

# Wandsworth Society



Newsletter Spring 2023

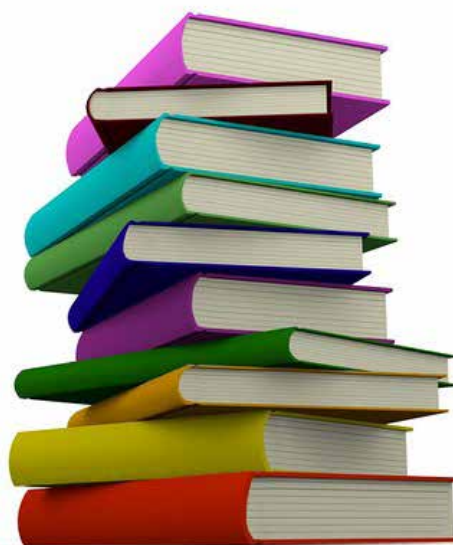
# Bookshops in the community

A good audience assembled for our January meeting to hear from Venetia Vyvyan, owner of the Barnes Bookshop (in Barnes obviously) and Tom Rowley, owner of the newly opened Backstory, a bookshop in Balham.

Venetia has been in bookselling for most of her career and fell into it almost by accident when a friend saw a job advertisement and urged her to apply. In 1985 she joined the firm of Heywood Hill, and in 2016 she set up the Barnes Bookshop. Tom's career up to now has been as a journalist, working for *The Economist*, *The Washington Post* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

Venetia and Tom took us through the process of acquiring premises and how stock is supplied. Publishers' reps visit with suitcases full of proofs and catalogues, allowing the bookseller to choose what they fancy putting on their shelves. Both agreed that one of the joys of the being in the book trade is that you can return for free anything that doesn't sell. This allows the bookseller to take a book which might not seem to be mainstream but which looks a little different and interesting. Venetia mentioned specifically a new novel called *Lessons in Chemistry* by an unknown (and 70-year old) author called Bonnie Garmus, which she took a shine to and was proved right as it became a big seller.

There was applause for Venetia when she said she was not planning to stock Prince Harry's



book (although she would of course order it if requested by a customer) whereas Tom planned to stock it for commercial reasons.

Both were enthusiastic about the independent bookshop being right in the heart of the community. In 2020 Venetia and the Barnes Bookshop joined forces with St Mary's Church, Barnes to set up the Barnes BookFest, a weekend packed with bestselling authors talking about their books in this fantastic setting. Not to be outdone, Tom at Backstory hosts sell-out evenings with authors and musicians – coffee and wine are also in plentiful supply.

Thank you Venetia and Tom for what you do and long may you both continue in business – you're both such an asset – so get buying your books from them!

Libby Spurrier

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The Barnes Bookshop - 98 Church Road London SW13 0DQ <https://barnesbookshop.com>

Backstory can be found at - 71 Balham High Road Balham SW12 9AP <https://backstory.london>

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This is the Newsletter of **The Wandsworth Society**, a registered charity no 263737. The Society is concerned with the quality of life and the environment in Wandsworth town centre, Wandsworth Common and adjacent areas.

If you are not already a member and would like to join please contact the Membership Secretary Gill Gray, details opposite. Please address, any comments, or, even better, contributions to [newsletter@wandsworthsociety.org](mailto:newsletter@wandsworthsociety.org)

# Wandsworth Society

Newsletter  
Spring 2023

## Our Executive Committee

**Chair** Philip Whyte

49 West Side, SW18 2EE

020 8874 4745

**Vice-Chair** To be confirmed

**Secretary** Philip Whyte

49 West Side, SW18 2EE

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**Treasurer** Richard Pook

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## Greetings

The Editor (and staff!!) hope that you are looking forward to Spring, the better weather and lower gas and electricity bills (said with feeling!) which this brings.

We hope that you will continue to support the Society by your attendance at meetings, other functions and if possible offer help to both the Society and friends and neighbours who may need assistance.

A summary of the recent Annual General Meeting follows:

The Society's Annual General Meeting took place on Thursday 9 March at West Side Church, Melody Road at which there were thirty-five members present, apologies had been received from two members.

The start of the meeting was slightly delayed as printed copies of the accounts were awaited.

Philip Whyte, Acting chair, opened the meeting with an explanation for the absence of the Chair Margaret Romanski due to ill-health and thanked the members of the Executive for their support and encouragement during the last twelve months.

The report continued with a summary of the past twelve months, with meetings of the Executive taking place on six occasions, the Roads and Transport group, three meetings, the new Environmental group, three and an explanation of the reason for only two meetings of the planning group, due principally to the lack of significant planning applications.

The acting chair asked members of the Executive to identify themselves.

The events group have continued to arrange most interesting speakers and were thanked for their efforts.

The planning group has continued to consider many of the applications in 'our patch' with very few of significance. Those of note are the former gasworks site on Armoury Way, Springfield

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## Cover

The chestnut at the corner of Heathfield Garden, one of the first, if not the first, tree to come into full leaf each spring

... continued from page 3 Hospital Trust site and the All England Lawn Tennis, former golf course, site at Wimbledon Park. In addition the Local Plan is under review, consultations on flooding from both rivers and surface water drainage and Conservation Areas to name but a few.

The Treasurer presented the accounts which had been independently scrutinised by Mr Paul Henry, as there were no questions arising, these were then adopted.

Election of the Chair and members of the Executive then followed. Philip was proposed as Chair, and as there had been no other nominations to the Executive and those standing members had agreed to continue, they were all re-elected.

The meeting concluded with questions from the floor, which included 'how can we attract younger members', 'are membership numbers being sustained' (response, yes), 'should the website be open for all to see', as this may discourage active participation in Society activities (like meetings), comment that social media may not provide additional participation, advice of walks being organised by other organisations.

The Chair thanked all those who had contributed to the continued success of the Society.

The full Minutes of the meeting and the Chair's address will be available on the website.

David O'Hanlon, Chair of the re-launched Wandle Piscators, spoke to the

Society in February introducing us to a new force for good on the River Wandle. This revitalised club for mixed-species, mixed-method, fishing and conservation was originally founded in 2004 but until its re-launch in 2022 has been fairly low key in subsequent years as the original members have aged and new blood was forthcoming. New life has been injected into the club by David and his passionate team as well and the 60 members.

The Wandle is a rare chalk stream with well organised interest groups along different parts of the river. It has seen much improvement in the last 40 years since the days when the river was heavily polluted and tended to be used as a rubbish dump. In 1978 there were reportedly no fish at all and headlines were made when a single trout was caught! Since those dark days the banks have evolved into a busy trail for walkers and cyclists and a green lung for communities along its length, increasing interest in positive activities such as litter picking and ecological improvements.

## THE WANDLE PISCATORS



With the cleaning up of the river there is a resurgent interest in fishing with 500 young fish restocked in the last year. Unusually, anyone can fish on the Wandle (providing they have a modestly priced Government fishing licence) apart from within Morden Hall Park where the Piscators have secured club fishing rights, and even there they are subject to the national closed season which runs mid-March to mid-June.

The Piscators are ambitious to make further improvements to the river, working with the Environment Agency,

National Trust and South East Rivers Trust (SERT). This includes improving bio-diversity (including fish breeding grounds) and transforming accessibility. They are also keen to reach out to young people, particularly those who may have had less respect for the river. To this end they have set up a junior club together in partnership with the National Trust in Morden Hall Park. There is still a long way to go and we hope that this has been assured by the enthusiasm and pragmatism of the Wandle Piscators.

There will be a Society walk along the river on Thursday 29 June – details to be announced.

# The once (and future) museum

Sheila Allen relates the tale of Wandsworth Museum

This is a story of hope, determination, energy and triumph in the face of adversity. Our aim is to achieve a secure, accredited museum in Wandsworth that will use the collection to tell the borough's story, giving it a stronger sense of place, offering a service to schools and providing a social hub. Here is our story.

Once upon a time (in 1986, actually) an enlightened Wandsworth Council Leader created a small museum in Putney in a room adjacent to the local library. It soon outgrew its home and in 1996 moved to the Court House in Garratt Lane. It became one of London's most successful fully accredited local museums providing a schools education service and telling the borough's history.

In 2007, in spite of the museum's popularity that same council which had been so supportive decided to close it in order to create a town centre library. This has now re-located to premises near South Thames College. The Court House has yet to find a new tenant.

The closure of the museum triggered a major public campaign, with over 20,000 people signing a petition. The issue was reported in the national press and raised in the House of Lords by the late Baroness Trumpington. This resulted in an incredibly generous donation from the Hintze Family Foundation. Michael and Dorothy Hintze are local residents who had made very good use of Wandsworth Museum. Their funding saved it from being consigned to storage.

New premises in West Hill library became available and there a director and a board of trustees established a museum, which opened to the public in 2010. The collection, much of it donated by local people, was kept in excellent environmental conditions. The Friends of Wandsworth Museum (FoWM) quickly formed and registered as a charity in July 2007. More than 300 people became Friends, supporting our efforts to hold events and establish projects and contacts with local schools. A particular success was a collaboration with Beatrix Potter School recreating the evacuation of local children to the Surrey countryside in the Second World War. Dressed for the part, including gas masks, 200 small children and their teachers marched to Wandsworth



The Wandle 1900

Unknown artist

Photo credit: BAC Moving Museum: Wandsworth Collection

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Common Station and boarded a steam train specially loaned for the occasion (see Battersea Matters Autumn 2009).

Guided tours were arranged for Friends to the City of London, the former lavender fields and asparagus beds of Battersea and much more. Once established in West Hill we held coffee mornings with guest speakers and housed many memorable exhibitions such as The Villages of Wandsworth and a display in collaboration with the V&A containing an early Picasso.

We shared the premises with the De Morgan Collection and were able to enjoy those marvellous works, we ran a café and shop, and our volunteers welcomed visitors at the entrance, worked on youth projects and developed an education service for local schools. All was set fair for obtaining accreditation. This is important as it confers formal recognition by Arts Council England and



### 'Leather Bottle', Garratt Lane

Jane Murphy

Photo credit: BAC Moving Museum: Wandsworth Collection

opens the door to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other foundations whose constitutions restrict their support to accredited bodies.

But then the Council withdrew its special arrangement of a peppercorn rent. This was an almost fatal blow as, without this concession, the Museum was forced to close in June 2015. The collection was put into storage in the basement.

Thanks to heroic efforts and masses of good will, a merger agreement with Battersea Arts Centre was completed in June 2016. The brief included developing temporary exhibitions, installations and our very popular education services. The residual FoWM funds were donated for that purpose in July. We were rebranded The Moving Museum- moving round BAC, and round the country.

Tragically, circumstances beyond anyone's control, including financial pressures following the Grand Hall fire and the Covid closures, meant that BAC had to terminate the collection agreement. In 2021 the collection was once more consigned to the West Hill basement, where it remains.

However local support for the museum was not destroyed and so the Museum Action Group was formed. We sent a letter outlining our plans and aspirations to Wandsworth Council in August 2021 offering to work with it to find a way forward.

The public support is still there and we continue to strive, offering to work with the new Council to ensure that Wandsworth is not one of only three in London without a borough museum. The story is not ended. I would love to say that we - the supporters, Friends and the museum - all lived happily ever after. We shall see. Watch this space!

Sheila Allen

This article was first published in the 22 / 23 Winter edition of *Battersea Matters* the magazine of the The Battersea Society

## A request for Transcription Volunteers for the Wandsworth Museum Collection Catalogue:

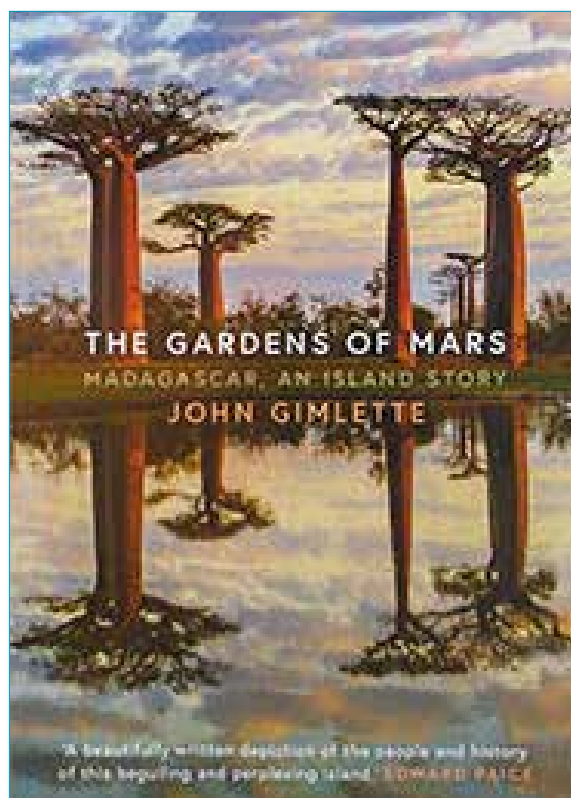
The Wandsworth Museum Action Group have been asked to provide volunteers for the vital task of transposing written records of the Wandsworth Museum Collection to a database. The computer catalogue which holds the catalogue information was damaged in the Battersea Arts Centre fire and it has proved impossible to retrieve the relevant files. Written records have been scanned into PDFs. The task for volunteers will be to type them up onto a simple Excel data base. This can be done at home. You will need email, internet connection and some basic grasp of excel spreadsheets.

If you would like to help please submit your email contact details to Sheila Allen- email: [sheilamacallen@gmail.com](mailto:sheilamacallen@gmail.com). We will forward your name to Sara O'Donnell, Head of Arts and Culture, at Wandsworth Council who will send you the relevant scanned files to transcribe and return.

We will be supported in this by a team from Roehampton University with whom we will be preparing a series of Mini-Museum exhibitions to be displayed in the new Town Centre Library and other suitable venues. This requires a comprehensive catalogue. The database is the essential first step in getting the Wandsworth Museum collection more available for public display.

If you have any queries, please contact Philip Bradley on [southlondoner23@gmail.com](mailto:southlondoner23@gmail.com).

Our AGM this year was on a rather chilly, damp, March evening, all the better then to be transported by John Gimlette to Madagascar and all its beauty and idiosyncrasies.



Madagascar is the fourth-largest island in the world and would stretch from London to Algiers. The island is very diverse in climate, geography, flora and fauna. The east is 5,000 feet high and has plenty of stormy weather – not unusual to have 15 centimetres in one hour. The west is very flat and dry.

There are many tribes and consequently many battles. These are mainly about cattle and there are many killings as the fighters are armed with guns.

The island is known as the land of ancestors and ancestor worship is common. The inhabitants build intricate tombs with designs ranging from houses to the titanic. Tombs are very important to the Malagasy people as they are a symbol of life's journey. Erotic art is also very important as it signifies one life going and a new life taking over. Many shrines are to be found including one we were shown made from biros by students. On a certain day the bones of the dead are dug up washed and processed around the village to be shown developments that have occurred since their death. This is followed by a huge feast with music and dancing.

There are ten species of mammals of which only bats are found elsewhere. The *foosa* is a cross between a dog, fox and mongoose and is prone to biting and stealing. There are 107 species of lemurs who have been on the island for 40 million years. They vary in size from a teacup to a 4-year-old. The *indri* are the big-

gest and loudest and are captured for food but are also regarded as ancestors. There are also hump-backed whales and the males sing very loudly! There were in the past elephant birds on the island which were ten-feet high. They were hunted which led to their extinction.

10,000 years ago humans came to the island from Borneo – 3,700 miles away – and they brought with them the art of basket making and rice cultivation as well as the language of Malagasy which is still the prevalent language on the island.

In the eighth century Arabs settled on the island and called the island *Mountains of the Moon*. They brought with them arithmetic and astrology as well as slaves. Then came the Africans who maybe came with the Arabs or as slaves. In 1610 they built large forts using lime and egg-whites.

The first Europeans to arrive in 1818 were Breton boat builders and boats of their design are still used. In 1828 twelve Welsh missionaries from Carmarthen imported a printing press. They learned Malagasy and



translated and printed 2,000 copies of the New Testament.

They were invaded and colonised by the French who wanted to build roads. They conscripted unwilling Malagasy people to do the work and during the work half of the 18,000 men died. In 1947 they couldn't persuade the men to work and so conscripted them to build a railway during which 80,000 died and 100 kilometres of railway were built. A ski train, complete with snow plough, was given by the Swiss and is still working!

The present population of 26 million is expected to rise to 130 million in the next generation. The Malagasy people have embraced new technology and already have 2 million Facebook users, data processing, call centres and the best 4G in Africa.

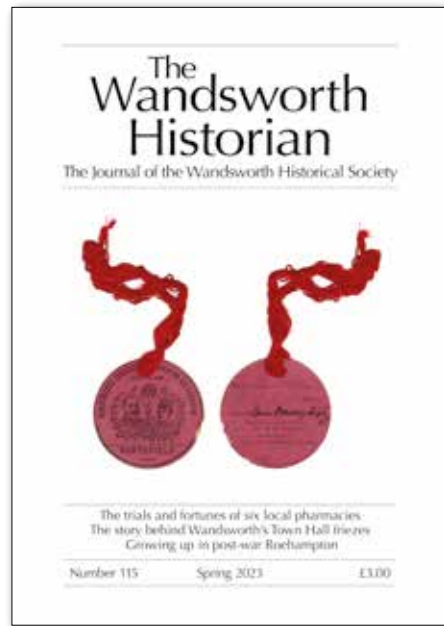
A fascinating talk! If you want to watch the talk in full you can find it on our website. Better still buy John's book *Madagascar. Garden of Mars*. We await John's next book on Cyprus and will definitely welcome him to give us another fascinating talk.

Gill Gray

# Wandsworth Historian

The Journal of the Wandsworth Historical Society

The front cover of the latest issue of the *Wandsworth Historian* joins the run-up to King Charles's crowning in May by carrying a fragile memento of Wandsworth's official celebration for Edward VII's coronation in 1902. The main articles in the magazine



itself explore growing up in post-war Roehampton, the story behind those amazing carved stone historic freezes on the southern side of Wandsworth Town Hall, and the varied fortunes of six pharmacy shops in our area.

All this and more can be found in the Spring 2023 issue of the *Wandsworth Historian* (ISSN 1751-9225), the magazine that brings you the latest research into Wandsworth's past.

The *Wandsworth Historian* is published by the Wandsworth Historical Society, and copies are available price £3.00 plus £2.00 for postage and packing from WHS, 119 Heythorp Street, London SW18 5BT or by emailing [020neil119@gmail.com](mailto:020neil119@gmail.com). Cheques payable to 'Wandsworth Historical Society', please, though on-line payment is much preferred.

The website address of the Wandsworth Historical Society is [www.wandsworthhistory.org.uk](http://www.wandsworthhistory.org.uk).



# The former gasholder site

A planning application ([2022/3954](#)) for the redevelopment of the last major site in Wandsworth town was submitted in December 2022. The redevelopment of the site, just north of Armoury Way on the eastern bank of the Wandle, was reviewed as part of the Wandle Delta Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD); a document to 'guide the physical aspect of future changes in the area', it was adopted on 28 September 2021.

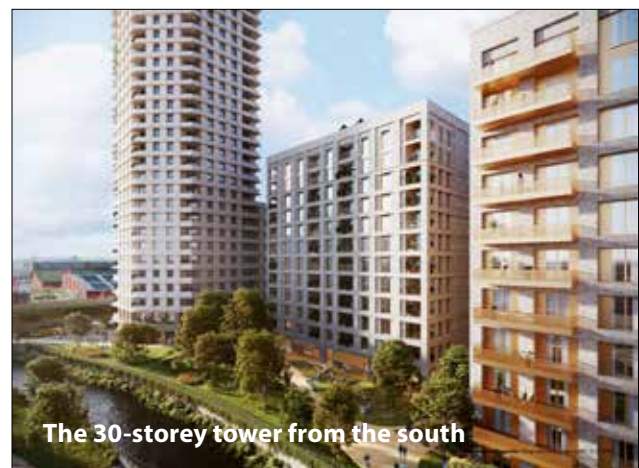
In September 2021 the guidance for the site outlined in the SPD proposed **4-8 storey buildings with 481 homes**. The application is for buildings of **12, 16 and 30 storeys with 646 dwellings**.

We have submitted a comprehensive objection dealing with the many shortcomings of the scheme.

*We are concerned that the heights, massing and density of the proposed buildings on Plots A1, A2 and A3 will overwhelm the Wandle Trail adjoining the river Wandle, cast significant shadows on both the river, The Trail and provide virtually no sunlit areas at ground level between the proposed buildings on the site itself. Ecologically this is extremely poor and badly conceived.*

*The site is not a 'town centre' site nor is it within a 'cluster' of other tall buildings, thus a significant breach of adopted planning policies would occur if a 'one-off' tower of the type proposed on Plot A1 was permitted. The Masterplan provided for tall buildings to be located north of the rail line, this is not the case with this application*

Our complete objection is available on our website .



# Planning News

## Spring 2023

At the risk of repetition by the author, do you know how many Ministers of Planning/Housing/Levelling up there have been in the last ten years! I cannot find the precise number but probably as many as there are red/blue/green smarties in a tube (you may recall how smarties were packaged "back in the day"!!!).

Seriously though, the constant churn of Ministers who almost always seek to "reinvent the wheel", cannot lead to consistent and well thought through policies. Unfortunately all Ministers have agendas either self-imposed or thrust upon them, which for political expediency they try to complete before they are "moved on".

Members may recall that two/three years ago there were a significant series of changes proposed to Planning Laws to bring "up to date" a somewhat overburdened/complicated system of twists and turns in the planning system. This had resulted from changes being made over the years to better deal with the evolving requirements of society. The fundamental reason for planning is to look to the future, which is most unlikely to be accomplished in a relatively short space of time or with a frequent change of administration at the top.

We are awaiting yet another consultation on proposed changes but in the meantime, have to work with the existing system. This includes the preparation of a new version of the **Local Plan**. This instrument is a requirement under current legislation to review existing site allocations for different uses and to attempt to identify where changes can be made beneficially. The current consultation is for the period

up to 2038, which in principle is good forward planning but inevitable will have many holes/escape routes.

One of the problems which the Society has found during the past ten years or so is that the adopted Local Plan has been sufficiently "flexible" to allow significant variations on what was believed to be "policy" not "guidelines". Particularly the Tall Buildings Policy which has permitted a number of buildings which the Society consider unsuitable for the location. Swandon Way (both sides) is a good example, which together with the significant loss of roadside trees could have softened the environment.

Other Consultations which are currently ongoing include a review of Conservation Areas, The flood risk assessments and action plan, it is a lot to encompass.

Turning now to individual applications in our area:

### **The former gas works site, Armoury Way, Swandon Way, Application No 2022/3954**

The Society submitted an objection to the application which is explained in greater detail elsewhere in this newsletter. The objection can be viewed on both the Society's and the Council's websites.

### **Springfield Hospital NHS Trust site. Applications Nos 2022/5288 and 2022/4812**

The last phases of the redevelopment of the Springfield site are addressed in the two applications now with the Council. The Society has been supportive of the Trust's proposals for the last fifteen years which has brought forward the provision of new badly needed clinical facilities together with residential uses and a new parkland which is being laid out currently. The density/numbers of the residential provision have been reached already as provided by the Appeal decision of 839 units, however the two applications now being considered will take the total density to well in excess of this

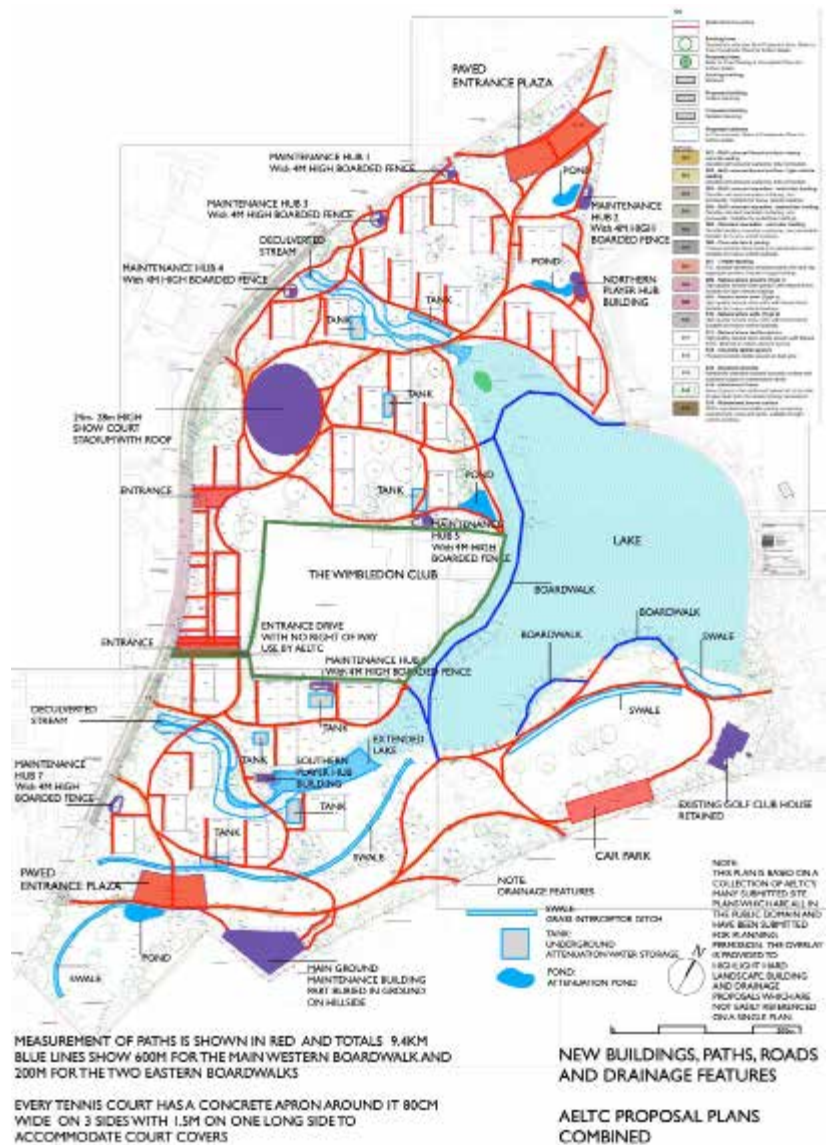
number. It could even reach or exceed the 1200 or so that the Appeal decision rejected in 2012. The implication is that the Trust have wilfully colluded with the various developers to encourage higher densities than that permitted on Appeal, thereby providing greater revenue to the Trust. The Society understands the Trust's needs for funds but to fly in the face of an Appeal decision on density is not what the Society would have expected from a Public body of the Trust's status.

The pressure that such an additional number of homes will put on the local infrastructure is enormous, to the detriment of the immediate and wider vicinity.

The Society have objected to the first of these applications and at the time of writing will be doing so to the second. The objections will be on the Society's and Council's websites.

**All England Lawn Tennis Club. Golf course site Application nos Wandsworth 2021/3609, Merton 21/P2900**

Members may be aware that this application for a significant change to the parkland which was previously used as a golf course was submitted by the AELTC in 2021. The principal changes are for the provision of a new stadium for 8,000 seats, 38 no grass tennis courts together with ground maintenance buildings, player hubs and others. The parkland was a Capability Brown park originally but is also Metropolitan Open Land which is the equivalent to Green Belt in non-urban areas. The park is also on the "at risk" register. There have been many significant objections since the application, the Society's objection was made in September 2021. There have been many



additions to the submitted material which it has been difficult to follow. The plan has been provided by The Wimbledon Society which demonstrates the extent of the proposed buildings, pathways and other alterations

It is not too late to make an objection as the application has no date for hearing by the respective Councils at the present time.

Finally, if you have any questions about an application or need help in making a representation, be it supportive or an objection, please get in touch with either the writer or one of the planning group.

Philip Whyte

# And coming soon ...

**THURSDAY 18 MAY 8:00 PM**

Leonie Cooper, the Representative for Merton and Wandsworth on the Greater London Assembly since 2016 and also Deputy Leader of the Labour group. She currently chairs, or is a member of, five committees for the GLA and has sat on other committees too so this is your chance to find out what is going on in our area

where it closed in 2015. On this walk, we will visit the sites linked to Wandsworth Museum and hear about the rise and fall of the Lost Museums of Wandsworth

Organised by the Wandsworth Museum Action Group

**FRIDAY 26 MAY 2:00 PM**

A Walk: the Lost Museums of Wandsworth  
Meet outside Putney Library, SW15 2DR

**THURSDAY 15 JUNE 8:00 PM**

Frances Craig from Wandsworth Libraries will talk about the Library service, especially Putney where she is based, as well as the relocation of the Wandsworth Town library to new premises and what it will offer

Wandsworth Museum started life in Putney Library, moved to the Old Court House in Garratt Lane and then to West Hill Library

**THURSDAY 29 JUNE**

A walk along the Wandle, from its source northwards to the Thames, more details to follow

## Wandsworth Heritage Festival

This year's the festival runs from  
May 20 - June 11  
and will explore the theme  
***Educating Wandsworth***



## WANDSWORTH ARTS FRINGE

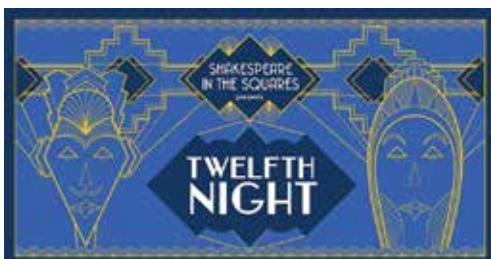
9 - 25 JUNE 2023

Theatre, comedy, dance, spoken word, gigs and concerts, exhibitions and more - check out some of the amazing events happening across the borough this year.  
<https://www.wandsworthfringe.com>

And in particular one very local event from the fringe

14 June, 8.00pm - 9.30pm at ST ANNE'S CHURCH

Benjamin Britten's Five Canticles, songs spanning the sacred and secular, sung by Richard Robbins (tenor), accompanied by Chris Jeanes (piano)



Twelfth Night Shakespeare in the Squares  
The Garden at St Anne's Church Wandsworth  
Twelfth Night

7pm Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 June  
<https://shakespeareinthesquares.co.uk>