

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society WINTER 2016/2017



Getting better connected

Matthew Rea describes a student-led project helping people make better use of new technology

You don't know how to use a function on your new phone. You're at a loss with your laptop. That tablet you just got for Christmas seems useless! There are so many technology-related annoyances today, but how do we solve them? Many of us just wait for family or friends to ask, or even brave picking up the phone to a (not so helpful) helpline. CommuniTech offers something different.

CommuniTech is a new initiative being set up in Battersea, allowing anyone with a question to sit down with friendly local volunteers over a cup of tea to take the stress out of asking for help with technology. 'Tech & Tea' sessions are open to all levels and you can come to ask questions, help out or both – while meeting people in your local community.

Goodwill

This project has been born out of Imperial College London and the Royal College of Art. We are currently a team of five students, all motivated by the continued decline of community spirit in London. Research showed us that most of us benefit from speaking to someone in person and not all of us love committing to a regular class – this is at the heart of our service.

Many of our engineering colleagues based their academic projects on reducing waste, for example of food or material goods. What we were struck by was the goodwill – particularly of young, tech-confident people – that we thought was going to waste.

We piloted a drop-in session at Battersea Library in December 2016 which was a fantastic success, with many attenders, both users



A one-to-one session can demystify technology

and volunteers. The idea is that you can drop by, help yourself to refreshments, have a chat with anyone there and find a solution to your queries or even learn something new. Events are open and friendly, held at local libraries and you can bring along your device for someone to take a look at. We are now looking to create regular events in Battersea and Wandsworth; we will be running several more pilots in the coming future all with the intention of learning more about how the events should run, making this the best service possible for both users and volunteers.

Volunteering at CommuniTech is flexible, fulfilling and fun: you can attend one session a week or one a year. All levels of technology knowledge are encouraged, from sending an email to installing software – a friendly face is the most important

attribute and a healthy appetite for tea and biscuits!

Our next 'Tech & Tea' event will be at Battersea Library from 19:00 – 21:00pm on Thursday 19 January. We also hope to run further events in February that will be publicised on the Battersea Society's email update. There's no fee, no sign up, you don't need to come prepared or even have a question in mind. We would just love you to come along whether you wish to learn, teach or both.

We hope that we can establish CommuniTech as a sustainable service and something that is valuable for us all in Battersea and beyond. We really do need your input, you can drop by or leave at any time.

Feel free to come without an appointment, or email me with any queries. *Matthew Rea, CommuniTech co-founder* mdr12@ic.ac.uk



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

From the editor



Nationally and internationally, 2016 was – how to put this? – an interesting year. Three quarters of us in Wandsworth voted to remain in the European Union, which we will now leave. The unlikely Donald Trump was elected president of the USA. Here I claim some foresight. For 22 years my toilet has been graced by a photograph torn from a magazine. Taken by Annie Liebowitz, it shows Mr Trump and his then wife Ivana leaning on a marble mantelpiece, heavily inlaid with gold. Behind them is an elaborate golden clock, below them a golden electric bar heater. Ivana

is in a long gold evening dress, a diamond necklace and a pained smile (she has probably been posing for hours). Donald wears a tuxedo and a look that says ‘I’m a real man – don’t mess with me.’ The pretentiousness made me laugh 22 years ago and it still does. Though rather bitterly since November.

If the wider outlook is depressing, let’s look at what we can be upbeat about locally. The council’s decision to end Formula E racing in Battersea Park was welcomed by most local people. Protection of our pubs, which will now have to apply for planning permission for change of use, makes Wandsworth a pub-friendly borough. Battersea Arts Centre is progressing with its rebuild after the disastrous fire in March 2015. Many of the borough’s roads will go 20mph this year after the council’s decision in 2016. The first Falcon Road festival

was a success despite some mixed weather, and will be repeated this year. Sadiq Khan’s London is Open campaign made the world aware that, in the Mayor’s words, ‘We don’t simply tolerate each other’s differences, we celebrate them. Many people from all over the globe live and work here, contributing to every aspect of life in our city.’

Planning Matters (opposite) tries to look on the bright side (not the *Brightside*) but cannot hide the fact that council decisions on planning applications very often clash with local residents’ views. On page 12 Aaron Barbour calls for the government and the council to build more social housing. And on page 6 Carol Rahn highlights the need for the council to take a more pro-active approach to preserving our heritage.

I wish all *Battersea Matters* readers a happy, healthy and positive new year.

Man on the Battersea Bus

Mike Roden reflects on things that have been, and things to come.

What you’re getting this time is a message from the past. I know that you’ll be reading this sometime in mid-January, with turkey sandwiches a dimming memory and only an occasional Christmas tree needle appearing painfully out of the carpet to remind you of the festivities. But I’m still stuck in the middle of December, with Christmas just round the corner.

Publishing schedules can be cruel, skewing one’s normal perceptions of the world. Once in the dear dead days beyond recall I wrote stories for magazines, and as July arrived I had to start turning my mind towards Yuletide themes. These days I could easily find an internet radio station broadcasting non-stop Christmas music to put me in the mood.

Anyway, the fact remains that round here there’s still a week or so to go before we get to sing *Auld Lang Syne*. So forgive me if I look back at the year which I now feel coming to an end before I peek into the dark mysteries of the future. For some it has been, in the words of HM the Queen in 1992, the year Windsor Castle went up in flames, an ‘annus horribilis’. Some seismic political

shocks certainly which will be reverberating painfully for a long time to come. And of course, we’ve lost a lot of familiar faces from the world of entertainment.

Uplifting

Yet we must (surely we must?) all have some special memories of 2016. One unexpected highlight for us was early in the year at a crowded St Mary’s Church, where the choir, augmented by three young professional singers and a hastily formed orchestra of young musicians performed Mozart’s *Requiem*. A little ragged round the edges occasionally perhaps but their sheer energy and dedication was moving and uplifting as they filled the church with that glorious music. And just before the referendum we saw a performance of *Henry V* at Middle Temple Hall with French and English actors playing first world war soldiers re-enacting the play and summoning up a world of European co-operation and hope.

I’m assuming – in the couple of weeks left to me in 2016 – that a couple of *Old Moore’s Almanac’s* more startling predictions for the year did not come pass: asteroid mining

did not become commonplace, and commuters have not had yet had a chance to lift themselves out of Southern region hell by travelling to work using a jetpack strapped to their back. Nevertheless looking into my crystal ball I do see some of you staring listlessly out at the bleak midwinter landscape, waiting for Donald Trump’s inauguration, and for Article 50 to be invoked.

Stop that at once. Hold your head erect and whistle a happy tune and you’ll easily get a seat to yourself on the bus. There is in fact lots to look forward to. There will be three more editions of *Battersea Matters*, you might win riches untold at the Summer Party raffle, and there will be no Formula E event in Battersea Park.

So always look on the bright side of life, mind you how go and see you next time.
PS I realise I’ve included several song titles, or snatches of songs in the above. A modest prize for the first person to list them all correctly. Email mike.roden@live.co.uk with your answers.



Planning Matters: Good news or bad? Lots of both this month!

Monica Tross outlines some of the committee's workload

BAD NEWS FIRST

In December the Council's Planning Applications Committee (PAC) voted in favour of the major high rise development at 3 Culvert Road (2016/4188) despite compelling arguments against the application made by many concerned Latchmere residents as well as ourselves and many others. This application was approved. So too were proposals to demolish and rebuild all but the façade of a pair of villas in Ursula Street (2016/3061). This sets a sad precedent when even relatively small domestic properties in a conservation area are at risk from such changes.

We hope we are being pessimistic but past decisions suggest more bad news to come in the New Year. Developers have put in plans to change Plantation Wharf into an undistinguished housing complex (2016/5644) and destroy and over-develop a site at Palmerston Court, opposite the Dogs and Cats Home (2016/5422). The developers at the former gas holders site at 101 Prince of Wales Drive are applying to add storeys to their already overbearing proposals (2016/6417). The developers of the Mount Carmel site at 8a Battersea Park Road have put in plans to add height to their agreed proposals in a manner which we believe will have an adverse effect on the church (2016/5803). In all cases you can see our objections on the applications website and on the Society's website under planning applications.

THE GOOD NEWS

The most surprising is the refusal of plans for a Tesco Local at the Prince of Wales in Battersea Bridge Road (2016/0728). We have consistently objected to plans for this unneighbourly proposal in terms of the detrimental effect on traffic and on retail outlets to the south and north. The refusal notice cites these



Left: Proposed high-rise flats at 3 Culvert Road get the go-ahead despite many objections

the moment the applications have been withdrawn. Again, see our website for our concerns.

Neighbours mounted a spirited – and successful – defence for the retention of a retail outlet at 43 – 45 Parkgate Road (2916/5392) which we supported.

VAUXHALL BUS STATION

Another year, another TfL consultation on proposals for Vauxhall Cross and the bus station. Last January TfL consulted, reported in March and then all went quiet. They have now published their report on proposed action

as the reasons for the decision. Less surprising, but welcome nonetheless, was the Planning Inspector's decision to uphold the refusal of a plan for 'a contemporary take on a Georgian town house' to be built on the garden of the Prince of Wales (2016/0608).

We are also delighted to report that proposals for a building on a small open space at 1 – 5 Gowrie Road (2016/5528) have been refused. We had objected to the inappropriate design of the proposed buildings, as had the local councillor. The planning officer agreed, stating that 'the proposal by reason of its excessive scale and massing would be an over-prominent and incongruous feature within the streetscene.' The many residents who mounted a spirited campaign against the proposals would prefer there to be no building but this is unlikely as the council sold the site to the developer, which suggests approval will be given to an appropriate design.

Two applications to which we objected have been withdrawn. More plans for a house at the dock north of 34 Falcon Wharf (2016/5862) and the site on the corner of Battersea Park Road and the Latchmere Road (2016/4327) may come back but for

as a result of this. Surprisingly they conclude that the majority of those responding were in favour of the proposals, not our understanding, but despite this they propose changes and new consultations (see <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/roads/vauxhall-cross>).

Consultation details were too late to include here but with Mike Roden's help we will circulate details as soon as we have them.

SHARED WORKING

And finally we are keeping an eye on how the shared working between Wandsworth and Richmond, operating since the beginning of October, impacts on local planning and policy decisions. Wandsworth's planning director, Tim Cronin, now heads planning for both boroughs; some key Wandsworth planning staff have left; and 'backroom jobs' are now undertaken jointly. This, according to a WBC press release 'will deliver greater efficiencies, share expertise and, importantly, save public money.' Watch this space!

Please let us know what you think – on Vauxhall Cross and other planning matters.
planning@batterseasociety.org.uk

A fine future for fish in the Wandle

Valerie Selby outlines the benefits of removing a weir in the Wandle delta

Last October a grey seal was spotted in the Thames as far inland as Lambeth Bridge. A few years ago many of us went whale watching on Battersea Bridge. Improving breeding grounds for smelt may not hold quite the thrill of seeing those two aquatic mammals but it will be an important step for water quality and fish preservation. This is what we hope to see as a result of removing the half-tide weir at the mouth of the Wandle.

In 2015 Thames Water identified the removal of the weir as a key way to offset the impact of some of its Thames Tideway Tunnels works along the river, together with helping both the Thames and the Wandle to improve water quality and restore lost wildlife habitats. Wandsworth Borough Council will undertake the removal of the weir and, crucially, much of the silt that has been deposited upstream of it, funded by Thames Water.

Silt

The Wandle delta should be a great intertidal habitat, but the installation of the weir 25 years ago has led to a huge build-up of silt behind it. This has buried the natural gravel river bed, usually such an indicative feature of chalk rivers.

Ecological and sediment studies were undertaken last summer to inform the design of the silt and weir removal processes. First, all the silt will be removed by closed-bucket dredging; in total it is thought up to 5,000 m³ may need to be taken to a specially licensed waste facility. This will prevent the silt washing out into the Thames and causing wider contamination and muddying of the river.

Then the concrete structure of the weir itself, which has formed a barrier to natural processes, will be removed allowing the water to flow much more freely and naturally with the tides. Natural tidal action will then scour fine muddy sediment from the area and re-create the gravelly river bottom. This will restore valuable sub-tidal and intertidal habitats for fish, invertebrates and wading birds



Above left: Looking towards the half tide weir structure you can see the silt built up particularly on the left hand side
Above: Gravelly river bed on the River Wandle in Carshalton. This is what we hope will return.

over a hectare of the Wandle mouth at its confluence with the Thames. In particular we expect that the newly restored gravel bottom to both the Wandle and the Thames will encourage the endangered smelt fish to breed here.

Spawning

The European smelt (*osmerus eperlanus*) is a small (up to 20cm long) predatory fish that inhabits cold water estuaries including the tidal Thames. Although the Thames has one of the smelt's largest UK populations, the specific spawning location was not known until 2014, when a study pinpointed the main spawning ground as a small area of the Thames between the Wandle and Wandsworth Bridge. Thus it is hoped that removing the weir and the resulting changes in water quality will have a significant effect on breeding and survival of young spelt. We also hope that flounder and dace will return to this area to breed.

We also hope that invertebrates such as freshwater shrimps and mussels, indicative of clean water,

will become more frequent visitors, along with fish-eating birds such as the great crested grebe and even the kingfisher.

Work started in autumn 2016 with the aim of being completed by Easter 2017, in time for the smelt spawning season to begin.

It is not anticipated that the wrecked ships, such a feature of this area, will be moved or removed. In fact such features can prove useful for ecology, allowing vegetation to establish a foothold and providing secure waiting areas for fish away from the beaks of predators.

Culinary note: Smelt are known for their distinctive cucumber-like smell. They can be eaten fried or pickled.

As well as Thames Water, the scheme is also supported by the Environment Agency, the Marine Management Organisation and the Port of London Authority, all of whom have to provide consent for the works to happen.

Valerie Selby is biodiversity manager for Enable Leisure & Culture

Trees brighten our streets

Patrick Langley, arboricultural manager, Wandsworth Council, describes their care

Growing trees in the street seems on the face of it a strange practice: the conditions for their planting and ongoing health are appalling. Under the pavement the tree's roots will find sand, old tarmac, rubble and crushed brick as well as soil in the immediate tree pit, occasionally supplemented by soil in nearby private gardens that the roots have found. Nevertheless, a wide range of both forest type trees and ornamentals grow and thrive in these tough conditions, which is fortunate as without them our surroundings would be dull indeed.

A fine example of ornamental trees is the avenue of cherries in Hillier Road, south Battersea. Although usually considered forest trees, oaks are thriving in Victoria Drive, SW19.

Wandsworth is fortunate in having some of the finest settings for street trees in south London. These complement the trees growing in our parks, commons, cemeteries, schools and allotments. The Council has over the years consistently provided resources for the care and management of its trees, allowing us parks officers to get on with looking after them. Our annual maintenance cycle consists of four categories: purchase, planting, maintenance and removal.

Pest free

We buy trees in late autumn from specialist wholesale suppliers who produce hundreds of trees for the London market and who meet the plant health requirements. We inspect the trees in the nursery fields to ensure those we buy are up to Wandsworth's strict required standard, are of good form (strong straight leader stem with plenty of buds), free of pest or disease and are sufficiently robust for the streets of south London.

Tree planting takes place in December and January, when the young trees are not growing and are better able to deal with change. Which species to select is an important decision. Where a street has a theme we will try to maintain this, for example if there is

a history of acacia trees in the street we will replace one that has died. This will include ornamental species as well as forest type trees and also roads where there is a mix of species. Suppliers strive to produce species that their customers require, though there are occasions when they halt the sale of trees eg horse chestnut which is currently suffering from various health problems.

Wandsworth's priority is replacing trees that have died or been removed, the oldest sites being the highest priority though we aim to leave 12 months before we replant. This is so that any remaining underground roots have time to rot so that we can successfully dig a new pit. We also have a quota of new sites.

Treescape

Most trees purchased are containerised, so each tree is in a pot with roots protected by soil. Existing sites (where a tree has been lost) and new sites are checked for underground cables and pipes which can and frequently do prevent us from planting a tree. We will also take into account other factors such as trees in private gardens which complement the treescape, street furniture such as lamp posts, road signs and proximity to road junctions, so that they do not block drivers' sight lines.



Maintenance for established trees takes place all year round and often involves substantial work. For newly planted trees the critical period is soon after planting, when they are young and vulnerable. As well as watering in the first spring and summer we also look out for the health of the tree including fresh signs of pest and disease, whether the stake is firm and upright in the ground and the tie at the required position and not too tight, and if any formative pruning is required. Crossing, split or cracked branches could have a significant impact on the form of the tree if allowed to remain.

Some established trees are very large, so public safety is our primary concern. We have put in place a regular inspection programme in which each tree will be seen at least once every two years. Resulting from the survey, we issue orders to the contractor with strict instructions on what should be done to each tree (dispelling the myth that tree surgeons make it up as they go along).

Damage

As part of the process we may contact residents who have views on trees in their street, other council departments including those caring for the footway and the building control officers who deal with cases of tree related damage to private property.

Removing dead trees carries on all year round because trees can die at any time and often become unsafe as a result, requiring prompt attention. The council's policy is to remove only trees that are dead, dying or dangerous. Occasionally we also remove trees that have been proven to be the cause or partial cause of damage to a building, but only after convincing proof has been supplied.

I do assure residents that we have the tree's best interest at heart at all times. However, conflicts of interest may arise. Trees will lift paving, they do block light from windows and their roots may invade private gardens; all these issues have to be addressed. Our role is to manage these scenarios, retain as many trees as possible and plant up new sites where appropriate.

Stink pipes, murals and an old laundry

Carol Rahn nominates 200 heritage features worthy of local listing

Across Wandsworth, there are five Grade I listed buildings; 39 Grade II* and more than 160 with Grade II listing. Most of this elite group, such as St. Mary's Church on the river, the Granada Cinema in Tooting and Battersea Arts Centre, are familiar to all of us. We have some listed green spaces as well, most notably Battersea Park. In addition, there are some 500 locally listed heritage assets across the borough.

Local listing certainly does not afford the fierce protection of Grade I or Grade II listing. It is merely an indication of merit, in the Council's gift to bestow and equally to withdraw. Still, those who propose to develop or demolish a locally listed feature must at least justify doing this. Local listing raises awareness of a heritage asset and makes it easier for the diligent planning committees of our amenity societies to know when one is threatened.

Research

This year, Wandsworth Borough Council decided to review local listings, with a view to including more buildings, open spaces and other features that are part of our heritage. Amenity societies in the borough were asked to take the lead on this, and I chaired the team for the Battersea Society. A panel put forward suggestions, aided by some expeditions through SW11; Susan Hoffman and I took most of the photographs and did most of the research (benefitting greatly from *Buildings of Clapham* and the Battersea volumes of the *Survey of London*); the panel met to review and winnow the nominations and altogether we have put forward more than 200 heritage assets for local listing.

The majority of assets are buildings, and we have nominated more than 80 buildings in Battersea to join those already locally listed. These include some gems that it is hard to believe were previously overlooked, among them the stately former J&B Stevenson bakery (now

residences) on Parkgate Road. The bakery was built in the 1880s, one of a group of buildings mostly dedicated to the food industry. They clustered here after Allen Ransome extended the creek adjoining Battersea Foundry into what is now Ransome's Dock.

We've nominated rare architectural styles, such as the massive Greek-revival style homes at 30 – 54 Altenburg Gardens (1868 – 69; built by Edmund Wood), and distinctive runs such as 2 – 30 Thurleigh Road, with their Doulton faience porch columns and stained glass (built by John Miller, 1885 – 87), 35 – 49 Lavender Gardens adorned by more fanciful terracotta figures and the unbroken, unmodified run from 1 – 52 Broughton Street.

Unsurprisingly, most of the homes we're nominating are Victorian, but we are also putting forward some of Battersea's fine examples of modern architecture, such as the international-style semi-detached homes found at 105 – 115 Thurleigh Road, with curving brick and render facades and Crittall windows, designed by Pell & Clayton between 1934 – 36, the Civic Trust award-winning flats in Battersea High Street (designed by Walter Monteth for the Ujima Housing Association) and even the 21st century Thrive building in Battersea Park. Some of the buildings are valued for their beauty and architectural merit, others for their echoes of Battersea's industrial past. The latter include Propert's blacking factory and the Old Imperial Laundry, both on Warriner Gardens/Battersea Park Road.

Parks

We have nominated many of the structures in Battersea Park, including the three shelters and the Peace Pagoda altar because although Battersea Park itself is listed, most of its distinctive structures are not. Eleven other parks and open spaces are on our list, most of them small like Montefiore Gardens, Heathbrook Park and the Dorothy Road Lavender Gardens.

English Heritage blue plaques



are already protected, but we have identified, photographed and nominated 20 other plaques erected by the Battersea Society, London County Council and other similar groups that would otherwise not be protected. Did you know that in 1864 Battersea Park was the site of the first football game played under the new FA rules intended to reduce the violence on the pitch? We've nominated the plaque mounted on the cricket pavilion that commemorates this event.

We have also mapped, photographed and nominated six boundary markers, making it easier to preserve and celebrate these physical testaments to our history. Perhaps you



are already an inveterate inspector of post box ciphers. If so, you'll know that those with ciphers for George V, George VI, Edward VII, Victoria, or no cipher at all, are relatively rare. We've nominated several examples of each found here in Battersea. Do you know where they are?

There are nine murals and two ghost advertisements on our list. The 'Battersea in Perspective' mural by Brian Barnes on Dagnall Street is urgently in need of repair, showing how important it is for the borough to protect and preserve these heritage assets as well as list them. The project has brought attention to forgotten works such as the concrete murals of William Mitchell. Mitchell's work, for which there has been a resurgence of appreciation, can be found on public buildings across the

UK, as well as in places as distant as San Francisco and Qatar.

We have catalogued more than 60 original blue enamelled street signs and the heritage white enamelled street signs with 'Borough of Battersea' above the street name – a welcome reminder, especially in those areas perennially mistaken for Clapham. We have catalogued artefacts from cattle troughs to granite kerbs, cobbled alleyways and York paving stones, electricity sub-stations to sewer stink pipes, shopfronts with chamfered corners, mosaic shop entrances and remnants of Georgian walls – all features that comprise our layered visual and architectural heritage.

Website

All of this is captured in an online application chosen by Wandsworth Borough Council with both a list view and a map view. Imagine a map of Wandsworth covered with three types of little pins – one for buildings, one for gardens, and one for 'other features.' Zoom in on any one of these pins to see the exact location;

Clockwise from top left: Brian Barnes' London Perspective, Dagnall Street; street sign, Lavender Hill; William Mitchell mural, Thomas Baines Road; 40 Parkgate Road; ghost sign, St John's Hill; hairy man with blue eyes, Lavender Gardens; 2 - 4 Battersea High Street

then open it to find a photograph and brief description of the item. With this, you can make a fascinating tour of Wandsworth on your phone or from the comfort of your home.

It now remains for the Borough's heritage committee to review and accept nominations and to make this app available to the public. Ideally, all the existing listed buildings and open spaces would be incorporated. We in the Battersea Society are ready to get out there with our cameras and reference material to add the existing heritage listings in SW11 and I'm sure others would volunteer to cover other areas of the Borough. We also call on the Borough to invest in preserving these elements of our rich heritage that we have now identified. *This article first appeared in the Wandsworth Society Newsletter, December 2016.*

The Man on the 19 Bus

A familiar journey can take an unexpected direction

“Scuse me. You the chap what writes about bus journeys?”

I was on my way home on a murky, chilly, late January afternoon, and there were flecks of sleet in the air. I’d thought I was alone at the front of the top deck of the 19 bus but now I turned to look at the person sitting across the aisle from me. He was a stranger, a rather pinched-faced little man in a dark overcoat which seemed a bit too big for him.

‘You mean the pieces in *Battersea Matters*?’

‘I don’t know about that,’ he said, ‘Someone pointed you out once. Said you wrote about bus journeys.’

Invisible

‘I’ll be there soon as I can!’ The young woman sitting somewhere behind me had made phone contact with the outside world. She was talking on in a voice that was just a bit too loud. Probably hadn’t even noticed me. Older people are invisible to the young. ‘Traffic’s dreadful tonight.’ She paused, then, ‘No. Only about halfway along Kings Road...’

The stranger introduced himself. ‘I’m Vernon. Late of Battersea, I suppose you’d say. Used to live in Octavia Street.’

‘You must know my friend Leo, then. He’s lived there since the year dot.’ He didn’t reply but stared out of the window again as the bus lurched to another halt. There was clearly a log jam of traffic somewhere ahead.

Vernon spoke again. ‘Didn’t get traffic this bad in my day. Used to work on the buses, I did. Conductor.’

‘Really. On this route?’ He nodded. ‘How long ago?’

He shrugged. ‘Lose track of time, don’t you?’

‘Better than being a driver, I should think. A conductor gets to meet people, talk to them. These days most people don’t even acknowledge the driver.’

‘All right if you like people, I s’pose,’ he retorted darkly.

‘And you don’t?’

Without answering that he said, ‘No jumping on or off at traffic lights anymore.’ His fists clenched,

knuckles white. ‘Dangerous. Fall off the platform and you could do yourself an injury.’

He gave a hoarse little cough. ‘S’posed to keep an eye on them, we were. Not that the young ones ever took notice. Come haring down the stairs like flippin’ mountain goats, then straight off into the traffic. Not a scratch.’

Accidents

The girl behind us laughed suddenly, derisively. ‘Oh he didn’t say that? That is really out of order... Oh thank the lord for that, we’re moving again.’

‘Presumably there were accidents sometimes,’ I suggested.

Vernon glared at me fiercely.

‘Why’d you say that?’

A bit taken aback, I said, ‘Well, not everyone’s as agile as a mountain goat.’

He eyed me thoughtfully, and then his voice went off into a gallop, words tumbling over each other.

‘You’re right there. Course it wasn’t my fault. Winter’s day like today it was. Come on to the platform and seen his lady friend coming out of a shop, jumped off before the stop. Had too many business lunches I reckon. Top heavy and couldn’t keep his balance. Taxi driver saw him, but couldn’t avoid him, not really...’ He shook his head grimly.

‘That’s terrible – was he killed?’

‘No,’ said Vernon. ‘Wasn’t going to do much walking anymore, though. He swore blind it was my fault – he didn’t exactly say I’d pushed him, but I had a bad reputation by then you see.’

I eyed this mild-looking little man in astonishment. ‘Reputation?’

Sour

Vernon sighed. ‘After me and Shirley split up I lost heart in the job, see. Got a bit sour you might say. People got the rough end of my tongue. I had complaints. Once an inspector caught me cheeking a passenger. So when this bloke accused me of ... being responsible, they believed him. He got the compensation he was after – and I got the push.’

‘Surely somebody saw what happened?’ I said disbelievingly. ‘Someone to speak up for you?’

‘Maybe, but I couldn’t be bothered anymore. Just admitted it was down to me. That I should have taken more care of my passengers, whatever.’

He looked straight at me, his blue eyes suddenly piercing. ‘But I’m telling you now, that I didn’t do nothing. I’m putting the record straight, at last.’

‘Why are you telling me?’

‘Maybe you’ll write about it?’ He suddenly looked like a man with a weight off his shoulders. ‘A trouble shared is a trouble halved, is that right?’ He glanced out of the window. ‘This bus terminates here, eh?’

We’d crossed the bridge while Vernon told his sorry tale and we’d reached our destination. ‘Come across the road and I’ll buy you a drink,’ I said.

Pushing

Not waiting for his response I got myself to the head of the stairs with the girl, still talking on her phone, pushing behind me. I was hustled down the stairs by her eagerness to get off. As usual the Parkgate Road bus stop was very crowded, and I had to squeeze through the crush to find some open pavement. The girl was still right behind me as I swung round to look for Vernon.

‘Where’s he got to?’

‘What?’ she glared at me in irritation for blocking her path.

‘The man I was talking to upstairs? He must have been behind you?’

‘No idea what you’re talking about.’ She dismissed me from her mind and stalked off. But clearly Vernon had decided our conversation had also terminated.

When I got home I called Leo. After the usual preliminaries, I asked, ‘Did you ever have a neighbour called Vernon?’

‘Vernon the bus conductor? What on earth put him into your head?’ Without waiting for me to explain, he went on, ‘He moved away after his marriage broke up. I last saw him five or six years ago. He came along to

the summer party.'

'He was a member of the society?'
I asked in surprise.

Leo laughed, 'No. Came along with an old acquaintance who was a member. Poor old Vernon. Terrible cough. Just a shadow of his former self, really. Why are you...'

'Did he leave Battersea under a cloud?'

But Leo was listening to something his wife was saying in the background. 'Oh, that's right.' He came back to me. 'Harriet's reminded me that Vernon got the sack for pushing someone off his bus. Twenty-five years ago maybe.'

'He didn't do it you know.'

'Didn't do what?'

'He didn't push anyone off the bus. He was... framed.'

'You seem to know a lot about it,'
Leo said suspiciously.

I started to explain. 'He was on my bus tonight. We got talking and for some reason he decided to tell me about it.'

Silence

There was silence at the other end. I think Leo's hand was over the phone as he spoke to Harriet. Then with a nervous laugh he said. 'Someone's having you on, my friend. We went to Vernon's funeral, few months after that summer party...'

Later that evening I finally managed to track down the photos I'd taken at that party. Sure enough there was Leo and standing near him a thin faced little man with piercing blue eyes staring straight at me, as if making sure he'd recognise the man who wrote about bus journeys.

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Morgan Crucible: A Battersea landmark

Jon Newman celebrates an icon of riverside industry

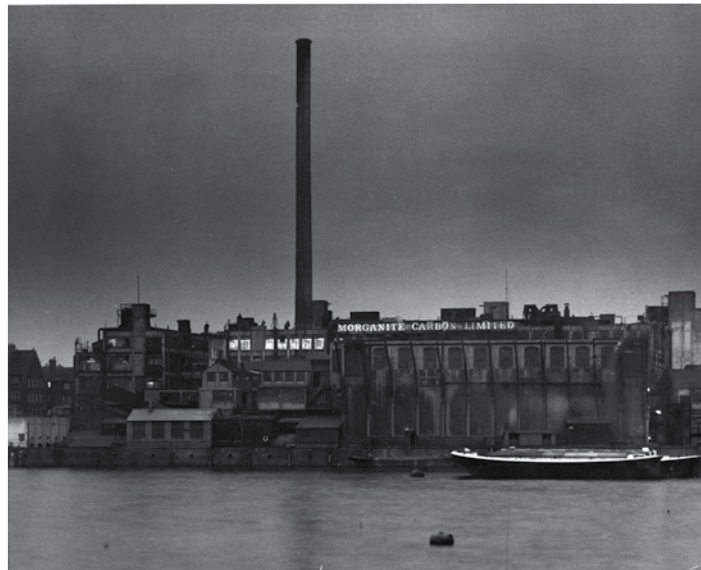
The notion of a 'Landmark' building has become wearingly familiar along Battersea's riverside, an area that has undergone a very precise and highly monetised interpretation of that word by developers which has resulted in a mostly charmless and cyclopean over-development of the entire stretch between Battersea and Wandsworth bridges.

In a sense it was ever thus. Context is everything: look far enough back and one can trace a succession of, predominantly, industrial landmarks along the river here. In 1790 the massive horizontal windmill became just the first of many structures to dwarf St Mary's suddenly modest church tower. If we confine ourselves to living memory then it is the nineteenth century industrial buildings of Prices Candle Factory and Morgan Crucible Works that dominated the landscape and were the major employers in the borough.

Graphite

As well as being the two largest Battersea employers there are other curious similarities between these two businesses which stood either side of Battersea church. Both started as small concerns run by brothers; both used startling technological innovations to create their core business; and both began by exploiting colonial raw materials from Ceylon, now Sri Lanka (coconut oil for Prices' candles and graphite for Morgan's crucibles). Both came to dominate global markets in their respective fields. Both subsequently sold up their Battersea factory estates for housing and almost no trace remains of either today.

Morgans began manufacturing at Battersea in 1856. Two of the five Morgan brothers who were druggist and hardware merchants in the City had been impressed by new US



smelting. They were made of fired clay and had a finite life. Their innovation was the discovery and use of graphite (plumbago), a stable crystalline form of carbon, close to coal. When this was mixed with clay its heat-refractive properties made crucibles more durable and less prone to cracking. The plumbago was first imported to Battersea from Sri Lanka, then from Madagascar when the former mines became exhausted.

MORGAN BROTHERS,
Merchants, Manufacturers, and Black Lead Grinders,
1, JEWIN CRESCENT, LONDON, E.C. AND

Battersea Mills, Surrey, S.W.
Prices Nisi unless otherwise stated and subject to market fluctuations.

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| No. | Description | Mode of packing | Price |
|-----|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | CARBURET of IRON (A chemical preparation to superheated Black Lead) | 1 lb. Tin Cans, with handsome and appropriate labels, in wood boxes of 2 dozen. | 7s. 6d. per doz. or 15s. per box. |
| 2. | CARBURET of IRON | Solid blocks, with handsome and appropriate labels, in boxes of 12 doz. 1d., 6 doz. 2d., or 3 doz. 3d. | 6s. per box. |
| 3. | PENCIL BLACK LEAD | Solid blocks, in bronze-blue paper with green labels, in boxes of 6 doz. 1d., or 3 doz. 2d. | 4s. per box. |
| 4. | HALL'S ROMAN LEAD | Orange Wrappers, in 2, 4, and 8 ounce packets | 6s. per cwt. |
| 5. | CHEMICAL BLACK LEAD | Black loose paper, with red label, ditto | 25s. " |
| 6. | PENCIL BLACK LEAD | Bronze-blue paper, with green label, ditto | 42s. " |
| 7. | SERVANT'S FRIEND Or THE MEXICAN JET | Purple paper, with white label, ditto This is as good a Servant's Friend as can possibly be made. | 35s. " |
| 8. | SERVANT'S FRIEND | Packed as No. 7. | 38s. " |
| 9. | SERVANT'S FRIEND | Black paper, with white label, ditto | 21s. " |

No. 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9, may be had in 1 oz. packets, POWDERED LEAD loose, per cwt. A 1s. B 2s. C 3s. D 4s.

No. 1 & 2 will bear our name.
Buyers' names in addition on Nos. 3 to 9, in quantities of not less than 1 cwt.
Nos. 4 to 9 are packed in 7 lb. paper parcels.
Leads of any quality packed to order. Warehouses.
Nos. 2 and 3 will not be completed for a few weeks.

TERMS.
Under 45 nett. 2 per cent. discount.
Above and under 10 2 per cent. discount.
Ditto ditto 15 7 1/2 ditto.
Ditto ditto 25 10 ditto.

Above: The Morgans factory at night, and a wholesale price list

crucibles on display at the 1851 Great Exhibition; they first secured the English distribution agency rights and then the manufacturing rights for their new enterprise, the Patent Plumbago Crucible Co.

The move into the precarious business of manufacture came because they had spotted a new angle. Crucibles had existed since the Bronze Age and were used in all forms of metal making from fine jewellery through to large-scale

The brothers' hunch paid off. The crucibles marketed under their Salamander brand (a mythical beast believed to live in fire) were a commercial success – particularly during the Klondyke gold rush in 1897.

The firm rebuilt the former porcelain works it occupied in 1862 then expanded inexorably along the riverside over the next 60 years, taking over Brunel's saw mills, Condy's vitriol works, the Thames steam boat dockyard, May and Baker's chemical works and Green and Son's sugar factory. By 1920 the business occupied an 11 acre site at Battersea employing over 4000 people as well as several agencies overseas.

Using graphite for crucibles was the initial innovation (previously it had been used for black-leading fire grates and for pencil leads). Subsequent developments using the same raw material created new products for the emerging electrical industries: carbon brushes for electric motors, electrical resistors and carbon rods for arc lights. These rods, created for cinema projectors in the 1920s, were then used in searchlights during the war.

Arguably it was the war that was the beginning of the end for Morgans at Battersea. The Government required factories manufacturing

military materials to set up 'shadow' factories away from London. Battersea was indeed bombed but the company's 'shadows' at Norton and Tamworth were not. Post-war Morgans opened further out-of-town factories in Neston (Wirral) in 1947 and Jarrow. The 1956 Clean Air Act created a further disincentive and the polluting carbon brush manufacture shifted from Battersea to Swansea. Nevertheless Battersea remained the company's research centre and was still employing 3000 people in the 1960s.

Low-rise

The end-game for Morgans when it came was clumsy and contentious; it took fourteen years after closure in 1971 to redevelop the factory site and the initial proposal for tall office blocks got whittled down to the low-rise brick domesticity of Morgan's Walk. Yet this was the first of the

big Battersea riverside industries to be replaced by housing and it set the template for the rest as London land values became increasingly overheated, the cachet of a balconied riverside view became more sought-after and so mere manufacture here became financially untenable.

The prosaic factories have all gone now, replaced by 'wannabe' palazzi, and the remains of Morgan's legacy are slight: a stained glass window in St Mary's church; their grand bronze mooring rings still set in the river wall that they had reconstructed in 1904, and the occasional lump of raw graphite that can be turned up along the foreshore at low tide.

But the other way Morgans survives is through the work of the Chelsea-based artist James Whistler. From the 1860s to the 1890s he repeatedly captured the industrial frontages of Battersea at twilight from across the river, where

as he put it, 'The poor buildings loose themselves in the sky and the warehouses are palaces in the night'. These monumental and visionary depictions of Morgans can still be found on the walls of galleries around the world: in Glasgow, in Washington, in Philadelphia, at Yale, in Detroit; there is even one hanging in the White House.

For anyone wanting to know more about Morgans, Prices and the industrial Battersea riverside, Jon Newman is curating an exhibition at the Morley Galley in Waterloo on the subject.

South London Walking, showing from 8 – 29 June 2017 looks at the historical landscapes of South London that influenced John Ruskin and James Whistler.

www.morleycollege.ac.uk/events

100 miles from Battersea: where shall we go next?

Angela Roden plans an outing

Last year I had the idea of organising a visit to Althorp, ancestral home of the Spencer family who historically owned much of Battersea. As I live on the Althorpe estate I thought other residents might be interested too and also widened my net to include Battersea Society members. In the end we filled a 26 seater coach and had a grand day out, made particularly special by a very well informed guided tour of the house.

People on the trip enjoyed it so much that they were keen to suggest other destinations we might attempt, keeping within the 100 mile maximum distance that worked so well for Althorp. The suggestions made so far include: Highgrove, Turner Contemporary Margate, Goodwood House, Stonehenge, the Mary Rose at Portsmouth. If you are interested in any of these or have other suggestions for trips for next year then please get in touch: angela.roden@riverwise.co.uk



Ravi Govindia



Luke Rittner



Jatinder Verma

New Year, new gongs

Congratulations to Ravi Govindia, appointed CBE in the New Years Honours list for services to local government. Cllr Govindia has been a councillor for 34 years and leader of Wandsworth Council since 2011.

Other honours include a CBE to Luke Rittner, chief executive of the Royal Academy of Dance, currently based in Battersea Square, and an MBE to Jatinder Verma, founder and director of Tara Arts Theatre in Earlsfield.



Homes in Battersea – the challenge of affordability

Battersea needs more housing, but it must be the right kind, says Aaron Barbour

‘Battersea is becoming south Chelsea’, said Katherine Low Settlement’s annual report back in 1970. The slow creep of gentrification has been going on for decades locally. But Battersea during Victorian times had a very different reputation. There were whole neighbourhoods that were thought ‘beyond redemption’ (said of Orville Road, off Battersea High Street). The poverty experienced in the slums of Battersea was the driving factor behind the establishment of Katherine Low Settlement in 1924. Although nowadays it is known for its wealth, Battersea remains characterised by economic inequality, with large social housing estates surrounded by much more prosperous areas.

Overdrive

Over the last decade the rate of regeneration in Battersea has gone into overdrive. There are at least half a dozen planning projects in development and/or being built at the moment, within a stone’s throw of our community centre in Battersea High Street. For example, there is a 7-storey block proposed where the garages are currently situated opposite KLS, a 14-storey block on Gwynne Road, the 28-storey Lombard Road Tower, £60m redevelopment of Winstanley/York

Gardens estates, a new bridge over the Thames, redevelopment of the Homebase site (sold for £52m), York Road towers (30, 17 and 20-storeys all in for planning permission), and then just up the road there’s the massive Battersea Power Station and Nine Elms development, which meet the demands of a prosperous few, but not the many poorer communities.

There are areas in Battersea of significant deprivation. Poverty, overcrowded housing, poor health, low levels of education attainment and high levels of unemployment lead to a lack of positive opportunities for many local people. Latchmere and Queenstown wards, where Katherine Low Settlement focuses much of its work, rank in the most economically deprived 5% of the UK and over 40% of children live in a family dependent on income-related benefits.

So what of these low-income communities in Battersea and their needs for housing, for a home? Are these being met? Before I answer this let us first briefly consider the national context of the housing crisis.

Estimates put the need for more housing in England at between 232,000 to 300,000 new units per year, a level not reached since the late 1970s and two to three times current supply. This would mean building two cities the size of Bristol

every year. It has been done before - house building peaked in the UK in 1968 at 425,830 units.

House prices have risen much faster than wages, meaning houses become less and less affordable for the majority of people. The average UK house price has increased annually by 7% since 1980 and is now over £500,000 in the capital.

The earnings to house price ratio is now so high (approximately 12 times in London) that most people cannot afford to buy. In 1997 the Bank of England has estimated that the amount of take-home salary a first time buyer in London would spend on their mortgage was 22.2%, by 2008 this had risen to 66.6%.

Rented

As a consequence we have created ‘generation rent’. PWC reports that by 2025 a quarter of all the UK’s housing will be rented, rising to over half for the 20- to 39-year-old bracket. In London, the proportion of households renting has already passed the 50% mark, with people spending, on average, a third of their income on rent. As the Resolution Foundation noted recently, the shift to renting privately can reduce current living standards and future wealth, with implications for both individuals and the state.



Will empty towers look down onto homelessness?

This is the affordability challenge we now face.

Soul-less

So what of the impact on local communities in Battersea? Most people are simply priced out of the existing home ownership market. Some of the new developments are attracting foreign investment and ownership, which may lead to the 'dark streets' phenomenon – empty and soul-less communities. In Nine Elms, for example, 20,000 new luxury apartments are being built over the next 15 years. Will these all be lived in year-round?

Many people have moved out of the area, leaving behind parents or grandparents who may have bought their council house or flat through the Right to Buy scheme. Now that they have no family close at hand they may be elderly, isolated and require support from the state and charities. Some younger people are delaying major life events such as marriage, children and moving jobs. If they can turn to parents for help, they do so, which in turn has a knock on effect on their financial retirement plans. Others have to turn to the benefits system for support, and the cost of doing so is astronomical. Housing benefit cost £43bn in 2014/15.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not

against new buildings per se, we are crying out for them in Wandsworth. I'm not against new people moving in to Battersea as that's been going on for centuries, and we already live in a mixed and wonderful community. However these private developments are tipping the balance towards greater inequality, at a time where we need more inclusive communities. Housing was the single biggest issue raised at Battersea Society and KLS's Battersea pre-election hustings in 2015.

If the state functions as a safety net, it can't overlook housing. Housing, run by councils or housing associations, is a prudent investment that provides the stability and security of a home (that we all need) and prevents homelessness, which is far more costly both financially and socially. So what can we do?

- 1 Build more social housing
- 2 Build more social housing
- 3 Build more social housing

And I'm not talking about so-called 'affordable' housing. We need all

types and tenures to be built but the priority for government must be decent, truly affordable (low cost) social housing.

This will require the support of all the political parties for the next 20 years. It requires all of them to put housing in their Top Three priorities and keep at it. It requires a long-term commitment and major investment over successive governments. There is no denying that it is complicated. But planning laws, brownfield sights, rent caps, bedroom taxes etc. can all be resolved if the will is there and the investment to back it. We, the electorate, must hold their feet to the fire, calling them to account.

We ask Wandsworth Council to be bold and take the lead amongst London boroughs in committing to triple the amount of genuinely social housing in Wandsworth by 2022. Twenty-five percent of all new building developments should be social housing.

Aaron Barbour is director of the Katherine Low Settlement.



Battersea Society's housing meeting fills York Gardens Community Centre

On 1 November 2016 The Battersea Society held a well-attended open meeting in York Gardens community centre. Chaired by trustee Sue Demont, the speakers were Lord Bob Kerslake, chair of Peabody, and Councillor Paul Ellis, Wandsworth's cabinet member for housing.

The speakers addressed the huge challenge of affordability. Lord Kerslake said that the problem was basically that London is not building enough. The answer lay in intense and detailed collaboration between local authorities, housing associations and developers. Cllr Ellis said that the right to buy scheme had led to more mixed housing estates, a positive outcome. Lord Kerslake said

he was not against the right to buy, but saw the large discounts available as a poor use of public money. The scheme reduced the amount of social housing for renters.

Questions included the possibility of using prefabrication to reduce cost and delay in building. Cllr Ellis said that there were no appropriate sites in Wandsworth. The plight of young professionals who cannot afford to buy in London was also raised. Both speakers agreed that the word 'affordable' had become meaningless. Paul Ellis suggested the phrase should be 'sub-market'. To buy a starter home in London a couple or individual would need a salary of £77,000.

Angela Carter

Magical realism south of the river: Janice Morphet writes about the work of Angela Carter

Angela Carter (1940 – 1992) spent much of her early life in Balham and died, aged 51, while she was living on The Chase, SW4. Between these periods, Angela lived in Yorkshire, Bristol and Japan but she saw herself as particularly being from south London. In reviewing Iain Sinclair's *Downriver* in 1991 she wrote 'This reviewer is a south Londoner herself.



When I cross the river, the sword that divides me from pleasure and money, I go North. That is I take the Northern Line 'up west', as we say; that is to the West End. My London consists of all the stations of the Northern Line but I don't think that I scare easily ... nothing between Morden and Camden Town holds terror for me'. In the same article Carter describes her first visit to Whitechapel when she was 30, feeling like a 'country bumpkin, slow moving, slow witted, coming in from the pastoral world of Clapham Common, Brockwell Park, Tooting Bec'.

Insomnia

After being evacuated to spend her early childhood with her grandmother in Yorkshire, Angela returned to live at 121 Ravenslea Road, Balham, and attended Streatham Hill and Clapham High School. She had a very close relationship with her mother with a high degree of mutual dependency. Angela was kept up late to provide company for her mother while her father worked as night editor at the Press Association, leading to insomnia and imaginative experiences. She did well at school, studying for her A levels and was expected to go to Oxford. However when she learned that her mother intended to move to Oxford to be with her she decided to leave school. Her father ensured that she had a job, finding one in journalism like him. She joined the *Croydon Advertiser* and quickly became a feature writer,

writing record reviews. Angela was keen to escape from her home and married Paul Carter when she was 20. She moved to Bristol and after failing to find a job in journalism studied English, writing four novels in quick succession including *The Magic Toyshop* and *Several Perceptions* that both won literary prizes. She used the prize monies to travel and live in Japan, leaving her husband. She returned to live in Bath and then moved to The Chase in Clapham in 1976 with her second husband and son.

While Carter is known for her feminism and magical fairy stories, her work was always rooted in places. She travelled a lot, as shown though the many postcards that she sent to her friend, the journalist Susannah Clapp, but it was frequently the immediate environs of her life in The Chase and her family in south London that informed her work and appeared in a number of her novels including *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children*, both about the music hall.

Two cities

It was to the north and south London divide that Angela returned in her last book *Wise Children* (1991), written when she was in the last stages of the lung cancer that killed her. The book opens with a question – 'Why is London like Budapest? A. Because it is two cities divided by a river' and it is south London that the protagonist Dora describes as 'the wrong side of

the tracks'. Inviting the reader to compare the city with New York and Paris, she wrote 'With London, it's the North and South divide'. The North represented wealth and outward show whereas 'in the south in circumstances of urban deprivation condemned to wait for hours at windswept bus stops ... it was cold and dark'. However, as Dora notes, 'you can't trust things to

stay the same ... you'd never believe the price of a house round here these days'.

Thus the story starts of two sisters from a theatrical family (said to be modelled on the Redgraves) living in Bard Road, Brixton – assumed to be Shakespeare Road – secure because they had a house left to them by their grandmother, despite the changes around them.

Angela Carter's memorial service was at the Ritz in Brixton. She would have preferred it to be at the Granada in Tooting, her favourite cinema, which she had visited regularly with her father, but by this time it has been turned into a bingo hall. Angela wrote that her father had a free pass through his work. Angela recalls that this world of the Granada was half real and half false – like much of her own writing that blended the two.



www.lrb.co.uk/v13/n05/angela-carter/adventures-at-the-end-of-time

Susannah Clapp A Card from Angela Carter, 2012, Bloomsbury

www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-notes-about-tooting-granada-cinema-by-angela-carter

Northcote bookshop: the last chapter



The dream of an independent, not-for-profit bookshop on Northcote Road is over. In the spring 2013 issue of *Battersea Matters*, Viv Taylor-Gee reported on the plans to replace the Bolingbroke Bookshop with a new shop; in the autumn 2013 issue Carol Rahn explained the plans to incorporate it into a new public library, together with a café.

Wandsworth Council plans, following public consultation, to sell

off the present Northcote Library for development and develop a site across Northcote Road, the site of the present Chatham Hall.

The plan is to build a new library, with flats above and possibly some retail space. After working with the council and their architects, the bookshop group realised that the space available in the new library would not be large enough to make their project viable.

Viv Taylor-Gee, who founded and led the project, says, 'We are grateful for the unstinting support of our local

councillors, and for the Council grant we were awarded in 2013. We are of course pleased that the library is not being closed down, as is happening in many other local authorities and that a new library is planned. But we are very disappointed that after three years of work and a great deal of passionate support, the bookshop will not go ahead.'

There is no independent bookshop in Wandsworth.

The public consultation will run from mid-January to early March.

Why the saints chose Clapham

Timothy Walker, local resident and author of *Twixt the Commons*, has written another book about south-west London history.

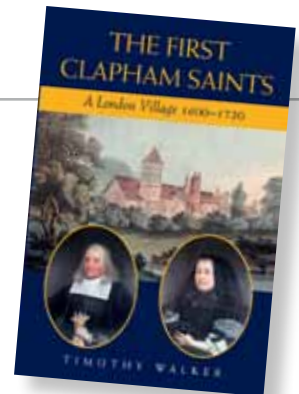
The First Clapham Saints gives a picture of the group of radical Puritan merchants who settled in the village in the early 17th century. Their influence was far reaching: they financed the Mayflower; ran the Navy; and helped start both the slave trade and the first missionary society to

New England. After the Restoration, Clapham continued as a centre for Nonconformist merchants, so much so that it was described as a 'Whig warren.'

Walker explains why they chose Clapham and gives an absorbing picture of the village community, the relationships within it, and the part its inhabitants played in the major events of the time, the City of London and the development of Nonconformism.

The book costs £15 from Timothy Walker's website, www.claphamhistorian.com,

from Amazon, or from Clapham Books at the Pavement.



The pleasures of Vauxhall

Words by Jenny Sheridan, pictures by Carol Rahn

Just occasionally, it's good to leave the little corner of paradise that is SW11 and venture further afield. But not too far. Vauxhall is just one stop on the train from Clapham Junction and on several of Mike Roden's Great Bus Journey routes. You may be surprised at the treasures it has to offer, from high art to urban farming.

Carol and I met at the bus station (still threatened: see *Planning Matters*). Crossing the rustic-sounding but perilous Kennington Lane, we entered Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, famous in the 18th and 19th centuries for 'romantic assignations' and balloon ascents. The entrance is marked by **two tall columns (1)** topped by sculptures representing a man in modern dress offering a flower

to an 18th century lady. We tried our best to ignore the hideous, unrelated mish-mash of new buildings that divides Londoners from our river.

Feeling in need of lunch, we walked briskly through the gardens to the **Newport Street Gallery (2)**, a large building, part new, part converted, which won the architects Caruso St John the Stirling Prize in 2016. Ignoring the art (all from Damien Hirst's huge collection) we headed first for the **Pharmacy (3)**. Not a chemist's shop but a restaurant featuring medicine cabinets full of pills, shouty colours and windows showing DNA strands. The food however is neither hallucinogenic nor clinical but simply *continued on p16*



The pleasures of Vauxhall *continued from page 15*

delicious. I had Heaven and Earth, a mound of rich black pudding on a base of onion and apple mash in a sea of red wine gravy. Carol ate brik a l'oeuf, fried filo pastry marvellously encasing an oozy egg, accompanied by a stonking harissa paste. Apart from that, the highlight of lunch was trying to decide whether the mink coat worn by a young man at the bar was genuine (it was).

Much fortified, we explored the six galleries, all devoted to the work of Gavin Turk. A black rubbish sack left outside one room turned out to be fashioned from bronze, like the **black skip (4)** pictured.

How could we resist the shop? With Damien Hirst dinner plates at a cost of £10,500, we managed.

Heading back towards the station we came across the Institute of Contemporary Music, a degree-awarding academy shuddering from the trains thundering across

its railway arch home. Next was the Beaconsfield Gallery, another outpost in what Lambeth proudly proclaims as Vauxhall's 'gallery quarter'. Hippy to Hirst's hipsterism, it features a café with check tablecloths, mismatched chairs and spoons stacked in golden syrup tins. The food is of course vegetarian, verging on vegan.



Behind, in the railway arch, is a gallery, and there's another above the café.

Royal Doulton Pottery's factory was based in Lambeth till the Clean Air Acts chased it out in 1956. What remains is the office building on Black Prince Road with a pottery frieze (sadly, Carol and I missed it) and some **delightful mosaics (5)** under the Salamanca Street railway arch.

Inside Walker Books we spotted a six-foot rabbit cradling its baby.

Rather less cuddlesome, the **Cabinet Gallery (6)** is the latest to open. A five-storey, 12-sided brick structure, the gallery sits under three

floors of lucrative (no doubt 'luxury') apartments. The art on show was small painting of women's heads by American artist Jim Nutt, one of the Hairy Who group.

We emerged into the rolling grass hillocks of the pleasure gardens as dusk fell. Alas, too late to visit the Vauxhall City Farm with its horses, pigs, chickens and rabbits, we were forced to console ourselves with tea. The Tea House Theatre Café is the ultimate in cosy. Built as a pub in 1886, it now features a wood fire, board games, Classic FM on the radio, a relaxed ambiance and a range of 25 teas and herbal infusions. And, on the mismatched wooden table, cakes perched everywhere, large and luscious.

We chose possibly the richest chocolate brownie ever concocted, accompanied by Russian tea under its **hand-knitted cosy (7)**.



The Tea House organises occasional theatre events, poetry readings and writers' evenings. I want to return to sample its mind-blowing Scottish breakfast, which offers smoked salmon and haggis alongside the usual heart-stoppers.

One afternoon: all this. Next time, it'll be the Doulton frieze, the city farm, Bonington Gardens – and another helping of Heaven and Earth!

