

Wandsworth Society

Newsletter February 2019



Battersea Power Station – Past, Present, Future

Caroline Pook reports on the Society's meeting on 10 January

The Past Jeanne Rathbone, a Battersea resident, local historian and tour guide, took us on a romp through the early history of Battersea. The land where the power station was developed was waterworks in the 1850s. They were abandoned in the early 1900s; the land lay barren. Until the late 1930s electricity was supplied from small power stations dedicated to a single industry or group of factories that sold excess electricity to the public. In 1925 Parliament decided that the power grid should be a single system under public ownership, with a smaller number of large stations.

In 1927 the London Power Company proposed to use the Battersea site, close to the river (for coal delivery and cooling water) and close to the population. There was strong opposition from both local residents and the King, concerned about sulphur and other pollutants. The initial designs had to include complex internal flues to ensure emissions were minimised - hence the need for tall

chimneys (initially just two in the A Station). There were protests from those who felt the building would be too dominant, an eyesore and damage local buildings; the company addressed the concerns by hiring Sir Giles Gilbert Scott to design the exterior. He used 6 million bricks from Worcestershire to complete the fluted design; internally there were art deco features, arcades and decorative door panels. The building of the first phase was completed in 1935 and, until the construction of the B Station, the eastern wall of the boiler house was clad in corrugated iron.

After the Second World War, the now nationalised electricity company began construction of the B Station which came into operation between 1953 and 1955. It mirrored the floor layout for the A station, adding the familiar third and fourth chimney but with none of Gilbert Scott's decorations. The extended power station met 20% of London's needs, was nationally the most thermally

efficient power station and one of the largest brick buildings in the world. Pollution concerns about emissions from the coal fires in the era of the 1970 Clean Air Act led to the power station's decommissioning (1975-1983). The building was then generally neglected while proposals for its future emerged. Public pressure and local affection for the building led to Grade II listing in 1980, upgraded to Grade II* in 2007. Over this period the power station was not totally unused: it had a rich cultural life; its iconic profile made it a popular film and arts destination for a wide range of artists, both musical (from Pink Floyd to the Beatles) and visual.

Since the station's closure, redevelopment plans were drawn up by successive site owners. Their ambitious plans included a giant indoor amusement park, a mega multi-level shopping centre and thousands of homes. The first project to have any traction is the one we see now.

The Present Alex Baker, Community and Sustainability Manager for the Battersea Power Station Development Company, described the site today. You can now enter directly from Battersea Park, Battersea Bridge Road or from Battersea Park Road to the south. Circus West Village, launched in 2017, grows all the time. There is a vibrant new community of over 800 apartments, restaurants, shops, offices, a village hall, public open space with a water feature, and a pier in use by the Thames Clippers. In last summer's heatwave the deck chairs and family events made this a very busy destination. Meanwhile the power station is a building site with 17 cranes currently at work and too many people to count employed on refurbishment, new buildings and new tube line. With the four chimneys replaced, the profile is back to what it was. The tradition of the site as an arts destination continues, with an official artist in residence and support for a community choir.



The Future ... Alex went on to describe the final vision. Circus West Village (aka Phase 1) will shortly see a cinema and further commercial lettings. Phase 2, under way for a few years now, is the re-building of the power station. By 2021 there will be 540,000 sq ft of offices (including a new HQ for Apple), 100 shops and restaurants, event and leisure space (highlighting the historic interior of turbine hall A), as well as some 250 homes. And, yes, you will be able to rise to the top of an 8 metre wide chimney to a viewing platform. Phase 3 which lies between Battersea Park Road and the power station has also started on site and includes a hotel, 1500 apartments, 40 shops, some leisure and the tube station on the Northern line extension which opens in 2020.

Phase 4, which has planning consent, includes 386 affordable Peabody homes, a medical centre, open space and some starter employment units. The site controlled by the Battersea Power Station Development Company extends eastward along the river. This part of the site, Phase 5 and beyond, for which detailed planning consent is not yet in place, will include a further 3 million sq. ft of buildings, of a height which should not obscure views of the power station. There will also be an extension of the Thames path, with a bridge over the existing Ransome Dock waste transfer station, to meet the new footway in front of the Embassy Quarter buildings. And we shall then be able to walk or cycle from the heliport to the South Bank without obstruction!

Our Executive Committee, Society officers and sub-committee leaders

Chair Margaret Romanski
30 Wandle Road, SW17 7DW
07815 937779
m.romanski@talk21.com

Vice-Chair David Kirk
15 Aspley Road, SW18 2DB
020 8874 9167
davidcameronkirk@hotmail.com

Secretary John Dawson
210 Beechcroft Road, SW17 7DP
020 8772 4282

Treasurer Norman Holmes
Flat 7 Tiffany Heights,
59 Standen Road, SW18 5TF
020 8877 9616

Membership Secretary Gill Gray
Studio 8, Royal Victoria Patriotic
Building, SW18 3SX
020 8870 4567

Iain Gray ('Bedside' editor)
contact details as for Gill Gray

Bruce St Julian-Bown (Open Spaces lead)
39c Heathfield Road, SW18 2PH
020 8874 6966

Philip Whyte (Planning Group lead)
49 West Side, SW18 2EE
020 8874 4745

Other sub-committee leads

Events Team

Caroline Pook
caroline@pookfamily.co.uk

Roads & Transport Group

Harry Waddingham
61 Magdalen Road, SW18 3NE
020 8874 8784

A new era for the Society?!

It is excellent news at the start of 2019 that the Society now has a new website. Congratulations to Margaret Romanski, Caroline and Will Pook, Peter Farrow and others who have worked hard to get it launched. If you have not already done so, have a look at www.wandsworthsociety.org. There is of course further work to be done on this project - but early 'feedback' will be welcome.

There is no doubt that our new website will change the Society's public 'image' for 'visitors' (who can now join the Society online). It may well change members' own perceptions. It will require more effort by the Society - preferably involving more of our members - to keep the site up-to-date, and to engage and involve a wider 'audience' within our membership and beyond. In other words, we should welcome something of a 'culture change' and the ability that IT gives us to involve more Society members more fully, if they wish, in our activities and in raising the Society's collective voice about our local environment - criticising the bad, but applauding the good. And of course debating what is bad and good!

Many younger people, concerned about our local environment, do not have time to go to Society events during the week. We need to cater for their concerns - and that means, in part, greater use of social media. There will be much material, including the Society's views on eg planning and roads and other transport matters, and minutes of our meetings that we can put on our new website.

This Newsletter reflects, we hope, the diversity of the Society's interests and the range of our members' interests and enthusiasms.

David Kirk

Society Subscriptions for 2019 were due on 1 January (Individuals and Households £15; Senior Citizens £10; Organisations £30). If you pay by Standing Order, please check that this is set up for the right amount (many have not been updated since subscriptions were

raised). It is a great help to us if you pay promptly - it saves us time and energy in chasing non-payers. If you would like a Standing Order or Gift Aid form, let Gill Gray, our Membership Secretary (details above) know.



Riding the Munda Biddi Trail with 65 Degrees North

WS member Jonathan Thomson, a retired Royal Marines Brigadier, is best known to us as a local Clean Air champion on behalf of the Society and an enthusiast for electric cars . He is also currently a patron of 65 Degrees North ...

... a very small outfit, shortly to become a charity, that invites wounded, injured or sick veterans of our recent wars to undertake various challenges aimed at Rehabilitation through Adventure. In October we cycled with four men and one woman on the 1,000km Munda Biddi Trail that runs from near Perth in Western Australia down to Albany on the Southern Ocean. The ride was 'unsupported': we carried all we needed.

Our team consisted of Tam, ex-Scots Guards, badly wounded in the femur in Afghanistan; Mark, ex-Royal Marine who has a lower leg prosthetic; Amy from the RAF who suffers from PTSD, as does Pete, a current Marine. The team was completed by Mark, another ex-Marine, who was twice smashed up in

accidents. All were brave, tough and determined. They became a 'team'.

Munda Biddi means "Way through the Forest" in a local Aboriginal language and Way through the Forest it was! We took 13.5 days on this journey, living in wayside shelters and occasional 'proper' accommodation, feeding off supplies bought on the way. The trail took in tiny paths, possibly made by kangaroos, open gravel roads and a very little tarmac. Being Spring, the forests were full of flowers of many hues, very quiet and eerily empty. At the end of the second day, when we had seen no other humans but lots of kangaroos, including big ones, we concluded that this was a land deserted by humans and populated by strange animals that hopped about, and even stranger creatures that moved on well loaded two-wheeled machines. 'Normal life' as we know it was not there.

Of course, that wasn't right. After a few days we started going through small townships, some that time had passed by. In Jarrahwood, for example, once a centre for the exploitation of the great 'Jarrah' forests (a lovely hard wood, once used to pave London streets), we found a small cluster of aging dwellings, aged and friendly people and a most comfortable little Community House

where we could sink as a soggy and tired little group. From there we rode down Railway Line No 78 (now a fast track) - which suggests there were once at least another 77 lines servicing the Jarrah industry. We went to Quinninup, which once had a pub, burnt down quite recently and not replaced, so the little township, founded in 1924, now has nothing. We went to Donnelly Mill, beside a large lake, where we found a general store, a 'place from the past' where the owner's wife cooked delicious food to power us on our way. An amazing journey places few people ever see.

Trails in Australia tend to be bedevilled by what's known as pea-gravel, ball-bearing sized red gravel that causes bikes to slip, skid and crash. And sand pops up at inconvenient moments to cause crashes - which we all experienced. Looking up as we progressed south, we could see the huge trees of the 'Valley of the Giants' and felt insignificant amongst their grandeur.

The days churned by. Moving south, we came under the influence of weather generated by the Southern Oceans; the air was colder, with not a lot between the shore

and Antarctica. On warm days we began to see snakes, just waking up after their winter's sleep, and hungry. Some, such as the Tiger snake, are extremely dangerous. We were wary and gave them a very wide berth if possible. Equally important, we got our nutrition right and were able to do 12-hour days (103km our longest ride) - not a lot on an unencumbered road bike on a good surface, but on heavily loaded mountain bikes 'across country' it could be diabolical. It was not unusual for us to arrive at the night's shelter exhausted, just as the sun was setting, knowing we had to be away at 6 am the next day. Because of diversions for controlled burns in the forest we covered 1,107km, rather more than the 1,000km planned for, and we climbed 49,000ft. We broke one chain, two spokes and a 'hanger' that keeps the gears at the back together. We trained for this and achieved repairs that allowed us to carry on.

The Munda Biddi is unique - lovely, tough, dangerous if taken for granted - but adventure aplenty for our little team, and an amazing experience!!

Local news

Our Society and the Wandsworth Historical Society were pleased to see the Council's announcement early last year that Council funding was being made available for the restoration of the fine tombstones at 'Mount Nod', the Huguenot burial ground located behind Book House on East Hill. We could look forward, therefore, to the re-opening of the cemetery and its development as a 'pocket park'

Mount Nod has always had a special place in the Society's heart. In 1985 we planted a tree in the graveyard and unveiled a plaque (now scarcely visible to the public) to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Sadly, the tombstones, some of

them listed monuments, have deteriorated seriously and the cemetery has had to be kept locked for many years, with only occasional guided tours enabling public access. We and the Historical Society have now been asked by the Council to discuss with them and their contractor, Enable, the possibility of our involvement in the establishment of some form of 'supporters' group'. We shall be seeking some initial briefing from Council and Enable officers shortly.

At its January meeting our Roads and Transport group noted that there had been nothing more heard about the Trinity Road/Burntwood Lane road junction studies (with significant implications for Wandsworth

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Debenhams (Clapham Junction) has a new landlord

Society member Cyril Richert, a member of our Planning group, also runs the Clapham Junction Action Group (CJAG). Its blogs can be accessed at cjag.org. We were particularly interested to read a piece written just before Christmas by David Curran, which CJAG was happy for us to reproduce in our Newsletter. The Society too will be taking a close interest in the future of local retail premises - and, indeed, the future of shopping in our area. Will the new developments in Wandsworth Town centre all prove viable?

British Land has agreed to sell the Debenhams building in Clapham Junction to an as-yet undisclosed buyer for £48 million. They originally bought the building in 2005 amid the collapse of previous tenant Alders, and leased it on to Debenhams.

British Land are one of the UK's biggest owners of commercial property and until recently owned at least 24 Debenhams stores across the country; this sale is part of their plan to sell off all the 'freestanding' branches (i.e. high street branches that aren't part of bigger shopping malls) in order to reduce their exposure to the retail

sector in general, and Debenhams in particular.

To be clear – this doesn't mean Clapham Junction's Debenhams is in danger. It's well located in a wealthy and growing area and it is, certainly by Debenhams' standards, consistently busy throughout the week. We doubt that Debenhams would want to leave Clapham Junction unless either their hand was forced, or they were made an offer they couldn't refuse.

However British Land's worries about over exposed to the department store chain are another sign (as if we needed one) about general fragility of British high streets. Debenhams' CEO has recently announced plans to close a third of the company's stores – as he put it, "taking tough decisions" on stores where financial performance was likely to deteriorate over time. With closures looming, we're keenly aware that we have two Debenhams branches within about a mile of each other – possibly the two closest branches in the whole of the country – albeit the strong local economy means both are quite good-performing ones by the standards of Debenhams' stores as a whole. If it did come down to an either/or choice, we have informally heard that the Wandsworth

branch performs significantly worse in terms of sales, but the building layout there is certainly more modern and may cost Debenhams less to rent.

With several of the Debenhams buildings being touted as potential “redevelopment opportunities” there’s also a risk that the buyer goes for a quick return on their £48m and seeks to push Debenhams out and split all the upper floors in to flats. It’s a big building (139,000 square feet), and British Land have a 25 year lease to Debenhams from 2005 (some sources report 30 years). The initial rent was at £1.25 million a year, with 2.5% minimum annual rental increases and five-yearly open market rent reviews from 2015 – suggesting a decent return for the buyer, but who knows?

What’s not in doubt is that, for all the ups and downs it has had in recent years, Debenhams is important to Clapham Junction. Alongside Asda it’s the anchor

tenant in the wider shopping area, drawing trade to the district as a whole and benefitting the smaller traders: any change to the use, especially any move away from retail, would be very controversial. It’s also a major local employer (a typical large Debenhams store employs 100-150 people). And alongside BAC it’s probably Clapham Junction’s most recognisable building – though its listed status means we’re unlikely to see much change to the exterior.

Hopefully all this sale means is a change in landlord – but we’ll be watching any developments closely.

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... Local news continued from page 5

Common), featured in our November Newsletter. We shall be seeking further information and have been assured by local Councillors that there will be full consultation before any decisions are made. The group was also concerned about the implications the Wandsworth Town 'gyratory' - another issue about which there had been little recent news - might have on traffic flows further south.

Among other matters, the group agreed that the Society should write to the Council Leader in support of the stance that the Council (and the borough's three MPs) have been continuing to take against the expansion of Heathrow airport.

On the Planning front, the Society has now submitted our objections to the proposals for Jaggard Way (application number 2018/5413), which can be seen on the Council's planning website. We shall shortly be submitting our comments and objections to the proposed re-development of the

Ferrier Road industrial estate.(2018/5669). Among other applications we are also now considering one for 190/194 St Ann’s Hill SW18, the old postal sorting office now vacated by the art restorers, Plowden and Smith (who have moved to Mitcham). While the back of the building is being cleared for flats, the attractive and interesting façade of the building will be retained. A three storey development will have implications for Aspley Road residents, some of them also Society members, and there will be discussions with them before the Society's views are submitted to the Council.

David Kirk (with the help of colleagues during Philip Whyte's absence on holiday)

Events

Thursday 14 March

7.15 for 7.30pm

West Side Church

AGM and 'Follies are Fun'

Our **Annual General Meeting** (starting at 7.30pm; hall will open at 7.15) will include the Chair's annual report, the Society's annual accounts and the election of its officers and other Executive Committee members. All are welcome to attend both the AGM and the talk that follows, but only Society members may vote at the AGM.

Follies Are Fun! an illustrated talk by Iain K S Gray (Society Executive Committee member and trustee of The Folly Fellowship), starting at about 8.30pm

Follies, grottoes and landscape buildings became enormously fashionable in the 18th century, notably decorating the estates of the landed gentry. Almost by definition they're eccentric, often reflecting the characters of their creators. They continue to enjoy great popularity. Like them, the subject of Iain's talk will be fun!

Sunday 17 February

7.30pm for 8pm

A solo harp recital

by Sunshine Lo

who will play transcriptions of Bach, Spohr and Handel, together with some traditional Chinese music.

Tickets must be booked with Perter Farrow at wandsworth.society@mac.com or on 020 8874 3274. Ticket are £15, including the cost of a first drink.

Sunday 10 March

7 for 7.30 pm

Piano recital by Clifton Hughes.

He will be performing works by Chopin, Scriabin, Prokofiev and Debussy.

Tickets must be booked with Perter Farrow at wandsworth.society@mac.com or on 020 8874 3274. Ticket are £15, including the cost of a first drink.

Monday March 18

11:30 am - 1:30 pm

A visit to Langdon Down Museum of Learning Disability

The Langdon Down Museum of Learning Disability was the home and institution developed by the Victorian physician Dr John Langdon Down and his family where a revolutionary and enlightened approach was developed for the care of people with learning disabilities. It shows exhibitions about his work, Normansfield and the Royal Earlswood Asylum. The building also contains a Grade II* listed Victorian theatre which is a rare example of a private theatre with original painted scenery and other ornate fixtures and fittings. The tour outlines the history and work of the centre and will cost £10. Booking required on events@wandsworthsociety.org. Those who wish may like to walk in Bushy Park (with a lunch stop) after the tour – no booking required for the walk.

Thursday 11 April

West Side Church

7.45 for 8pm

We hope to arrange a presentation and Q&A discussion on the Thames Tideway project. Details to be announced.

Friday 10 May

West Side Church

7.45 for 8 pm

Music for Minds

will be the Society's contribution to the Wandsworth Arts Fringe festival

A presentation and interactive music workshop with the Wigmore Hall's stimulating "Singing with Friends" choir, together with a talk by the Alzheimers Society branch responsible for Wandsworth. Both work to enrich the lives of local families living with dementia