cars and onto public transport, walking or cycling. Active travel plays an absolutely key role in tackling the air pollution crisis, and has multiple additional benefits for public health, road safety, and in addressing the wider climate change emergency.

Throughout London, measures to restrict motorised traffic and improve conditions for cyclists and pedestrians have proved controversial, and Wandsworth is no exception; in September a low-traffic neighbourhood trial in the borough was scrapped following opposition from some residents. But the evidence is clear: low-traffic neighbourhoods in particular are effective in reducing residents' car ownership and/or use and increasing active travel.

One way in which parents can help is by advocating for School Streets, where roads around schools are closed to cars at drop-off and pick-up times. Not only do School Streets make the area around a school cleaner and safer, but they encourage parents

and children to use more sustainable and active forms of transport. There are currently 21 School Streets in Wandsworth and we provide resources and support for parents who want to advocate for one in their area.

But we want to do much more to improve the air we all breathe, and for that we need to put pressure on local authorities and central government to act. You can

help by writing to your councillors telling them you would like much more active transport in the borough and more restrictions on car use such as controlled parking zones and low-traffic neighbourhoods.

ULEZ

We are also continuing to support expansion of the Ultra-Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) to Greater London. Transport for London's April 2020 report into the first ten months of the ULEZ revealed there had been a 37% drop in roadside NO₂ levels in central London.

As well as these campaigns, we are working to combat pollution from wood burners and challenge misconceptions about air quality in the media. We've also held fabulous street parties on closed-off urban roads to show people what our cities could look, feel, sound and smell like if they weren't dominated by cars. If you'd like to get involved please get in touch through our website: www.mumsforlungs.org/

We have recently seen what the government is willing to do in a health emergency and what innovation in the face of a pandemic can look like. So we're optimistic that we can make the city a cleaner, greener, safer and better place to live.



Great Bus Journeys revisited

Mike Roden goes from Victoria to Roehampton on the 170 bus



In the current circumstances it seemed impractical for me to travel a new bus route. So the editor and I decided that it would be useful to create a revised version of a journey already taken, noting some of the major differences between then and now. I settled on the 170, because it is one of the earliest of the 'great bus journeys' and one I know well. Let me know if I've missed any major change.

Back in 2012 when this journey was taken, you had to wait for the 170 bus to Roehampton, Danebury Avenue on the cramped and narrow pavement on Buckingham Palace Road. These days the stop is on Victoria Street opposite some of the shops and restaurants forming part of Victoria's extensive redevelopment. What follows is largely the same account of the trip which appeared in 2012 but I've updated some information and you'll see that in square brackets.

Art deco

Thankfully the single-decker bus arrived promptly, and we headed off, past the Art Deco frontage of Victoria Coach Station, opened in 1932 by London Coastal Coaches Ltd, before turning right onto Ebury Bridge Road and into Pimlico the home of expensive antique dealers, and Lord Linley's upmarket version of Habitat. Today was not Saturday so the stalls of the weekly farmers' market weren't obscuring the elegant statue of a youthful violin-playing Mozart. He lived with his family on nearby Ebury Street.

[A new addition just before Chelsea Bridge Road is part of the six-storied Chelsea Barracks luxury development]

The Chelsea Royal Hospital, was commissioned by Charles II in 1681 to provide 'for the succour and relief of veterans broken by Age and War'. It was completed in 1692 in the reign of William and Mary. Well worth a visit – especially the Chapel, and the little museum.

At the next bus stop a couple of Chelsea Pensioners joined us, wearing their unflamboyant blue everyday uniform. The National Army Museum concentrates very much on the life of the ordinary soldier and has an interesting art collection. Nearby is the Chelsea Physic Garden which was established in 1673; only Oxford's botanical garden is older. Here the bus joins the embankment and heads on towards Albert Bridge, with a good view of Battersea Park's Peace Pagoda over the river.

Medieval building

Sir Thomas More's statue sits outside Chelsea Old Church. His house near Beaufort Street has long gone, but what remains of his private chapel can still be seen in the church. This is not the original building, which suffered catastrophic damage during the Blitz, and was completely rebuilt after the war. Crosby Hall, at the end of Danvers Street is apparently the most important surviving secular domestic medieval building in London. It was moved from its Bishopsgate location in 1910 and since 1988 it has belonged to the financier Christopher Moran who has added a handsome neo-Elizabethan mansion fronting onto the Embankment.

Crossing the river via Battersea Bridge, the bus turns down Battersea

Church Road, once the home of the Morgan Crucible works. The inhabitants of Morgan's Walk, the estate built on its site are reputedly those who once asked for this part of north Battersea to be designated New Chelsea. The Hovis flour mill once stood on the site of Richard Rogers' Montevetro building – right next door to St Mary's Church, which needs no introduction to most members of the Battersea Society.

Oldest bridge

The name of Battersea Square – once the historic village centre – vanished from maps sometime during the twentieth century. In 1990 Wandsworth council set about restoring the square, and revived the name. On Vicarage Crescent we pass Old Battersea House which dates from the late seventeenth century and was once the UK home of the Forbes family. [It has changed hands a couple of times in the last few years and was sold in August 2020. The guide price was £9,975,000 so affordable housing it ain't!]

Almost immediately we pass under London's oldest railway bridge – the height of which explains why this route is served by a single decker. Nearby is the Hotel Rafayel which styles itself as being on 'London's left bank', a marketing idea which hasn't really caught on yet.

Soon after turning onto York Road we encounter the construction site for part of the Tideway tunnel scheme then head down Plough Road on our way to Grant Road and the back entrance to Clapham Junction station.

On Falcon Road we pass the busy café next to the Travelodge. [These

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



days please pay your respects to the Arding and Hobbs Building whose long-term future has yet to be determined]. Round the corner on St Johns Hill the two Chelsea Pensioners (you probably thought I'd forgotten about them) disembark at the stop opposite the station. No doubt the shopping opportunities here seemed more congenial (and affordable) than on the King's Road.

Continuing up the hill past the station entrance on Brighton Yard we reach the other end of Plough Road, and here take a quick look at the Grade II* listed Transformation House, opened in 1937 as the Granada Cinema, and now a very upmarket conference centre which includes an auditorium capable of seating 2,500 people. An ideal place for a Battersea Society meeting perhaps, except that daily hire costs £14,000 (plus VAT). Just beyond the St John's Therapy Centre is the site of the old Union Workhouse, now a residential estate. After crossing Trinity Way, the bus trundles down East Hill into Wandsworth.

Huguenots

There are several references here to the Huguenots in street and building names. Many of them fled here from persecution in 17th century France, and their old burial place (known as Nod Hill) which closed in 1854 is nearby.

The Town Hall was opened by Queen Mary in 1937 – across its whole façade is an ornate frieze depicting events from the town's history. Along Wandsworth High Street is the Southside Shopping Centre – built on the site of the

Wandsworth Greyhound Stadium.

[Redevelopment of the section fronting onto Garrett Lane was completed in 2015, and in terms of retail square footage the centre is second only to the Westfield centres at Stratford and White City].

The bus continues up West Hill past the former Wandsworth Museum which shared its home with the De Morgan Centre (whose treasures were once housed in Old Battersea House). [The museum closed in 2016 and the building now houses a private nursery school].

Charity

The most impressive sight on the next stretch of the busy A3 is the Royal Hospital for Neuro- Disability which was established in Carshalton in 1854 by philanthropist Andrew Reed as 'The Hospital for Incurables'. With aid from supporters like Charles Dickens and Florence Nightingale it moved in 1863 to its current site, formerly part of Lord Spencer's estate. It's now the oldest independent hospital and medical charity in the UK.

As the bus reaches Tibbet's Corner, it begins the steep climb up Putney Hill to Putney Heath and the Green Man. This inn (which probably dates back to 1700) featured in *War of the Worlds* by H G Wells when the narrator – fleeing the Martian invaders – breaks in looking for food. It's said that the pub was often a refuge for those who had taken part in the duels which were fairly commonplace on the heath, including one (bloodless) 1798 encounter between Prime Minister William Pitt and William Tierney MP. Thomas Cromwell – the nemesis of Sir Thomas More whom

Sights to see:

Victoria Coach Station, The Royal Hospital, statue of Sir Thomas More, Chelsea; Mount Nod cemetery, Wandsworth; The Green Man pub, Putney and former LCC housing in Roehampton

we met earlier on the trip – was born nearby.

And that's nearly it. The route follows the edge of Putney Heath for a few minutes, and then takes you down into Roehampton. Here there are faint traces of the country village it once was – a few small cottages – but the rest is a far cry from the wealthy neighbourhood at the start of this trip. Journey's end is at Minstead Gardens on Danebury Avenue. It's spitting with rain, but back then we took the ten minute walk to Richmond Park via the Roehampton Gate, and enjoyed a well- deserved coffee and muffin. There are other ways to return home, but we simply returned on the 170.



Murder on the Northern Line

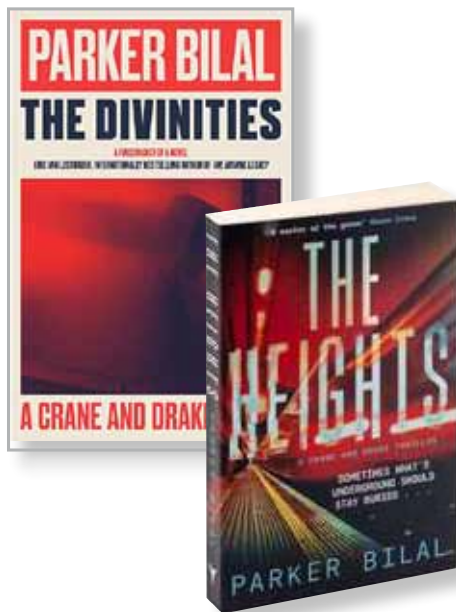
Janice Morphet outlines new detective fiction set in south London

Battersea has been the main location for Golden Age detective fiction written by Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers and played a supporting role in John Le Carre's novels including *The Deadly Affair*, *Looking Glass War* and *Mission Song*. Now, Battersea is emerging again as a crime location in new detective work, including Robert Bryndza's *Nine Elms*, (2019) where the plot is concerned with the way in which a young police detective, Kate Marshall, finds a serial killer but with dire personal consequences. Fifteen years later, there are copycat crimes where Marshall remains one of the intended victims. In the original crimes, in 1995, the events occur in a wrecker's yard in Vauxhall and spread out over South London to the south coast.

Crosshead

Another new crime series set in Battersea stays closer to the location as the plots develop. These are written by Parker Bilal and set in the present when some things in Battersea have changed while others have remained the same. In these books, *The Divinities* (2019) and *The Heights* (2020) Cal Drake, a detective, investigates crimes on the Battersea riverside and then at Clapham Common tube station.

In the first of this new series, *The Divinities*, we are firmly on the Battersea riverside at the fictional Magnolia Quays, off York Road. DS Drake knows the area well as he lived there as a child and uses his memories to reflect on the rate of change. As his colleague says, 'there's nothing there. Converted or disused warehouses. An antique store, used furniture, that sort of thing, all awaiting extinction'. He knew what she meant. In a couple of years they would be gone. 'Ripped down to make way for new properties.' The plot revolves around two brutally murdered bodies found



on the riverside building site and the efforts to find the killers with forensic psychologist Dr Rayhana Crane.

This is the Battersea of small shops, hot food takeaways but also of change. Drake watches the dawn emerge 'The four towers of Battersea Power Station stood out like the pillars of a shattered temple. The horizon was still dotted with angry red eyes, the warning lights on dozens of crane rigs that ranged across the skyline'. Drake's peripatetic life as a child enhances his understanding of the way in which the riverside works and helps to solve the crime.

Murder

The second book, *The Heights*, starts with a severed head found at Clapham Common tube station. Crane and Drake team up together again to solve this murder that has links with Crane's father who was involved in the Iraq war, through the intelligence dossier, as was Drake – a former soldier before he joined the Met.

The crime disrupts commuters and much of the plot of the book is set in the Underground, following its lines from Earls Court to Finsbury Park, emphasising how each station is an entrance to a much wider London.

This is a modern world of coffee

and wine bars, CCTV, the links between the underground and the overground, of people smuggling, modern slavery and terrorism. The older world of a Chinese restaurant in Wandsworth Road is still there as a backdrop to the continuing face of Battersea. The pot is again centrally inked with Drake's memories, this time of the Iraq war. South London is also present to create the milieu for the crime.

Parker Bilal is a pseudonym of Jamal Mahjoub, who was born in London, lived across the world and already has a number of other books published including the *Makana* detective series.

Real

Speaking in 2019 at the Balham book festival about *The Divinities*, Bilal said that, although he enjoyed setting the first of his new series in Battersea, he had no particular plans to continue it in South London, so the location of *The Heights* was unexpected. Perhaps we will see more of this pair in other Battersea locations in the future. There is no doubt in reading Parker Bilal's books, you are definitely in the places he describes. They feel real and, for Battersea readers, suggest a world below the surface that can only be guessed at.

A MATURE, SUBSTANTIAL-LOOKING MAN

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries drug stores were cheaper competitors of chemists, selling their own makes of many medicines, sometimes using dubious practices. One such was Parkes Drug Store at 313 Lavender Hill, on the corner of Ilminster Gardens. An article in the trade journal indicated that stores should avoid young assistants. 'A mature, substantial-looking man can sell almost what he likes.'

The story of these drug stores, and also that of the Lurline Gardens Library (1890 – 1971) is told in *The Wandsworth Historian* autumn 2020.

**Copies from the editor Neil Robson
0208 874 6341**

Planning Matters: Traffic concerns and a new blight

Monica Tross reports on design wins and losses

DO CONSULTATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

In the case of the recent Government white paper (see page 4) probably not, but nonetheless we put a lot of work into our response. The same lack of influence is likely to be true of plans for changes to the current planning system and possibly even the Council's Urban Design consultation (outcome to be published in January). So far we continue to respond, in part because it enables us to share our views with the planning team at Wandsworth Council – and of course with our members. Our response to all three of these can be found via the Planning Consultations link on the Society's website.

WANDSWORTH DESIGN AWARDS

A much jollier form of 'consultation' is our participation in the review of candidates for these awards, usually followed by a party, though not this year. Four sites won in Battersea with Battersea Arts Centre the lead for 'its exemplary and scholarly restoration following a fire ... a phoenix arising from the ashes ... within a grade II* listed building'. Smaller winners are the Archlight Cinema at Battersea Power Station, 'an imaginative and well-executed design' and the 'well-executed' conversion at 21 Cabul Road of the former Milton Congregational Hall, built in 1885 by James Holloway to the design of Searle & Hayes, architects. Finally the Thessaly Road Bridge artwork by Yinka Ilori in collaboration with local people and a school does indeed turn 'an uninviting bridge into a more welcoming space'.

TELECOM EQUIPMENT – A NEW BLIGHT ON THE STREETScape

Readers may remember our constant battle (not always successful) to stem the tide of advertising plaques masquerading as phone boxes and their successor the Inlink 'information' stands. We are now seeing the rise of a new blight with rooftop additions and poles with the recent

case of proposals for twelve new antennae on the roof of Bolingbroke Academy (2020/3556 and 3558), a 20m pole in the centre of Battersea Park (2020/2853), a telecom mast in Petworth Street (2020/3588) and more equipment on the roof of the Glassmill in Battersea Bridge Road (2020/3746). We will object to those which have an adverse effect on the streetscape, particularly from open spaces or with an impact on conservation areas.

NINE ELMS/BATTERSEA UPDATE

Another arch is due for a facelift. Arch 42 is one of a series of arches forming a section of the Victorian railway viaduct carrying the south western main line into Waterloo station and is to the south of Covent Garden Market. It will be opened up to create a new route between Nine Elms station, Nine Elms Lane and the River Thames. A design competition is being held and the short list will be announced soon.

Plans for the new health centre in Sleaford Street have been agreed between Wandsworth Council and the NHS. See: ninee.london.com for more details and information of other events in Nine Elms..

BUSES IN NORTH BATTERSEA

Those of you who travelled to work in normal times will know how very crowded the buses along Battersea Church Road and Battersea Bridge Road were at peak hours. Assuming we will be back to normal sometime in the next year or two there will be added pressure with Thomas's school adding some 500 new arrivals once the secondary school is up to full numbers (2020/3115). The Crewkerne Garages development, with 101 new homes proposed in a 19 storey tower and a 4 storey low rise building, will add further pressure. While we are generally happy with the Thomas's proposals we would like to see clearer information about their travel plans. We continue to alert the Council to our concerns about

transport capacity (especially on the 170) and about the need for a thorough review of traffic flow along Battersea



Bridge, Battersea Church and Westbridge Roads. We first made these points around 2010 and I begin to think they will still be a concern in 2030. In the meantime there are rumours of traffic calming measures along Battersea Church Road but we have no firm information.

OTHER PLANNING NEWS AND UPDATES

Arding & Hobbs' application is in (2020/3421 and 3484). While we are in favour of the conversion we have objections to aspects of the current proposals. There has been a flurry of concern over plans to demolish a house at 59 Sudbrooke Road (2020/2797) and replace it with a much larger development, and similar concerns about 5 Parma Crescent (2020/3505). ASDA changed its mind about removing planting around the car park (2020/3073) after many objections. Plans for the Randall Close development (2020/0635) were approved as expected. Changes to the building at 61 – 63 St. John's Road (2020/2483) currently housing the Blacks store were also approved.

Planning comments are available on an the Council's website until a decision is made, after which the plans and the committee report remain but comments are removed. In the case of major applications our comments remain on our website. We do not put our comments on smaller applications on the website but can always email them to you once they are no longer on the Council's website. Just contact planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

Feedback appreciated

We always like to hear from our members so do comment, on this article, or on planning in general. planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

Time and Place: A winter's tale

Mike Roden spins a strange yarn

Laura is the daughter of some old friends. She arrived in London some years ago to work for a PhD in Chemistry at Imperial College. Naturally she was steered in the direction of finding a flat in Battersea or nearby. Once settled she'd come over occasionally on her bike and we'd feed her. As a reward she kept us up to date with her growing interest in psychic phenomena.

She gave us a mock glare, 'I blame that book you sent me when I was about ten. Mum and Dad were worried it'd give me nightmares. I found it fascinating. Not that I believed most of it even then.'

She told us about the house she'd shared in Sheffield which was reputed to have a poltergeist. She and her fellow students thought it was a small price to pay for such a low rent. But it was unsettling to have books falling off shelves without warning, or furniture shifting across the floor. And the stairs were constantly creaking as if someone was walking stealthily up and down.

Poltergeist

'I'm a scientist – there's usually a rational explanation,' she said, 'I took a visit to the town hall and looked at some maps.' A rueful smile, 'I wasn't all that popular though – with both my housemates and the landlord. We had to move out while he had the expense of sorting out the subsidence which was responsible for the poltergeist.'

'The law of unintended consequences,' I observed. 'It's not always so easy to explain things away. For instance, there was a case in the fifties – in Balham – not far from where you live...'

'The woman who was in two places at once? she said and I nodded.

'That's the one. Her daughter claimed she was shopping with her, but the woman's husband insisted she'd been at home all the time in a deep sleep.'

Laura considered. 'There was no real evidence that the two events took place at the same time.'

'The local papers loved it of course.'

'But it was probably a result of mixing up dates or something.' She grinned. 'Maybe I'll look into it one day.'

Unexplainable

Once qualified Laura was offered a university post and stayed in south London. Her scepticism was undiminished – away from the day job she continued to take a forensic interest in the allegedly unexplainable activities of things that go bump in the night and was writing a book on the subject. Which is why when the Events Committee organised a talk on 'Hauntings in Battersea' and needed a speaker I thought of Laura.

That year it had been an unusually chilly November. We'd had a spell where the skies were ice-blue and the frost hardly lifted all day. Like going back to the winters of my childhood, although I'm glad to say that ice did not form on the inside of our bedroom window.

As we started to gather in the church it was clear the audience for Laura's talk was going to be very small. I suspected the dangerously icy pavements were putting off many, and it was also getting foggy. But the bar was open – 'Pity there's no mulled wine', said someone – the screen was set up, and the computer loaded with the memory stick that Laura had sent in advance.

Time went on a bit, and the organisers started to look nervous. 'She's a bit late, isn't she? Are you sure this friend of yours is reliable?'

Luckily at that moment Laura arrived. She looked a bit flustered,

distracted even, but she smiled brightly enough. 'So sorry I'm late. I ... I got delayed.' For moment she looked down beyond the meagre audience in the first two or row of pews, and narrowed her eyes as if trying to see something in the distance. The moment passed and she turned to the chair, who introduced her.

Then she shook herself and became brightly efficient, her normal self – although on and off she let her eyes play over the far end of the church. So much so that other people occasionally sneaked a surreptitious glance in that direction. There was nothing there.

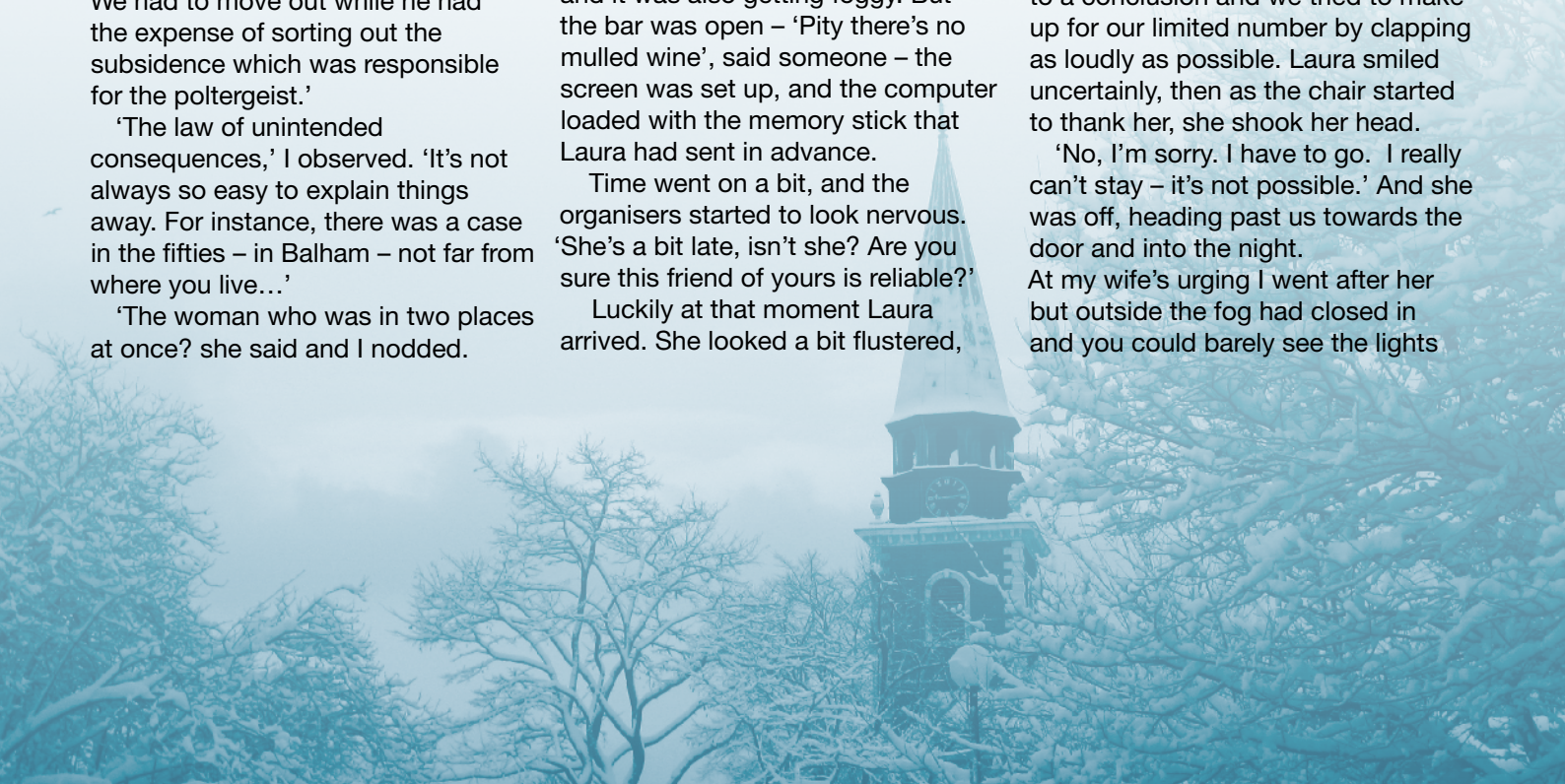
If you were there you'd probably agree that Laura was one of the best speakers we'd had for a long time. She gave a little nod of her head when she wanted the presentation (beautifully put together) advanced to the next slide. I'd heard most of the stories – the one about her first 'poltergeist' of course, and another one about a feline apparition in Tooting.

If you've ever owned a cat you'll know how sometimes they tense, ears pricking, fur bristling and eyes fixed on something you can't see. As she told the story she went very tense herself, and like the cat she stared fixedly towards the back of the church her face pale and her hands clenched. Once again most of us looked round half fearfully but we could see nothing.

Soon after that she drew the talk to a conclusion and we tried to make up for our limited number by clapping as loudly as possible. Laura smiled uncertainly, then as the chair started to thank her, she shook her head.

'No, I'm sorry. I have to go. I really can't stay – it's not possible.' And she was off, heading past us towards the door and into the night.

At my wife's urging I went after her but outside the fog had closed in and you could barely see the lights



on the other side of the river. I could certainly see no sign of Laura and saw no point in following her. I went back inside. 'I'm sure she just went for the bus.'

'Well, let's hope so,' said my wife.

When we got home I sent Laura a text hoping she'd got home OK.

A reply came almost at once. 'I'll tell you about it tomorrow.'

She phoned the following afternoon. My wife took the call. After listening for a few moments she looked concerned, 'Are you sure you're all right?' She listened again. 'Yes, it happens to us all. Well, as long as you're OK. Yes, he's here.'

She put her hand over the mouthpiece. 'She wants to talk to you. She spent the night in St George's under observation. Slipped over on the ice and banged her head.'

She handed the phone over with a mouthed, 'Be sympathetic.'

'Hi Laura,' I said, 'Sorry to hear about ...'

'My own fault. Running for the 319 I skidded and crashed into a wall. I

suppose I was knocked out for a minute and was in a kind of daze when I came round. Didn't quite know what was going on. Someone called an ambulance and ...'

'Good job it didn't happen on your way to give your talk,' I said.

Silence

There was a long silence, then Laura said slowly, 'I was late, which was why I was rushing. I was really looking forward to giving that talk.'

Confused, I said, 'Are you saying the accident happened on your way here?'

'Yes I'd only just set off,' she said, 'I spent the rest of the evening at St George's. Still in that weird daze where I could see what was going on round me, but there were shadows behind the things that were really there.' She finished, 'I was sure I was giving the talk in the church. Then just before eight o'clock I came back to normal – with a bit of a sore head.'

'That would be about the time you left – saying you had to rush off. It

was an excellent talk by the way.' I thought of the way she'd stared at the back to the church, seeming to see something. Shadows behind the things that were really there, perhaps.

Laura didn't speak for a long time. 'Like the woman from Balham. Two places at once.'

'Impossible, but possible at the same time?' I suggested.

I've not told that story before because we agreed that Laura could use it in the book she was writing. Anyway, that's a project which has been shelved for a while as she and her new husband head for New York to take up posts at Columbia University, so she said I could go ahead and write it.

So this is the first time I've told this the story. If you were one of the privileged dozen or so members and friends at that meeting in St Mary's Church some years ago I suppose you can confirm that it happened. If you believe it ...

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Battersea Society Events December 2020 – March 2021

DECEMBER

● **Thursday 17 December, 6pm**
The Dickens Christmas Carol Tour
Richard Jones, Blue Badge guide and author of *Walking Dickensian London* will be dressed in his Victorian finery for a virtual walk through the London of A Christmas Carol. Follow Richard on a journey back to Christmas Eve 1843 as he leads you, ghost-like, through snowy alleyways and explores Dickens's timeless classic. One hour with an opportunity for Q&A at the end.

JANUARY 2021

● **Wednesday 6 January, 6pm**
Twelfth Night Poetry Night
Poet and Battersea Society member Hilaire will read some of her critically acclaimed works including those from joint poetry project *London Undercurrents*, which unearths the voices of women who have lived and worked in Battersea over the centuries.

● **Thursday 21 January, 6pm**
Talk on Battersea Riverside Industrial Heritage

Discover the industrial heritage of Battersea with local historian Jeanne Rathbone. The waterfront between Wandsworth Bridge and Battersea Bridge was home to major industries including Princes Candle Factory, Garton's Glucose, Battersea Enamels, the Flours Mills, Morgan Crucible and Brunel's Sawmills.

FEBRUARY

● **Thursday 11 February, 6pm**
Virtual Walk round Battersea's Locally Listed Buildings
Trustee and local heritage expert Carol Rahn researched and photographed hundreds of buildings and structures in Battersea that helped Wandsworth Council compile its Local Listings register. She has devised a virtual walk between some of the most interesting buildings, so you can enjoy the diverse heritage and history of Battersea from the comfort of your own home.

MARCH

● **Thursday 18 March, 7pm**
Lookback at Lockdown talk and Battersea Society AGM

Aaron Barbour, Director of Katherine Low Settlement will look back at a year since the initial Coronavirus lockdown in March 2020. He will describe how Battersea organisations and residents worked together to help our community and the positive initiatives that have remained. The AGM will include updates from the Society's Chair and Committees.

● **Date to be confirmed**
Battersea Power Station's Heritage Contractors
At the heart of the 42-acre Battersea Power Station development lies the Grade II* listed Power Station. Restoration work is near completion with the Power Station scheduled to open to the public in 2021. Some of the heritage tradespeople involved in the restoration will share their experiences of working on this great building.

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

Sid, his wife and his Jag

Christine Eccles tells a tale of wrong-doing at the Town Hall

Sid Sporle (1920 – 1981) was a local boy made good – or was he? Battersea born and bred, he started public life as a dynamo of the post-war Battersea Borough Council but ended his career in ignominy. The son of a Battersea railway porter, he left school at 14 and became a fitter-welder, living in Latchmere Road. After he married his wife Mabel, a fellow Labour councillor, the couple moved into a flat on the Peabody Estate, St John's Hill. Sid was hugely popular with the electorate who liked seeing this local lad and his fur-coated wife parking their Jag on the Peabody forecourts. They didn't ask any awkward questions about where his money was coming from.

Distress

Sid went into local politics for the right reasons – wanting to serve his community. Having joined the Council in 1945, he became Battersea's youngest mayor in 1954. Sid was well used to constituents knocking at his door in some distress at all hours of the day and night. Invariably housing was their main issue, and Sid became frustrated at the snail's pace of the council's housing projects.

He determined to rid Battersea of its grim post-war slums and his vision was to build a 'New Jerusalem'. The film *Up The Junction* (1968) captures that period which saw the terraced houses come tumbling down and the multi-storey blocks go towering up. It also captures the community spirit that existed in these over-crowded conditions.

The Winstanley Estate which began construction in 1956 was the first of Sid's big projects. He was so excited by the architect's ideas – particularly for children's play provision on the rooftop deck - that he 'read it over six times'. 'The Winstanley got a gold medal award for design' he said. 'It was heaven... a separate kitchen, separate toilets. It was unheard of in the old days ... You went down the end of the garden ... In the old houses there were four to five families to a house. Some houses didn't even have a bloody roof.' Towards the end of its construction, density regulations changed and tower blocks using industrialised prefabricated techniques and a negotiated contract were added to the scheme. This form of contract which replaced honest tendering with sealed bids was to prove Sid's downfall.

When the boroughs of Battersea and Wandsworth merged in 1965 he became a powerful member of Wandsworth Council. He was its Deputy Leader and Chair of the Housing Committee and here he built up secret alliances with council officers, opposition Tories and businessmen via the Town Hall's Freemason's Lodge. As the Town Clerk at the time noted later, 'The real

seriousness ... was the incestuous relationship between the two opposing leaders, Sidney Sporle and Ronald Ash. Sporle ... had no visible means of support, he didn't have a job, but he nevertheless lived at a fair old rate, always having rolls of five-pound notes in his pocket.' Sid's new mate was Ash, the Tory leader, who was the proprietor of a small Balham builders' merchants.

Valuable

In 1968 Labour lost the election and shortly after the victorious Conservative group met to consider the council's representative on the South London Housing Consortium, an organisation set up to enable councils to bulk buy building materials. Ronald Ash nominated the Labour leader – Sid, his brother freemason. Ash with Sid in his pocket was to gain many valuable contracts through the Consortium. But Sid with Ash in his pocket was to access multi-million pound deals through negotiated contracts.

It began in earnest with the Doddington Estate which was system-built between 1967 and 1971 - with the 'help' of T Dan Smith. T Dan Smith was the Leader of Newcastle City Council and together with architect John Poulson was behind the corrupt housing practices of the 1960s. Through his PR firm Smith got involved with Wandsworth by pushing redevelopment schemes through his contact, Alderman Sidney Sporle.

Ambitious

Under Sid's galvanising direction Wandsworth fully embraced an ambitious goal to build 1000 plus homes a year. 'Sentiment must not be allowed to stand in the way of progress ...' Sid said, 'we have to look to the future. This is Socialism. Three years ago we were building



250 new homes each year, now we shall build a thousand or more a year'. Laings won the contract for the Doddington without any competition. Essentially the Doddington was a bespoke scheme – thus putting into Sid's greasy palm backhanders, bribes, blackmail opportunities and the more than occasional sweetener of lavish hospitality. For a start he went to Sweden (all expenses paid by the developer) to check out the preferred building system.

Corruption

Sid left a bewildering trail of corruption. We may never know the half of it but we do know he amassed 'salaries' worth about £60,000 per annum in today's values. Some of these 'salaries' were paid to Sid's wife Mabel. Not bad for a poor boy from the Peabody – but nothing to compare with the big bucks made by the really big boys from the North! Perhaps some of the desperate midnight callers at his Peabody flat were also offering him smaller inducements to secure a desirable council flat – those rolls of fivers had to come from somewhere.

They say you throw a sprat to catch a mackerel and Sid was that sprat. In this case not just a mackerel was caught but whopping big sharks. After a trial that lasted for weeks, in 1971 Sid Sporle was sentenced to six years under the Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act 1889, with the judge comparing corruption to dry rot: 'it is insidious and it spreads fast'. Bizarrely, although Sid was convicted of taking a bribe from T Dan Smith, Smith was acquitted of bribing him! Nevertheless eventually he and Poulson were hauled before the courts again and similarly sentenced. On appeal Sid's sentence was reduced to four years, largely because 600 local residents had signed a petition in support. The appeal court judge said: 'This is an example ... where a man of perfect character who has done a great deal of exceptionally good work for the community commits a serious breach of his trust ... such cases must be marked with a substantial sentence of imprisonment'

'If I had my way,' said John Betjeman the poet laureate who was instrumental in saving Battersea Town

Hall from Sporlification in the late 1960s, 'all "developers" would be put in prison for the crime of murdering our souls.'

Sid became a free man within a couple of years but his legacy lived on. Problems on the Winstanley quickly surfaced with faulty lifts, condensation, vandalism and the unsupervised playdeck. And the proposed community centre never left the drawing board. As for the Doddington, Sid's vision of 'streets in the sky' was impossibly flawed – partly because of the contracts awarded to those small local firms who had bribed him. They were not sufficiently experienced for a project of this scale. At its worst, 400 of its 970 flats lost heating and two plumbers were kept on permanent standby. The sewage system suffered from backflow and tenants were blamed for stuffing cabbages down their lavatories! Without the community cohesion and informal supervision of the old streets, social problems multiplied: anti-social behaviour, vandalism and isolation.

No Robin Hood

Labour regained the Council in 1971 with a new slate of young councillors who put Sporlification well at arm's length. Although he was no Robin Hood – in fact it could be said that he stole from the poor to give to the rich – despite Sid's corrupt shenanigans he remained a popular figure. Moves to re-name Sporle

Court (left) got nowhere.

He was still a comparatively young man when he died in 1981 aged only 61. His son Sydney eventually became director of planning at Westminster Council. He was so traumatised by his father's fall from grace that he was determined not to be sucked under by bribes or blandishments. Not a cup of coffee was drunk by him at a developer's expense. .

When the irrepressible Sid senior was asked if he had any second thoughts about this sorry ending to his otherwise praiseworthy career he merely said, 'Life is too short for regrets, mate.'

Note from the author

I was director of Mayday Theatre based at BAC in the 1970s and co-wrote All The Councillors' Men about corruption at Wandsworth Town Hall. It was based on research particularly with the former Town Clerk. He was still scared of the repercussions of talking about this saga and many of its details beg more questions than answers.... this is by no means the definitive account.

Congratulations!

Battersea Arts Centre received a substantial grant from the government's Cultural Recovery Fund. BAC has been unable to open as planned but its Beatbox Academy's version of *Frankenstein* (above right) was shown on BBC TV and they have commissioned artists to create various digital performances. BAC has played a major part in the creative packs for children initiative and is crowdfunding to repeat it in the Christmas holidays. If restrictions ease in December they hope to put on some pop-up theatrical activities but are looking to spring 2021 for a return



to normal creative activity.

Omnibus Theatre in the old Clapham Library on Clapham Common also received a government grant, which will enable them to remain operational until next spring. In October the theatre opened briefly in covid-secure conditions for a comedy, *We were having a perfectly nice time*, which sold out swiftly. They have been running creative activities with children and elders in both virtual and real life.

Discovering Battersea's open spaces

Author Clare Graham outlines the Society's first booklet of walks

I've lived and walked in Battersea for many years, but – like many of us I would guess – since March I've come to a new awareness of just how precious a resource our wonderful local collection of parks, commons and other open spaces is. Walking out of doors and in Nature is of such very great benefit always, for both our physical and our mental wellbeing. It's something I had always managed to do every day anyway, as a dog owner, but during that first scary lockdown it assumed a new and much greater importance. Both Tiger the greyhound and I felt determined to make the most of our one precious hour of exercise, back out in the world.

Tucked away

That lockdown experience then provided the push, as restrictions lifted again, to progress a project which the Open Spaces Committee had already been discussing: bringing out a guide to promote greater awareness of these green places, especially the smaller parks. In addition to Battersea Park and Clapham and Wandsworth Commons we are lucky enough to have a score of these locally, often tucked away on back streets and easy to overlook. Some of them are very near to each other, forming green chains or clusters; this gave us the idea of linking them together in a series of walks which could then be published as a booklet.

Happily the Society's Executive Committee gave us the go-ahead, wanting to make this the first in what will hopefully become a series of new Battersea Society publications. So during the summer I started putting that together. I knew that mapping the walks would be the main challenge, but happily help was on hand from a wonderful local



graphic designer, Karen Horan, who also works with the Friends of Battersea Park. And PowerPrint on Lavender Hill proved helpful and professional when it came to the printing.

So I am proud to say that this booklet is very much a local effort, making the most of the human talent

as well as the natural resources that we are fortunate enough to have on our doorsteps here in Battersea. Even the 'models' posed around the Peace Pagoda within the cover image are some of Karen's and my fellow Battersea Women's Institute members, who kindly turned out at short notice for a photocall on a sunny November afternoon, literally hours before a second lockdown started.

As I write this, that's still ongoing. I'm having to keep my fingers firmly crossed that PowerPrint can still deliver the printed booklet on

schedule at the end of November, as they hope to do, and that Waterstone's in St John's Road will reopen again on 2 December. If so, you'll be able to buy it there. Meanwhile we're also doing our best to find some other local outlets, and also a free, socially distanced and hopefully not too labour-intensive way in which the Society can sell it for itself. If so, we should be able to offer it at a small discount to Battersea Society members; if not, Waterstone's will have it at £5 a copy.

Present

For that you will get a 26-page booklet containing six individual walks, each mapped as a double-spread, and visiting between them all of Battersea's public open spaces. The routes also pass by and mention some of its more interesting buildings; as I'm an architectural historian by training, I can never resist including these. We've also provided a detailed map of Battersea Park, and a fold-out map at the back showing the whole of Battersea, and giving public transport links at the start and end of each walk. So – a great Christmas present, surely? And one that should encourage some healthy New Year's Resolutions too, whatever kind of restrictions we may find ourselves undergoing by then.

Clare Graham is Chair, Open Spaces Committee