

# Wandsworth Society

Newsletter June 2013

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## The Making of Our Regional Park

The Wandle Valley Regional Park is a idea that emerged some years ago from a collaboration between the South London Partnership and the GLA. As a Wandsworth Society member with an interest in the River Wandle, I became involved and was commissioned to write a report designed to get the four riparian councils, Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton and Croydon, working together to make the most of this great and underappreciated asset in our patch of south-west London.

Many years down the line I find myself still a WandSoc committee member, but also chair of the Wandle Valley Forum, the umbrella group for about 50 community groups and charities with a keen interest in the river and the string of parks and open spaces through which it flows all the way from Croydon and Carshalton to the Thames at Wandsworth.

There was a danger that such a regional park would never be more than lines on a map and otherwise look the same as it had always done to those walking their dogs or cycling along the Wandle Trail that links most of this chain of open spaces. However, there is now a thorough understanding of the great importance of this remarkable green necklace, which also includes Mitcham Common, Beddington Park and the mysterious 'Farmlands' that link the two.

In order to raise the profile of the park in the local community it was decided to hold a launch to present some of its frankly astonishing features, and a number of guest speakers have been invited to explain the importance of these community assets and of the development of the park itself, these include representatives from the WVRP, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Merton Priory Trust, as well as Bill Dunster of BedZed and local ornithologist Peter Alfrey.

If you would like to attend please email me as soon as possible at [bsjb@onetel.com](mailto:bsjb@onetel.com) under the heading 'Event Reservation'. Seats are limited and cannot be guaranteed on the day. A £6 charge will be requested on entry to cover catering and drinks. I look forward to welcoming you then.

*Bruce St Julian-Bown*

Wandle Valley Forum 'How Green is Our Valley', Wednesday 19 June, 10.00 am - 4.00 pm (light lunch included), KNK Stadium (The Hub), Bishopsford Road (see <http://www.tmuvc.co.uk/location.html>).



# How Neighbourhoods Change & Why it Matters: 100 Years Along the Northcote Road

*A Talk by Carol Rahn, March 2013*

Carol Rahn's well-researched and well-illustrated talk on life in Northcote Road provided welcome light relief after the business of the AGM.

She started by quoting Jung: 'Everything worth having is paid for by the loss of something worth keeping.' We all think that what we grew up with is what was 'right' – or what should be retained, yet over the last 100 years the street has changed considerably and it was interesting to see the range of opinion at the meeting as to whether things are now better or worse than they were decades ago – or indeed, whether what was there in the lifetime of some of those present was remembered as good or bad.

100 years ago the area was more densely populated, with more people living in each house and more servants. Then as now, there were pubs and shops. Shopping was a daily task, food was not wasted and it could not be so easily stored. In 1910, as now, there were market stalls, but the fortunes of the market have waned and waxed over the years. Buildings have changed use – for example, a motor engineer changed to a builder, then to a saw mill and is now an antique market. The old cinema is now the Co-op – and, as in many cases elsewhere, a bank became a pub. Along the way, shops catered for the immigrant West Indians and Italians. But overall the profile of the shops was remarkably similar to the present, although the service shops that were prevalent in the 1980s are now mostly gone.

By 1980, following the recession and high-inflation years, there were a number of boarded-up shops and the area was depressed, indeed, it was said that if you wanted to buy a present you had to cross the river. The area was more working class, with incomers from poorer areas of London.

However, by 2011 Northcote Road was again thriving, with fewer than 3% of premises closed. There were 22 restaurants and cafés, 9 pubs and bars, 16 food and drink shops – all of which says something about what we find important in our lives especially as there is a night-time economy too! There are also 15 clothes shops and 12 connected with babies and children (but there were more of the latter in 1900). Today the emphasis has changed from shops where you bought items to cook or for making/doing things yourself to those selling ready-made food items or furnishings. If you want to stay in business you have to adapt. In 1980 the market was lively, and daily, but in the 1990s there were huge rent

increases and many stallholders opted out. Now, once again, there is a waiting list for a pitch on the weekend market.

Today one of the biggest challenges faced by the premises on Northcote Road is how to pay the business rates. Business rates vary according to rental value, not turnover. They are decided by a central agency which bases its calculation on a percentage of rental, combined with input from estate agents, and depending also on window space, the rental value of other premises in the area and on demand. Carol said that the present rating system penalises successful neighbourhoods because in a depressed area rental values stay down and business rates are steady, whereas in a successful area rental values rise, so business rates go up too.

Like all shopping areas the Northcote Road faces challenges: from on-line shopping (but some also use on-line selling to grow their business); from the out-of-town superstores with their long opening hours and ease of parking (although London is less affected by this than some regions); high business rates; efforts (or lack of?) from us as individuals, consumers and citizens in making a good neighbourhood; from councils not managing what is there; and from central government.

In the Northcote Road there are fewer multiples (60%) than in London overall (69%) or the UK as a whole (64%). So it seems that, generally speaking, Northcote Road has weathered the latest storm and looks set to carry on into the future as a vibrant retail and social area. Go visit!

Jenny Massey



A Motor Bus in Northcote Road, c1913  
Courtesy of Wandsworth Heritage Service

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[www.wandsworthsociety.org.uk](http://www.wandsworthsociety.org.uk)

# Wandsworth Society

June 2013

## Planning News May 2013

### Ram Brewery

Our main consideration recently has been the continuing saga of the Ram Brewery site application. We had to submit our comments and objections by 18 March, and with the help and co-operation of various members of the Planning Group were able to do this. The Council has still to receive the comments from their independent external valuers on the figures to apply to the Community Infrastructure Levy, and until these are verified no report can be made to the Council by the officers. We voiced our great concerns on the heights and massing overall and made particular reference to the 36-storey tower at the northwest corner of the site on Armoury Way. We believe that we have the support of English Heritage who have not yet commented, but were surprised that the Georgian Group supported the scheme as proposed.

### Skydeck

Our faithful readers may not be surprised to learn that 'not a lot has happened'! We would dearly like to report that work to remedy the building is due to start but, despite further chasing of the Council, nothing has been heard.

### Springfield

A further consultation (it seems life consists of further consultations) is due. This new consultation will be on the decisions taken as a result of the previous consultation on the various proposals for the parkland to be provided as part of the development. In view of the current difficulty in funding any capital project, let alone one involving an NHS Trust, we are not holding our breath.

### Planning Process

It is almost unbelievable that, once again, the Council is required to review the basis of the local plans, which have been adopted only within the last twelve months or so. The rigorous process of consultation (there we go again!) which was required last time should have produced an adequate basis for the next ten years or so, but no, Central Government has decreed that a further round has to be undertaken. Can you imagine how many hours of unproductive effort by the Council go into this process? We do not expect to be able to offer any constructive comment, and indeed have yet to see the detail of what may be required.

### House Extensions

I have written about this in previous newsletters but the problem continues. The senior planning officer has not responded to a letter sent by the Society in late November 2012 and followed up subsequently. While the officer has written to various individual objectors, we do not  
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# Music and Words for a May Evening

## *The Return of the Soirée*

Sunday 12 May, excited chatter, an expectant hush and the Wandsworth Soirée was reborn! Stefan and Arjan Byron had generously offered to host an experimental evening at 14 Patten Road, unbelievably close to the Soirée's home of 25 years with David and Elizabeth Ward. A programme of words and music was devised by David Kirk, Sheila Allen and Wendy Cater to engage and present the impressive talents of Wandsworth Society members and local friends in a celebration of Spring.

David introduced the programme and our hosts launched the evening with three songs sung warmly and sweetly by Arjan, a specialist in the Jewish Art Song genre, accompanied by Stefan on his beautiful Steinway grand. Arjan sang in Hebrew of desert camel bells, tripping and swaying; in Yiddish of a poor fellow who argued with God but found things improved when he sang 'Chiri biri bam bam'; and in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) of a bridegroom who wanted, instead of her dowry, a nice bride who was lucky and shy. Stefan also delighted us with Schumann's tender, dreamy 'Arabesque'. A vocal ensemble, comprising Paschal Allen, Sarah Bryant, Jo Coker, Julie Harrison, Stephen Miles, John Pead, Mark Wilkinson and Griselda Williams, was gathered together by Sheila and rehearsed by her friend Mary Hill, until recently Head of the Opera Department at the Royal Academy of Music. The group sang charmingly of rosebuds, daffodils, thyme-covered banks, bluebirds and singing birds and finally, with no words at all, vocalised a Rachmaninov air. Jo sang a sweet solo of joy in love.

The readings were a delight: a cuckoo in 13th-century English by David, who also read of Mayday from Wordsworth's *Prelude*, plus a droll extract from *Three Men in a Boat* on how not to hang a picture! Sheila gave us Burns's 'Red Red Rose' (Ah! murmured the audience) and the Scots ballad of 'Tom the Rhymer' who, attracted by 50 silver bells on the Fairy Queen's horse, kisses the Queen and has to serve her for seven years! Paschal then sang the ballad in German. Wendy read beautifully of daffodils from the *Prelude*; of her blackbird transforming the suburbs into country woods; and of Puck dashing 'thorough bush, thorough briar'. Mark and Stephen, in broad bucolic worthy of the Two Ronnies, debated the merits of a girl or flower called Daffodil. Stephen gave us a Herrick poem urging Corinna to enjoy her youth and Mayday

fun while she could. This was followed by a sparkling piano solo by Julie, playing Debussy's enchanting (and difficult) 'Jardins sous la Pluie'.

At the first Soirée 25 years ago Paschal and the late John Cater sang Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Pirate King'. This time Paschal obliged and the audience joined in. The programme drew to a close with Wendy reading Fletcher's 'Evening Song' – 'so farewell; thus I end my evening knell' – and Stefan playing the Chopin Nocturne in E minor.

What a tremendous success! – the same happy, informal atmosphere and warm hospitality. Fortunately Stefan told us all that he loved it too – 'music, words, love, poetry and compassion'. We hope fervently there will be more! A huge thank-you to Stefan and Arjan for allowing us to gather in their home and to enjoy their singing and playing. Congratulations to David, Sheila and Wendy for producing a delightful show and many thanks to all the noble performers and helpers.

Helen Blumer

*The ensemble that made its debut at this soirée doesn't as yet have a name – and would like one. If you have any bright ideas Sheila Allen would like to hear from you. The winning proposal will be appropriately rewarded.*

## Recycled: A Second Visit to the Materials Recycling Centre

Finally we made the return visit to the MRF (cancelled last time as the equipment wasn't working), but it was worth the wait as this time we went right into the recycling hall, fetchingly dressed in high-vis jackets and hard hats. The many conveyor belts and grabs and suckers were all easily visible. As before, Steve Ford, Western Riverside Waste Authority's Operations Manager, was a patient and informative host. Well worth a visit if you haven't been.

PLEASE NO shredded paper in orange sacks, nor very small bits of paper such as till receipts, which can block the works, and cause stoppages and hence delays. They can also contaminate other separated-out elements, which are all then useless for recycling and so get sent for incineration. These items should go into black-bag waste. Similarly, very small plastic pieces can fall between the gaps on the conveyor belts and contaminate other waste – again these should go in black bags, even if they came from food packaging. And finally to quote a poster I saw recently – 'wash it, squash it and tops off it'.

Jenny Massey

# There is a Way, Once there was a School, Now there is a Stamp...

... that is as of 16 April 2013, when the Royal Mail issued a set of first-class stamps to celebrate the lives of ten distinguished individuals – ten Great Britons. An interesting collection, amongst them a photographer, Norman Parkinson, a football manager, Bill Shankley, a cook, Elizabeth David, and an actress, Vivien Leigh. Our interest though is with John Archer, one of the two politicians in the set.\*

John Archer was first elected to Battersea Borough Council as one of six councillors of the Latchmere Ward in 1906, and was Mayor of Battersea from 1913 to 1914, but more particularly he was the first Black mayor – that is the first Black mayor in London. He thought he was the first Black mayor in Britain, and until recently this was the general opinion. However, in 1904 a Bahamian, Allen Glaser Minns, was elected mayor in Thetford, and where Norfolk leads others follow. However, if not the first, John Archer was probably the more noted. He was active in local left-wing politics, standing first as a Progressive candidate and eventually as a Labour candidate. He was also active in Black political affairs, and a member of the African Progress Union.

There is an excellent biography of Archer by Mike Phillips on the British Library website, to which I am indebted, and a paper by a longstanding Society member, Sean Creighton, 'John Archer – Battersea's Black Progressive and Labour Activist, 1863–1932', to which Mike Phillips refers. I am sure I have a copy somewhere, but the archivist was stumped again.

The Way is John Archer Way, a turning off Windmill Road leading to the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building, and a less-than-successful housing development; the school was the John Archer School, closed in 1991, its site redeveloped as a less-than-successful housing scheme.

The stamp is 60p, a small price to pay, should you feel inclined, for a souvenir of a man who seems deservedly to be a Great Briton, and it is pleasing that he achieved his greatness living in Battersea – outside the Society boundaries, but near enough for us to bask in the glow.

Peter Farrow

\* The other politician is David Lloyd-George



For Mike Phillips's biography of John Archer go to <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/blackeuro/archerbackground.html>

## Badges

One of our members has suggested that we might like to have enamel lapel badges made with the Wandsworth Society logo and the date of the Society's founding.

We discussed this at an Executive meeting and thought we should canvass members about the idea. The badges would cost around £2 each. It would be interesting to know how many of you would support this idea and would be willing to buy a badge.

Please let me know your feelings at [gg@candycollect.co.uk](mailto:gg@candycollect.co.uk) or on 020 8780 0866.

Gill Gray

## Cyril Marshall

Obituary

Many of our longstanding members will have known Cyril and his delightful wife Bella who lived in Loxley Road. They first joined the Society in 1982 and for many years Cyril was one of our faithful band of deliverers, so the numerous members from the surrounding area will remember him with great affection. He carried on with his round for some years after losing his beloved wife. Now they are together.

# Planning News *Continued from page 3*

believe he has correctly addressed the problem. The nub of this is that certain work is now permissible without planning consent, and this work can be disregarded when and if further work to the same property is required. One member of the Planning Group is acting as our terrier and if anyone needs help in this connection please let us know.

## **Thames Tideway Tunnel**

The Planning Inspectorate has accepted the application as valid and is now going through the statutory procedure prior to a public inquiry in the autumn. This fast-track method of dealing with the application is the result of the 2008 Planning Act, whereby projects considered to be of national importance can bypass much previously required scrutiny in an attempt to allow such schemes to avoid the long delays hitherto associated with major applications. The Planning Group has differing views on the need for such a massive scheme and whether the Society should comment on or object to the proposals. If you have any opinions please send them to me for consideration by the planning group.

## **Local Heritage List**

We have received a plea from Civic Update to provide details of buildings that are not currently on either the main register of buildings considered of architectural or historic interest or on the local heritage list that is prepared by the Council. If you have any ideas for additions please let us know and we will check whether the building is on either of the existing lists and if not, will forward the suggestion to Civic Update. Could this be a good excuse for a stroll in this pleasant weather which seems, at last, to have lost the bitterness of late?

## **Melody Road Car Park Area**

The Council has very recently resolved to sell the area of land between the existing blocks to a housing association for the provision of assisted housing. This will inevitably increase on-street parking in the area and residents of the existing blocks will lose a very pleasant area of open space and sky. The block will be subject to the normal planning procedures, but it is most unlikely that the Council will take any real notice of objections as they will not wish to frustrate the sale of the land. If any local residents wish to be kept in touch with proposals please let the Planning Group know.

## **Musing to Finish – Thought for the Day**

Despite the current economic position of the country, the Planning Group is surprised at the number of applications that continue to be made to the Council. Many of these will not be implemented immediately but they show that the borough has a stock of outmoded or outdated buildings which sooner or later will need replacement. One of our great concerns however is that the borough is turning into a dormitory, losing much of its work-space to higher density, mainly residential use. It seems that the Council planners are no longer called upon to arbitrate on the proposed use and size of any application, but are being driven predominantly by the economics of the proposal. We are not sure that this will lead to the sort of redevelopment that future generations will thank us for. Plus ça change! If you have any views please get in touch or come to one of the regular Planning Group meetings.

Philip Whyte

## **Life-Centered Funerals: Changes in the Funeral Ceremony**

*A Talk by John Valentine, April 2013*

Christian funerals, even today, are generally based on the funeral service in the Book of Common Prayer of 1666, but as John Valentine pointed out at the beginning of his stimulating talk, the printed service makes no mention of the name of the deceased, let alone their life story. When we bear in mind that about one million people (about 2%) attend a Church of England service each Sunday, and around 50,000 people in England and Wales are paid-up church members – comparable to National Trust membership figures – it is clear that faith or belief is a minority interest. However, death can truly be said to be a majority interest, universal but unique. At the moment there are fewer than 500,000 deaths per year in England and Wales, the lowest since the 1950s, but there will shortly be a dramatic increase in these numbers as the ‘baby boomers’ begin to die off, and this is a group mostly admitting to no faith. What is surprising is that 90–95% of funerals are still led by a professional cleric. While the British

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# Our Roads and Transport

Roads and transport affect us all, pedestrians, cyclists and motorists alike; indeed most of us are all three at some time, although the requirements of each group are not always the same and are often conflicting.

It would be Utopian to expect that each group could have exactly their hearts' desire – we live in the Wandsworth of 2013, an increasingly crowded borough with an essentially 19th- or very early 20th-century road system governed by Victorian and Edwardian buildings which few would like to see disappear, and the problem is compounded by the fact that the Council is constrained by a greatly reducing budget.

Over the last few years the Society's Roads and Transport Committee has sought to uphold its mission statement: 'To monitor, investigate, inform and campaign in the context of local road and transport issues.' Each member has taken on a specific area of responsibility, be it road and pavement condition, public transport, aircraft noise, public behaviour and the effect of building development.

We also investigate complaints brought to us by borough residents, and have created an excellent working relationship with senior members of the Council, including Robert Langridge, Assistant Director (Engineering and Design), and Russell King, Cabinet Minister for Strategic Planning and Transport. The Committee has recently been engaged in detailed surveys of the condition of various streets, in particular Magdalen Road, Garratt Lane, Wandle Road, Ritherdon Road and Melody Road, and our findings have been shared and discussed with the appropriate council executives.

For the borough's transport system to work at all effectively, it is essential for all its users to work together and respect each other: motorists must be aware of and allow for the inherent vulnerability of pedestrians and cyclists, who in turn must be equally aware of and make due allowance for that very same vulnerability. Co-operation is all and the Roads and Transport Committee will continue to play their part in helping to make the borough safe and enjoyable for all.

Harry Waddingham

## Life-Centred Funerals: Changes in the Funeral Ceremony

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Humanist Association was the first group to offer an alternative to a religious service, their membership is atheist and this is reflected in their ceremonies, although they always strive to fulfil the wishes of their clients. However, as John pointed out, in times of stress many people find comfort in the traditional words of the Bible, and these can be included in a civil ceremony since the aim of the life-centred funerals he provides is to help the bereaved however they wish.

A civil ceremony will concentrate first and foremost on the life of the deceased. If folk find comfort in familiar words, there is also comfort in stories, so the Celebrant, probably the only one in the room not to have known the deceased (although he may have spent time with someone terminally ill), must tell the life story as built by others.

Where do civil ceremonies take place? Sadly, mainly in a cremation chapel where there is a 'production line', and consequent time restraint. Sharing memories, telling the deceased's life story, giving readings, listening to music – whatever the family or deceased wants – all has to be done in 45 minutes (less the time it takes to get people in). Prior discussion must include consideration of the existence of God and whether there is life everlasting: comfort is all and the responsibility of Celebrant is to find the best way to supply it on each particular occasion.

In bereavement, many people are confused, upset, and can't cope with the thought of never seeing the deceased again, and so perhaps find comfort in the old words, the old hope, without looking too closely or thinking too deeply about meanings. It takes courage to face the future and perhaps decide there is nothing there – except memories.

This interesting and unexpectedly enjoyable evening, thanks to the delicacy and charm of John's personality and involvement of the audience in the ideas raised, ended with quotations from Marcus Aurelius: Death is nothing but a dissolving of the elements of which each living being is composed. If the elements themselves are not harmed by each continually changing into another, why should a man feel any dread of the change and dissolution of all his elements? For it is as nature wills it, and nothing is evil which nature wills.

Any comfort in that, asked John of the audience? 'He who feels an overwhelming desire for posthumous fame does not consider that all those who remember him will themselves also die very soon; then they also who succeed them, until the whole remembrance of him is extinguished. Even suppose that those who remember you are immortal, and that the remembrance will be immortal, what then is that to you?'

Let me know if you wish to contact John Valentine, or go to [www.humanistfuneralservices.co.uk](http://www.humanistfuneralservices.co.uk).

Valerie Taylor

# Wandsworth Society Walks & Talks

## **Building a Garden: An Illustrated Talk by Karen Grosch**

*Thursday, 13 June*

*7.45 for 8pm at West Side Church, on the corner of Melody Road and Allfarthing Lane*

Karen's garden in Pitt Crescent is the culmination of 13 years' work and planning, which began in the late summer of 1997. Karen will tell the story of the transformation of an unprepossessing plot to a secluded terraced garden packed with well-structured and subtle plant combinations offering great design ideas for a long sloping garden overlooked by a busy railway.

## **A Guided Tour of the World's End Estate Chelsea**

*Wednesday 3 July 11am*

This 'pearl of 1970s social housing', was generally considered to provide the best homes that could be achieved at the time. It was designed by Eric Lyons (1912–80), who worked for Walter Gropius and Maxwell Fry and was famous for the development of forward-looking communities integrated into their surroundings with a high standard of landscaping. Lyons's partnership, Span Developments, led to the building of over 73 estates. The tour will take between 1½ and 2 hours. There is no charge, but a voluntary donation to the residents' association would be appreciated.

We will meet at 11 am in the World's End Residents' Association Clubroom, 16 Blantyre Street, World's End Estate, SW10 0DS. Blantyre Street can be reached either from the Embankment or from the Kings Road via World's End Place (a pedestrianised area). Bus C3 from Bridgend Road, Wandsworth Bridge, to Gunter Grove: various buses from Sloane Square down Kings Road: 319 to Battersea Bridge or Beaufort Street then walk.

Please note that there is no visitor parking on the estate and that the Council enforces parking restrictions on nearby streets.

Expressions of interest/bookings to Valerie Taylor, [vyt@wandsworthsociety.org.uk](mailto:vyt@wandsworthsociety.org.uk), 020 8767 3814.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World's\\_End,\\_Kensington\\_and\\_Chelsea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World's_End,_Kensington_and_Chelsea)

## **A Society Social Event**

### **Open Air Jazz on a Warm Summer Evening at Merton Abbey Mills**

*Friday 19 July, 6.30 for 7pm*

The jazz is free and begins at 8 pm, but if you want to hear it sitting down, under cover in delightful company, then join our party at the highly recommended Mamma Rosa Italian restaurant. To be guaranteed a table for this popular event we are obliged to arrive at 6.30 for 7 pm for a meal costing £19.95 a head (wine extra).

Details of the music are not available at the time of going to press but should be available by the time your newsletter is delivered; go to [www.mertonabbeymills.org.uk/](http://www.mertonabbeymills.org.uk/)

Expressions of interest/bookings to Valerie Taylor, [vyt@wandsworthsociety.org.uk](mailto:vyt@wandsworthsociety.org.uk), 020 8767 3814.

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## **Enjoy Your Park: Guided Walks in Wandsworth Town Centre**

This summer there will be a series of free guided walks through King George's and Wandsworth Parks. Jane Clarke of the London Wildlife Trust will be the leader each Friday between 2 and 2.45 pm. The walks will alternate between the two parks, on Friday 7 June the walk will be through Wandsworth Park and the following week, 14 June, will be in King George's Park. The programme continues until the last scheduled walk, in Wandsworth Park, on Friday 2 August.

## **Real Tennis**

In summer 2012 we visited the Real Tennis Court at Hampton Court Palace when we had a talk from Lesley Ronaldson and saw a professional game being played. If there is sufficient interest a further visit could be arranged in coming months. Please give your contact details to Jenny Massey on [jennyafmassey@aol.com](mailto:jennyafmassey@aol.com), or telephone 020 8874 6579 if you and/or friends/family want to be included.