

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society AUTUMN 2017



Battersea Power Station: des res for peregrine falcons

Liz Walton focuses on our local avian VIPs



The highlight of our regular visits to the Forest of Dean used to be the hard slog up to the viewing point overlooking Symonds Yat, always with the hope that we might see the illusive peregrine falcons. This was if we were lucky. Too often one had to use much imagination to believe one had really seen falcons emerge from their ledge on a distant cliff. Little did I think that a few years later they would be flying above us in Battersea.

Peregrine falcons in the UK were a threatened species as late as the 1960s, largely due to use of pesticides and theft of eggs. However as Schedule 1 birds, they received the strongest of legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 and fortunately the number of breeding pairs has steadily grown since then; mostly in craggy coastal and upland areas but also significantly in urban areas. They do not make a nest as such but lay their eggs in shallow unlined holes or even surfaces with slight dips in them. Hence the suitability of ledges on high buildings. Here they are generally undisturbed by day to

day human activities at their level, can over-see a large hunting area and find a continuous food supply in the ubiquitous feral pigeon. It is estimated that there are now at least 30 breeding pairs in London.

Peregrine falcons first took up residence on the Battersea Power Station chimneys in 2000, one of the first sites taken by the birds in London. They picked a good spot, at that time little troubled by any close human activity. With a good supply of pigeons locally, (subsequently expanded to include the equally delicious parakeets!) they started to successfully breed.

Breeding

However once serious changes began to take place on the Power Station site the falcons presented something of a challenge to the developers. Under the legislation it is a serious offence to disturb them during the breeding season. It was obvious that the work of dismantling the chimneys which started in 2013 would inevitably displace the breeding pair. However it was known that peregrines tend to stick to areas

where they have bred before and would look for an alternative nearby site.

The Power Station called in the assistance of David Morrison, a former construction worker who has become an expert on urban peregrines and their habitats. He continues to advise BPS and protect these significant early residents of the Power Station development. The solution has been to provide an alternative breeding spot at the top of a special tower, based on the type used for cranes, with a breeding box on top. Many Society members will have seen this structure close to the river in front of the Power Station. An attempt seven years earlier by the previous owners had failed to wear the birds away from the chimneys so it was with relief that the falcons readily took to this new perch. They have since bred there successfully, producing over 11 chicks to date.

The chick's life is not without hazard. Their first attempts at flying can result in a belly flop to the ground. All workers on the site have been briefed that if they find a fallen chick on the ground they protect them and immediately call David Morrison who will get them back on the platform.

The peregrines are treated very much as VIPs. This was well exemplified by the fact that when Elton John performed at a Power Station event he moved his stage inside as the noise of his act from the



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

From the editor



Unusually, there is an emphasis on schools in this issue of *Battersea Matters*. We look at the history of

both Thomas's School on Battersea High Street and of Honeywell Schools, further south. Both have distinguished buildings, though I had not realised how varied in time Thomas's are. Seeing the photos and reading Ben Thomas's article made me aware of how we tend lazily to see buildings as a backdrop – just 'old' or 'new' rather than really looking at them. Perhaps we will get similarly used to the towers that are shooting up all round us. Or perhaps not.

Thinking of schools, all the 'community' or guerrilla gardeners in

the back page article are teachers or ex-teachers. Coincidence? Or might working in education foster a strong sense of community and an interest in helping things (plants and people) grow?

Street gardening is a wonderful idea. It spreads colour and joy, encourages conversation and is good for wildlife (including, unfortunately, foxes). In a small way it may also contribute to flood protection. Rain rushes off hard impervious surfaces and into our overworked drains; Battersea has seen a number of local floods in recent years. So, please: plant and sow, don't pave over your garden!

Of course, you may not have a garden. But if you live in one of the many new apartment blocks, you may well have a balcony. A recent article in *The Oldie* estimated that there are 1,300 balconies along the river between Wandsworth and Chelsea Bridges, with another 2,000

at the power station site. Not to mention many others overlooking busy roads, traffic junctions and waste dumps. Buses roar, motor bikes rev, lorries beep. The noise! The pollution! No wonder most balconies are used as extra storage space rather than for sitting sipping a cocktail in a hazy sunset glow, as developers' hoardings would have us imagine.

Architects' perspective drawings are equally unrealistic. In the picture of the future Battersea Power Station tube station on page 5 you will see nobody old or black or blind or fat or in a wheelchair or pushing a buggy or carrying shopping bags. Everyone is young, slim and smartly dressed. Undesirables (the rest of us) have been edited out of this brave new world.

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

Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden ponders sandwiches, spiralisers, emails and anniversaries

Cookery programmes are watched by millions and the latest book by Nigella or Nigel or Jamie will top the Christmas bestseller list every year. But the evidence seems to be that while a celebrity chef can cause a sudden surge of demand for spiralisers, smoked black salt, truffle oil or even rhubarb, the great British public tend to go back to their tried and trusted meals, and the spiralisers go into the cupboard and join all the other impulse purchase gadgets that have been jettisoned over the years.

Since the most viewed recipe on the BBC Good Food website is for lemon drizzle cake, it seems improbable that everyone is eating quinoa and kale risotto. It's also a fact that the most commonly eaten meal in the UK is a sandwich. And what a choice there is these days – Pret a Manger is currently offering curried chickpeas and mango chutney along with more prosaic combinations. And yet the most popular sandwich in the



UK is still ham and cheese.

We're creatures of habit, fixed in our view of the world, as was witnessed by a conversation I overheard on a bus (where else) between two women in their mid-sixties:

Woman 1 'Both our lives would be a lot easier if you got email.'

Woman 2 (fiercely) 'That's never going to happen!'

Sad to see somebody who might be quite sensible in other ways rejecting such a useful means of communication. Just because email can be over-used and sometimes abused doesn't make it bad. Ignoring its existence is rather like blocking up your letterbox because you don't want to get letters.

Suspicion

Some who are prepared to use it regard it with distaste and suspicion. Like the person who told me that if someone sent a thankyou email rather than a letter, no gift would ever go their way again. But I'm as delighted to get an email or a text message from one of my grandchildren as I suppose my own

grandparents were to get a letter from me.

It dawned on me as I started to write the above that it is almost exactly ten years since I wrote the first of these pieces. In those days I was dubbed *Man on the Battersea Omnibus*. Looking back at my first offering I found the following: 'A few weeks ago I turned sixty and was at last able to claim my Freedom Pass – one of the few reasons that youngsters stuck in season ticket misery envy us oldies. Worthy of a celebration, and of course I was invited to canapés and champagne in the Town Hall, with a speech from the Mayor. Would have been nice wouldn't it?'

Well, as they say, growing old is compulsory, growing up is not. So I look forward to the next ten years of boring and infuriating you with my thoughts. And I should also pay tribute to my esteemed editor who at the same time took charge of the Society's newsletter (not called *Battersea Matters* in those days). Well done, Jenny, and thank you for providing me with a platform to moan about the world.

As I always say, that's all for now. See you next time, and mind how you go.
PS The Man on the Battersea Bus has just arrived online at batterseabus.co.uk

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originally intended outside performance area had been deemed likely to cause the peregrine chicks distress. If only we could all get this treatment when we are subject to noisy events!

What of the future for the peregrines now the chimneys are rebuilt? Current plans are that the breeding tower will be there until 2020 when the peregrines will be encouraged to move back into the Power Station again, with a permanent breeding

ledge built into the north-eastern washhouse.

So if you are in the park and hear a bit of a to-do overhead, look carefully as it could well be one the falcons just out to get their evening meal – nature in the raw in Battersea!

20 is the new 30

Sumathi Menon hunts the speeding drivers

Thanks to the *Battersea Banter* blog that I started a few months ago, I have learnt a lot about the many happenings in Battersea. One such initiative is Community RoadWatch and its work on the 20mph campaign.

Twenty mph is part of a nationwide campaign to make roads safer. 'Not only road safety, this reduces congestion, leads to quieter streets and better air quality by shifting unnecessary vehicles away from the residential areas' says Robert Molteno, co-founder of Wandsworth Living Streets, a charity which envisions safe, attractive and enjoyable streets for people on foot. I had the opportunity to join one of their RoadWatch sessions.

There's a significant difference between 20 and 30mph in terms of drivers being able to assess slow movement of pedestrians, as well as for people crossing the road to gauge the speed of the oncoming vehicle. Fatality risk in accidents is said to be 1.5% at 20mph and 8% at 30mph. Reducing driving speeds from 30mph to 20 mph increases travel time by just one minute per mile.

In July 2016 Wandsworth Council gave all the residential roads in Wandsworth a 20mph speed limit, with exceptions for some A roads, B roads and bus routes. This decision followed the Council's borough-wide consultation in which 59% of residents were in favour of lowering the speed limit. Transport for London has funded signage changes; there are no changes to other traffic calming measures.

On the designated Community RoadWatch morning, I joined the team of PC Frank Howe and volunteers Sumi Tickaram and Robert Molteno at the junction of



Queenstown Road and St. Philip Square. The volunteers use a hand held speed detection device (the Pro Laser 2, worth £3,000) by pointing it at an oncoming vehicle and pressing the button which records the distance and the speed. These are then recorded by the officer along with number plate details. Anyone who is found speeding is issued a warning letter. After two warning letters, they get a visit from the police. Tickets or penalty points are not issued as part of this exercise.

I enjoyed having a go at using the laser. It was easy to use, with a downside being that the battery drains very fast.

Warning

The team is positive about the effectiveness of these sessions. Most drivers who speed tend not to repeat once they've received a warning letter. Getting pulled out like this does help in changing the habit. The locations are picked based on residents alerting the police that they see a lot of speeding.

PC Howe clarified that what is needed is for people to think that all the residential streets are 20 mph unless they are clearly marked to

On patrol: laser technology helps the policing of speed limits

be 30 mph. And these RoadWatch events are designed to do just that – increase awareness and engage the community in order to change driving behaviours. Robert told us that in a previous RoadWatch session, on a particularly hot day, an elderly resident brought out cold water for them to drink. As if on cue, a local resident stopped by and asked what all this was about and we had a good chat about the reasons for the new speed limit and its enforcement. It was lovely to see such open conversations and community participation.

*If you would like to take part in the Met's Community Roadwatch events, contact Robert Molteno
Robert.Molteno@gmail.com
020 7223 0408*



‘The baby’s always shivering’

Graham Slater, chief executive of fuelbanks and families, describes this local charity’s work

This winter children in families across Wandsworth will wake up and get dressed in the cold, and later go to bed in the cold. They will be part of the one in ten households in the borough that are, according to government statistics, fuel poor. While ‘fuel poor’ is a technical term defining households whose income is below the poverty line but who have high energy costs, there is nothing technical about the effects of fuel poverty on families.

Our local research brings to light the hardships faced by families on pre-payment meters, usually the poorest households. Standing charges and high tariffs mean many families have to go without gas or electricity as they cannot afford to ‘feed the meter’. Perversely, the poorest families often pay the highest tariffs for their fuel – on average £300 more per year. Families in poverty with pre-payment meters often have the dilemma of choosing whether they ‘heat or eat’.

Going without

Nationally foodbanks increasingly identify fuel poverty as a growing area of need for their customers. In recent research for the Trussell Trust, 38.7% of UK households using foodbanks included dependent children under 16 years of age, and over 50% of foodbank users had gone without heating and hot water for more than four days in a given month. Citizens Advice suggests more than 1.6 million people go without electricity or gas at least once every year due to high cost or difficulty topping up.

Locally, two-thirds of a sample of Wandsworth foodbank guests interviewed in March 2017 reported having been unable to heat their home, use hot water, or cook during the past year because they hadn’t enough money for gas/electricity. Of those who had experienced fuel poverty, 42% said it had ‘often’ been their experience, and 33% said ‘sometimes’.

The impact on children is far reaching, and includes as well as a



Fuel poverty harms health
Photo: Joshua Brown

schools and hospitals. The family takes the fuel voucher to one of our trained volunteers based within the foodbank centres. Our volunteer redeems the fuel voucher to the value of £49, and sensitively assesses the family’s other immediate or longer term support needs. The family is then provided with a barcoded credit slip that can be redeemed at any PayPoint outlet for an immediate transfer to their prepayment meter. The amount is reckoned to be sufficient to provide energy for three to four weeks.

Having responded to the immediate crisis with a fuel voucher, we offer advice and support around benefits, debt and financial management to relieve the issues that led to the crisis. Our advice services are provided by Centre 70, a specialist independent advice agency that offers confidential one-to-one advice and provides a dedicated resource for our families.

Winter coats

For families already in crisis we also provide items that can help children get off to a good start, including: compulsory items of school uniform, school shoes and winter coats. These are essential costs which are often disproportionately expensive and can tip a tight family budget back into crisis.

We are a small charity which has made a big impact on the local community over the last two years, helping nearly 700 families with 1600 children in their time of crisis and towards longer term stability. We receive no statutory funding and rely on grants and donations to support our work. By donating to fuelbanks and families you can help local families in need this winter. If you receive the Winter Fuel Payment and are lucky enough not to need it, why not donate it to directly support local families in crisis?

For more information and to make an online donation through our website www.fuelbanksandfamilies.com

lack of heating and hot water, a lack of cooked food for growing children, and a lack of adequate lighting for school work or everyday use.

The health and well-being of these children suffers. Children in cold homes are more likely to experience respiratory problems, take more time off school due to illness, have lower weight gain and more hospital admissions as infants, suffer from mental health problems particularly as adolescents and have poorer educational performance and outcomes. As Rita, a local new mother told us, ‘The baby hasn’t been putting on weight as he should be, and the health visitor thinks it’s because he is always shivering’.

fuelbanks and families is a charity established in 2015 and based in Battersea that provides real help and support to families facing the cruel effects of fuel poverty. Working in partnership with local foodbanks, we seek to support those families that are most in need, providing practical help to respond to the immediate crisis, and holistic support to tackle the underlying issues that have led to the crisis.

Vouchers

We are the first and only charity independent of the energy companies that offers fuel credit direct to the pre-payment meter of a family in crisis. The process is simple; a family is referred by one of a network of agents that issue foodbank vouchers and our fuel vouchers, such as GPs, social workers, advice agencies,

Planning Matters: Onwards and upwards – and not in a good way!

Monica Tross bemoans some excessively tall local buildings

There is mixed news of two Homebase sites, one at 198 York Road, the other on the borders of Battersea at Swandon Way. In York Road the developers have put in an application for an additional three storeys 2017/4380 which 'builds upon the extant planning permission by reflecting the height and massing changes within the surrounding context since the first approval of the scheme'. In other words, many excessively tall buildings have been approved so 20 storeys, subsequently raised to 21, is no longer tall enough. At this stage at least, the developer has not sweetened this with the offer of any additional affordable housing. The offer remains at the 41 units agreed, 15% of the current approved scheme, less than this if three more storeys are approved. You can see our full objection on the Battersea Society website.

The Council did refuse the Swandon Way development following a vociferous campaign, aided by publicity in the *Evening Standard*. However this has been 'called in' by the Mayor and is being debated at GLA on 17 October. It seems likely that it will be approved but we, and colleagues in the Wandsworth Society, are hoping that the refusal will be maintained. See 2016/7356.

RECENT PLANNING APPLICATION COMMITTEE DECISIONS

This summer has seen a number of planning decisions taken despite there being many, in our view totally valid, objections from neighbours

and many others. In July two major schemes were approved: one for a 25-storey building at 100 York Road, 2017/0745 and the other on the Palmerston Court site opposite the Dogs and Cats Home, 2016/5422. Objections to the Palmerston Court plans contained many relating to the loss of Flanagans pub. While we are wholly supportive of this concern, we are even more worried at the density of the scheme overall and the impact it will have on the roadway.

In August the committee approved an amendment to the plans for 1 – 5 Gowrie Road, 2017/3273 which made a bad scheme worse. (The scheme is by Languard whose inappropriate use of zinc at another site was reported on in *Battersea Matters* Spring 2017). Then in September two more disappointments. The Lidl application for an enlarged retail shed with added car parking was approved, 2017/2972.

Tesco finally got consent for their use of the Prince of Wales in Battersea Bridge Road, having put in train an appeal against the earlier refusal. This saga has been going on since 2014 during which time the garden has become detached from the public house and the frontage of the Prince of Wales has become steadily more dilapidated. See the website for our latest objection to the consented scheme 2017/3434.

CONSULTATION NEWS

We have visited, and commented

Below: architects' impression of the new Northern Line Station

on, the exhibitions for the Peabody development and an enlarged campus at the Royal College of Art in Battersea Bridge Road. As far as we can tell there is little active opposition to the Peabody revisions, with our own concerns centring not on the new scheme so much as the ugly white 'sheds' on top of the first of the new buildings to be built.

The expansion of the RCA through to Parkgate Road is a mixed blessing. It means the loss of another local petrol station and its design is raising concerns, with several neighbours contacting us to tell us of their views. On the other hand we will be getting an expanded academic institution which in its field is a world leader. Our own response, to this and to the Peabody scheme, are on the website.

DRAFT GLA TRANSPORT STRATEGY

We trawled through this immensely detailed and mostly unexceptionable document and used our response to raise concerns, once again, about the problems of congestion at Clapham Junction and on buses in the York Road and Lombard Road areas. One piece of reasonably good news is the support for the Millennium Bridge at Cremorne Railway Bridge. If you have time, do read our response on the website. We would very much like to hear your views on the issues raised.

NEW TUBE STATION AT BATTERSEA POWER STATION

As far as we know, there hasn't been an exhibition of the designs for this new station but they can be seen on Wandsworth's planning website, 2017/4269. They seem to follow a standard, and somewhat ordinary, TfL pattern but we are still pondering our response which will be on the website in due course.

VAUXHALL BUS STATION – ANOTHER LONG-RUNNING SAGA

We hear plans are about to be presented for the island site within the gyratory. Although this is officially in Lambeth we aim to view the proposals and will report back. *Do email us with any questions or comments on the issues raised here or other planning concerns.* planning@batterseasociety.org.uk. *We like to hear from you.*



From St John's to Thomas's: 350 years of education in Battersea

Ben Thomas, principal of Thomas's London Day Schools, reveals the school's history



Thomas's Battersea is an independent, co-educational preparatory school of 570 pupils aged from four to 13. The school prides itself on high academic standards, a broad curriculum, a strong set of values and its most important school rule, which is simply to 'Be Kind'.

The school is part of Thomas's London Day Schools, a family-founded organisation now run by the founders' two sons, Toby and myself. It has four preparatory schools, one primary academy and a kindergarten, in Battersea, Clapham, Fulham and Kensington.

Thomas's Battersea has occupied the buildings of 28 – 40 Battersea High Street since 1990. There is a proud tradition of education on this site, which has been a place of learning, almost continuously, for more than 300 years.

A school existed here in the late 1600s, instigated and funded by Sir Walter St John, (pronounced 'Sinjun') whose family had owned the Manor House at Battersea since 1627, on the site of what later became Battersea Flour Mills and then today's Montevetro.

Village

Battersea at this time was a sizeable rural village of some 200 houses, with perhaps 1,500 inhabitants. A visitor from those times would recognise today 'The Elms' at the heart of the village, named after the trees that stood there until 1925 and now known as Battersea Square. The Raven Inn would be familiar

as today's Melanzana. But such a visitor would be astonished by the disappearance of the flood plain, the low-lying area of marshland and meadow that stretched away to Nine Elms on the right and to Wandsworth and Putney on the left; by the contemporary gentility and fashionability of Battersea fields, which was then a 300 acre waste land 'of ill repute'; and by the roads and bridges, passable today (traffic permitting!), which mean that it is no longer necessary to rely on the ferry from Chelsea to Battersea.

Foundation

In 1700, Sir Walter decided that it was time to put the school on a permanent footing. Thus, on 7 September 1700, the school was given permanence by Sir Walter St John's Foundation Deed, which established 'in the said parish of Battersea... a Schoole there for the education of Twenty Free Scholars... and that the said Messuage or Tenement shall forever hereafter be used as a Schoole house for teaching of Scholars therein.'

The school was provided for by the endowment of three fields in Camberwell, recently purchased by Sir Walter for the princely sum of £570, which were to provide an ongoing income for the school. Thus, through the vision and foresight of one man, began an educational journey which continues to the present day.

The oldest part of the surviving buildings dates from 1859 and

includes today's entrance arch and adjacent building fronting the High Street. It was designed by William Butterfield, a prominent Victorian Gothic Revival architect, whose major works include Keble College, Oxford and the Church of All Saints, Margaret Street.

From 1913 to 1914, a playground wing was added, designed by A H Ryan Tennyson, which extended into today's courtyard. At the same time, Butterfield's headmaster's house (to the right of the entrance arch) was demolished to make way for the school's gymnasium and great hall, which remain almost unchanged to this day. A new library wing followed in 1926, visible today to the left of the entrance arch and housing the current school's music room and science laboratories. In 1938 a further extension was added, recognisable today as the classrooms above the vehicle entrance off Battersea Square.

Bomb

In September 1939, the entire school was evacuated to Godalming, where it remained until the end of the war. It turned out to be a prescient move: just after midnight on 14 September 1940, a 500lb bomb crashed through the roof, down through the water storage tank in the loft and on until it lodged firmly in the cupboard next to the headmaster's study. There it remained, ticking away until, despite the best efforts of the Military Engineers, it exploded at 10.30pm on 17 September, utterly destroying the headmaster's study and taking with it



Above and right, the new Playground Wing of 1913 – 14, and after bomb damage in 1940.

Far right: an aerial view of the school today



most of the south wing.

Although the school returned to its Battersea site, amidst rubble and rather battered buildings in October 1945, it was not until 1952 that a new teaching wing and headmaster's study were built. A stone tablet above the entrance to the 1952 building records the bomb damage of 1940.

Merger

A rather functional concrete science block in 1961 completed the fourth side of today's courtyard and was the final significant construction of Sir Walter St John's School, which was itself about to undergo a transformation. Having flourished as a boys' grammar school throughout the 1940s, '50s and '60s, the school was eventually overtaken by the comprehensive movement, which saw it merge with William Blake Secondary Modern School in 1977. A further merger with Battersea Park Comprehensive School in 1986 led to the loss of the school's name and the abandonment of its historic site.

Incredibly, by the standard of today's London, the school buildings remained empty for four years, until they were purchased by Thomas's in 1990 and the playground was once again filled with the sound of children at break times.

Always mindful of the legacy which it has inherited, Thomas's has continued to develop and improve the school site. Major programmes of building and renovation were completed in 2000, 2011 and 2015. Most recently, the school has

undertaken its biggest ever project, the delivery of an architectural masterplan, completed in September 2017, in which £9m was invested in the provision of a purpose-built dining room and kitchens and the complete renovation of the 1930s and 1960s blocks to provide modern facilities such as a media suite, drama studio and outdoor play area, which equip this historic site for a first-class education in the 21st century.

Although today's school is very different to the ones that preceded it, it is true to say that Sir Walter St John's original vision lives on. The proceeds of the sale of the school buildings in 1990 were received by Sir Walter St. John's Educational Charity, which continues to support young people in Wandsworth and Lambeth who are in financial need, especially those in the Battersea area. Although the current school is fee-paying, the Thomas's Schools Foundation (www.tsfoundation.org.uk) provides eight bursaries a year (known as Sinjuns Awards) for pupils to attend the Thomas's schools – a continuation not so far removed from Sir Walter's original provision for 'Twenty Free Scholars'. The Foundation is also extremely active in the school's local neighbourhood, working closely with local primary schools and other organisations.

Flourishing

Sir Walter would no doubt be astonished by the buildings, the traffic, the population and popularity of Battersea today. Much of the area

would be unrecognisable from the quiet rural village of which he was clearly so fond. It would be good to think, though, that once he had got over the shock of modern Battersea, he would be pleased to discover that his commitment to the flourishing of young lives is still being played out in the exact location that he designated for that purpose almost 350 years ago.

www.thomas-s.co.uk

This article draws heavily on Frank T. Smallwood's A History of Sir Walter St. John's School Battersea 1700 –1986, 1998.

Ben Thomas is chair of the Katherine Low Settlement.

The Battersea Society

Chair Sara Milne

chair@batterseasociety.org.uk

Secretary Harvey Heath

secretary@batterseasociety.org.uk

Committee Chairs

Planning Liz Walton

planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

Open Spaces [openspaces@](mailto:openspaces@batterseasociety.org.uk)

batterseasociety.org.uk

Events Sara Milne

events@batterseasociety.org.uk

General enquiries

information@batterseasociety.org.uk

Website

batterseasociety.org.uk

Registered charity no.1103560

The uninvited guest

A story for Halloween, by Mike Roden

It was getting crowded in the function room of the pub and though of course I had no trouble seeing Leo, head and shoulders above everyone else as always, he and Harriet were pretty well surrounded by the latest group of newly-arrived well-wishers.

Thankfully, despite the date, nobody had worn fancy dress for the occasion. Not like the group of noisy young people outside the bar on Battersea Bridge road plastered with gruesome makeup and dressed as vampires, zombies or other assorted movie monsters.

'You're always the same at parties.' My wife glared at me. 'Standing around looking miserable. What on earth are you brooding about now?'

'These things are always the same,' I said, 'Full of people I don't know.'

She shrugged, 'Anniversary parties are always like that. Loads of family members turning up for free food and drink.'

'I haven't seen a canapé recently,' I grumbled. 'And I can't understand why Leo and Harriet got married at Hallowe'en... Not very propitious.'

'Well it's worked so far,' she snapped 'Anyway let's get another drink and go and say hello to them.'

'If we can get near them,' I retorted. Before I could follow her a voice next to me said chirpily 'Good do, isn't it?' He was probably in his late seventies, wearing an old-fashioned rather greasy-looking double-breasted suit. He thrust out his hand, 'Uncle Bill. But you can call me Bill. Ah the stories I could tell you about that pair.'

Clammy

It was an unpleasantly clammy handshake and I gave a little inward groan, feeling like one of the wedding guests being stopped by the Ancient Mariner. He was clearly about to embark on a long string of amusing and possibly risqué tales about one or other of my friends or perhaps both.

'Ah, they were too young to get married.' He rubbed a hand over his bald head. 'Everybody told them that. Said it wouldn't last.' He sniffed. 'Shows how wrong folk can be,

doesn't it? Harriet and Leo married for fifty years. Seems like only yesterday.'

Looked over my shoulder, he started. 'Oh I didn't know he was here. 'Scuse me. I'll go and bother someone else...'

Uneasy

And to my relief he disappeared into the crush. There was something about him that made me uneasy. It was definitely time to refill my glass. But I was interrupted again.

'I've been looking for you,' Leo's eldest son Ben eased his way through a little group of guests. 'I expected to see you moving among the guests taking notes. And why aren't you drinking?'

'Chance'd be a fine thing,' I grumbled.

'Anyway, I wondered what you'd make of this.'

I took the photograph off him. It was clearly a reprint of a much older sepia tinted photograph. It showed a group of soldiers in First World War uniform standing in front of an old barn. One or two had their thumbs up towards the cameraman, others looked drawn and weary. Some wore their helmets, others were bareheaded.

'I wonder how many of those young men survived...?'

'From what I've been told,' said Ben with a studied casualness, 'One of them was already dead when this picture was taken. The one standing back – on the left, nearer the barn.'

There was something wistful in that tired face, old before its time. He was bareheaded, his helmet dangling from his hand.

'His name's Sam Galliers,' Ben told me. 'He was Dad's great uncle. Born on 31 October 1893.'

'Really?' I said suspiciously. 'Another Hallowe'en? What a coincidence.'

Ben didn't rise to that, 'He was killed on 25 October 1916, just a few days before his birthday. Turn over the photo.'

I did so - written in very faded, very neat handwriting, I saw, "A farm near

Amiens – October 31st 1916."

'I don't know some of the details,' said Ben, 'But eventually the picture got back to Sam's wife. Imagine what she felt when she saw him there and saw what date it was taken. Did he really come back on his birthday, to be with his mates? Makes you shiver, doesn't it?'

Cold logic swept over me. 'Frankly no, Ben it doesn't. For a start who's to say those dates are accurate? Did Leo put you up to this? How come I've never seen this photograph before?'

'It's been missing for years,' Ben told me. 'You know how chaotic Dad's filing system is. But I found it a couple of weeks ago. Wanted to show it to Alex. We'd just taken him to see *Journey's End* so I told him our family First World War story.'

Alex was Ben and Jill's thirteen-year old son. I'd spotted him earlier, thick as thieves with one of his cousins. 'And what does he make of the photo?'

'Hasn't seen it yet,' replied Ben. 'I've been letting a photographer friend check it over. I'll show him later, and you can tell him what you think.'

'OK, I'll believe you up to a point. But even if the dates are accurate, who's to say the photo isn't a fake? Back then it wasn't unknown for pictures of a dear departed to be superimposed onto a family group.'

'Early form of Photoshopping. Quite right,' confirmed Ben, 'My friend's taken a close look at it – blown it right up and so on. Says he couldn't be sure whether it was faked. Not without the negative ... Good story though, maybe you could make something of it?'

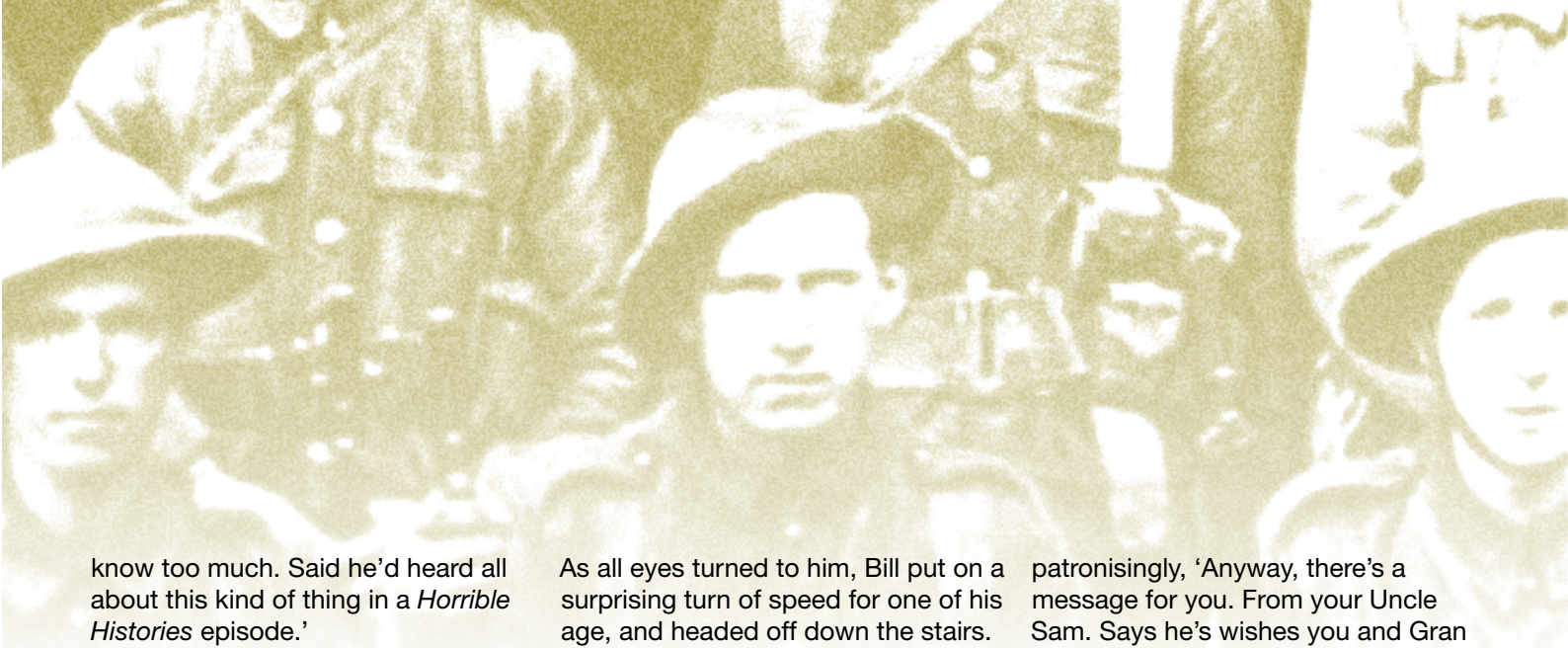
Scruffy

'I'll add it to the long list of tales I've been told which would make a good story!' We headed off towards the bar. 'Incidentally who's the chap in the shabby black suit? Like a scruffy undertaker, bald head. From what he told me he was at your parents' wedding.'

'Well I certainly wasn't!' retorted Ben. 'And I haven't seen anyone in a suit.'

'Did Alex enjoy *Journey's End*?' I asked as he brought me back a drink.

'You know what kids are like. They



know too much. Said he'd heard all about this kind of thing in a *Horrible Histories* episode.'

'There you are.' Leo joined his son and now they both towered above me. 'Is my son bothering you?'

Harriet came up too and gave me a kiss. 'Thanks for coming. And thank you for circulating.'

'Not much of that,' I said, 'I got rather stuck with your Uncle Bill regaling me with lurid anecdotes about your wild youth.'

'Uncle Bill?' Harriet stared. 'You must have misheard. Uncle Bill's been dead for twenty years or more.'

I raised a weary hand. 'All right, I know it's Hallowe'en, but I do get the feeling that everyone's trying to provide me with creepy story material. It's always the same when you're a writer.'

I suddenly spotted the bald-headed man in the shabby suit. 'There he is. That's Uncle Bill. A very solid-looking ghost.'

As all eyes turned to him, Bill put on a surprising turn of speed for one of his age, and headed off down the stairs.

'You don't know him then?' I said, stating the obvious.

'He's a complete stranger.' Harriet burst out, 'How did he know I had an Uncle Bill?'

'Well, most people have an Uncle Bill somewhere in their past,' I said. 'And it'd be easy for him to get in and – circulate. He'd soon pick up enough information to pass as an invited guest.'

'I feel rather proud,' said Leo, 'I've heard that only parties of quality attract gate crashers. And talking of gate crashers. Shouldn't you be in bed, young Alexander?'

Message

Alex looked up at his grandfather with all the knowledge and sadness of youth. 'You normally go to bed earlier than I do, Grandpa.' He paused, allowing the grownups to chuckle

patronisingly, 'Anyway, there's a message for you. From your Uncle Sam. Says he's wishes you and Gran well, and that he's sure he'll get to meet you both someday.'

He paused again, 'Oh yes, and sorry he can't stop.'

'Alex,' interrupted Ben sharply, 'What are you playing at?'

'He was over there...' said Alex, waving vaguely over towards the far side of the room. 'Dressed like the people in the play the other night.' He brightened, 'Is he an actor, dad? Is he related to us?'

He had a sudden thought, 'Course, he was a bit young to be your uncle, Grandpa. Anyway, like I said, he couldn't stop. It's his birthday and he had to get back to see his mates. S'pose he'll be having a party.'

Leo blinked, and said rather shakily, 'Yes, Alex, I'm sure Uncle Sam and his mates will have a great party.'

© Mike Roden 2017

It's almost that time again!

I hate to mention the c-word in October, but if you are looking for a Christmas show to take children or grandchildren to, it's time to start thinking, or even booking. Here are some local shows that will be easier to get to – and cheaper – than the West End.

- Battersea Arts Centre
Lavender Hill

Snow White and Rose Red

'Adapted from a Brothers Grimm story, this is 'a magnificent quest for justice, love and friendship, with live music, songs and plenty of festive touches'.

For age 5 up. Tickets £12.50 – £22

29 November – 30 December

www.bac.org or 020 7223 2223

- Omnibus Theatre
1 Clapham Common Northside:
Zeraffa Giraffa

'A young giraffe is sent as a gift from the Pasha of Egypt to the King of France. But Paris is very far away. A co-production with the Little Angel company, this enchanting show has beautiful hand-made puppets and an original musical score.'

For children aged 4 – 10 and their families.

Tickets £10 and £8

25 November – 17 December.

Omnibus-clapham.org or 020 7498 4699

- Theatre 503

Above the Latchmere pub, Battersea Park Road.

Scrooge and the Seven Dwarves

'Santa and his Elves are preparing for a busy night. But just as Santa is ready to set off on his present delivery, he realises the sleigh won't start. In desperation, Santa looks to an unlikely hero to save the day – Ebenezer Scrooge. Surreal, physical, fast-paced comedy for all the family.'

For children 7 and up. Tickets £12 – £19

Theatre503.com or 020 7978 7040

Avoiding eviction: how law centres can help

Nicoletta Crivellaro outlines the work of the South West London Law Centre

Miriam (not her real name) was living alone in a damp and mouldy flat. Two years ago, her home was flooded. Her landlord has done no work to it since then, despite promises to carry out repairs. She was unable to use the gas or electricity in her derelict kitchen, forcing her to live off expensive takeaway food. Due to a leaky ceiling, defective boiler and gaps in the windows she had to spend more on heating than she could afford.

Depression

Miriam suffers from severe depression and has memory problems which are heightened as a result of stress. Her father died recently and she was feeling very low. Too embarrassed by her surroundings to have friends and family over, she became more and more isolated.

Though she was receiving income support and housing benefit, she could not fully cover her rent with these payments due to the Bedroom Tax. She faced the dire prospect of eviction, with nowhere else to go.

At this point Miriam came to our Law Centre. Our housing solicitor managed to stop the eviction, clear the rent arrears and get all the repair works completed. This allowed Miriam to stay in her home.

This is an example of the work that South West London Law Centre does. Our history dates back to



1974, and we have four offices covering all six south west London boroughs (Kingston, Richmond, Croydon, Wandsworth, Sutton and Merton). We provide legal advice at four locations on legal issues relating to debt, employment, housing, and immigration and asylum law.

In addition to legal aid work, SWLLC runs one of the largest free advice clinics in the country. We also operate the housing court duty scheme, in three courts, to provide last-minute assistance to people facing eviction or repossession.

The Wandsworth Branch of South West London Law Centres is situated at 76 Falcon Road, SW11 2LR. Here we have a team of housing lawyers who specialise in assisting vulnerable members of the community with their legal issues around housing and homelessness. We are also

the duty solicitors at Wandsworth County Court where we are able to provide emergency representation on the day for those facing housing and mortgage repossession as well as those facing eviction. The office also houses the Stepping Stones Project which supports clients from Wandsworth, Lambeth and Westminster with welfare benefits appeals and support to prevent them falling back into crisis.

Housing is the biggest area of our work, much of it helping people to remain in their homes. However we also offer casework for employment, debt advice, immigration and asylum. For other areas of law we also run free advice clinics each week, mostly during evenings, details of which are on the website or by calling us.

Opportunities

SWLLC faces many funding challenges and in recent years we have lost over 40% of our income largely due to cuts in legal aid. Despite this we strive to offer as many services as before, providing everything on a shoestring with little ability to plan for the future due to our tenuous finances. We rely heavily on volunteers to be able to increase the number of people we can help every year and we have developed a range of volunteering opportunities, including roles such as administrators, caseworkers, debt advisors and fundraisers.

To find out more, visit our website www.swllc.org
020 8767 2777

On a sunny evening in early September the Friends of Battersea Park celebrated the installation of their 2017 sculpture award. The winner, Makiko Takashima, explained that she was inspired by the sounds she recorded in the park, especially planes and birdsong. FoBP chair Frances Radcliffe remarked on the echoes of the park's Festival of Britain gardens in the 'bobbles' on top of Makiko's poles. The sculpture can be seen outside the sports pavilion on East Carriage Drive.



ALL ABOUT BATTERSEA 1882

In the summer issue of *Battersea Matters*, Clare Graham wrote about her digital version of Henry Simmonds' 1882 book, *All about Battersea*. Simmonds was a busy missionary as well as author. He visited families and organised weekly Bible study meetings, though he is thought to have made few conversions as many working class families

were indifferent or hostile to organised religion.

He ran a penny bank, a sort of credit union vital to a poor Battersea community with no access to normal banking.

His life is described in the Autumn 2017 edition of the *Wandsworth Historian*, available from Neil Robson: 020neill19@gmail.com or 020 8874 6341

Nine Elms – were they right to be optimists?

Janice Morphet explores the creation of the book and film

While the film *The Optimists of Nine Elms*, starring Peter Sellers, is well known, far less is known about the film's director Anthony Simmons, who also wrote the book on which it was based. He wrote no other books for children and it has been a mystery as to why this solitary book, published in 1964, was made into a film in 1973. The answer appears to be that initially it was not written as a book at all but a film treatment. Nevertheless, why would a film director from East London decide to make a film about life south of the river?

Success

Anthony Simmons (1922 – 2016) was born in West Ham of parents of Polish extraction, changing his name from Isidore to Anthony. He entered film making after a law degree at LSE and had some early success, winning the Grand Prix at the Venice film Festival for *Sunday by the Sea* in 1953, about an East End day trip to Southend.

He later made *Bow Bells*, an evocation of his own family's life in east London. His second film, *Four in the Morning* earned a BAFTA for Judi Dench as 'most promising newcomer to leading film roles' in 1965. His next feature film was *The Optimists of Nine Elms* in 1973. Between these films, Simmons was directing TV and radio programmes including *The Professionals*, *Van Der Valk* and later *Inspector Morse*. He also directed *On Giant's Shoulders* in 1979 for the BBC's Play of the Week.

Simmons characterised himself as a European film maker, interested in neo-realism. He was part of the Free Cinema movement with Lindsay Anderson and Tony Richardson but, as his *Guardian* obituary states, 'His brand of socialism was more optimistic and less anti-establishment' than theirs.

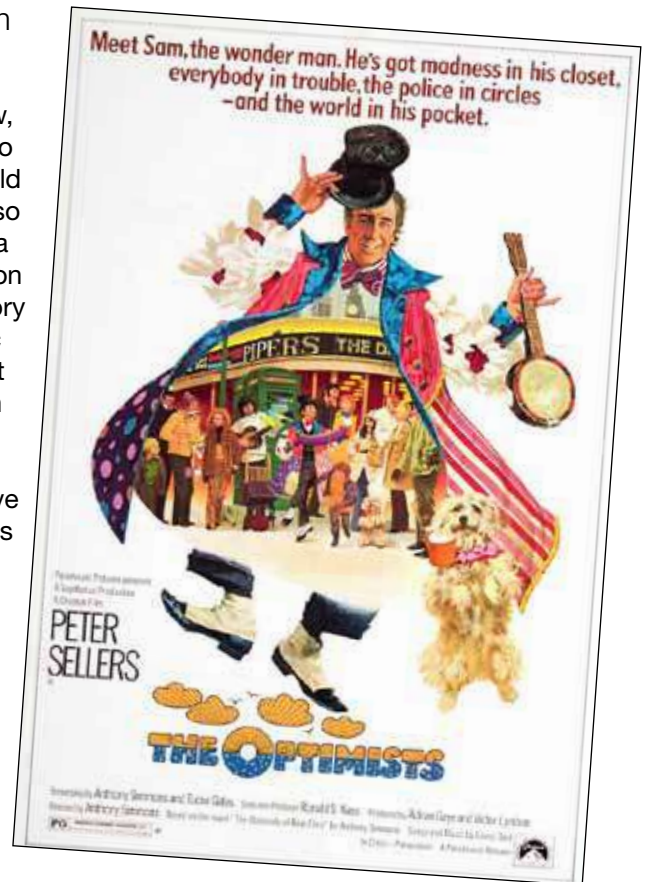
How did *Optimists* come to be written at all? Simmons had been encouraged by a friend to make another film like *Bow Bells*, based around the river. The original idea was set out in a three page summary, about a tramp and two children in

Hyde Park. In an interview, Simmons said 'I wanted to express how the film would look, how it would feel – so the solution was to write a short novella, a first-person story or memory'. The story is of Sam, a former music hall entertainer now street entertainer, based on Dan Leno, who befriends a brother and sister from Battersea. The children live in poor housing conditions and their parents are keen to move to the new council flats across the river – probably the Churchill Gardens Estate that was completed in the early 1960s. The children enter Sam's world by joining him in his busking in the West End. Eventually the family are offered a new flat in Battersea rather than Westminster and the children see their parent's pleasure and relief. Sam continues to live his busking life.

Initially, Simmons was offered funding for the film if he used Peter Sellers in the lead rôle, but he had already agreed with Buster Keaton that he would play Sam. United Artists would not support this and the project was shelved. It was revived again at the end on the 1960s when John Mills was to have played the lead, shortly after winning an Oscar for *Ryan's Daughter*. However, Mills had to withdraw due to injury. Danny Kaye was then considered but finally, despite having been vetoed years before, Peter Sellers took the role. Simmons felt that Sellers' performance made it a less sentimental and more effective film than it would have been with Kaye.

Stared

The Nine Elms location had already been considered in the early 1960s. When the film was revisited, Simmons went back 'to the location to see how much we could still use ... we spotted this young girl on



the bridge over the railway coming home from school. And I said to the photographer 'be ready, because I'm going to go back and clear away the other kids, so there will just be the one girl. Photograph her before she runs'... but the little girl didn't run off, she just stayed and stared at us. I took the photo to the casting director and said that's the kind of girl we are looking for'. She said, "why don't you find her and test her?" so we did'. The film was shot on location in nine weeks and, as Dolan and Spicer remind us, it is primarily about the parents' desire to move out of their tenement to a council flat – finally achieved through contact with a councillor. Simmons thought working class aspirations for new housing were being overlooked by the Labour movement.

When the film was released it had a big opening night in 1973 and received complimentary reviews. However it was drowned out by *The Exorcist*, which opened on the same evening. Simmons went on to work primarily in television and we are left with an evocation of 1970s Battersea in both the book and the film.

Laundry for the girls, physics for 'the young savages'

Honeywell's archivist Cathy Rowntree peers into the school's history

In the summer of 2016, Honeywell Infant and Junior Schools in Honeywell Road, south Battersea, celebrated their 125th Birthday. As well as a themed summer fete, panoramic photos, an archive exhibition and the publishing of a special PTFA magazine illustrating the schools' history, the children and staff celebrated with giant parties. As a retired teacher and the schools' archivist, I thought that Society members might be interested to learn a little about our early history.

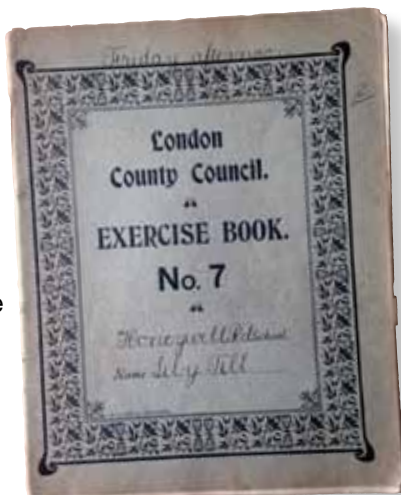
The idea of Nappy Valley is not new. When the 1870 Education Act made compulsory the partially state-funded schooling of all children between the ages of five and 10, Battersea's estimated school age population was 12,600. Yet there were only 4,160 voluntary (non-state) school places available. Parents complained about overcrowded schools and the lack of places, while thousands more homes continued to be built, as Victorian London grew. It was up to the School Board for London to solve the problem and their initial answer between the commons in South Battersea, in 1875, was Belleville School with 828 places, (enlarged in 1912).

Wilberforce

Then in 1891, only a few streets away, the foundation stone for Honeywell Road Schools was erected. It was recently described in the English Heritage Survey of London as 'One of Battersea's best-preserved schools, it is typical of the robust three-decker designs produced by the School Board for London's architects.' One claim to fame is that it was built partially on the estate first occupied by slave trade abolitionist William Wilberforce.

In 1889, three iron huts had been constructed as temporary classrooms, but by 1901, when

building was complete, the roll had risen to 1,634, more than double that of today. It was not until 2000 that the last corrugated iron hut was replaced by an all-weather games pitch. Over the years it had been used as a boys' woodwork space, a fire fighters' rest room in WWII and latterly as a rather grim dining room.



In 1893 the minimum school leaving age was raised to 11, amended to 12 in 1899, to reach 14 in 1921. At Honeywell, the Mixed Infants School was on the ground floor, the girls on the first and boys on the second floor and loft areas. Girls, considered to be gentler, shared the Infants' playground, while the boys had complete run of their own playground.

One former pupil, referring to his classmates as 'young savages' described a rough game called Fort, in which teams tried to push each other off a long bench in the shed, resulting in torn clothes and grazed hands.

Architects' plans and early class photographs show tiered seating and metal framed wooden desks in rows facing the teacher, with slots for writing slates in the infants. Left-handed children in the infant class were rapped on the knuckles with a ruler when writing, as this could have been a problem when progressing to pen and ink.

With average class sizes of 60, discipline must have been strict and caning was not uncommon, especially for boys; there was a complaint from one parent about an 'unmerciful thrashing.'

Unlike today there was a great difference between the curriculum for the girls and boys, the most striking being in science. In 1895 'in order to retain the older boys at school', special instruction in electricity and

magnetism was offered as well as shorthand and advanced drawing. A great advance came in 1901 with new laboratories for chemistry and physics. The nearest the girls got to science was hygiene and botany, while they also had classes in sewing, knitting, cookery and laundry. French was taught in both departments.

The curriculum in the Infants was not all the 'three Rs' (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). The School Managers' report of 1894 tells us that, 'A maypole which has proved very attractive to the first Class children, has been added for use in the large hall.' No other exercise is recorded, apart from December 1918 when there was 'marching and forming lines in the hall.' The girls seem only to have had 'drill', but the boys fared better, the Managers reporting in 1903, 'the physical welfare of the boys is very well cared for, cricket and football being fostered and encouraged.'

Drawings

Art was a subject in which the school excelled. In 1895 Managers reported that 'At the exhibition of drawings a larger number of awards... was received by Honeywell than any other school in London'.

A highlight of the year was Empire (later Commonwealth) Day, instituted on 24 May 1902 and commemorating Queen Victoria's birthday. In later years a spectacular pageant took place, when a girl was dressed as Britannia and other pupils were costumed as citizens of the British Empire, or wore their Scouting Movement uniforms. There was enthusiastic singing of patriotic songs accompanied by the school orchestra and much flag waving. The event was attended by parents and local dignitaries, including the Mayor of Battersea and the local MP. The best part was that then there was a half day holiday!

Before WWII there were no school dinners, but a two hour lunch break, so that pupils had time to return for a home cooked meal. At Honeywell, older girls cooked lunch for the

teachers in the cookery room in the caretaker's house, as well as for a few pupils who could not go home. Cecily, a former pupil, said that working mothers were looked down on. 'I hated staying to dinner prepared by the cookery class; stewed lamb and tapioca pudding with lumps.'

Soup

We are lucky to have in our archives some exercise books from Lilly Till, who in 1907 recorded, in beautiful copperplate writing, that the soup on her dinner menu for a family of six was, 'To nourish, to keep out the cold and it is very cheap.' Most Honeywell families were relatively well-off, but a former pupil (1905 -12) recalled that some children were sent to school with little or no breakfast and one or two permanently had their bottoms showing through their clothes. The Managers also record many absences due to diseases such



Far left: Lucy Till's exercise book for housecraft lessons, left: Empire Day, above: a girls' classroom in 1923

as whooping cough, diphtheria and measles. These could be killers, as can be seen by some of the graves in St. Mary's Cemetery, Bolingbroke Grove.

Charity collections at Honeywell began from the schools' inception. In 1884, profits from the sale of the *Scholar's Own Magazine* were sent

to fund orphanages while in 1897 '... a high boot for a poor cripple child attending the school was partly paid for by some of the girls who contributed 15 shillings.' Money was also collected for Bolingbroke Hospital whose founder Canon Erskine Clarke of St. Luke's Church was also chairman of Honeywell and Belleville School Managers and introduced the local Scouting movement.

From what I have discovered, pupils from Honeywell's early years looked back fondly on their time there and felt that they had been given a good start in life. Sadly however, many of the boys would be sent off to fight in the First World War while the lives of those left behind would never be quite the same again.



Doddington & Rollo Community Roof Garden hosted a harvest lunch on 16 September, attended by over 40 people. A free vegetarian lunch was served, made from fresh garden produce and surplus food donated by New Covent Garden Traders and Fare Share. Local curator, Mel Barry, ran a creativity workshop, shown above, where participants of all ages explored the harvest theme through drawing and collage. The event was held to celebrate the great variety of fruit and vegetables grown in the garden this year. [facebook.com/DoddingtonGarden](https://www.facebook.com/DoddingtonGarden)



Battersea Society trustees Sue Demont and Jenny Sheridan led a guided walk for Wandsworth Open Studios weekends, 8 and 15 October.

The walk linked four studios with sites of historical or contemporary interest in south Battersea. Walkers included both local residents and others from areas including Brompton and Kilburn.

Swords at the ready

Steph Tickner joined a group of Battersea Society members on a visit to Cutlers Hall

On 4 September we visited the Cutlers Company HQ in Warwick Lane in the City, and were shown round by the very knowledgeable deputy beadle.

The Cutlers' Company is one of the oldest City livery companies, having received its first Royal Charter from Henry V in 1416. Its first members worked in the mediaeval City of London around Cheapside. As with the other trade guilds of the day, its function was to protect its members' interests, to attend to their welfare, and to ensure that high standards of quality were maintained. Their business was producing and trading in knives, swords, and other implements with a cutting edge. Over time the emphasis shifted from weapons to cutlery and other domestic wares such as razors and scissors.



Battersea Society members wearing the traditional gowns worn during dinners and special occasions.

With the demise of the sword making and cutlery trade in the City during the 19th century, the Company turned its attention towards supporting the surgical instrument trade by encouraging apprentices,

and expanding its charitable activities, with an emphasis on education.

Today the Company combines these endeavours with maintaining the traditions of the City of London. It supports the Lord Mayoralty, provides fellowship and hospitality and preserves the Company's fine 19th century hall and other assets. With a livery of only 100 members, many of them admitted by patrimony, it is in every sense a family Company and one which is proud of its ancient heritage. We saw one of their prized possessions, a sword belonging to the Black Prince, son of Edward III.

Elephants

The armorial coat depicts two elephants (ivory was used in handles for high-class pieces) and a castle, symbolising security and dependability. The elephant and castle crest gave rise to the name of an inn owned by a member of the Cutlers' in the 17th century, in south London, which in turn gave its name to the well-known area Elephant and Castle.

Small parks in Battersea

Geraldine Kelly of Enable describes our local parks

The great Battersea Park with its events and activities, grand trees, lawns, and riverside vistas, attracts a good many visitors throughout the year. Visitors from around London or even around the world need go no further. But for those who live close by, there are many other smaller parks which can offer a quiet few hours' relaxation, or hectic moments in playgrounds.

Enable Parks looks after these small parks on your doorstep. We carry out surveys, draw up management plans, raise funding and manage the improvements. We also support Friends groups at some of the parks, and devise volunteer projects from time to time.

What follows is a brief description of each of the parks we manage, including current and historical information, and an update of work we've been doing there.

Heathbrook Park, St Rule Street, SW8, recent host to events at the Wandsworth Arts Fringe. In 2016 there was free music, cabaret, puppets, dance and a big art picnic, and in 2017 Tiny Monster Productions. We recently resurfaced the pathways here.

Compared with Battersea Park this park is fairly newly formed. It was laid out in the 1970s originally with a café, pond, and aviary. Times have changed and now you can enjoy the changing colours of bulbs in succession, sit and chat at picnic tables, or exercise on outdoor gym equipment. The park is much used by school children at Heathbrook School, dog walkers throughout the day (great running for dogs), and commuters taking a short cut to or from Wandsworth Road and the train station.

Montefiore Gardens was created from WW2 bomb damage between Montefiore and Tennyson Streets. At first it was used for prefabs, then turned into a park in the 1970s and it now houses a small playground. Dogs are not allowed in here. We've installed bike racks

here in the shape of 'M' and 'G'.

Queenstown Green, opposite the former St Philip's Church in Queenstown Road SW8, provides a good place to view this Grade II listed building. The Green takes the space of two or more terrace houses (possibly lost to WW2 bombing). It is mainly used for short dog walks. The cherry trees near the gate are visible along the length of the street, especially noticeable at blossom time.

Latchmere Rec was laid out in 1906 as a centre-piece for the new housing estate on Burns Road and Reform Street SW11. Railings and a passageway divide the Rec into two halves, with a playground for all ages and what are believed to be original willow trees on one side, and a grassy sitting out area on the other side. A circular area in the centre of the passageway was home to the original Brown Dog Statue and plinth, placed there by Battersea Council and the Anti-vivisection movement when the park was first laid out. This attracted such riots that the statue was mysteriously removed one night in 1912 and has never been seen since.

Recently, following consultation,



THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE: AN UPDATE

Many thanks to everybody who responded to the recently-revived Open Spaces Committee's article in the Society's September email. We received some valuable information and offers of help, but would welcome more. Maybe you could you take on responsibility for monitoring your local park or other open space? Or even consider joining the committee? We meet every couple of months with the next meeting scheduled for the afternoon of Tuesday 21 November. We look forward to hearing from you at openspaces@batterseasociety.org.uk

a wide tarmac area which used to serve as a playground for the old Latchmere School has been grassed over, making this a much greener park. Outdoor gym equipment is newly installed in an enclosed area on the other side. There is a good selection of ornamental trees which provide colour, texture and variety, and habitat for birds.

Falcon Park also known as Banana Park due to its shape between the curves of two railway lines out of Clapham Junction (no, to our best knowledge there has never been a banana tree growing there!) The copses around the edge have lots of wild plum trees. A street of terraced houses called Latchmere Grove was here until the 1960s and in very dry summers you could still see the outlines of the houses marked in the grass. Cabul Road runs up to the railway arch, then access to the park is via the busy pedestrian Latchmere Passage.

Planning permission has been granted for a floodlit football pitch, but building will not start before spring 2018. Plans to remove the tarmac and railings at Latchmere Passage, and build a small natural playground await funding.

Shillington Park is the other side of the railway line to Falcon Park. It is noisier and busier this side, if only because the two schools - Sacred Heart (RC) and Christchurch Primary - overlook the park; the former Shillington School is now residential. Shillington, Falcon and Heathbrook Parks were all created on land that was handed over to Wandsworth Council from the Greater London Council in 1971.

Christchurch Gardens where Cabul Road joins Battersea Park Road, is a small ornamental garden with a seating shelter which houses the memorial to Battersea's civilian casualties of World War 2. The shelter is Grade II listed and has recently been renovated by the Council. The Gardens were opened

in 1885 as an 'outdoor drawing room'. The Metropolitan Parks and Gardens Association leased the triangle of land from Christ Church and St Stephen's whose original building had a tall, imposing steeple that overshadowing the Gardens. The steeple stopped a V1 rocket in November 1944 which destroyed the old church but fortunately saved the tenement block opposite where there would have been far more fatalities. The War Comes Home project, supported by the Battersea Society, is currently investigating the list of casualties and gathering stories from the many survivors of that period who are still with us.

Fred Wells Gardens on Vicarage Crescent was named after a local councillor who lived nearby. Fred Wells died in 1982 as the park was opened and it was unanimously agreed to name it in his honour, such was the respect he commanded across the Council. Today, playgrounds cater for children aged up to 16. A single tennis court is free to use on a first-come, first served basis (please don't prolong your game if you see someone waiting). Apart from the playground this park can be noisy with the sounds of trains and helicopters, or hugely exciting if that's where your interests lie. 'F', 'W' and 'G' bikes racks welcome careful cyclists here.

Harroway Gardens on Yelverton Road is over the other side of the railway from Fred Wells Gardens. A power station used to stand nearby in Lombard Road, backed by small rows of houses. When these were demolished in the 1970s a green space was created known as Harroway Road Open Space, since renamed as Harroway Gardens. (Harroway Road remains as the entrance to the timber yard.) The playground is for all ages up to 16. Caius House youth and community centre stands at one end of the park.

York Gardens is the largest of the 'small parks' in Battersea. Visible to traffic along York Road, mounds of light woodland under-planted with daffodils shield the park from noise and fumes. Playgrounds for all ages, ball games area, outdoor gym equipment, seating and table tennis. The park will see some drastic changes in the next few years as it is redeveloped by the Council along with the local estates.

Back in 1972 it was the first public park to be opened in the borough for 50 years. The library and community centre soon followed. The rose wheel garden paths were laid out to form a labyrinth (though much marred by subsequent repairs). The Falconbrook Pumping Station in the middle means this park is the site of a lot of work to do with the Thames Tunnel project for several years to come.

Guess how many visit your local park each day? Approximately :

- Shillington Park 1000**
- Heathbrook Park 600**
- Fred Wells Gardens 400**
- Falcon Park 300**
- Montefiore Gardens 200**
- Queenstown Green 150**
- Harroway Gardens 100**
- Christchurch Gardens 50**

These figures are based on visitor count surveys over the past two years. The work has led to an evidence-based estimate of 19 million visits a year to Battersea Park.

Sowing the seeds of community

Jenny Sheridan talks to some street gardeners

Neighbourliness, a sense of place, community spirit: these are aspects of life that most people value (and that some think are missing in cities such as London). And then there's nature and colour and beauty, not to mention biodiversity.

Grand words, you may say, and what have they to do with us? Well, some people have taken a simple route to improving their lives and those of their neighbours, just by planting flowers. It is remarkable what a difference a few plants in the road can make.

Take Jackie Bowers, in Comyn Road, which runs between St John's Road and Boutflower Road. Three years ago, Jackie planted a few flowers round the street tree nearest to her house. 'I felt a bit embarrassed at first', she says. 'I wasn't sure if I was going to be stopped. But the street cleaners were kind and removed any litter, and dogs surprisingly didn't seem to be a problem. Somebody left a bike, chained up but apparently abandoned, and I planted some nasturtiums that went wild all over it.'

Cuttings

About a year ago, Jackie noticed that plants had appeared round other trees in the street. People watered their plants, dead-headed them and generally looked after them. 'It's not expensive. Geoff lives in a top floor flat with no garden; he buys his plants in the marvellous Thrive garden in the grounds of Springfield Hospital. I take cutting from my own back garden or buy plants on special offer at Homebase. Sunflower seeds fell out of my bird-feeder and sowed themselves, and I transplanted them.

Jackie feels that the little gardens round the trees bring people together; neighbours stop to chat and children take an interest. 'It encourages people to come out of their house and say hello when they see you gardening. And maybe there's less likely to be crime if it's clear



Above: Petergate Green, above right: Hillier Road, right: Comyn Road

that people are looking after their properties.'

Over in Petergate, off York Road, Jane Eades practises a slightly different form of guerrilla gardening. She has taken over a corner of Petergate Green. The green is an attractive open space, created by the council about 40 years ago from a WWII bombsite. It is heavily shaded by trees planted at the time. Jane's gardening started when, at a loss for a birthday present for a friend, she cleared the overcrowded space in front of his flat and put in some new plants. But what to do with the untidy shrubs she had removed? The answer was to plant them on the green. This was not an easy task. The soil was dank and impacted and Jane had to clear piles of rubbish and dog mess. Digging was difficult.

Gradually, over several years, Jane improved the soil and increased the number of plants. As well as shrubs, there are rose bushes, perennials and annuals. Jane buys some, mainly from B&Q at knock-down prices, or takes cuttings from her garden. Her area is the only part of the green with flowers and colour.

Colourful

Like Jackie, Jane finds that neighbours stop to chat while she is gardening. It is noticeable that Petergate has more colourful front gardens than most Battersea streets. Jane thinks that people have gradually become more interested in gardening and now feel that it is 'something you do'.

The green is unusual in other ways. A Portuguese family keeps chickens in a shed in their garden. Sometimes they are let out onto the green, but always return when they are called by name.



Hillier Road, in south Battersea, may have been the first street in our area to attempt community gardening. Catharine Infield, who wrote about her road in *Battersea Matters* (spring 2011) is still involved. 'I don't tell people what to do, of course. When someone who has been looking after a tree space leaves the street, I leave it a few weeks then knock on the door of the new person and ask if they want to be involved. I look after the tree outside my house and some of the others if nobody wants to take them on. I've just bought a whole sack of daffodil bulbs from Lidl for £5 and I'll plant them around. Lidl is excellent for cheap plants.'

Catharine says most of the local dog-owners are punctilious about picking up their pet's mess, but foxes remain a problem.

Catharine believes the flowering tree surrounds add to the sense of neighbourliness as well as giving pleasure to passers-by.

The last word should go to a resident of the Peabody Estate. He put a hand-written note through Jackie Bowers' door:

'This is to say how much your flowers (and those planted around the pavement) have for years boosted the spirits of my wife and I whenever we pass by. If only more people would contribute to the community in such a way. Thank you.'