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Wandsworth Society

Newsletter Summer 2018

The launch of the Friends of Wandsworth Common

On a grey, rainy Saturday evening, 12 May, over 125 people (including the Society's new Chair and a significant number of other Society members) packed into The Skylark, the popular café housed on the ground floor of Neal's Lodge on the Common, to launch the Friends of Wandsworth Common.

The Friends' Co-Chairs, Society members Julia Bott and Richard Fox, have been local residents and users of the Common for 30 years, and members of the Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee (the MAC) since 2015. This is their report.

Our grateful thanks to those of you who attended the inaugural meeting and/or are

now amongst the first 200 Friends of Wandsworth Common. Our vision for the Friends, as we described it, is 'to build on and expand the work begun by the MAC to engage with the community through events and projects for the protection and enhancement of the Common'. Most substantial green spaces in London now have a Friends group; those that do tend to be better protected from the pressures of overuse and under-funding. Local authorities have no statutory duty to maintain their green spaces.

A special guest at the launch was Emma Passmore, whose mother, Shirley, is remembered affectionately by many current and former Society and MAC members for her knowledge and dedication to the conservation and enhancement of the Common. Work has now started on forming

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an effective committee to take the Friends' ambitions forward. Come and join us.

You can join the Friends on the new shared website www.wandsworthcommon.org

It is well worth a visit for the wealth of information it contains about the Common.

Richard Fox and Julia Bott

How will the Friends work with the MAC?

It's a question that many may be asking. It was discussed at the MAC's Annual Public Meeting on 18 June. Both George Meakin, as the re-elected MAC Chair, and Julia Bott, co-Chair of the new Friends, commented.

As George said, one of the MAC's functions, as set out in its constitution (recently approved in revised form by Wandsworth Council), is to 'promote public interest and participation in the protection and appreciation of the Common'. That is very much what the Friends are about too. So we're very much on the same page'.

But, of course, the MAC and the Friends are formally separate organisations, with some shared membership. The MAC, as Julia said, will 'continue as now – monitoring and advising – and will remain the formal consultative body for the Council on policy and planning. The Friends will be the public face of the Common, more action-oriented – bringing new ideas, cajoling, fund raising, promoting and protecting the Common and its biodiversity through talks, walks, projects and forging links with other organisations such as the Wandsworth Society'.

As a re-elected MAC member, now also a Friend, and a Society Exec member, I'll settle for that! We don't want any turf wars on the Common ... and I am sure there won't be any!

For many years a part of it was used as accommodation for the Council's groundsmen. When their tasks were privatised, that use ceased. After considering its options, the Council decided to seek bids for a 15 year lease to use the property for an 'educational or cultural' purpose. Nine bids were submitted for use as a 'pre-school'; the highest bidder was selected. A tenth proposal to use the site as an activity centre for state school children was submitted by Sandy Muir, a local resident – but his bid was judged non-compliant. The matter received further public attention when the successful nursery school bidder applied for, and received, the necessary planning approval. The Society, the MAC and many others had objected, partly because of doubts over the legal position.

Last summer the High Court, on the brave application of Mr Muir for a judicial review, judged that, since the Common was by law 'held in trust' by the Council for the use and enjoyment of all local people, the Council had acted unlawfully in offering a contract for a Common property to be used as a private nursery. The Council appealed. In May this year three Appeal judges unanimously approved the High Court's ruling; permission to appeal to the Supreme Court was refused.

We understand that the Council is considering further the detail of the judgement, which has received no publicity. There has been no public announcement. The Council Leader had seemed confident at the time of the initial ruling that it could, and would, be overturned. Questions are now being asked about how the Council handled this matter, and the legal costs involved. Other local authorities may well be considering the legal issue too. The Society will soon be asking our Council the 'what next, with what local consultation' question soon. The Council would be well advised to listen to local concerns. The deadline for any further appeal to the courts has passed.

David Kirk

And what next for Neal's Lodge?

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From the editor

Conservatives hold Wandsworth ...

Whatever members' political allegiances, the Town Hall really matters for an 'amenity' or 'civic' society such as ours. At the time of our own 'hustings' (12 April), pundits were forecasting a Labour win, but polls can be a mixed blessing.... In the event, the Conservatives held on with a majority cut by two-thirds, thus giving Labour a potentially stronger say in Council policy-making.

Ravi Govindia and Simon Hogg, leaders of the only two parties winning Council seats, both deserve congratulations. It was a close-run thing - Samantha Heath (who gave the Society a spirited talk on 'clean air' not long ago) missed winning a Labour seat in Shaftesbury by 35 votes. The persistence of Lib Dem, Green and new 'Remain' (in the EU) candidates was impressive, but there were few signs of imminent breakthrough. Worth noting, however, in a Wandsworth election with the most candidates for 20 years, that the personal winner (4,002 votes) was the now 'Independent' Cllr Malcolm Grimston (West Hill), a man of considerable qualities (but scarcely a friend of the Wandsworth Museum). Only six other candidates, all Labour women, won more than 3,000 votes.

We thank Society member Stuart Thom, who stood down this year, for his public service as a Councillor over many years. He is succeeded in Fairfield by Cll Stuart O'Broin. Another Fairfield Councillor (and past speaker to the Society), Piers McCausland, is this year's Mayor; Will Sweet continues to chair the important Planning Applications Committee.

A major current issue is Heathrow expansion. We have strongly opposed. Good to note that this borough's three MPs (two Labour, one Conservative) voted against and that Wandsworth, with other boroughs, will continue to oppose. Do I sense that there is a public mood locally for more inclusive politics, public consultation, listening, cross-party working? Perhaps...

David Kirk

Capability Brown's Wimbledon Park, then and now

A talk by Dr Dave Dawson on 6 June (a sunny evening!) at, for a change, Naturescope on Wandsworth Common. This was the Society's contribution to the Wandsworth Heritage Festival and was attended by about 40 people. *Celia Jones reports.*

Dave Dawson (ecologist for the Friends of Wimbledon Park) delivered a thought-provoking talk about the significant green space that straddles the boundary between the boroughs of Wandsworth and Merton. Bought in the early 18th century by Sarah Churchill, 1st Duchess of Marlborough, it was bequeathed by her to the 1st Earl Spencer.

Spencer had ambitions. By buying up surrounding farm and common - lands, he amassed a large enough estate to employ Lancelot ('Capability') Brown, to turn what had been a rundown deer park into a private playground – an early example of Brown's talent for landscape transformation.

The work was completed by 1766 and included the building of a barrier to dam two

brooks, thus creating a lake, a series of temples and follies, and the inclusion and expansion of several areas of woodland.

Today, the estate has shrunk back dramatically: all that remains are the Grade II* listed Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon Club and Wimbledon Golf Course – the last now owned by the All England Lawn Tennis Club (itself on former parkland), which has development plans for the site). Merton borough now manages Wimbledon Park but shares conservation responsibility with Wandsworth.

The two remaining areas of woodland, Horsefall Wood and a fragment of Ashen Grove are home to birds, bats and small mammals. All are struggling, despite attempts to create new hedges and areas of naturalisation. The Park needs the help and support of Friends who are committed to the protection and survival of this historic and precious green space which is used and enjoyed by so many the year round.

For more information on befriending the park see

friendsofwimbledonpark.org.uk

Jenny Massey adds an interesting postscript

Wimbledon Park lake is suffering its worst ever explosion of weed – the effect of over fertilisation. The All England Tennis Club and



golf course use large amounts of fertiliser to keep their grass unnaturally green all the time: it gets into the water streams supplying the lake, severely compromising water quality. After a prolonged dry and sunny spell, the water level drops and allows sunlight to penetrate to the lake's bottom, thus causing weed to grow very quickly. Huge areas of the lake are made nearly impenetrable. It has to be cut from the lake's bottom, allowed to drift to the bank and then laboriously pulled out. Many mounds have been taken away over three days before I took the picture opposite (on 20 June) and there was more, much much more, to be done.



A local shop and its owner remembered

Prue Raper tells the story ...

In these parts we're used – unfortunately – to seeing shutters going up on the corner shops. But knowing that Len Gower himself owned his hardware shop, Domec, on the corner of Garratt Lane and Delia Street, I was – some months ago now – rather alarmed. I had never seen these shutters down before, and Len was not a one to go on holiday. So I asked at the launderette and was given the sad news that Len had died a few days before.

I was told that, as he owned his own home as well as the shop – which he always described to me as “his hobby” – his estate, which he left in its entirety to the Battersea Dogs' Home, was quite a considerable one. I was very sad to have missed the sale and shop clearance, presumably carried out by the executors. The last thing I bought there was an incinerator for the garden – the metal dustbin sort, with a chimney, for burning old documents in my case. In typical fashion, Len said: “I've only got one size in at present, but I can get you another if this one's not right.” The same went for my previous purchase, rubber feet to put on my metal

garden seat, available in several sizes on one of the many racks in the packed shop.

The article below, published in a local residents' journal, was the outcome of an interview Len gave to a local writer, Elizabeth Salmon. It gives a good flavour of Len and his wonderful emporium, now sadly no more.

Our local Aladdin's Cave

Are you in need of an ironing board, baking tray, reel of cotton, flower pot, bin bags, step ladder, potato peeler, shoelaces, moth balls, superglue, winter gloves or perhaps just a toilet seat? Forget the superstores, you will find all these and a thousand other items in the corner-shop ‘Domec’ at 185 Garratt Lane near Allfarthing Lane. Both the hardware store and its owner, Len Gower (who has been in the ironmongery business for over 50 years), are legendary. Given the vast numbers of articles not just in the shop, but at the back and down in the cellar, Len says that even the Inland Revenue recognise that a stock check is impossible. Where Len wins over the superstores (‘sheds staffed by semi-robots’) is that he stocks a lot of what the bigger stores don't and, what's more, if he hasn't got what you want, he'll order it in for you.

“The Two Ronnies ‘Four Candles’ sketch is very true to life” says Len “and all those

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events in Open All Hours really do happen.” In fact, he has been given the nickname Arkwright by the family-run ‘Bathrooms at Source’ opposite. Over the years, there have been many dogs resident in the shop. One pedigree Chihuahua named Kylie (after the illustrious Australian singer-soap star) “was an absolute villain. If a customer went to pat her, she’d try to have their fingers off.” Fortunately her bad nature did not put off the many locals who frequent the place.

Visit Domec and you will not only step into a miniature emporium of organised chaos but you’re bound to come away with more than you had gone in for. That said, don’t ask for a sack of potatoes. “I am amazed at the number of people who look around my shop and presume I must also be a greengrocer.”



The Domec store [on the corner of Garratt Lane and Dekia Street] that is now closed

Let the Editor know if you have a story to tell about our local community and how it is changing.

Planning news June 2018

As used to be said in the stock market ‘sell in May and go away’. This is not quite the situation with the Planning Group, but I have to report another month of few applications or requests for consultation. One of the group quipped at the last meeting that the borough (or our part of it) has run out of sites! There continue to be many householder applications for side, rear and upward extensions, but thankfully not many for basements (perhaps that phase has passed!).

One of our continuing concerns is with the growing number of BT Communications/Inlink provision of “smart” advertising and communication hubs throughout the borough. We were not aware of the functions of these seemingly innocuous pieces of street clutter which BT say replace the telephone kiosk. Their functions are different, in that

they act as base stations for smart phone communications and can be used to target advertising to the phone user amongst other things. They can also provide other types of information including “you were here” to the technology providers. Big brother really is close to you!

We have received no further information on the progress of either Crossrail2 or the Armoury Way proposals.

If any Society member has a planning concern which they would like us to consider could they please let us know as early as possible. The last minute is not the best time for careful consideration.



Philip Whyte

Editor's postscript Grateful thanks to all contributors and 'deliverers' of this issue. We are trying hard to improve the Newsletter's timeliness (which means starting a September issue now!). While it will be available online (flyers, and website again), **the print version will of course continue.**

Two recent soirées

So far this year, we have held two brilliantly enjoyable musical evenings at 14 Patten Road, each deservedly attracting an audience of forty or more Society members and guests. We



continue to be very grateful for the hospitality of Arjan and Stefan Byron – and the use of their new grand piano. On 7 March we were treated to a virtuoso performance by Karl Lutchmayer (pictured) of, mainly, Romantic composers (Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt), but with some Bartok as an

encore. Karl is not only a virtuoso pianist but a virtuoso talker about the composers whose works he plays. While the music was brilliant and moving, many will have found, as I did, the discussion of biographical and historical context almost equally enjoyable.

We shall soon be reviewing plans for our next soirées. If any member has ideas about performers, themes and/or genres, please inform a member of the 'team' (Sheila Allen, Stefan Byron, Peter Farrow, Julie Harrison and myself). There is of course an open invitation to our soirées for all Society members.

David Kirk.

Our soirées go from strength to strength! The latest, on Sunday 10 June, was a case in point: a duo of two friends, both Scottish, both graduates of the Royal College of Music in



London, treated us to a breathtakingly virtuosic, and most sensitively expressed programme of songs and piano pieces.

In the years since their meeting at the RCM, baritone Richard Morrison (pictured) accompanied by Martin Cousin, both securely established on the international music scene – Richard largely in leading roles in the opera houses of Germany, besides appearing here at the Wigmore, Festival and Royal Albert Halls. Martin has

toured as a soloist in the USA, Canada, New Zealand and the Far East, as well as giving recitals in the Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room, and concerto performances with our leading orchestras.

They delighted and impressed us with expert, deeply moving accounts of George Butterworth's Shropshire Lad song cycle, Schumann's Dichterliebe and three of Richard Strauss's songs; Martin thrilled with Chopin – the F Minor Fantasy. A rousingly elicited encore brought more Chopin, a gentle Prelude, and, from Richard, a haunting, unaccompanied "My love is like a red red rose." It was a magical end to a magical evening – which could not have happened without the generous hosting of the Byrons in their beautiful drawing room and garden. Many thanks to them and to our stunning performers for a perfect summer evening's entertainment.

Wendy Cater

Panorama of the Thames

Our meeting on 10 May, attended by about 40 people, was the Society's contribution to this year's Wandsworth Arts Fringe Festival: a presentation by John R Inglis of the filmed record that he and Jill Saunders have made of both banks of the River Thames from Richmond to Tower Bridge. This remarkable work, incorporating modern photography and the carefully restored 1829 images of the river banks, has taken years of dedication by John and Jill and, indeed, in smaller ways, many others. It now provides a unique record of the 2014 riverside which has already been overtaken by developers. The Society has been a supporter of the project for several years.

The 'output' of John and Jill's work can be seen at www.panoramaofthethames.com and in the beautifully produced book *Panorama of the Thames: A Riverside View of Georgian London*, published by Thames & Hudson.

Caroline Pook

The Society walks and talks ... and parties

Thursday 19 July

Summer Evening Party

From 7pm, in the courtyard of the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building at Le Gothique Restaurant. Two course buffet supper accompanied by Graeme Airth on saxophone.

The RVPB SW18 2PH, which dominates the Common near Trinity Road, can most easily be approached from the south on foot from John Archer Way, off Windmill Road. The 219 bus stops on Trinity Road nearby.

The cost is £25 per head - to book, send an email to Caroline Pook at wandsworthsocietyevents@gmail.com or phone her on 020 8870 4958.

Monday 3 September

9.30am - Walk along the Beverley Brook from New Malden to Putney. Around 7 miles in total but it is easy to leave at Barnes after 5 miles. Led by Rose Harley. Meet outside M&S Simply Food, Clapham Junction Station – no need to book in advance.

Thursday 13 September

7.45 for 8pm
West Side Church
corner Melody Road and Allfarthing Lane,
SW11 2QQ

Waste disposal matters

a talk by Michael Singham, Waste Strategy Manager for Wandsworth and Richmond Councils who will try to answer all our questions about local rubbish and its disposal.

Wednesday 19 September

5.30pm – Meet on the bridge on Penwith Road and amble along the Wandle from Earlsfield to where it meets the Thames, looking at man's

impact on the river's setting. This short walk is the Society's contribution to the Wandle Fortnight (8-23 September). It will be a 'collaborative event', with participants sharing their knowledge and views. No need to book.

Thursday 4 October

9.30am - Walk to Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats. Led by Rose Harley. Meet outside M&S Simply Food, Clapham Junction Station – no need to book in advance.

Thursday 11 October

7.30pm at St Mary's Church

Putney High Street SW15 1SN (note start time and venue!)

Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister from 1534 to 1540

A joint meeting, organised by the Wandsworth Historical Society, with the WHS and Putney Society

An illustrated lecture by Professor Diarmaid MacCullough.

Sunday 14 October

Walk to explore where the third Heathrow runway is planned, plus a visit to the threatened Great Barn at Harmondsworth. Details to be announced (Caroline Pook is arranging).

Thursday 8 November

Carol Rahn will give an illustrated talk on Growing Up in Wartime Battersea

... and a new Wandsworth Common WI was set up in our area recently. Meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at 7pm in St Mary Magdalene Vestry Hall, 10a Wiseton Rd, SW17 7EE. Next meetings include "making some simple jewellery items together for a bit of chat and creativity" (5 July) and a talk by Homestart Wandsworth, part of a national charity supporting families with children under the age of five (6 September). Newcomers would be very welcome.
Caroline Pook