

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society SPRING 2013



Beaten by the business rates

A bookshop closes, but Viv Taylor-Gee hopes the community can take over

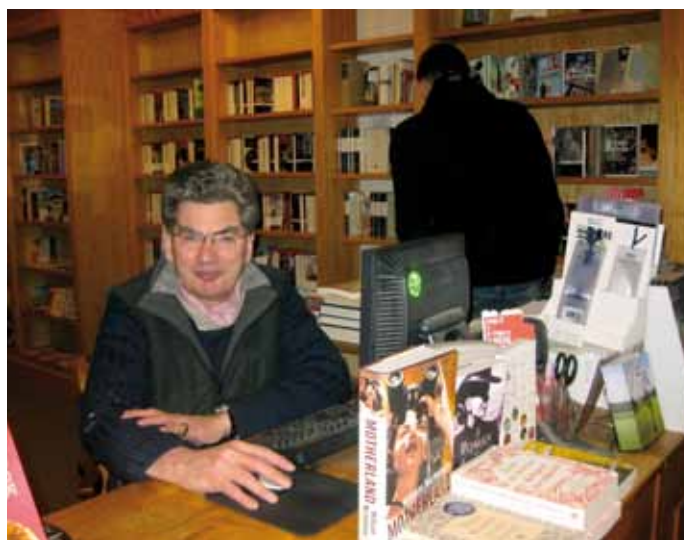
After 30 years in Northcote Road, the much-loved Bolingbroke Bookshop has been forced to close. But now a group of local residents is exploring the idea of starting a community bookshop.

Michael Gibbs, who has owned and managed the shop since 1982, says the last straw was the crippling business rate. The shop survived the recession in the early 90s, but the fast rise in the business rate locally – set by the government based on local rents and rateable values – has done for it. In 2009 the bookshop paid £3,600 per year business rate, now the bill is a shocking £15,000. In the last five years, turnover has dropped by 25%, from £230,000 to £170,000.

Next step

Michael and his wife Chantal opened Bolingbroke Bookshop in April 1982. Chantal had been an apprentice bookseller since she was sixteen, in Paris, and Michael had been a book keeper – which sounds a pretty good match – and they both loved books. It could be tricky however. On their first day, Michael remembers a customer came in 'looking for a particular book, I don't know the author or the title, but it's about this big, and it's got a yellow cover...'

The bookshop stocked a wide range of excellent new books and



Michael Gibbs : the consummate local bookseller. The business rate has beaten him at last.

could get books to customers faster than Amazon. Michael has a special love of good quality, well produced books, and he will continue to offer an online and delivery service. We will miss the shop. But now for the next step...

Losing the bookshop to a stationery shop has caused such dismay locally that it has inspired interest in a co-operative venture. We are looking for premises nearby and asking everyone who is interested, would like a stake in it, or has time or skills to spare, to get involved.

A public meeting has been called for **Monday 18 March, from 7pm to 9pm at Northcote Library** to brainstorm the proposal and examine the possibilities.

Hub

Community co-operatives are emerging all over the country, with support from Co-Operative UK and the Plunkett Foundation. Do we need a community bookshop? We have My Back Pages in Balham, the Bellevue Bookshop by Wandsworth Common, Clapham Books, and Waterstones, but they are all only just keeping afloat (one received a 40% increased rent demand last week).

We feel we need an open welcoming space to browse, a community hub which can be flexible and enterprising and respond to local demand. This is what we will be discussing. It might seem a reckless project, and the exorbitant local rents for shops may make it impossible, but being not-for-profit might help it survive.

Do come along on 18 March to listen to the story so far and contribute your ideas, or contact us at viv@europe.com.



visit our website: batterseasociety.org.uk
for regular updates on Battersea Society news, events and planning matters

From the editor



It has been a cold, wet winter, hasn't it? Our roofs have leaked, our toes have frozen, our heating bills are

frightening. But hopefully spring will soon be here. Lucy Saunders (page 8) welcomes frogs and their spawn to her garden – and who would have thought that there were so many newt-fanciers in the borough? As I write a wren is singing lustily outside and there is plum-coloured new growth on the roses. All we need is some sunshine.

This is another 16-page issue and there is more we could have covered. The Battersea Park adventure playground saga

continues; the occupiers have left amid recriminations. I look forward to hearing how children and teenagers get along with the new play structures the Council is installing, reckoned by many to be not adventurous enough. There is general regret about the loss of the One O'Clock Club for new parents.

Another area of concern is the Mayor's London-wide changes to police stations. At present it seems that the station in Battersea Bridge Road will close while the Lavender Hill station will be open for 24-hours (currently daytime only). The Battersea Society's view is that this is a police operational matter but that local people should have access to a designated station. Our libraries (page 9) are being outsourced to GLL, a social enterprise

currently rather creepily rebranding itself as Better. As in 'I work in the Better library' or 'Wandsworth has Better libraries'. I find it sad when we lose another part of public service, but let's hope they will provide an excellent service at a lower price for council tax payers.

Coffee shops seem to have taken the place of pubs in our culture (sadly, in my view). Suzanne Perkins has counted no less than 21 at Clapham Junction station alone. See the back page for her exposé of the price differentials between them.

And while we're at the Junction, let's wish it a happy 150th birthday.

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The man on the Battersea bus

Mike Roden gets on his high horse about home improvements

I expect most of you know the definition of an intellectual. That's someone who doesn't immediately think about the Lone Ranger crying 'Hi Ho Silver' when they hear the *William Tell Overture*. To return to a topical theme, have you heard the one about a horse going into a pub – 'Sorry', says the barman, 'We don't serve food.'

It is of course no laughing matter that supermarkets have (unwittingly of course) been stocking ready-meals whose main ingredient once came in third in the 2.30 at Newmarket, or that Ikea has been forced to withdraw its famous meatballs from the menu. Adulteration of food is serious and was first tackled by legislation in 1860 when adding noxious whitening agents to bread flour, or strychnine to beer (to improve the bitterness!) became illegal. The trouble was that the great British public actually liked their bread to be snowy white, and their beer to have that little extra flavour, and there was a bit of a fuss about it. Perhaps the same thing will happen this time and there will be calls for the equine element to be restored to bargain burgers.

Unabashed

There was a little spat prior to the Oscar ceremony about the accuracy of Spielberg's movie *Lincoln*. Apparently some Connecticut representatives were shown as being in favour of slavery when in fact they were implacably against. The unabashed screenwriter retorted that historical drama didn't have to be accurate down to the last detail. Filmmakers have never worried much about accuracy – the film title *Krakatoa East of Java* spectacularly misses the point that the island is west of Java. Someone said of Mel Gibson's portrayal of William Wallace in *Braveheart* that adding a plasticine dog to the cast and calling the movie Wallace and Gromit wouldn't have made it any more inaccurate than it already was.

Of course everyone's always taken the accuracy of Shakespeare's histories with a pinch of salt. Then suddenly we're faced with the news that his portrayal of Richard III with a deformed back – long seen as Tudor propaganda – is probably true, after the late king was unearthed from his resting place under a Leicester car

park. Whether he actually said 'A horse, a horse etc.' is still open to doubt.



Kitchen

As my dear friend Jane Austen so perceptively remarked, it is a truth universally acknowledged that a flat with an old kitchen must be in want of a new one. So it was on a Monday morning (about a month ago) that the builder came to call. And as my other dear friend Jane Marple might have observed, it's a mystery why it's all taking so long.

Without a functioning kitchen the microwave has become a great friend, and of course we have resorted to buying the occasional ready meal. It was a little disconcerting to be offered a reduced rate subscription to *Horse & Hound* magazine with our beef stroganoff – especially the mention of the second animal. (*Editor's note: That is in very bad taste!*) Hopefully the next time I write for you, all will be finished, or perhaps we'll all be finished?

Mind how you go.

Planning Matters

Monica Tross demonstrates how the Planning Committee speaks up for residents on planning and transport issues

800 BORIS BIKES FOR BATTERSEA

2013 looks to be the year of the cyclist. So far there have been 32 applications for cycle hire docking stations in Battersea with the maximum number of cycles per station ranging from 20 to 35 – I've taken an average of 25 to reach the total of 800. Most will be on the carriageway and many will replace parking bays. We were concerned at the lack of publicity for each site with residents only contacted directly by the Council if their home is very close to the docking station. In all cases one or more site notices have been displayed at the nearest point to the proposed station so we hope that their arrival will not be too much of a surprise. We look forward to hearing your experiences once the bikes are installed and ready for hire.

INCREASING PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

This consultation closed on 24 December and the Society sent in a brief response making clear our disquiet at this apparent attempt to centralise planning decisions. The proposals would permit extensions to be built without planning permission at double the size currently allowed. We were pleased to read that the Parliamentary Select Committee was critical as was Wandsworth Council; Jane Ellison, our local MP, also voiced

some concerns. When it is published the Government's response will be posted on the Local Government website, www.communities.gov.uk/consultations

BUS TRAVEL

We are well served by our buses but we have raised a number of operational concerns with TfL. One is the apparent increase in the closure of bus stops (and the footway) during construction work, rather than planning for the work in advance in order to maintain the service. This has been a particular problem at Falcon Road but problems are not restricted to the Clapham Junction area. Many busy stops lack countdown notice boards and it seems that TfL will continue to restrict this service unless cash is forthcoming – while offering a phone service at a cost to the phone user. The maddening habit of buses waiting at bus stops seems to be on the increase – unless I have been particularly unlucky. We complained about that too. On a happier note some of us find it handy to be able to change directly from the 19 at the Parkgate Road stop on to one of the other buses through to Clapham Junction and beyond and we have told TfL that too.

QUEENSTOWN ROAD STATION

The platform is being extended to take 10-coach trains and hopefully it will no longer then be physically impossible to board trains to Waterloo during the morning rush hour. But there don't seem to be any plans to remedy the vertiginous vertical gap between the train and the existing section of platform.

PLANNING UPDATES

Things have been quieter than usual although there is an interesting proposal just in to replace garages in Heathwall Street with a partly sunken modern house. Take a look at reference 2013/0458. Many residents are concerned at early warning of an application for a very large development on the Lookers Garage site in York Road (2013/0483). We were pleased that councillors refused an application by the owners of the Gardeners Arms site in Chatham Road for changes in the opening times of the planned nursery (2012/4861). On a less happy note, the plans for the building to replace The Castle were approved. We had objected to the poor design of the proposals (2012/4647).

Finally we came across a new tactic – twin tracking. An applicant recently put in two proposals essentially for the same work. The Society objected to both. One application was modified during the process to be more acceptable to a neighbour and the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee, and agreed. The second application then was posted as approved, but without modification. We will look out for this in future.

You can help. It is always helpful to be alerted to your concerns on planning or transport matters (or indeed told of things you like).

planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

322 more cycle docking stations have been applied for, bringing the totalling over 1100 for Battersea including 170 in Grant Road.

Nine Elms: a new city on our doorstep

Robert Molteno looks at the size and pace of development – and wonders who will live there

For 30 years now, we have been titillated by stories of the imminent redevelopment of Battersea Power Station. Like the people who heard Peter cry 'Wolf', we have almost ceased to believe that this area will ever be transformed. But yes, it really is going to happen. 2013 and the three or four years ahead are going to see a huge construction effort on

what is now being called 'Nine Elms on the South Bank'. The disruption to residents in the vicinity will be huge. The ambition over the next ten or twenty years is even bigger.

On the plus side, we are promised two new parks: the Thames Path running all the way from Battersea Park to the South Bank, and an urban space that prioritises people on foot

and on bicycles. But will the area become a ghetto for largely absent millionaires? And will the new shops and offices suck the life out of our borough's existing five town centres?

Wedge

Let's try and get a grip on what is actually going on. The area to be redeveloped is big – two-thirds of a square mile (or twice the size of Battersea Park) – mainly in Wandsworth, but with its northern segment in Lambeth. It runs from Battersea Park to Vauxhall. Its

shape is a triangular wedge between the river and Wandsworth Road. It includes Battersea Power Station, the Flower Market and the various warehouses, depots and Post Office Sorting Office behind it, as well as New Covent Garden Market.

There are 26 main developments. One is already built – Chelsea Bridge Wharf, the apartment blocks squeezed between Queenstown Road and the railway line into Victoria. Three are being constructed right now, including the Riverlight flats on the river. The most spectacular is the circular One St George Wharf at Vauxhall where a helicopter crashed in January. This, with its 50 storeys almost 600 feet high, will be, its developers proudly announce, ‘one of Europe’s tallest residential towers’. Another 13 developments have already received planning permission. From the upper deck of the 344 bus going along Nine Elms Lane the extent of site clearance already happening is clear. And finally, the remaining nine developments have either submitted their applications (four of them) or are still ‘pre-development’.

Commercial space

The scale of what will be built over the next ten to twenty years is astonishing. 16,000 new apartments. Around 30,000 – possibly as many as 40,000 – new residents – that’s nearly a 10 per cent addition to Wandsworth’s population. 600,000 square metres of new commercial space, mainly shops and offices. To get this in perspective, Tooting and Clapham Junction (our two largest town centres) have less than 100,000 square metres between them.

Building will accelerate greatly this year and next. By far the biggest site is, of course, the Power Station where Phase 1 (with 800 units) will start this year. Embassy Gardens is another large site with 650 apartments in Phase 1, almost all of which, like the Power Station, have already been sold, largely to overseas buyers. The first residents will move in at both sites in 2016 (those at Riverlight will occupy their new flats as early as 2014-15). The new US Embassy will



above left **Nine Elms: before start of the development**, above right **Proposed view towards US Embassy from Embassy Gardens**

also start being built and will open on Independence Day, 4 July 2017.

Other construction includes the demolition of the Battersea gasholders this year; the Northern Line extension from Kennington starting in 2015 (due to open in 2020); and the Thames Tideway Tunnel where work on its two shafts in the Nine Elms area is expected to start in 2015-16 and will take eight years to complete.

Temporary park

So what are the prospects for existing Battersea-dwellers? The most immediate is a new temporary park which will apparently open in front of the Power Station this summer though there is as yet no sign of topsoil, trees or planting. The developers have promised it, and Wandsworth Council has approved it. It will be connected to Battersea Park via an extension of the Thames Path under the railway bridge. Some ten years down the line, the developers promise a new six acre public park by the river on their site, lined with cafes, restaurants and shops. (For comparison, Battersea Park is 200 acres. Six acres is the size of four football pitches.)

A more ambitious green space will be a new ‘linear park’ running for a kilometre through the development. This will be about ten acres in extent – 30 metres wide at its narrowest and 300 at its widest near the US Embassy. It will contain a walking and cycling route along its length, as well as trees, gardens, and shops and cafés. The first part to open will be around the American Embassy and the Embassy Gardens development, but it will not exist fully until some time in the 2020s. The Thames Path extension will likewise take a decade or more before it runs continuously along

the river. Two obstacles have to be overcome – the Cringle Dock Waste Transfer Station, which will have to be removed, and completion of the Thames Tideway Tunnel.

This enormous project raises many questions that we need to investigate more closely. Lambeth is aiming for 40% ‘affordable’ housing in its part of the site. But in Wandsworth, the council’s target is just 15%. There are none in Phase 1 of the Power Station development. So will Nine Elms become a ghetto for the privileged – and largely non-resident – few?

Land has been allocated for only one new primary school. With up to 40,000 new inhabitants, is this realistic? And why are there are no sports fields, except for two football pitches on a roof?

Why on earth is the Northern Line extension not going a few metres further to Battersea Park Station? This would link the rest of us in the borough much more firmly to the new development.

The buildings around the linear park will range from 11 to 23 storeys. The flats at Southside in Wandsworth are 23 storeys. Surely it will become a shadowed windblown canyon?

If cyclists and pedestrians are to be prioritised (and the Barclays Hire Scheme will be extended to the area), will Wandsworth Council follow through with a slower, safer 20mph speed limit in the area? What will the extra 5,000 cars belonging to residents do to traffic congestion and road safety?

We can all benefit from this regeneration project – or suffer! Let’s keep a close eye on what is planned.
Robert Molteno
Wandsworth Living Streets

Wandsworth's Design Review Panel: toothless tiger or community watchdog?

Jenny Sheridan gives a cautious welcome to a new element in the planning process

Except where the railways rudely cut through them, you can mostly thread your way through Battersea's nineteenth century streets to your destination. But try to walk through an estate, whether private or council-owned, and you hit problems. Private estates are often gated to keep you out. Public housing seems expressly designed to deter anyone who simply wants to walk through to get to somewhere else. 'Why don't architects and planners design these things better?' we grumble.

How have these estates been planned and designed? What generally happens is that developers and their architects have discussions, sometimes over months or even years, with Wandsworth's planning department. They then put in a planning application and there is a consultation exercise before the application comes to the planning committee for a decision.

This is still the process for small-scale developments. However since April 2012 larger developments have come under greater design scrutiny. Following national guidelines, Wandsworth has set up a design review panel. Its aim is to improve the quality of large-scale development schemes.

Some failures

Quality, according to Antony McDonald, Wandsworth's director of environmental and community services, goes beyond aesthetics. In a report to the council in 2012, he says that good design involves offering

'the broadest range of benefits to the widest cross-section of the local community.' He acknowledges that some schemes have failed this. He cites the Montevetro building by St Mary's Church which 'is architecturally striking but gives nothing to its neighbours' and Chelsea Bridge Wharf, which 'channels pedestrians through a segregated strip'. Conversely the Putney Wharf scheme, despite unremarkable buildings is popular due to its 'wonderful new riverside space'.

Respect

The new panel's role is purely advisory; however its opinions are intended to carry weight with the developer, the planning applications committee and, where relevant, any future planning enquiry. It will be involved in residential schemes of over 50 units (including the Peabody estate on St John's Hill), other developments of 5,000 plus square metres, and other major schemes.

The design panel consists largely of architects who either live or practise locally, including well-known architects such as Will Alsop and Terry Farrell's and Norman Foster's practices. Other members include town planners and landscape architects. These are professionals whose views will command respect from their peers.

Naturally, all 36 members do not get involved in each case. In the case of the Peabody estate, there were six panel members,

most of them architects. Following a walk round the estate, the Peabody team gave a presentation followed by a panel discussion.

After their discussion the panel sent their views to Peabody. They comment positively on the larger size of the flats and their increased energy efficiency. They approve of the street frontages and the new north-south route leading to the new Clapham Junction station entrance. Noting that the scheme had been revised to reduce the height of the buildings, they approve the proposed massing.

Critical

However the panel is critical of the design of the scheme's public spaces, especially 'its sub-division into a series of tightly designed spaces which run the risk of introducing complexity that might discourage public use'. In other words, the kind of small and potentially menacing spaces that bedevil estates such as the Winstanley.

The public spaces should link better to both the station, with a new public square, and to Wandsworth Common. On the buildings themselves, the panel comments that 'stronger appreciation of the surrounding established buildings should be represented'. In other words, the estate should make more effort to fit in with its environment.

The Peabody Estate, built in the 1930s, currently consists of 351 homes; the charity's plans include increasing this to 650. It will be a mixed development: all current tenants will be offered a home on the estate and there will also be homes for sale or rent at market rates.

When the Peabody development came to Wandsworth's planning committee (where it was approved), the developer had made some amendments to the design of buildings and public spaces in response to the design panel's comments. It is to be hoped that this will help result in an estate that all of us – residents and non-residents – will be happy to walk through.



Plans for the new Peabody development, seen from the south

Boris bikes come to Battersea

Susie Morrow welcomes a new way to make ourselves healthier and our streets more pleasant

As a member of the Barclays Cycle Hire (BCH) scheme since its 2010 launch, I'm pleased that it is arriving in Wandsworth. Like car clubs, the scheme allows access to a particular mode of transport – in this case, cycling. For many local residents it will remove the obvious barrier to cycling of having nowhere to keep a bicycle at home. The scheme increases opportunities for 'multimodal' travel, and flexibility of journey eg allowing trips out on the bike and back on the bus. It's sociable too; whenever I've used a Boris Bike, I am struck by the camaraderie between users.

Using Boris bikes is healthy, and it can save you money. (Is it just me, or does £784 for an annual bus and tram pass and £1,216 for an annual Zones 1&2 Travelcard seem a lot of money?). The scheme is designed for short trips of up to 30 minutes or four to five miles, putting Chelsea, Putney and Wandsworth within easy reach of Battersea residents for a single-hire-trip. Half of all London car trips are two miles or less, so there is clear potential for hire bikes to replace some of these. This is a win-win, with the benefit of a more active lifestyle as well as cleaner air and quieter, less congested streets.

No car

Since 2001, car ownership has fallen across London, and nearly half of Wandsworth households do not own a car. Some Battersea wards have even lower car ownership, notably Latchmere (62.3% of households) and Queenstown (59.3%) (Census 2011 data).

Perhaps some of us will use the BCH scheme as a kind of outdoor low-cost gym (£90 annual membership). Imagine groups of older residents going for leisurely rides round Battersea Park and via the riverside to Putney... 'Battersea Bimblers', anyone?

As anyone who has used them will know, Boris Bikes are well suited for local journeys. Though sturdy (for which read: 'built like a tank'), the low gearing makes it easy to glide along on the comfortably

wide tyres, and the enclosed chain means you can wear normal clothes – as many 'suited-and-booted' City types have discovered. The small front luggage rack securely holds a bag or briefcase.

The scheme is due to arrive here in December, as part of a 25km². extension into Wandsworth and Hammersmith & Fulham and increased coverage of Kensington & Chelsea and Lambeth. Transport for London has learned much about running it, and those lessons will be applied in Wandsworth. The first requirement is a good network of docking stations; around 60–70 are planned for our borough, including a 'super-docking-station' on Grant Road immediately north of Clapham Junction station.

Useful signal

Docking stations must be accessible for service vehicles, and experience has shown that they need to be sufficiently large to minimise the need to redistribute bicycles so that both spaces and bikes are available at each station. As few of Wandsworth's pavements are wide enough, in most locations the docking stations will be on the carriageway. Bicycles, like cars, are vehicles, so there's logic in using road space. This also sends a useful signal about who our pavements are for, as well as helping to re-balance our streets towards 'active travel' (walking and cycling).

Some local people appear anxious about the impact of a docking station near their home. I for one would welcome it – the ultimate in door-to-door transport! And I would feel safer after dark with more people around; natural surveillance is the best way to make our streets safer. While there may be some noise from docking/undocking, what about the reduction in car doors slamming and the nuisance and dirt from vans and cars? We have got so used to this low-level motor-vehicle annoyance that we don't even notice it.

From April, Wandsworth Council takes over public health responsibilities locally, and the BCH



scheme will help address the pressing need for residents to be more physically active. Indeed, recently published NICE health guidance identifies cycle hire schemes as a cost-effective way to promote cycling and improve public health.

Speed limit

The scheme's 19.5 million journeys to date have highlighted its safety* and rôle in normalising cycling among a wider range of Londoners. Nevertheless, more could be done to make Wandsworth's streets more inviting to would-be Boris-Bikers; fear of 'the traffic' is what most discourages people from cycling. With this in mind, Wandsworth Living Streets has floated the concept of a 20mph speed limit for most roads in the northern swathe of Wandsworth, between Vauxhall and Putney.

You can find out more about the scheme as it develops on Wandsworth Council and TfL websites, at www.wandsworth.gov.uk and www.tfl.gov.uk (search for 'cycle hire'). See you on a Boris Bike next Christmas?

Susie Morrow worked on behalf of Wandsworth Cycling Campaign with Jane Ellison MP on the proposal to the Mayor of London in March 2011 for extending the cycle hire scheme into Battersea. She is chair of Wandsworth Living Streets but is writing in a personal capacity. She is also community member of the NICE advisory group which produced national guidance on promoting walking and cycling as forms of travel or recreation (published November 2012, www.nice.org)

Meditation through movement

Hamid Momtahan answers common queries about the ancient art of T'ai Chi

What is T'ai Chi?

T'ai Chi in the West is associated with physical, mental, philosophical and spiritual health. T'ai Chi's gentle movements are known to combat stress; it is a good form of relaxation or 'meditation in motion' and also an effective form of self-defence. Above all it improves balance and can help prevent falls in mature people. It is estimated that 180 million people worldwide practice T'ai Chi daily.

How will T'ai Chi benefit me?

Through practicing T'ai Chi, the body gradually learns to be flexible and softens, and the mind follows, un-hindered by memories of the past or unknown future events. This mindfulness helps you to see clearly and yield in the face of difficulties.

Is there any research about the health benefits of T'ai Chi?

There is a great deal of empirical research on the effectiveness of T'ai Chi in maintaining and balancing good physical and mental health. Simply Google T'ai Chi or see www.southlondontaichi.co.uk

What happens in a T'ai Chi class?

Most classes start with gentle stretching or warm-up exercises. These loosen the body, relax the mind, improve flexibility and balance and build up awareness of your body. Hidden in these exercises is the essence of T'ai Chi: being soft rather than hard and unyielding.

In most classes a T'ai Chi 'form' will be taught. A form is a combination of movements initially developed by a Grand Master, passed on to his students and then taught to you movement by movement. The form is not the end; it is only a tool to practice the essence of T'ai Chi.

Many additional exercises go on in the class, most of which involve working with other

students. They are all good fun.

How long does it take to learn the 'form'?

Normally a short form takes about a year to learn and a further year to internalise and make it your own so you do not become your teacher's carbon copy.

Are there any rules to follow in the class?

I have some 'Cool Rules' in my classes, some of which have been suggested by my students.

We are constantly learning from each other.

- All students to under-perform by 24% in my classes. For example, if they can reach and touch their toes or knees, they aim to do less by 24%. We have a lot of fun with this.

- We encourage everybody to sit when they are tired. It's not a competition.

- We practice softness to accumulate softness. No hard external martial kicks or punches.

- We are kind to ourselves. If we cannot do a movement at that moment, so what? No need to get cross with ourselves.

- We maintain a sense of humour and enjoyment.

- We practice mono-tasking not multi-tasking, eg no walking and texting simultaneously.

I can't lie on the floor or yoga mat. Does that matter?

You don't need a yoga mat or to lie on the floor to practice T'ai Chi.

Do I need to wear a Chinese uniform or Kung-fu soft shoes?

No. You do not need any uniform, coloured belt, or even Kung-fu shoes. The beauty of T'ai Chi is that you can exercise barefoot (as long as you are not diabetic, as in that case minor

injuries may take longer to heal).

Feel the grass underneath your feet and sun on your back (use your imagination for the last one). It is all about celebrating your achievements internally and not wearing any external marking or ranking.

Will I lose weight or would my headache go away?

Probably not. What you achieve is good balance, coordination and good breathing habits. Further to this, you develop your stabilising muscles, good body mechanics and postural stability, above all general well-being mentally and physically.

I am 85 years old. Can I learn?

My oldest student was 105 when she was learning T'ai Chi. She died at the age of 107. I learnt from her that one of the keys to longevity is not to give up on learning.

Can I buy a book or DVD instead of attending a class?

Books and DVDs can be useful as supplementary tools but not as the main learning resource. Register in a local class, feel the energy of a good teacher and other learners around you. Breathe together; fly like a flock of birds together as you move through these gentle and beautiful movements.

How do I start?

Head for your nearest T'ai Chi class, talk to the teacher, ask if you can attend a session and judge for yourself. Do you like the teacher, their style of teaching, the group, and the environment? Do they practice 'soft' T'ai Chi or have 'Cool Rules'? There's a saying 'A thousand mile journey starts with its first step'. Enjoy the journey.

Who are you and where do you teach, Hamid?

Among my classes are a group of nuns, Lambeth Council's Healthy Lifestyles GP Referral Patient Scheme and over 50s classes. In Battersea I teach two low-cost classes at Katherine Low Settlement.

Hamid is at 07932 671 258, email [Hamid\(AT\)southlondontaichi.co.uk](mailto:Hamid(AT)southlondontaichi.co.uk) or see www.southlondontaichi.co.uk You can also Google other teachers and classes.



Our gardens are full of amphibians

If frogs are in the garden spring can't be far away, says Lucy Saunders

Whatever the weather seems to be saying, it is spring. There are frogs in my pond, soon there'll be spawn, and the solitary toad in my garden will appear shortly. Newts are the third in this amphibian group.

Watching tadpoles in a jar is one of the common experiences of childhood but it does take a little more care than just dumping them in a tank with some weed to get them to turn into froglets. With reports in the press of the deadly redleg and other diseases of amphibians, we are all more aware of the pressures that these creatures are under and many people want to help. In Wandsworth, we live in a borough particularly graced with still water, with lakes and ponds in many local parks. The ponds in people's gardens provide refuges for all three of the commonest amphibians.

'I've had two ponds of common or smooth newts for 10 or 15 years,' says local resident Caroline. 'They came from an original six (four female, two male) brought from a friend's pond in Devon. They settled in quickly and now I guess there must be 60 or more. They come back into the ponds around late February or early March, the males seeming to arrive first. I take their first sighting to be my first official day of Spring.'

Amphibians don't spend all their time in the water. It's a spring thing as they get together to mate and spawn. You can have frogs or toads or even newts in your garden even if you don't have a pond. Australian Erin was surprised to find frogs. 'I was scared the first time one jumped at me while digging and thought it was a rat. They come out all the time in the rain and there must be some water source for them somewhere.'

Damp places

According to Valerie Selby, biodiversity specialist for Wandsworth Council, if you have the right environment, amphibians will appear. She emphasises the need for more than just a pond; amphibians need places to go for the many months of the year when they stay on land. They

want dank, damp places to hide from predators – both cats and foxes kill even if they do not eat frogs.

The current fashions in gardening encourage neat organisedness rather than the slightly chaotic wilderness that amphibians require. Valerie also points out the basic incompatibility of fish with amphibians. She says: 'I hear from many people who think they have both fish and amphibians. Unless there are barriers and places in the water that are fish-free, it is unlikely.' Valerie says while there are some types of fish that are more compatible with sharing with amphibians, the common goldfish is a carp and will eat tadpoles with delight.

Valerie is also concerned at the potential for spreading disease by people moving amphibians from one place to another. 'People know about red leg disease in frogs and there are similar diseases in newts.' While Valerie has no concrete evidence that redleg is active in the borough, because of the lack of funds to test any mass death of frogs, she certainly has heard from people who have suddenly got a lot of dead frogs. Amphibians do move themselves but nothing like as far as human beings sometimes take them. 'Because no one understands the science of

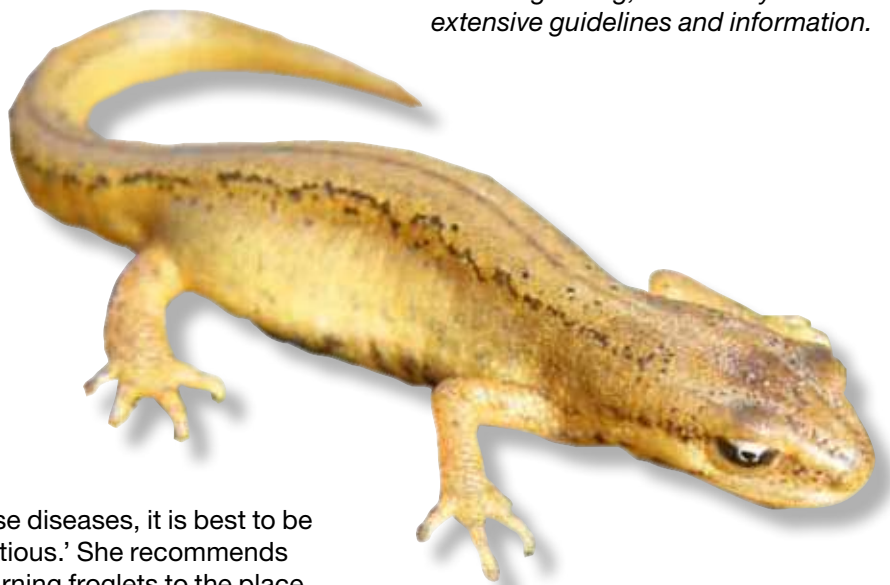
about the lack of genetic diversity created by isolated populations. 'Having amphibians is not like buying bedding plants,' she comments, the future sustainability of the population has to be a consideration.

Amazing variety

There are seven public parks in the borough with lakes or ponds of significant size. Thirty-one sites in the borough are deemed Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation. And our gardens are an important resource for wildlife all over the borough. Another local resident is amazed at the variety of wildlife she meets. 'There are frogs in our garden which is about 100m from Clapham Common. No pond. I don't know how they do it. There have been frogs since 2002 when we moved in so they must have gone away, bred and the offspring come back.'

'We also have seen many stag beetles, supposedly very rare, bats, jays and other wildlife I never expected to see in London.' Making our gardens even a little bit amphibian friendly by having a wild untouched patch makes a difference to wildlife in the area.

For more information about all amphibians – not just frogs – go to www.froglife.org, where they have extensive guidelines and information.



these diseases, it is best to be cautious.' She recommends returning froglets to the place the spawn was acquired to ensure that genetically driven diseases are kept in one place. She worries

What next for our libraries?

Jenny Sheridan outlines the current situation

From 1 April this year, our libraries will no longer be run by Wandsworth council. Following a lengthy competitive tendering exercise, the contract has been awarded to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), a not-for profit social enterprise.

In 2011, faced with cuts to its government funding, the council decided to outsource its library and heritage services, together with Croydon Council. According to Councillor Jonathan Cook (*The Guardian* 5.1.12), the aim was to benefit from shared overheads and buying power.

Shortlisted

Three organisations were shortlisted to manage the service: John Laing Ltd, the construction company, Wandsworth's existing library staff who formed a company to bid as demanded by the tendering process, and GLL. The final decision was based both on price (75% of the weighting) and on service delivery.

Despite Cllr Cook's view that the councils would save on costs by sharing a provider, Croydon has chosen John Laing – the most expensive bidder and 'the worst nightmare of public library

supporters', according to www.insidecroydon.com. Wandsworth's choice of GLL ensures that the contract goes to an organisation which has experience of running former council services.

No closures

The GLL bid for running the service represents a saving to the council of almost £900,000 a year. The contract runs for eight years, renewable for a further eight. The council has pledged that the service will be at least as good as at present, that no library will be closed and that all permanent staff will transfer to GLL. These pledges refer to the current state of the contract and changes may be made at a later date. Performance will be monitored by council staff.

There is no doubt that savings have to be made. Due to the funding cuts, over the last two years hundreds of public library jobs have been lost countrywide, opening hours have been shortened and 10% of local authorities have closed libraries. In London, Camden, Brent, Barking and Barnet have all closed libraries and many more are under threat across the country.



York Gardens Library

Library staff in the borough seem cautiously optimistic about their new employers. GLL, they say, has a good reputation for running leisure centres; moving into libraries is new to them (to date they manage only Greenwich libraries). The organisation will want to be seen to be doing a good and responsible job. It is run as a co-operative, with the staff electing the directors annually.

GLL say that they are committed to local communities and their priorities are to increase book stocks, encourage a range of activities, upgrade IT and create community hubs. It is also taking over the heritage and archive service, an area new to the organisation.

What remains unclear is how GLL can manage to make the savings they promise while matching current performance. Due to commercial confidentiality, the council paper describing this is unfortunately not in the public domain.

Forthcoming events

Monday 8 April

7 for 7.30 pm

Lecture Theatre, Dyson Building, Royal College of Art Hester Road, SW11

Talk on the Cass Sculpture Foundation about its stunning sculpture collection and recent commissions. £5 on the door.

Apologies: the date of this lecture has been changed from 18 March.

Thursday 25 April

7 for 7.30 pm

AGM, followed by talk on the Battersea Summer Scheme by Henrietta Croker-Poole. St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road.

Sunday 28 April

Annual spring lunch

Thai on the river, Lombard Road.

Dragons' Den or good neighbours fund-raiser?

Battersea Arts Centre is hosting an event described as 'a friendly Dragon's Den for philanthropists'. Run in conjunction with The Funding Network, it is the first event of its kind south of the river.

Three local charities working with young people will present their projects followed by an optional crowd-funding session. There will be food, drink and entertainment.

BAC's Jessi Pollack says, 'It should be a great evening. Battersea has a long history of social reform and today our local charities are still doing important work for social change. But it won't all be serious – it'll be a great opportunity to meet



friends and neighbours and have a fun and inspiring night out.'

Tickets £10 from BAC www.bac.org.uk and click on Good Neighbours or phone 020 7223 2223

Tuesday 19 March 6 – 9pm

Great Bus Journeys of the World No 6

Mike Roden takes the 87 from Battersea to the West End



This bus route begins at Wandsworth Plain, near the Town Hall, but the early part of its journey follows the 170 route already described in *BM* Autumn 2012, so on a bitterly cold, snow-flecked February morning, I choose to begin my trip to Aldwych from outside Clapham Junction Station.

I settle down on the top deck, and the bus carries me off up Lavender Hill, past Asda, the Magistrates Court and Battersea Arts Centre. We're quickly into uncharted (by me, anyway) territory as we enter Lambeth along Wandsworth Road. Railway lines separate this area from the ambitious large scale developments in Nine Elms. This neighbourhood is also ripe for modernisation, with swathes of municipal housing intermingled with small parades of mostly rundown shops, but one suspects it will be a long time coming.

Flamboyance

There are exceptions to this slightly shabby feel. The frontage of the Artesian Well is extravagantly decorated, but apparently the real flamboyance is found inside this popular nightclub. This traveller has no wish to experience the 'excessive, fantasy aesthetic' of its interior, so you'll have to venture there yourself if you wish to find out more...

Back to reality, we pass Wandsworth Town Station, and then the entrance to the romantic sounding Lark Hall Park, once the site of a substantial country house. Planned just after the war, it finally opened in 1974 after thirty years

of delay by Lambeth council.

Nearing Vauxhall, I catch sight of the Chelsea Guest House which is clearly contravening the trades' descriptions act. St George's Tower – like a vast upright Tower of Pisa – comes into view, as does its crane which, fog-enshrouded, probably caused the recent helicopter crash, which killed two people and closed this busy intersection for several days. No sign of any damage now as we take a brief stop at the futuristic bus station before crossing Vauxhall Bridge.

Haunting

Turning right on the embankment, we pass the Grade II listed Morpeth Arms. This was built in 1845 to help quench the thirst of warders at the nearby Millbank prison, which opened in 1816. It soon proved unfit to be the new National Penitentiary and was downgraded to a holding depot for convicts waiting for transportation. Rumour has it that one of those unlucky souls killed himself and now haunts the cellars of the Morpeth Arms.

The National Gallery of Art was built on the site, opening its doors in July 1897. It was soon better known as the Tate Gallery, after its founder Sir Henry Tate. Originally exhibiting both British and Modern collections, in 2000 it was renamed Tate Britain with the launch of Tate Modern on Bankside, and is now dedicated to the display of historical and contemporary British art.

Opposite Tate Britain is the Millbank Millennium Pier, which

provides the Tate to Tate river bus service. The original craft had a distinctive 'spotty' livery designed by Damien Hirst, but the high speed boat in question was wasted as the route has a 13mph speed limit. A less speedy boat is now used, and the spots on the first boat have now been painted over.

Protest

Next door stands Millbank Tower, 118 metres high. Labour ran its 1997 campaign here, subsequently relocating its headquarters to Millbank, but moving out when the annual rent of £1 million became unaffordable. Since 2006, the Conservatives have based their campaign headquarters here. In November 2010 the building was invaded by around 200 students protesting against increases in university fees.

We pass Lambeth Bridge and head towards Westminster. Horseferry Road commemorates the ferry which was here before the bridge, and Dean Stanley Road leads to St John's, Smith Square, now a concert venue. For those who appreciate English Baroque (which I don't) the building is regarded as a masterpiece.

A good alternative for when the queue is too long outside Westminster Abbey is a visit to St Margaret's Church, close by. Benedictine monks founded this in the 12th century to give local people their own simpler place of worship. It became the parish church of the Palace of Westminster in 1614, when the Puritans, unhappy with the



highly liturgical Abbey, chose to hold Parliamentary services in the more 'suitable' St Margaret's; a practice that has continued since that time. The bus circles round Parliament Square, passing a statue of Abraham Lincoln (a replica of one in Lincoln Park Chicago). On the other side Churchill's statue glowers towards the Commons. When the square was redeveloped in the 1950s he commented that he'd like a statue of himself in this spot.

Shivering tourists are beginning to flock across Westminster Bridge. Foreign school-parties predominate, taking more interest in each other than in the Mother of Parliaments.

We're on Whitehall now, and the Cenotaph approaches. The Great War officially ended in June 1919 with the Treaty of Versailles. A victory parade was planned and Sir Edwin Lutyens was commissioned to create a non-denominational shrine in memory of the war dead, which could be saluted by troops marching past. He dubbed this the Cenotaph: the empty tomb. The temporary wood and plaster structure captured the public imagination and Lutyens designed a stone Cenotaph, which the King would unveil on Armistice Day 1920. The ceremony was subsequently linked with a plan to bring the body of an unknown soldier to England (representing the hundreds of thousands who had no known grave) for burial at the same time.

Moving event

By all accounts it was an exceedingly moving event, as the Unknown

Warrior was brought to the Cenotaph on a gun carriage, and then after the two minutes silence, and the Last Post, taken to Westminster Abbey where 'they buried him among kings'. Over the next ten days an estimated 1.25 million mourners visited the Cenotaph engulfing it with a mountain of flowers.

Women of war

Just north of the Cenotaph, opposite the Ministry of Defence is The National Monument to the Women of World War II unveiled by the Queen in 2005. There are 17 individual sets of clothing and uniforms around the sides, symbolising the hundreds of different jobs women undertook in World War II.

The equestrian statue to Field Marshal Earl Haig (still dogged by controversy about his responsibility for the horrendous casualties at the Battle of the Somme in 1916) stands near the entrance to Horseguards, with two mounted Lifeguards from the Household Cavalry standing guard, and tourists milling around fruitlessly trying to get the cavalymen to respond.

So we pass into Trafalgar Square with Nelson keeping an eye (so to speak) on the crowds below. The fourth plinth is graced by another, non-militaristic equestrian statue of a young boy on a rocking horse.

Charing Cross Station opened in 1864. The cross in the forecourt – restored in 2010 – was based on the original 13th century Whitehall Cross that had been demolished in 1647. Distances in London are officially

Sights to see: The Artesian Well, Wandsworth Road; Tate Britain; Millbank Tower; statue Of Abraham Lincoln, Parliament Square; Monument to the Women of World War II, Whitehall; The Waldorf Hilton, Aldwych

measured from the original site of that cross in Whitehall, now the statue of Charles I, and not from this replica.

The Strand, once at the rivers' edge and studded with magnificent palaces, now replaced by theatres: the Adelphi, Vaudeville and, Savoy, and other tourist magnets like the Angus Steak House. Aldwych is a crescent joining the Strand at each end, here the bus turns and comes to a stop. After fifty interesting minutes this is journey's end – just by the Waldorf Hilton.

My expense account* will not run to a coffee in this establishment, let alone a Waldorf Salad so I make an excuse and leave.

**(Editor's note: What expense account?)*



Squaring the financial circle

Mac Downes looks at the impact of social services cuts on older people in sheltered housing

My work in Wandsworth over the past few years has brought me into contact with a lot of not-so-young people. As outreach manager for Wandsworth Older People's Forum I work with groups of elderly people across the borough, helping them gain access to additional activities and resources. The main thrust behind my work is to draw people together and help reduce isolation.

Recent headlines have expressed concerns about the ways in which the government's reaction to the financial crisis will affect some of our more vulnerable older people. Without going into the blame game I want here to reflect upon one or two issues that confront front-line public services. I will quote some questions and opinions from older people living in sheltered accommodation and a comment from a member of staff. I am not blaming or seeking out local villains; Wandsworth Council and registered social landlords have been asked by the government to square the financial circle. As we all know, that is not possible and doggedly attempting to do so can be painful – especially for the recipients.

To give one example, the Supporting People Programme, a funding scheme introduced by the last government nine years ago to provide flexible support around housing, is no longer ring-fenced. Local authorities have reallocated a portion of this fund in order to support direct care needs. Some authorities have made 50% cuts across the board while Wandsworth researched past uptake and is adopting a more targeted approach. Nevertheless it is still seen by many older people as a cruel cut.

Less supportive

An 86-year-old man living in sheltered housing with extra care provision wrote the following piece:

'When the time came for me to leave hospital rehabilitation I had to make a decision. Should I have my house made wheelchair-friendly or scrap the lot and come to a place like XY where all my needs would be satisfied. I would no longer have

to buy and prepare my food and could either eat in a friendly dining room or my own flat. My fridge, freezer, cooker and microwave would be redundant. My flat would be regularly cleaned and I would no longer need a vacuum cleaner. I could send clothes to be laundered as often as I pleased without worrying about washing powder.

'Then Supporting People became less supportive and in the name of financial efficiency a new care provider was contracted by the council to provide my extra care needs. They didn't realise my chosen home was special to me and my fellow residents. It wasn't a fully fledged care home nor was it just a block of flats. So they decided to call it a block of flats with care people calling according to a roster and using equipment that would have to be provided by the tenant.'

Wheelchair request

I know an elderly lady with heavily bandaged legs who can only wear carpet slippers. She lives in a sheltered scheme blessed with extensive garden spaces. Her question was, 'I would love to go out and feel the wind on my face. Why can't I have a wheelchair?'

Social Services' response was that they could only fund a wheelchair if she regularly goes out a minimum of four times every week. This lady cannot afford to buy a wheelchair. Presumably if four sturdy volunteers came along and offered to set up a rota to push her round the block on four separate days the criteria would be met and a funded wheelchair forthcoming!

Recently a sheltered housing manager said to me, 'Thank goodness you are in post, Mac. Our contracts no longer allow us to do the touchy feely stuff'.

Office hours

To explain, managers/wardens of sheltered housing schemes have been given revised contracts. In the past they would have a rôle in helping all residents towards community

activities. Now they are in post just to ensure the building is fit for purpose and to deal with any emergencies that befall residents within office hours.

Unease

To take one example of the change, a manager was told by the social landlord responsible for the scheme that, in a break with past practice, he was not to prepare a Christmas lunch for residents. Happily, the residents rallied round and organised a lunch, to which they invited the manager and his wife as guests.

I present no statistics; I attribute no local blame. These three examples fill me with unease.

The Battersea Society

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Paved with good intentions?

Jenny Sheridan recalls a recent trip

In January I tripped over a paving stone and fell, straining some muscles in my arm. It shook me up at the time and was painful for several weeks but no real harm was done. However it set me thinking about falls and their impact both on individuals and the public purse.

Falls, particularly in older people, can result in broken bones and hospitalisation, with all the additional problems that can bring. Think of the cost to the NHS, the possibility of further illness, potentially the cost to the Council or the family of home alterations.

I'm certainly not the only person to be concerned. Hospital admissions due to falls are higher than expected and falls and bone health are part of the Wandsworth Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)'s Commissioning Intentions for 3013/14. The Wandsworth Older People's Forum is part of a working group of GPs, the CCG and the Council looking at falls prevention. The forum is calling for recording of

falls to be differentiated as to whether they happen indoors or in the street, which is not done at present. Lillas Gillies, secretary of the WOPF, encourages people to report any falls they experience to the Council – there is a dedicated form on the website or you can phone the hotline on 020 8871 6708.

More than an inch

Kevin Power is in charge of roads and pavements at Wandsworth Council. He points out that the Council has a duty under the Highway Act to monitor and attend to road and pavement defects. The Council monitors the borough's roads every six months and busy roads such as Lavender Hill every month. Any paving stone that is more than an inch higher than its surrounds must be repaired or replaced.

Costs to the Council around roads and pavements arise mainly from insurance claims by drivers relating to potholes in the carriageway rather than by



A loose paving stone which caused serious injury to a 90-year-old resident last November

pedestrians – perhaps because a broken hip or ankle tends to take one's mind off claiming damages.

The Wandsworth Society has started an energetic investigation into the state of pavements, surveying Garratt Lane. Having sent it to the Council for comment, they are hoping to get a timeline for repairs and also to discover more about the guidelines which divide paving into three sections: unsafe, soon to be unsafe or aesthetically displeasing.

Although large, the costs to the NHS locally are also hard to quantify. Wandsworth's Falls and Bone Health Service (Battersea Matters Spring 2012) suggests that about one third of falls happen outdoors. The service has a strong preventative focus, with exercise classes, advice and work to improve co-ordination, confidence and balance.



Restaurant review: Rosita & the sherry bar

Carol Rahn loved the food at this tapas bar

Let me say right from the beginning that we will have to go back. For a start, it's a sherry bar and we didn't have any sherry. And when the menu is delicious and beautifully presented, more than one trip is definitely required.

On a Saturday evening, the restaurant and bar were both full. We were glad we had booked in advance.

The staff are Spanish; the service friendly but efficient. On one wall stretches an exuberant blue mural of Rosita and her friends, presiding in oversized glory and in party mood, all reflected on the mirrored wall opposite. The décor is contemporary but comfortable, keeping the rustic touches of muted tiles and hanging hams up-to-date. The overall effect is warm and relaxed, even if the

tables are a bit close together.

Our examination of the wine list didn't go much beyond the reasonable selection of wines by the glass, all in the range of £4.50-£5.50. We started with two of the £1.50 miniature Rosita skewers – one anchovy, roast pepper and aubergine; the other, goat cheese, tomato and basil. Both beautiful and bursting with flavour.

These were followed by meltingly tender, light sardines set off by onion and carrot and the zing of sherry vinegar. Tortilla made with haricot beans and chorizo was small but satisfying. Both these dishes were between £4.00 and £5.25.

Dishes from their Catalan-style Jospier oven start at £7.80 for the BBQ grilled octopus and top out at £11.40

for the 150g filet. Our fish, seafood pintxo (snack) offered perfectly grilled and seasoned tuna, cod and shrimp. Lamb cutlets were tender and were accompanied by rosemary potatoes and a garnish of chargrilled vegetable strips. In truth, we could have scarfed up a few more dishes. We limited ourselves to the manchego cheese – full flavoured and smooth but served with only a miserly portion of membrillo (quince cheese) – and citron vert, which turned out to be a palate-refreshing sherbet.

Each item on the menu is followed by a recommendation of the best type of sherry to accompany it. Unfortunately, I found the small print on the menu difficult to read. Still – another trip to try a sherry or two and a dip into the hams and ibericos is something to look forward to.

Rosita looks set to be a great success and a welcome addition to the southern end of Northcote Road.

Rosita & the sherry bar, 124 Northcote Road, SW11 020 7998 9093

The fence at the top of the cliff and the ambulance at the bottom

Aaron Barbour, new director of the Katherine Low Settlement, talks to Jenny Sheridan

The Katherine Low Settlement has been part of Battersea life for 89 years. It's a community centre dedicated to fighting the effects of both poverty and isolation. It nurtures and provides space for projects such as Young Carers, refugee projects and runs a lunch club for elderly people among many other activities, including T'ai Chi (see page 7).

This year it has, for the first time, appointed a director. Aaron Barbour started work in January and is beginning to think about ways to celebrate its 90th birthday as well as making vital strategic plans for its future. One of his first tasks is to make an inventory of its handsome but higgledy-piggledy Battersea High Street premises; two buildings from different eras tied together by a warren of corridors, staircases, hallways and doors. He then aims to raise 'a chunk of capital' to refurbish the building and make it more accessible and welcoming.

Updating communications

'KLS is a brilliant place, with so much potential. The staff are fantastic, we've got great volunteers, there's lots going on, but it can be even better. I'd like it to be buzzing all hours, seven days a week,' says Aaron. 'In my first three months I'll be finding out what makes us tick and sorting out some of the building's minor problems. Looking further afield, we're starting a community mapping project to gather evidence of existing community needs and assets, covering the whole of SW11, and perhaps the whole of Wandsworth.' This, he says, will give KLS a remit for action and the credibility to seek funds to implement it. 'Sarah Rackham did this 15 years ago but of course things have changed. We'll develop a three-year strategy based on the community's current needs. As well as working on updating our communications I want to work at ground level, developing relationships, working closely with people.'

I ask Aaron about his background. Brought up in Chiswick, his family



had a strong ethic of volunteering and community activism. He realised early on that he wanted to work in the voluntary sector and has held posts in several organisations, most recently Community Links, a charity with a firm base in the East End but a national remit. I sense this is the direction he would like to lead the Katherine Low Settlement. 'We were working closely with people in crisis but we also studied the reasons for that crisis – poverty, education, employment issues. We provided the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff but we also tried to build fences at the top. We learned from local issues and used that

**We studied
the reasons
for crisis**

knowledge to do national research, policy-making and campaigning.' While he was at Community Links, Aaron set up a social enterprise consultancy arm, which in just two years contributed £350,000 to the charity's income. He brings to KLS his skills in fund-raising and in strategic planning and systems.

Seeing him in action at a community meeting, it is also clear that he brings enthusiasm and networking skills. He comes across as committed, optimistic and very likeable.

Arriving in Battersea, Aaron was struck by 'the amazing inequality of wealth. Poor people are being squeezed out of the area, as in other parts of central London. One of our jobs must be to bring the various communities together, to try to prevent fear and distrust developing between different sections.'

Aaron has had little time as yet to explore Battersea's cultural and gastronomic delights, although he loves food and is the main cook at home. He lives in Shepherd's Bush with his Serbian-born wife and their two daughters, aged nine and five. Apart from work and family, his great interest is music, from electronic to opera. He is also looking forward to visiting Theatre 503 and Battersea Arts Centre.

Potential

As he guides me through the building to one of its several exits, Aaron is stopped by a tutor who has been teaching a dance class upstairs. She is frustrated because the door is locked and there is no-one around to open it. 'This place has so much potential,' says Aaron, 'and people are brimming with ideas and enthusiasm. But simple things like that can hold us back from being as good as we could be. One fifth of our income comes from letting rooms to community groups. We really need a reception area with a person to answer queries.'

I left the The Katherine Low Settlement feeling sure that it was at the start of a fresh new chapter.

NEWS FROM KLS

Two of the charities presenting their projects at the fund-raising event on 19 March (see page 9) are based at the Katherine Low Settlement. Their Young Carers Project provides support for children who look after a parent or relative with a physical or mental difficulty.

The Elays Network works with children and young people from the Somali community who have been excluded from school.

Flip-flops, bus maps and friendly conversation at 2am

Faye Duxberry describes the support night pastors give to Battersea clubbers

It's 10.30pm on a Friday night and the pubs and bars around Clapham Junction are full to bursting, people spilling onto the pavements even on the coldest nights of the year. At St Mark's Church on Battersea Rise, the night pastors are getting ready to go out on the streets for a night out of their own. This team of volunteers head out every Friday and Saturday night to offer help or just a friendly face to those who need it – from making sure a girl on her own doesn't get into an illegal minicab, to providing assistance to guys and girls who have lost their way or had too much to drink.

Lollipops

Armed with rucksacks full of 'goodies' – bottles of water, 'spikeys' (plastic tops that fit onto bottles to prevent drinks from being spiked), bus maps, flip-flops for the girls whose heels have inevitably become too painful and lollipops just for fun – night pastors have been part of the night-time fabric in this pocket of South-West London since September 2011. Wearing distinctive blue bibs, they are easy to spot as safe people to approach on the busy streets. Locals and bouncers in the bars and clubs have become used to the night pastors' presence, but many are still curious about why they are doing it.

Christine Perkin, associate pastor at St Mark's, who started up this night pastor group in the wake of the London riots, puts it simply: 'It's because we care for the safety of our community. We want people on a night out to have a great time – to be able to enjoy themselves but also to be secure'.

While the riots certainly provided a catalyst for wanting to do something to help make Clapham Junction a safer place at night, night pastors is far from a knee-jerk, short-lived



Saturday night at the Junction, and the Night Pastors are out offering a helping hand to clubbers.

reaction to the events of August 2011. If the amount of people that they connect with and help in various ways is anything to go by, the project has staying power, largely due to its intensely practical approach. A recent email from a guy who watched them in action on the streets said: 'I think you all do an amazing job. I've witnessed how much care you take over those who are intoxicated. The risk that you all could encounter is high and the fact you are willing to take those risks to make sure people are OK is brilliant. Thank you!'

Night buses

Ellen, who has been a night pastor since it started, says: 'I love seeing people get home safely as a result of help we have given. This happens every time we're out. Whether it's putting someone on the right bus, organising a taxi or actually doing the whole journey with them to their front door, I love that feeling of just knowing they are safe. One night, two of our night pastors took someone all the way to North London using night buses the whole way!'

Another highlight for the night pastors is the conversations they get to have with people out on the streets. Night pastor Madeleine describes

them as 'sometimes amazing, sometimes crazy' – but is always surprised by how much people want to talk and be honest about what's happening in their lives. Far from the reputation Londoners have for keeping themselves to themselves, the people the night pastors are meeting are mostly warm and open.

And once people realise night pastors is run by the local church, people

often seem to want to talk about issues and questions in their own lives. Outside the noise of the bars and clubs, the cool air of the streets seems to be a place of real engagement and conversation.

Positive impact

If you ask the night pastors, they certainly feel that having a team on the streets every weekend is making a real difference. The police and ambulance services have also noted its positive impact on the area. They believe, through small encounters, the streets are becoming a friendlier, safer place to be. Chris, another night pastor, describes one such encounter: 'As the night drew to a close at 2.30am, I spotted a young lady half limping up Battersea Rise, her four-inch heels having clearly taken their toll. I walked over to her and offered a pair of flip-flops from my rucksack. 'Thank you so much', she said with a relieved smile, 'How much do I owe you?' It was so nice to see another smile when I said 'Oh, nothing!'

By 3am, as the last song is played in The Grand and the remaining clubbers make their way home on night buses, the night pastors return to St Mark's to hang up their blue bibs and rucksacks and debrief the events of another evening on the streets. You may see them next time you are out – do say hello; you might even get a free lollipop!

Java Junction

Suzanne Perkins compares the price for 'a small cappuccino to take away'* at all the coffee joints at Clapham Junction station *'Small' seems to vary between shops (annoying)

Main entrance

Caffe Nero £1.85

Costa £2.15

West Cornwall Pasty Co
£2.30

Tunnel

Cornish Pasty Co Ltd £2.10

UPcaffè Bar £1.80

Clapham Express (closed for
2-4 weeks)

Bridge

Caffe Nero £2.20

Knot Coffee & Pretzel £2.30

The Cornish Pasty Co £2.10

Gourmet Hot Dog £2.35

Caffe Nero £2.25

Stewed! One Pot Meals £2.00

Miss Ellie's Coffee & Subs
£1.60

WHSmith £2.10

Platforms 1&2

Cappuccino £2.20

Platforms 5&6

Pumpkin £2.15

Platforms 9&10

Longitude £2.30

Cappuccino £2.20

Platforms 11&12

Cappuccino £2.20

Platforms 13&14

Délice de France £2.20

Brighton Yard

Entrance

WHSmith £2.10

'Platform 18'
(The Windsor Castle pub!)
£2.05

Apologies if I have missed any;
more seem to be appearing
every day!



Railway frills:
Wandsworth
Council staff
mark the 150th
anniversary
of Clapham
Junction
station.
Commuters
hardly glanced
- they've seen
everything!

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