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Society

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Events

Wednesday 28 January

Sam Cullen will speak about *London's Best Pubs*

Wednesday 25 January

Catherine Jenkins – *From Icon to Renaissance Masterpiece*

Wednesday 25 March

Annual *General Meeting*

Jonathan Callaway – *Ambulances to Ukraine*

Wednesday 22 April

Fred Pearce – *Despite it all, Seven Reasons to be Hopeful about Climate Change*



Gray's Eulogy

Aquatint: The Bedside edition of our newsletter is proof positive of the very high quality of Aquatint's digital printing.

Archetype Productions: Computers pose problems from time to time for everyone from the novice to the expert. When problems occur call the expert's expert – Archetype!

Chatfield Dental Centre: Chatfield will put a smile on your face. That's good news, by gum!

Cockburn & York: With lines like "Who owesya baby?" and those red boots, difficult debts suddenly seem collectable.

Harrison Allen: Most of us need help to get through exams. HA's team of tutors provide that help.

Lavender Framers: Ah, the scent of the sweet sunny south neatly framed in Barmouth Road. Picture perfect.

Le Gothique: The Royal Victoria Patriotic Building is such a romantic name and the building itself so wonderful that a visit to its very own restaurant for lunch, dinner, a beer and cider festival or perhaps a wedding reception – and I've done all four! – is a must for all our readers.

MWR Motörs: You know you know where the tréma comes from but you just can't think. Yes, it's Citroën. Of course! A special car? You bet. Your car needs special care.

Oranges & Lemons: All the latest in sounds from the tiniest and subtlest to the loudest, pounding bass and, if like me you don't have the state of the art, they'll apply all the necessary care and attention.

St Luke's Music Society: This music society has gone from strength to strength. The latest concert (by the witty and versatile A4 Brass Quartet) won loud and prolonged applause from a large audience. Were you there?

Sambrook's Brewery: Having settled in at Wandsworth's centuries-old brewing centre their bottled beer is even available in Venice and the Greek islands.

Young & Co's Brewery: Still getting a quart into a pint pot and these days many Young's pubs are ideal places to eat a really good meal too.

Iain K S Gray

Happy Christmas!

Did you know that Santa Claus, Father Christmas, (with help from the Magi) out did Amazon by many, many years in respect of parcel delivery. 2000+ years comes to mind!

What could be better than leaving your requests for train sets (not nationalised and standardised for failure to “get you there on time”, your “Barby doll”(sorry if I am out of date!) in the correct colour clothing and of course leaving the required “glass of something” on the hearth, only to find the glass empty, the mince pies all gone, save for the crumbs which Rudolph could not Hoover up! With the delivery guaranteed next day!

What a system.

Delivery. We have spent for ever trying to catch up, a bit like the cat/dog chasing its own tail.

No sooner had Boudica decided that wheels were good for getting her to the supermarket than someone suggested putting knives on the wheels and suddenly a weapon of war!

Delivery of housing has had as long a gestation. We started off in caves, no central heating alas but good for keeping the rain out, then we went into huts, all fine in good weather but leaky roofs again.

As the Magi found, there was ample space in the stable for not only the happy couple and their newborn little one but also the three of them with their gifts, non-returnable before the 28th December and their four-legged transport. Thankfully that night the weather was not overclouded as the Star of Bethlehem shone bright and clear but, no matter, the GPS was working really well so that they would not have been left searching the map, unrolled on the camel’s back, in a darkened place, arguing that they should have taken the last but one turnoff before the roundabout.

We have come a long way since then, trains, boats and planes have all brought enormous change but we hopefully have the humility to understand that the suffering many in this world have experienced during the past year may lead to a more peaceful New Year.

The Chair sends very best wishes to all our readers with hopes that the Christmas season will be all that they desire, and that the New Year will be healthy and happy for all.

Philip Whyte, Chairman

Memories of Ursula Nettleship, at home

John Spencer-Silver

Sitting comfortably, reading the *Evening Standard* as the tube drew into Sloane Square, my father realised that the brown Rover car, reportedly driven at speed backwards into a security van, in a bank heist, was his.

After that, he rented a garage at the home of his singing teacher, Ursula Nettleship (1886-1968). We always called her “Miss Nettleship” and her house was tucked into the corner where Milman’s Street meets Cheyne Walk. It was built to her requirements, so the music room, with grand piano, was the largest room in the house.

The roof was flat and coated with pitch so, sometimes, Miss Nettleship invited us to tea there, all perched on the parapet, like sparrows. Otherwise, we had tea indoors, sitting at a table beside an oriel window with a sideways view of the Thames. There was a shelf in the window bay, hugger mugger with potted cacti. The attraction of indoor tea was the dumb-waiter; a food lift which shot food and plates from the kitchen below to where we sat. It did its job by a combination of pulleys, weights and a rope, and beat hands down other toys.

A ground floor external window gave light to a room called “The Dump”, where the flotsam and jetsam of household life washed up. Perhaps this name is why an envelope from a bundle of envelopes and post cards within sheet music bought by my father from the estate and now in “Suffolk Archives”, is addressed to Miss Nettleship at “The Shambles, 104a Cheyne Walk”.

Miss Nettleship used crutches, with a broken hip which was especially painful in the morning. In earlier days, before mass skiing took over, she skied. The postcards include beautiful, mostly pre-WWI, cards, showing snow covered mountains, and isolated huts with deep deep snow on their roofs. The cards were sent by friends but two are from Miss Nettleship to Ethel Nettleship and K Tyrrell, sent in 1937: “All well, it’s so lovely here & we are skiing every day in really hot sun”.

Her bedroom was at the bottom of the stairs which led to the upper floor and sometimes the door would be open, and we could see a pair of old long wooden skis propped in a far corner.

Eventually, we had to find a new garage, to make way for a bedsit conversion for Miss Nettleship’s nephew, David John, son of Augustus and Ida John, Ida being Miss Nettleship’s sister. David had been a professional oboe player but at that time was working for the Post Office. David kept an eye on Miss Nettleship and was on hand. We all liked David. On his wall was an unframed oil portrait by Augustus John, secured with drawing pins.

Miss Nettleship is known, among other things, for the help she gave Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, professionally and by accommodating them for a while, at her home, after they returned to England from America, in 1942. Britten dedicated “A Ceremony of Carols” to her and, later, she was Choral Director of the Aldeburgh Festival. There is a footbridge in her memory at Snape Maltings.

Being a child when I encountered Miss Nettleship makes it impossible to draw reliable conclusions, but the above photo of an elderly woman, with a cat, must be viewed against a backdrop of important achievements in their own right, and not forgetting either the strength of character required of a sole woman with a broken hip greatly succeeding in music.

The envelopes have no letters inside, except for two, sent in 1926, by Owen O’Malley (later Sir Owen St Clair O’Malley KCMG (1887–1974)) at the British Legation, Peking. He wrote that his job was “to make China intelligible to the FO...”. His letters show self-doubt, and his disapproval of UK policy towards China.

He wrote: “The FO have got the wind up about China and have fallen under the influence of a man who is half a Hindoo & therefore just the wrong temperament for China today”. And: “The Legation here are under the influence of a charming creature called Teichman [later Sir Eric Teichman GCMG CIE (1884–1944)], an Anglicised German, gentle, clever at his books. So far as I can see only the thoroughly hard boiled dry salted kind should take a hand in Chinese politics nowadays, and I hardly think I come within this class myself.” And: “My mental distress is great because I haven’t grasped either generalities or details with my mind yet; and I am afraid to write to

anyone... until I have done that”.

Also: “Our war [Chinese Civil War] here seems to go on very slowly. One army is entrenched about six miles outside the town, and the other army can’t make up its mind to attack it. They are behaving well on the whole; indeed the Third Kuominchun – which means national peoples army & is pronounced Gwawminjun – has even put a sentry on each green at the golf course to prevent the turf getting dented.”

“Such fun as we’re having”

Many of the postcards show humour and appreciation of Life. “JAB” wrote, in 1910, from the Hotel des Alpes, Switzerland: “We are having the most glorious time... Hills so thick with blue gentians that you have to walk on them”. Another postcard, sent by “AB” and “NB” from Budapest, in July 1914, says “Such fun as we’re having”, with a hand-drawn cartoon of a hatted man, sitting, smoking a large cigar and contemplating a frothing beer mug on a small circular table before him. Under this picture is written “A. drinking beer and smoking Hungarian cigars”.

The service, “In Memoriam Ursula Nettleship”, in 1968, was at Chelsea Old Church. The first lesson was read by another nephew, Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Caspar John, the second by Ian Glennie and the address was by Professor Sir Alexander Hadow FRS.



Readers may be interested to know that *A Ceremony of Carols*, composed by Benjamin Britten and dedicated to Ursula Nettleship, will be performed by the Beaufort Chorale at St Anne's Church on 13 December (see page 51) ■

This article, based on childhood memories, comes with apologies for any errors, and for any impertinence in describing Miss Nettleship, whose relations are far better qualified to discuss than I am.

Remembering past Christmases

No poems appearing
On the page at present
In spite of Christmas fast approaching
At this time of year
You'd expect a flurry of them
For it is one of the most
Memorable and interesting
Times of the year
When one remembers people
Who are no longer here
With us
Who have often left us
With fond memories
Or irascible memories
Which made indelible marks
On our lives
Impossible to erase
Not that we would ever have it
Any other way
Which we were talking about
Over dinner yesterday
When we spoke about
How we were going to spend
Our Christmas this year
And if we were looking forward to it
Or if we were looking forward to it
Being all over
And behind us
As so many of us dread
The whole
Commercial extravaganza

By Eddie Forde

Secrets of The Wall



As he walks the length of Hadrian's Wall, JOHN GIMLETTE, ponders the weird and wonderful lives of those who once lived here.

It's odd, the things you'll find along Hadrian's Wall. The Romans were obviously careless with their bits and pieces. During 8 days of hiking and local museums, I came across a chain-mail shirt, numerous scalpels, some cockfighting spurs, a wig (made of moss), and a dildo.

A generation ago, you'd have seen little of this. Back then Hadrian's Wall was just a lovely, undulating ramble, with 17 forts, and 73 miles of intermittent masonry. In that sense, not much has changed. 'This is one of the UK's best walks,' says Will Ainslie of Discovery Travel, 'It's relatively easy, well-marked, and very dramatic.' There's also plenty of transport and accommodation, and I'd enjoy everything from a Georgian mansion to a shepherd's hut.

But modern technology has also opened up a more intimate Roman world. New techniques (including imaging and DNA analysis) enable archaeologists not only to find more artefacts but also to better appreciate their owners. The Wall was once home

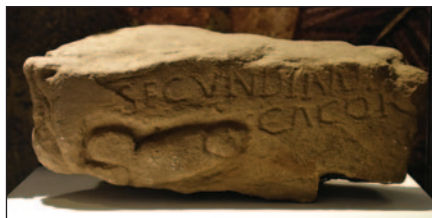
to some 15,000 soldiers, and suddenly it begins to feel like some strange, elongated city, strung out across the hills. All sorts of secrets emerge, and – moving from east to west – here are some of my highlights.

A bit of shoddy construction

The Wall wasn't quite as magnificent as people think. You get a first glimpse of it in Newcastle, at Segedunum: 50 yards of tousled limestone. It's only survived here because it collapsed, and sank into a swamp. If it was ever the standard 20 feet tall, it's now

barely shoulder-high, and the stonework is uneven and crude. Built by unskilled legionnaires, the entire Wall was cobbled together in a mere six years (122-128AD).

It did its job, I suppose. It was only meant to slow the advance of the marauding Caledones, and was never built to last. Indeed, only 10% of it survives. But, as a feat of organisation, it was a triumph. The soldiers cut some 23 million facing stones, occasionally decorating them with swastikas and phalluses (even today, some 57 penises survive. My favourite is inscribed 'Secundinus is a shit bag').



An army of foreigners

Across the Tyne is an ancient supply base, Arbeia. It's famous for its superb reconstructions of a gatehouse, some barracks and a commander's house (useful when the ruins ahead look like diagrams in the turf). But what really struck me was the foreignness of it all. The auxiliaries who manned the Wall

came from as far away as Iraq and North Africa. Here, at Arbeia ('Home of the Arabs'), they enjoyed Spanish olive oil served on Italian slipware. But there were also Batavians, Frisians and Gauls, all bringing their own habits, languages and gods (Gallic gods, incidentally, are depicted with moustaches).

Amongst Arbeia's treasures is the tombstone of a British slave, called Regina or 'Queenie'. She was acquired by a 'Syrian' called Barathes, who freed her, married her, and set her up as a lady of substance. She is loved and remembered in two languages, Latin and Aramaic.

Life in the Lavatories

Thirty miles on, you get to Chesters (near Chollerford). This fort's bathhouse is the best on The Wall, a mind-boggling complex of hypocausts and classical plumbing. But what really interested me was the loo. As in all forts, it's a multi-seater affair, with a little channel for dipping your sponge. These places found the Romans at their most careless, and – in recent years – the drains have turned up coins, combs, amulets, sandals, children's shoes and even gaming counters. Perhaps the loo was the hub of life?

'The Nasty Little Britons'

At this point, it's worth dropping down into the lush, green Tyne valley. It's postcard-pretty, and the fort of Coria (or Corbridge) was important for trade. Here, for the first time, you get a glimpse of the Britons.

The Romans were somewhat ambivalent about the natives. The local tribe, the Brigantes, were almost as unspeakable as the Caledones. The Romans tried to appease them with their own god ('Brigantia') but often thought of them as *Brittunculi* or 'nasty little Britons'. However, like



Queenie, some natives thrived, and, at Coria, there's a magnificent tombstone for a bearded Briton.

But things weren't always straightforward. Later (at Vindolanda Museum) I'd come across a British skull. Scientific analysis indicates he'd been brought up locally, killed with a sword, and decapitated. His head had been placed on a pike, as a warning to others. What's odd about all this is his DNA: it reveals that his father was Roman.

A secret cult

After this, great chunks of Wall appear, and the crags become ever more remote and magnificent. The troops called these wind-scoured moors *Ad Fines* (or 'The End of the Earth'). Sensibly, Rome let them worship whatever they wanted, and the finds up here have included a boar's tusk, a cache of children's teeth, and numerous altars to a god from modern-day Turkey.

Most intriguing of all is a tiny temple deep in the grass, at Carrawburgh. It belonged to the secretive Mithras cult, which was popular with soldiers. In their cave-like temple, they'd experience pain and humiliation on the spiritual journey. No one knows quite what they believed except that, amongst their stonework, there's a giant ovoid, known as the Cosmic Egg.

Hadrian's Whodunnits

Sprawled across a ridge is the most scenic fort of all: Housesteads. But amidst the military grandeur, there's a hint of the darker side of Roman life. In the 1930s, two skeletons – one male, one female – were found under the tavern floor. As they'd been illegally buried, and the man had a knife in his ribs, the Coroner declared them unlawfully killed circa 350AD.

Elsewhere, two other murder victims are now displayed in museums. Carlisle's Tullie House has the skeleton of man, tossed in a well, with a neat little slice cut from his head. Even more sinister is the girl at Vindolanda. Analysis shows she was of Mediterranean origin and aged about 10. She'd been found bound and battered under the barracks.

Women on the Wall

Vindolanda does have a more cheerful side. Thanks to its anaerobic soil, a remarkable world has been preserved. Recent finds have included the wig and the dildo, a hairnet, tankards, wineglasses (decorated with gladiators), and over 5,000 shoes. Even better is the correspondence: over 2,400 messages written on slats. As Head Archaeologist, Dr Andrew Birley, explained, these things belie the myth of military sobriety and celibacy. 'They take us to places the Roman State would rather have hidden...'

Perhaps most surprising is the abundant evidence of women and children. They probably outnumbered soldiers. It's all here, everything from toy swords to make-up. Look out for the dinner service, ordered from Gaul, smashed en route, and tossed straight in the ditch.

The beginning of the end

Beyond the craggy, middle section, the Wall peters out. Most of the masonry was plundered, creating a few new marvels like Lanercost Priory. But, in Carlisle, a milestone has survived (again, at Tullie House). It celebrates Carausius, who seized Britain in 286AD and declared himself emperor. After his assassination, he was 'airbrushed from history, and the milestone was turned upside down and re-inscribed. But Rome never truly recovered. The milestone marks the beginning of the end, for both the Wall and the empire.



If you fancy doing this walk, consider booking up with Discovery Travel (www.discoverytravel.co.uk; 01983 301133). Their 5-night itinerary costs £600pp including accommodation on a B&B basis, baggage transfers, maps etc. ■

John Gimlette is the author of *The Gardens of Mars. Madagascar, an Island Story* (Head of Zeus, £10.99)

A North Devon Councillor

Mark Haworth-Booth

My wife and I left Jessica Road, Wandsworth, in 2009 for a cottage down a muddy lane in Devon. We both appreciate the editor's kind invitation to contribute to the Bedside Edition and thus keep in touch with our old friends in the borough.

I wrote in the 2023 edition about my election to North Devon district council (NDC). As the Wandsworth Society has strong expertise in planning, I thought it might be of interest to write again about my councillor role. (I also have a weekly blog on Substack: CLLR MHB BLOG).

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is a major concern. I'm told that the UK already has the lowest number of councillors representing its communities than anywhere else in Europe: that number will be even less if LGR is implemented as the government plans. With district councils swept away, could parish and town councillors fill the gap, partially at least? And would the regional mayors envisaged by the government be effective? I shudder at the thought of a Reform mayor holding sway over, for example, the South West.

LGR may be one reason for the plummeting support for Labour. Another is, or should be, the government's arbitrary raising of the number of houses local authorities must build. Our target was raised from about 800 a year to over 1300. This meant that we no longer had a five-year land supply for housing. This in turn means that planning committees are legally required to look more favourably – a presumption in favour of 'sustainable' development – on applications to build outside development boundaries, thus undermining local decision-making. The new targets are in any case unrealistic.

My council work is, on the one hand, largely

low-key and local but – on the other – sometimes large-scale and with national consequences. First the low-key: I have been involved with issues like water leaks affecting roads and households; abandoned vehicles,

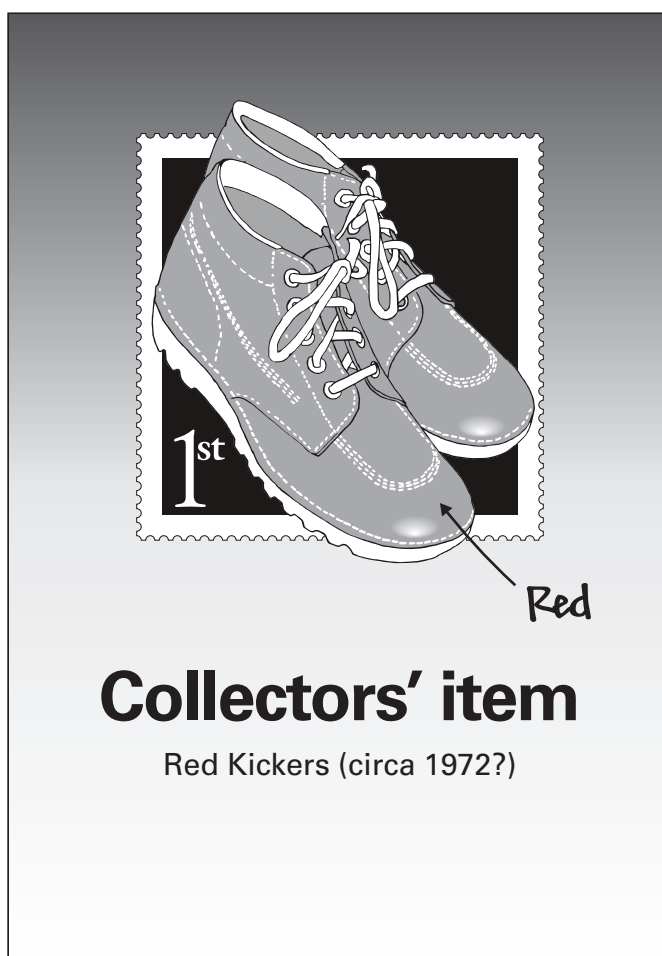


including an unlicensed caravan parked for months in a residential street; residents' steps down to a main road that had become unsafe; potholes that did but sometimes did not meet the criteria set by Devon County Council Highways Dept for filling but were dangerous all the same; flytipping; unsightly overgrown bushes etc. on verges in residential areas; lack of streetlighting on an Unadopted Road; Anti Social Behaviour. At the other end of the scale, I played an active role in a planning committee decision on an application for cabling to connect wind turbines on floating platforms in the Celtic Sea with an inland substation. This is the White Cross wind farm, 50 kilometres offshore, but with cables making landfall at the much-loved surfing beach Saunton Sands, then requiring trenching across or close to sensitive landscapes such as Braunton Marsh towards the Taw, which the cables would pass beneath, to connect to the national grid at

Yelland. The planning committee made a long site visit, read a case officer report of over 400 pages, heard a dozen speeches – half for, half against – and sat from ten in the morning to after three in the afternoon discussing the application. The technology of floating platforms for turbines is new and the application is for a scheme to trial their viability. The deliberations looked at the environmental implications for a treasured and sensitive landscape and its wildlife, plus impacts on local businesses, traffic movements and amenity, plus the larger questions of climate change, including rising sea levels and extreme weather patterns such as heightened tidal surges threatening very special places such as the species-rich Braunton Burrows. I gave the final speech, urging acceptance of the case officer's recommendation to approve the application. The vote was won by a large majority. However, for the committee to go against the case-officer's recommendation (which was supported by Natural England) would have opened it up – unless there were strong material considerations for our view – to an appeal by the applicant. Opponents of the application have always envisaged a judicial review of the decision and that is their right. I will also be involved in the application for a solar farm so large that it straddles our two districts, Torridge and North Devon.

One of my roles as a councillor is acting as a cultural lead. I serve as chair of the advisory board of the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon. Not long after my appointment two years ago I talked to its director, Alison Mills, about a bee in my bonnet. Although our area is well-known for farming and tourism, I became aware that there is also a surprising amount of expertise in hi-tech industries such as engineering, aeronautics and pharmaceuticals. We have other innovative companies with global reach – Nø Pinz, for example, is hugely successful with its locally-made, top of the range, cycling apparel. Alison and her team took up the idea and ran with it. Northern Devon Innovates opened on 25 October. The photo shows Gary Parson of

AutoNaut explaining the finer points of the vessel to the poet Katrina Porteous and myself: the AutoNaut is powered by pv panels and wave action and can stay at sea collecting scientific data for much longer periods than conventional vessels. EcoTribo turns marine plastic waste into garden furniture and pots. Algapelago is growing and harvesting kelp in Bideford Bay for a range of purposes including as a substitute for oil-based plastics. One purpose of the exhibition is to change our self-image, as a place, to include this sense of hi-tech enterprise. Another is to show that there are pathways for the young, or those re-skilling in the age of AI, in a range of businesses they might not have considered or even known about. Objects in Northern Devon Innovates remind me of the Design Council Awards I used to catalogue at the V&A in the 1970s. Although I retired from the museum in 2004, it seems that while can take the boy out of the V&A but you can't take the V&A out of the boy. ■



Commons Grasslands

Valerie Selby

This year I thought it would be good to look forward to summer by discussing the work being undertaken to improve the grasslands on the Commons and in the larger parks. As far as possible, we try to understand the historic land uses of the boroughs' green spaces and link our habitat management work to maintaining or restoring the original habitats. For example, Wandsworth Common and Tooting Commons sit on top of nutrient-poor, free-draining soils such as those found over the top of acidic rocks, and on sand and gravel deposits. As these soils are unsuitable for growing crops, the commons were historically used as grazing land which resulted in a mix of heathland, acid grassland and areas of gorse or "furze" and scrub, with wetland areas resulting from old gravel extractions.



Historic photo showing heathland species and grazing by horses

However over time, regular grazing, cutting of these habitats (for useable materials and for amenity), applying additional nutrients in areas for sports pitches, dog-fouling and leaving grass clippings in situ have all combined to shift the nutrient balance to supporting the more vigorous, coarse "amenity" grasses that outcompete the smaller, more delicate, low growing grasses and wildflowers which would typically be found. In many locations, all that is needed to restore the original diversity is patience, time, and a shift to more considered maintenance programmes.

Across Wandsworth's green spaces, a mix of techniques have been implemented following a stepped principle. The first step is to cease mowing throughout the growing period and undertake botanical surveys to understand what, if any, diversity may already exist in the seedbank but is being thwarted by regular mowing. Many rosette forming species such as daisies, and hawkweeds, as well as low growing species such as

tormentil may exist but are constantly having their heads chopped off before they can flower and set seed, so we are often unaware they are already there. This shift in regime, which usually involves leaving an area unmown all spring and summer and then undertaking a late summer "cut and collect" operation to mow after seeds have set, followed by collecting and removing the cuttings, is often all that is required to allow the natural diversity of plant species to flourish again. If, however, after a year or two of this approach, it becomes apparent through the surveys that the natural diversity of the seedbank has been lost, we can take one of two routes.

On Wandsworth Common the ground has been harrowed using a chain harrow, to remove moss and thatch formed when grass clippings are left in situ and which form a crust on top of the soil. This action also opens up bare patches of soil surface which provide places for wildflower seed to germinate in and allows more oxygen to plant roots. By contrast, on Tooting Common, "soil scraping" has been done to remove the buildup of nutrient rich topsoil exposing the poorer subsoils. Whichever route is chosen, the aim is to open up the soil, making germination easier and reducing the nutrients that would otherwise feed the vigorous amenity grass species. Patches of bare soil are also very important because they warm up quickly in the sun, which is good for a range of insects, spiders, and reptiles.



Historic photo showing the habitat mosaic on Wandsworth Common

The next step then sees these areas overseed with a mix of grasses and wildflowers which would be reminiscent of the original mix of species that might have been expected to occur here. The preferred way

to source this seed is to work with land managers in neighbouring boroughs who have allowed us to gather “green hay” from wildlife sites with similar habitats, which are then scattered on site allowing the seed to fall and germinate. These species are likely to be better adapted to local soils and climatic conditions as well as representative of local vegetation types. Alternatively, seed mixes are sourced from suppliers who don’t gather from the wild but who have seed of local provenance to the south-east of England. Again, this ensures that the species behave in the way we would expect them to whereas, for example, seeds of the same species from elsewhere in Europe can have different growth types and behave differently in our local conditions. In the past, planting “plug” plants into existing areas of grassland was tried, but it didn’t prove successful (and is also far more expensive to do).



Historic photo showing typical species of acidic grassland with sparse growth habit

It is then crucial to make sure that the correct maintenance is in place to ensure these species re-establish successfully and that these habitats don’t decline again. A grassland or meadow cannot just be left to take care of itself as not only will it become tussocky and coarse once more, but it will eventually be invaded by scrub and lost to trees. Actions to keep the sward fine, to allow the less competitive grasses and wildflowers to thrive and set seeds are required. This includes cutting after seed set and removing the cut material away from the grassland parts of the site. In Wandsworth, the hay bales are usually composted down at the contractor’s green waste facility in Battersea Park. This late summer cutting also allows for the critical aspects of invertebrate lifecycles to happen undisturbed across the height of summer and areas of grass are deliberately left uncut (on a rotational or mosaic basis) across the site each year to provide cover for larvae and eggs.

There is a steady movement towards low carbon, low impact methods to deliver a lot of this work as tractors heavily compact the soil, reducing the ability for soil-borne organisms to thrive and limiting the oxygen availability below ground. Heavy horses have been used

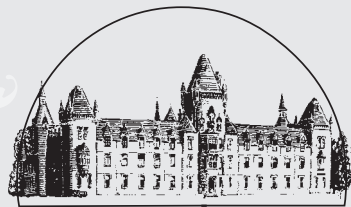


Photos of the heavy horses in action across (©2025 Owen Dodgson)

in recent years to harrow, and mow at King George’s Park and Wandsworth Park on newly created habitats, but across the past year their presence has been expanded, and they have also worked on both Wandsworth and Tooting Commons. In 2025, they brought with them their new baler to collect all the cut material, which was more effective (and less back-breaking) than gathering by hand. Across the autumn, the heavy horses visited for 7 sessions across 5 sites and a total of 41 volunteers (many of them Enable’s regular habitat volunteers and a few new recruits besides) gave a combined 103 hours, helping to rake 5 tonnes of cut grass into the rows for the baler to collect and then sowing 14kg of native seed mixes into these areas. They weren’t the only people attracted out to visit sites and see heritage skills in action as the heavy horses also enticed 7 nurseries, 17 primary schools and 6 secondary schools out. Throughout the year Enable’s community scientist volunteers have also been playing their part undertaking surveys of key indicator species such as butterflies and moths across these areas whilst parks team members have been recording plant diversity and ground nesting bee locations. This all helps to ensure we monitor the effectiveness of these actions and can suggest refinements to management action if needed. ■

If you are interested in finding out more about our habitat or community science volunteering, drop us a line to biodiversity@enablelc.org so we can share more details.

With thanks to Friends of Wandsworth Common and Wandsworth Society who have allowed the use of the historic photographs kindly lent from their joint archive.



Le Gothique

BAR, RESTAURANT
& GARDEN



*L*e Gothique bar, restaurant and beautiful award winning gardens with free off-street parking, have been host to wedding parties large and small for nearly 40 years. Head chef Michel Guzzo (from Sicily) and proprietor Andrew Justin have been at the restaurant situated in this unique Grade II listed historic building since 1987.

With some 2500 weddings under their belt you are not just booking a function you are buying into wealth of wedding experience. With no hire fee for the venue Le Gothique is a most affordable wedding, civil partnership and christening venue.

A champagne reception followed by 3-course sit down menu, half bottle of wine, a champagne toast plus minerals, tea/coffee will only cost you around £120 per head all in, including service and VAT. Champagne and canapé receptions can also be catered for in the award winning garden which can be covered, heated and lit.

Make an appointment to view NOW.

Wandsworth In Bloom Winner

Le Gothique, The Royal Victoria Patriotic Building,
John Archer Way, off Windmill Road, London SW18 3SX.

Telephone: 020 8870 6567 / 020 8871 0130
Email: marklegothique@aol.com www.legothique.co.uk



The Great Hall at the RVPB



Following the demise of ALRA, the professional acting school that occupied the space for 44 years, The Great Hall at the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building on Wandsworth Common has lain empty. Rent, business rates, insurance in a post-Grenfell World plus the service charges have thwarted all efforts to re-let the space.

Le Gothique owners, father & son restaurateurs Mark & Andrew Justin, have long pondered taking over this space and finally signed a lease in June 2025 making it one of the largest licensed spaces in London.

Designed by Rhodes Hawkins in the then fashionable Victorian Gothic Revival style it combines Scottish Baronial, Jacobean and French influences. The Hall boasts

a spectacular ceiling painted by J G Grace depicting the insignia of countries of the Empire and the Shires of England who all made a donation to the Patriotic Fund started in 1855. Built as an orphanage (NOT a mental asylum) for the children of Officers lost in the Crimea, it was a personal project of Queen Victoria who both laid the foundation stone AND returned to open the orphanage named in her honour.

Seating for 200 with 500 standing the Hall is

being hired out in conjunction with Le Gothique's buoyant wedding and party business. But while this has proved successful for Saturdays it is still dormant mid-week, Monday to Friday and on most Sundays. Mark Justin has lamented both the freeholders and his own failure to find full time occupancy for the spectacular but perhaps overly large space right in the heart of Wandsworth Common.

"We are in desperate search for a mid-week user. And a weekly Sunday operator." Approaches have been

made to various organisations but nothing permanent or long-standing. Expect to see an edition of BBC Question Time in 2026 being broadcast from the Hall, and a quarterly Arts & Crafts market called Salad Days will commence in February, but these are the only confirmed non-hospitality users thus far.

Some 40m by 20m and with a 30m high ceiling this is a blank canvas that surely would suit someone?

the meantime, everyone from the Bedside Edition wishes Mark and Andrew all the best in their quest for weddings and party bookings. And maybe YOU know of an organisation that might be interested in the Hall? ■

Mark Justin



Stay well this winter

A seasonal message from local health services

Dr Nicola Jones MBE

Chief Medical Officer, SW London ICB
Clinical Director for Primary Care, SW London



The nights are drawing in, there's a nip in the air and the festive season isn't too far away – but health services across Wandsworth are gearing up to help you stay well whatever the weather.

Even over the holiday period many GP practices and pharmacies are seeing patients – and you can visit NHS 111 online or call 111, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Here's a quick reminder of some of the services that can help when temperatures fall.

Just tap the NHS App

Almost one million south west London residents have now downloaded the NHS App to their phone for easy access to local care.

New ways to use the app are coming on stream all the time. You can use it to request repeat prescriptions, manage some GP appointments and view your health records – for a handy recap of what was said during your appointment.

Turn on notifications, and you can receive messages from your GP practice and local hospitals too.

We know that not everyone has a smartphone or is happy using the app. But if you can, give it a try. You'll find it easy and convenient to use, plus you'll be freeing up phone lines for our more vulnerable patients.

Don't miss your seasonal vaccinations

Spending more time indoors and getting together with friends and family is the perfect opportunity for winter viruses to spread. So it's really important to protect yourself before the festive season arrives by getting your seasonal vaccinations.

The flu vaccine prevented around 100,000 people from being hospitalised in England last winter by protecting those most at risk from serious illness. So

vaccines really make a difference.

The NHS flu and Covid-19 programmes launched earlier this autumn. This year Covid-19 vaccinations are available to adults aged 75 and over, older adult care home residents and people who are immunosuppressed.

The flu vaccination is offered to a range of groups including those aged 65 and over, expectant mums and children aged 2 to 16.

Book now on the NHS website, by calling 119 or contacting your GP.



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NHS Private



Shingles can be a really unpleasant condition with a painful rash that can last up to a month and persistent pain, eye problems and pneumonia. If you're aged 64 to 79, or with a weakened immune system, you can get an NHS shingles vaccination. The NHS will contact you if you are eligible, but you can also book via your GP.

The RSV vaccine helps protect against a common virus that can make babies and older adults seriously ill. It is available on the NHS if you're pregnant or aged 75 to 79.

Need an urgent dentist over the holidays?

If you need urgent dental care, you can now get round-the-clock help by visiting NHS 111 online or by phone, even over the holiday period. If needed, you will be booked in to an urgent dental clinic nearby as soon as possible.

New ways to GetUBetter

Local people can get free access to the GetUBetter app, a great resource for anyone who suffers from joint or muscular pain.

Download and register with the app for exercises, advice and tips for managing a wide range of conditions including back, knee, hip or muscle pain.

Women can get help for pelvic health issues too, including stress incontinence, an overactive bladder, menopause and period problems.

Think pharmacy first

If you're suffering from a minor illness or injury, your community pharmacy is a great option for getting quick, local care. Under the Pharmacy First scheme pharmacists offer advice and treatment for seven common conditions – without you needing to see a GP. These include illnesses that are a particular issue at this time of year – including sore throats, earaches in children, shingles and sinusitis. Pharmacists can also help with uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women.

Pharmacies offer lots of other services too. Call in if you haven't had a blood pressure check for a while, if you have a query about your medication, or you need contraceptive advice. If you wish to talk in private, most have a consultation room.

And if your pharmacist thinks you need to be seen elsewhere, they will advise you to contact your GP or go to A&E.

Getting the most from GP services

Wandsworth GPs work hard all year round to give people the care they need. Across south west London we deliver almost three quarters of a million appointments each year, over half of them on the same day as they are requested.

To help us do this, all our practices have improved their telephone systems with many using triage – so every request is reviewed by a doctor to make sure each patient is seen by the right person at the right time.

As well as practice nurses and doctors, we have a wide range of healthcare professionals working in local surgeries – including physiotherapists, counsellors and pharmacists – so people can receive the right care first time around.

Once again local people have rated our practices highly in the annual GP patient survey for England, where almost 80% of respondents said they had a good experience last time they visited their surgery, the highest result in London.

Our GP hub system means we can offer local appointments in the evenings, during weekends and on bank holidays, including over the festive period.

If you need medical help, don't put off getting in touch because it's Christmas. If your practice is closed, contact NHS 111 online, via the NHS App or by phone.

Mental health support

Christmas isn't an easy time for everyone. If mental health problems mean it all feels too much, contact NHS 111 for urgent support.

Talking therapies can help too, if you're suffering with stress or low mood. Talk Wandsworth is the borough's free, confidential service with appointments available by phone, online or face-to-face – visit talkwandsworth.nhs.uk.

Is your medicine cabinet well stocked?

Finally, if you take regular medication, make sure you order any repeat prescriptions in plenty of time before the holidays as your GP and pharmacist may need longer to fulfil your request.

Wishing you a very happy Christmas and all the best for 2026! ■

My dad has a huge record collection. He's always had a huge record collection. When

I was a kid I remember climbing up these little spiral library stairs he had. They were inlaid with leather and had gold patterned edging. They were on wheels and it meant that I could get high enough up to brush a record with the little velvet brush. It was dark, rich blue. The records were alphabetised and there were

shelves upon shelves of them. The record player was set into the shelves of records, like a little niche. Precious. I liked looking at it on my own.

At other times I'd put on my pink silk dress and just stand at the top of those spiral stairs. I think maybe there were unformed thoughts of Juliet on her balcony. The room always felt dim, with William Morris wallpaper, carved wooden wardrobes and heavy curtains. The doorknob is loose and rattles when you turn it. Turn

right for the bathroom – beautiful swirls of black and white plant-patterned wallpaper, a long lace curtain. Many years later I pierced 4 holes in my ears in there with the door locked, using a safety pin and an ice pop. Outside these rooms was a landing where I would sit on the floor and have my hair dried after a bath. Moonlight Shadow is playing and Martha is dancing around me.

Catriona Gray

My dad has a huge record collection!



The Life and Works of Surrealist Artist John Banting (OE1913-20)

The Emanuel School Archive was first contacted over six years ago by Joanna Ward who was researching a potential biography on John Banting. We were delighted when *John Banting and His Circle* was eventually published in 2025. It has since been nominated for the 'Hatchards and the Biographers' Club First Biography Prize'. It is always incredibly satisfying to see a new work on an Emanuel School alumna published, Banting particularly so, as a thorough critical look at his colourful career and work was long overdue and Joanna's research leaves no stone unturned. *Tony Jones (Emanuel School Archivist)*

Born in Chelsea in 1902, John Banting (OE1913-20) joined his brother George at Emanuel School in 1913. He was somewhat overshadowed by George who enjoyed a remarkable sporting career at school, followed by an extraordinary military one. On leaving school in 1915, George entered the Royal Military College at Sandhurst and then became attached to the Royal Flying Corps from where he graduated on 20 March 1917. He was immediately posted to France where he carried out dangerous reconnaissance flights, at a time when flight was in its infancy. After the war, he obtained a commission in the newly formed Royal Air Force, served again in the Second World War and rose to the rank of Air Vice-Marshal in the post-war years. By contrast, academic and sporting success eluded Banting and he left in 1920 without matriculating, going on to have a very different career from his brother.

On leaving Emanuel School, Banting took a job with Lloyds Bank but, determined to become an artist, took night classes at the Westminster School of Art where he was taught by the figurative painter Bernard Meninsky and the sculptor Frank Dobson. Here he met Stephen Tomlin who introduced him to Lytton Strachey and other members of the Bloomsbury Group.

In 1923 he went to Paris where he took afternoon drawing classes at the *Académie de la Grande Chaumière*. While in Paris he met



*Portrait of Stephen Tomlin by John Banting, 1927
(commissioned by Lytton Strachey)*

Peggy Guggenheim, the eccentric American art collector, Nina Hamnett, the English painter, Constantin Brâncuși, the sculptor, and Man Ray, the American surrealist photographer who would all gather on the pavement cafés of Montparnasse to drink and gossip.



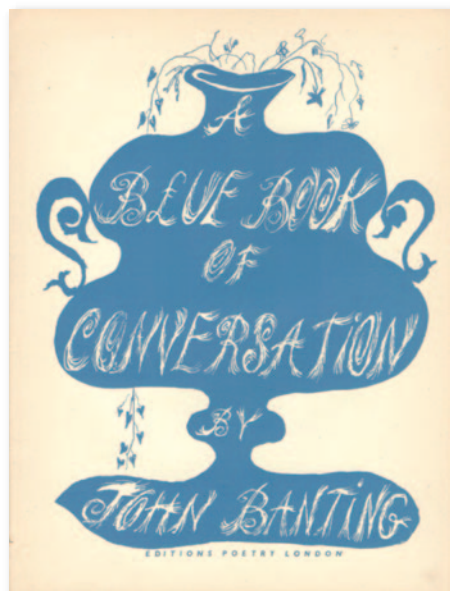
*Banting's mural for Fortnum & Mason's
Decoration Department, 1932*

On his return to London he took a studio in Fitzroy Street where Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell also had a studio. He started to make his mark on the art world and his paintings were bought by some of the influencers of the day. His unconventional private and personal life provided raw material for Henry Green and other chroniclers of the time and reflected the vigour and experimentation of this period.

Hailed as a man to watch – in 1936 the *Daily Telegraph* described him as, ‘a young artist of rare talent’ after seeing his work at the *International Surrealist Exhibition* – by the 1950s John Banting had fallen into obscurity where he pretty much remains to this day. With the current growing interest in the British surrealists the work of Banting deserves reassessment.

Examples of his work are held in the Tate, the National Portrait Gallery, the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and many regional galleries and prominent private collections. His murals – including a large mural of fig leaves and rope, two of his painting tropes, for the entrance to Fortnum and Mason’s Decoration Department in 1932 – have, unfortunately, been destroyed.

Constantly looking for new ways to express his ideas, in addition to his painting, Banting designed the sets and costumes for several ballets including *Pomona*, choreographed by Frederick Ashton in 1930



Frontispiece of *A Blue Book of Conversation*, Editions Poetry London, 1946

and *Prometheus* at the Sadler’s Wells Theatre in 1936. Thanks to his friendship with John Lehmann, he designed book jackets for the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press and commissions from other publishing houses followed. His illustrated book of satirical verse, *A Blue Book of Conversation*, was published in 1946. Ever the innovator, the illustrations took the form of blueprints using the cyanotype method, a slow-reacting photographic process sensitive to a limited near-ultraviolet and blue light spectrum, frequently used in the fields of architecture and engineering but rarely in the world of the arts.

In the 1930s, Banting was known as much for being a professional party animal as an artist as shown by his role in the Bruno Hat Hoax in July 1929, later parodied by Evelyn Waugh in his novel, *Vile Bodies*. He designed several of the extravagant parties given by the Bright Young People, including the infamous White Party given by Sandy Baird in July 1931, which made next day’s headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Gregarious, Banting enthusiastically embraced a wide range of friendships and acquaintances. Close to the shipping heiress Nancy Cunard, who he regarded as his muse, he would accompany her to New York in 1932 to gather material for her book, *Negro Anthology*, and to Spain in 1937 to report on the Spanish Civil War.

Other friends and allies included prominent figures in the world of arts during the inter-war years: the writer, Lytton Strachey, the sculptor, Stephen Tomlin, the artist, Edward Burra, the photographers, Barbara Ker-Seymer and Humphrey Spender, Eddy Sackville-West, the music critic, Brian Howard, the poet, E.L.T. Mesens, who ran the London Gallery, and Roland Penrose, who owned it. The story of Banting’s life showcases the artistic world of the mid-twentieth century and its denizens, and while the standard of his work is undeniably variable, it is often fresh and exciting, and at his best this Old Emanuel was undoubtedly a leading figure of the British surrealist movement. ■

Joanna Ward

John Banting and his Circle is published by Austin Macauley Publishers.



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Trieste Ahoy!

When thinking of Italy most people will think in terms of Rome, Milan or Venice. Few will give much consideration to Trieste. I urge you to give it more than a second thought as Elizabeth and I have returned from a very enjoyable and fulfilling short visit in early October.

It was in early days a Roman city with a forum, still in existence, and a fine Roman Arch known as “Richard’s Arch” after Richard the Lion Heart who is alleged to have ridden under it on his return from the Crusades. The key dates in Trieste history are 1382 when it joined the Austrian empire and had Habsburg rulers till 1918. In 1719 it became a free port, servicing the growing Austrian empire and saw the construction over the next 100 years of some very impressive Austrian-Hungarian buildings. In particular, it has as its major municipal building the “Palazzo del Municipio” set in the grand main square the “Piazza dell’Unità Italia”.

There are fine museums in Trieste such as the International Fashion Museum and the Museo Revoltella Gallery of Modern Art. Pasquale Revoltella was an entrepreneur and financier who not only left a magnificent arts collection to the city, he was also one of the founders of the Suez Canal, and one can see his working papers in the museum.

Of the fine houses in the immediate area, without doubt is the Castle of

Miramare which is the one most worth seeing. It stands ten kilometres outside Trieste on a promontory overlooking the Adriatic. It was built for the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, brother of the Emperor Franz Joseph. Archduke Maximilian was Commander of the Austrian Navy and subsequently Governor of Lombardy-Venetia. In 1863 he received an invitation to be Emperor of Mexico. He accepted what was a high-risk option given the considerable political unrest and subsequently was shot by firing squad by revolutionaries three years later. He was a man of great courage who accepted his fate. He was a patron of the arts and a great botanical collector, all of which is on show at the castle.

Trieste has attracted a wide range of interesting people. James Joyce spent ten years in Trieste where he wrote the “Dubliners” and created “Ulysses” before it was published in

Paris. There is a statue of him crossing the canal to his first house. Other Britons of note include the great African explorer and traveller, Sir Richard Burton. Burton was British Consul, and with time on his hands, he spent time translating “The Thousand One Nights” from the Arabic.

The well-known travel writer Jan Morris first visited Trieste as a soldier in World War Two and has been back many times. Her elegant reflection in her book “Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere” gives a subtle and evocative picture of the city.

Trieste has had its share of political drama. After the First World War it was awarded to Italy but during the Second it was seized by the Nazis. Among those who helped drive the Germans out was Tommy Macpherson, Britain’s most decorated soldier. Years later, I met Sir Tommy as he subsequently became, and he told the story with his small platoon he persuaded some of the Germans to surrender

by saying that the RAF was about to come and bomb them-even though it was a fairy tale! Trieste was then claimed by Tito who wanted to incorporate it into Yugoslavia. For a few years It became a free port before finally in 1954 a combination of Winston Churchill and Fitzroy Maclean persuaded Tito that it should be part of Italy- and there it sits to this day. ■

Stuart Thom



Wandsworth Common memories since the 1960s

Richard Fox, Friends of Wandsworth Common (FoWC)

Stephen Midlane, FoWC Heritage Group

What do you remember about Wandsworth Common in the sixties and after?

Following the success of our book 'The Wandsworth Common Story' (2,500 copies sold and counting) and the 'Common Memories' oral history film, our thoughts have turned to a more up-to-date 'sequel' which would capture stories and memories of the Common starting from around the mid-sixties, roughly where the book and the film ended. That's also when the GLC, and shortly thereafter Wandsworth Council, took over responsibility for the Common.

In collaboration with the Wandsworth Society, we're asking people who have lived locally during this period to contact us with your memories of significant events, developments, themes etc which should not be forgotten. Your old photographs could be a mine of information too.

What springs to mind? Here are some examples of events in the last 60 years to whet your appetite and get the memory juices flowing.

1966 – removal of the final prefabs along Bolingbroke Grove. We've interviewed Christine Brown who lived in one of them but have never been able to track down any photographs. Can you help?

The 'cinder patch' on the Scope – still remembered by locals from the

late sixties/early seventies before active tree planting began, leaving little trace today, but rumoured to have been the training ground for Chelsea FC, of which, sadly, we can find no evidence – do you have any?

Late 60s – the arrival of Dutch elm disease. Who remembers the felling of the long avenues of elms along Bellevue Road and Bolingbroke Grove?



Fallen tree next to the café, ©Cathy Rowntree

In 1970 Trinity Road, as it passes through Wandsworth Common, was converted from a two-lane road to a six-lane dual carriageway. The resulting 'spoil' created the Prison Banks area of the Common and was also one of the events prompting the formation of the Wandsworth Society in 1971.

1973 – Lady Allen playground built near Chivalry Road.

1974 – as described by the late Shirley Passmore: Council 'proposals for radical development of the Common... [including] new buildings... floodlighting... dressing room accommodation for 20 teams in the Baskerville Road area... The Common was [also] suggested as a possible site for a new athletics

track... with a terraced stand ... [which] would have covered 5 acres'. A Wandsworth Society survey at the time found overwhelming opposition to the idea and the proposals were not implemented.

That's a reminder of the power of public protest, witnessed again only this year with the proposals which would have allowed much larger events on the Common, but which were withdrawn and amended after popular opposition and campaigning.

1978 – the earliest management plan for Wandsworth Common was published. Who can remember the old putting

green, where the main playground is now? And whatever became of the plan for a new putting green and archery area north of the tennis courts and an animal enclosure!?

The gradual dereliction of the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building, culminating in the arson attack, and then the phoenix rising from the

ashes after 1980, thanks to the efforts of the Wandsworth and Victorian societies. The building was converted into flats and small office/industrial units, with the famous Le Gothique restaurant opening in 1987.

The great storm of 1987. Does anyone have stories to tell and photographs?

The various incarnations of the cafe on the ground floor of the Neals Farm buildings and the chequered history of the first floor space, unoccupied for over a decade.

The opening of the Nature Study Centre, next to Skylark, in 1991

Landscape and biodiversity changes under Valerie Selby from 1997

Valerie notes the increase in the numbers using the Common and for much lengthier time periods; also the concentration of activity around Skylark and the playground. This has led to increased compaction which causes vegetation erosion and localised water pooling/flooding.

Covid gave another boost to usage, a big increase in dog ownership and, for a variety of reasons, cycling.

Habitat creation has included much tree planting, such as the wooded area to the north of the tennis courts and lakeside vegetation – the contrast between old photographs of the lake and how it is today are quite startling.

Most recently the scrub/hedge screening planting along Trinity Road, near the junction with Bellevue Road and along the south circular on Northside, not to mention the more extensive grassland and wildflower areas. The bringing of the heavy horses to Wandsworth Common in September, for grass mowing and baling, is a fitting



The lake as it once was

culmination to all these efforts to rewild the Common.

It is no coincidence that there are increased sightings of butterfly and bird species and, not seen in a long time, common toads, which may be a consequence of the work on the amphibian pond.

Nick Rutter, one of our amazing ornithologists, says it's been a very good year for small birds on the Scope (firecrest breeding, treecreeper, migrant pied and spotted flycatchers) which may have benefited from the new and improved glade areas.

Letting the gorse and brambles regenerate round the south end of Anglers' Lake has also helped it resume its status as one of the better sites for migrant warblers after a couple of lean years. Insect-friendly planting round the bowling green may also have helped increase the diversity of bird species.

Some butterfly species may also be responding to the new planting, in both the Frying Pan area and in the middle of Bolingbroke Fields – for example hairstreaks and skippers. New species of bats have also been

identified, attracted to the new areas of scrub.

We can probably all point to the problems caused by climate change, not just warmer temperatures but also shorter/heavier periods of rain, new pests and diseases particularly affecting trees etc.

2003 – BBC Time Team excavation on the Scope in search of the Craig Telescope. Did anyone take part?

2007 – the move of the main playground from by the lake to its present location by Skylark, creating a wilder area.

What do you remember? What was, what is, and what might have been?

We are in the process of compiling a list of topics to focus on, before holding in depth interviews to inject detail and colour. We have no idea yet what medium we will use to collect all these ideas – very much a work in progress.

So get your thinking caps on over the Christmas period and get back to us in the New Year with your recollections at history@wandsworthcommon.org

The House of Lords

Last year I was delighted to be invited by the Wandsworth Society to give a talk about the rôle of the House of Lords and my rôles within it. At the time I was a serving Justice Minister in the Lords and I was advised not to give a party-political speech otherwise I would have to clear the content of my speech with the Special Advisers and be accompanied by a member of my private office. So the talk I gave to the Wandsworth Society was more about the mechanics and role of the institution rather than banging any political drum.

I was first appointed to the Lords in 1991 as an hereditary peer after my father died, at the time I was a local councillor in Roehampton ward, I was working full-time and we had our first child. In 1997 Tony Blair won his famous victory and in 1999 I was kicked out of the Lords along with most of the hereditary peers. In 2000 I was given a life peerage and I've been an active member ever since although for most of the period I have also pursued a separate career outside parliament.

When I was first appointed to the Lords there were 1200 members, most of whom were hereditary peers and not active. After most of the hereditary peers were removed in 1999 the membership was reduced to about 600 peers, since then through successive governments the numbers have crept up to about 800 peers. On a busy day in the Lords about 400 peers will turn up to vote and contribute to the working of the House.

The primary role of the House of Lords is to review and amend legislation. It does this by reviewing public bills which are presented by the government to parliament. Each bill needs to go through both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. After the bills are reviewed, they become acts of parliament which define the law of the United Kingdom. In addition to this primary role, the Lords also has an extensive committee system which looks at areas of particular interest, such as international and constitutional issues of the day and scientific and social policy issues. Most of these committees meet in public and are extensively lobbied by special interest groups who wish to influence the committees' conclusions and recommendations. Often the government will respond to the committees' recommendations. There are many members of the Lords who are experts in their own fields and the

committee system benefits from this expertise and the reports produced seek to influence government policy.

The history of the Lords is extensive, the first official parliament with Lords and Commons was 1295 with Edward 1, the English civil war and the execution of Charles 1 led to the temporary abolition of the Lords in 1649, it was restored in 1660 together with the monarchy. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Lords remained powerful and often clashed with the Commons. The Reform Acts, particularly 1832, began shifting power towards the elected House of Commons. The parliament acts of 1911 and 1949 significantly reduced the Lords' ability to block legislation. In the 1958 the Life Peerages Act allowed non-hereditary appointments to the Lords. As mentioned above, in 1999 the House of Lords Act removed most hereditary peers, leaving 92 hereditary peers who were elected by their fellow peers. At the end of the current session of parliament, which is expected to be in spring 2026, the remaining 92 hereditary peers will be removed from parliament.

The Palace of Westminster building, also known as Parliament, which we now know is comparatively recent. It was completed in 1870 in the Gothic Revival style. Augustus Pugin and Charles Barry were the architects. The mish mash of medieval buildings which made up the previous palace and parliamentary estate were destroyed in a devastating fire in 1834. The most important survivor of the fire is Westminster Hall which still acts as a focal point for national events, for example 250,000 people processed past to pay their last respects to the Queen as she lay in state in Westminster Hall after her death.

So what of the future? The building itself is crumbling but there is constant ongoing work to mitigate its worst effects. There is a large-scale restoration and renewal programme which is constantly debated but not yet agreed. My own view is that the House of Lords will survive for as long as it is useful. The detailed reviewing of legislation and the expert reports of the select committees are the life blood of the institution. From experience, I would say that the many people and organisations that come into contact with the House of Lords appreciate and value its work.

Fred Ponsonby
Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede

Open-air Schools:

to prevent and combat the widespread rise of tuberculosis

Gilly King, Southlands College Archives Historian

England's first open-air school opened in 1907 and the schools gained popularity in the 1930s when tuberculosis was rife.

For the most part, the pupils were not suffering from tuberculosis (TB) but came from a class of child described at the time as "pre-tuberculous". It was believed – wrongly, as it happens – that TB usually began in childhood and that certain children were especially susceptible. If these children could be reached, doctors thought, perhaps the disease could be stamped out. The children were effectively outdoors all day every day, and lessons were never abandoned however cold it got. Nor was there any heating, so pupils had



Nature Studies

nothing but coats, blankets and mittens to keep the blood circulating.

The Southlands College History records that one of the most rewarding experiments of 1937-

38 was the open-air class held in the grounds of Southlands College on Wimbledon Parkside.

On 3rd June 1937, twenty children from Hotham Road Girls' School, Putney, aged



The children became enthusiastic gardeners (unlike the students)

between eight and eleven, needing open air treatment came to Southlands College, which provided the grounds and their mid-day meal at low cost. The London County Council provided desks, chairs, rest beds and blankets and a teacher to take charge of the children. Gradually the Southlands students, as trainee teachers, had the opportunity to take part in the work.



Sept 29th 1937 – Mothers' Afternoon

As months went by the class seemed loath to return to its indoor classroom in Putney, and eventually it continued through the winter and another spring. The London County Council erected a shed for housing the

furniture and blankets, and the Central Council for School Broadcasting installed a wireless set to see whether it could be used in open-air classes. ■

For more information about open-air schools go to:
<https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2023/09/21/understanding-the-open-air-schools-of-the-1900s/>

All the images are from the Southlands College archive

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Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea and Riverside Strategies

Rebecca Law

Due to climate change, flood risk on the Thames will increase over the coming century. In response, the Environment Agency established a plan to manage this risk on the tidal river, called Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100).

The ground-breaking TE2100 calls for local 'Riverside Strategies' to be agreed – visions for the riverside that set out aspirations to integrate multiple benefits alongside upgrades to flood defences. One method to create these riverside strategies is through the 'Joint Thames Strategy' (JTS) that will be written by the Thames Strategy Partnership (TSP) to be published in 2027 (TSP is a collaboration between the Thames Landscape Strategy Partnership, Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea and Thames Estuary Partnership).

On one side of the JTS are the four detailed Thames Strategies (4TS) that provide local guidance to inform decision making (Thames Landscape Strategy Weybridge to Kew, Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea, the Thames Strategy London Central and Thames Strategy East). Each strategy is an overarching vision to guide fundamental change in how we approach riverside management, improve flood risk mitigation along the Thames and embed community values and priorities. The strategies look to combine this with delivering wider benefits, such as enhanced environmental quality, recreational opportunities, heritage protection, culture, and economic growth. The partnership is a collaborative approach; working with and connecting local authorities, stakeholders, and communities, sharing resource and knowledge to develop a sustainable future for the Thames.

On the other side is the Joint Thames Strategy itself – a shared toolkit providing the information that underpins and aligns the four local strategies.

Together, the 4TS and the JTS will provide a handbook for change to ensure future resilience and sustainability of the landscape; across the river Thames, in the context of increasing flood risk at a regional and local level.

Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea is a partnership based on a 100-year visioning document, published in 2002, to guide change along the river from Kew Bridge to Battersea Power Station. In 2023 funding was secured from the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee to update the document to reflect current flood risk and climate change predictions and what that could mean for future sustainability of riverside activities.

As part of the update of the strategy, we will be updating the local Landscape Character Assessments, which will be based on the wealth of local knowledge that the community and stakeholders have to offer. TSKC has already begun to capture an accurate view of this wonderful stretch of river with conversations and presentations to community members and local authority officers across the partnership boroughs – including Wandsworth. Looking at what has changed



Fig 1. New public spaces and landscaping at Battersea Power Station to be taken into account in the updating of the Character Assessments

since 2002, what is changing, and what the priorities are for the users and managers of these landscapes.

Not just about flood risk

The Strategies are exploring opportunities for projects that have multiple benefits for; leisure and recreation, river infrastructure, improved health and wellbeing, creating new wildlife habitat, ensuring community resilience and protecting historic buildings and public spaces.

The EA TE2100 is an adaptive plan – a suite of measures are needed to manage flood risk ranging from

increasing property resilience to the construction of a new tidal barrier (and future changes to its deployment). It demonstrates how managing future flood risk will necessitate reshaping our riversides and throughout much of the estuary, flood walls and embankments could need to be raised as much as a metre or more by 2100; in some places, above the barrier, this may even include an initial phased deadline of upgrades by 2050.

Without careful design, this could alter the character of the riverside

In other places, where the flood defences are set back from the river's edge, the floodplain will get significantly wetter and we need to respond in a positive way.

As the TSKC updates its character assessments, it is recognised that we must include information on flood defences and their *character* within their immediate landscape setting. The same for the functional floodplain – there needs to be a character appraisal of



Fig 2. Picture of a road by the Thames, where the flood defence is slight hump in the road

the landscape character of the floodplain; both as a wet and a dry place!

For example – looking at fixed assets like walls: how they do fit in the landscape, what are the predicted requirements for 2050 and how would access be affected (if they are higher – how do people see over?) Discussing these issues will form part of the aspirations set out in the riverside strategy visions on how the defence raising can also deliver the multiple benefits.

In this example (fig 2) the asset is the bump in the road (just in front of where the people are standing) – how would any rise in height here be managed in a practical sense and what would that mean for the character or accessibility? What could the potential options be?

The strategies are placing technical information regarding flood defences within a landscape character assessment that has also appraised the character of the defence *itself*, this is *new and essential*, if aspirations to achieve future multiple benefits in defence upgrades are to be achieved.

This approach also presents future changes (as known at the moment) in a clear and legible format. We are currently looking at how this information can be easily updated in the future as flood risk requirements evolve. Identifying opportunities to create green, accessible, and vibrant spaces.

Over the next 12 months, the TSKC will continue to engage with community groups – like the Wandsworth Society – to explore the value of these landscapes; what makes them special, and how can we sustainably manage them in the future. ■

For more information please contact rebecca.law@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk or visit www.jtsrefresh.com or the TE2100 website

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F

I love exploding myths and Putney, where I live, has its share – some propagated by reputable sources. It is much easier just to take someone's word for something than to check – a sin of which I too have been guilty.

Church feud

When I came to Putney in the 1980s, I worked in Brewhouse Street – originally Lane, now Lane again – a stone's throw from St Mary's church. The first Putney myth I encountered was that two sisters had worshipped there, had a falling out, and one had an identical church built across the river – All Saints', Fulham. There is, admittedly, a superficial similarity, but the story is of course nonsense!

turn of the 17th/18th centuries. He has an impressive tomb in Mount Nod, the 'Huguenot' cemetery on East Hill.

Grave error #1

St Mary's was Putney's only burial place for half a millennium and by the mid-18th century was desperately overcrowded. A new cemetery (soon, oddly, known as Putney Old Burial Ground) was consecrated in 1763. Ninety years later, eleven Putney ratepayers wrote a joint letter to the Putney Burial Board, claiming that it in turn was overcrowded and a new cemetery was needed. It was not! There was space for at least another 1,000 burials.

But eminent citizens were buried in POBG, a third of the plots were table

Myth-busting

The late Philip Evison

Winchester House's phantom owner

One of my interests is Putney's former 'great houses', of which there were once many – eight on the High Street alone. Only three survive – Winchester House on Lower Richmond Road, Lower Park (former home of the Leader family) on Putney Hill, and the second iteration of Putney Park House on Pleasance Road. Histories misinform us that Winchester House (Winchester House Club since 1997) was built c.1729 for Huguenot landowner Jacques/'James' Baudouin (1648-1739), who fled Nîmes, France, following Louis XIV's 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

The myth may stem from Baudouin owning land and/or buildings adjoining or on the estate and was disproved by Dorian Gerhold in Wandsworth Historian #69, Summer 1998. There is no evidence he ever owned or lived in Winchester House, which probably dates from the

tombs, and there was a growing working class. They must not mingle! The PBB quickly agreed to the request, land was purchased from Earl Spencer and tenders invited for Putney Lower Common Cemetery. The lowest of the fifteen submitted came from local father-and-son builders William & Robert Avis. Who also happened to have been signatories to the letter requesting a new cemetery!

Grave error #2

Every account I have read of the building of POBG states that Rev. Roger Mortlock Pettiward (1712-74), of the wealthy family who owned Fairfax House, one of the grandest on the High Street, 'donated' the land to the parish. He didn't! He sold it, as a glance at the wording engraved on the mortuary building confirms: "This Room Was Built and Burial Ground Inclosed By Subscription Anno 1763". His price was £260, for 0.86 acres! I believe

the present price would be around 5,000 times that! 90 people contributed sums between £20 and five shillings, and a total of £240-17s-0d was raised. It is assumed that Pettiward waived the balance.

Grave error #3

Local solicitor Henry Scarth (1802-70) became a wealthy land/property owner and developer, was an inveterate, polyglottal traveller and met 13(ish)-year-old Beirut-born Yusef Sirrie* c.1842, perhaps in Turkey, allegedly saving him from slavery! He brought him to England as his servant, as which he remained until Henry's death, Sirrie dying in 1880. The latter facts are true, the former dubious. (*Scarth built the Arab Boy pub, named after Sirrie.)

Scarth is buried in Putney Lower Common Cemetery and Sirrie in Old Barnes Cemetery, where his grave-slab is skewed about 30° from the general 90°, N-S W-E grid. A legend grew, encouraged by the Barnes & Mortlake History Society no less, that Sirrie had wanted his grave to be oriented to Mecca. A compass showed that it was 60° off Mecca and a copy of his will that he was Catholic (Maronite)! He did not convert in the UK, as some claimed, asked in his will that a Catholic service be conducted in his house before the burial, and even specified his preferred priest.

Cinderella Dancing Club – a tragic mistake

In Putney's worst incident of WWII, at 9-02 pm on Sunday 7th November 1943, a lone Focke-Wulf FW190 dived from the north, dropping a 500 kilo 'Stabo' bomb on the Cinderella Dancing Club on the 1st floor of 33-35 Putney High Street, and the Black & White Milk Bar on the ground floor of no. 35. Both were busy, two cinemas were just turning out, 81 were killed and 248 injured, two thirds under 23.

Stabo was short for Stachelbombe (spike-bomb), named for its long frontal

spike which, according to "We Served" (WBC 1989), caused the bomb to explode higher up, widening the blast radius. This became the accepted wisdom, which I confess to repeating. In fact, the bomb was designed not for civilian but strategic targets, e.g. road and rail, the spike digging into the ground to prevent the bomb skidding away. The fighter-bomber's track took it directly over Putney Bridge, which was almost certainly its target, but a 2-second delay releasing the bomb meant that it hit the CDC instead.

The burning of the Hippodrome Theatre

The Hippodrome Theatre on Felsham Road opened on 5th November 1906 as the Putney Empire and Palace of Varieties, in which many music-hall stars appeared, including Marie Lloyd, Vesta Tilley and Harry Champion. Animated films were shown as early as 1908 and it was converted to a cinema in 1924, closing in 1961. It stood idle for a decade* until used briefly for exterior shots in director Douglas Hickox's *Sitting Target* (1972) and extensively for exteriors and interiors in his grand-guignol *Theatre of Blood* (1973). (*A friend swore he watched a film or live broadcast of the 1966 Football World Cup final there!)

In the latter, it became the Burbage Theatre, affording glimpses of its still beautiful décor. The film features hammy Shakespearean actor Edward Lionheart (Vincent Price), who systematically murders his critics in ways mirroring deaths in the plays. Cornered by police, he sets fire to the theatre, climbs to the roof and plunges into the flames, dead daughter Edwina/Cordelia (Diana Rigg) in his arms. The theatre was demolished not long afterwards, spawning an urban myth that it really was burned down for the climax! Several people told me so, with genuine conviction, but it was special effects, and the theatre was professionally demolished in 1975/6. ■



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Days of Rest and Relaxation

Rosemary Haworth-Booth

This year I did something very naughty – flew to Canada with both daughters, to see my brother.

He's lived in Toronto since the mid 1960s, having started off on a trip around the world but trapped by a fairy godfather into taking a job which developed, in the words of the accompanying blurb to his subsequent book 'Metropolitan Problems' (1970), into a "systematic international study of the world's metropolitan areas....with the official cooperation of the United Nations...designed to produce positive insights into the methods of coping with the interlocking sets of problems associated with the expansion of the modern metropolis..." I've kept in touch with Simon over the last fifty years or so, and surely he must have told me about his experiences with the UN, I had simply forgotten about it. I am suddenly deeply impressed.

Now, in his eighties, Simon works mostly in a voluntary capacity. Supporting the traders in the incredible St Lawrence Market has been one of his longer running projects.

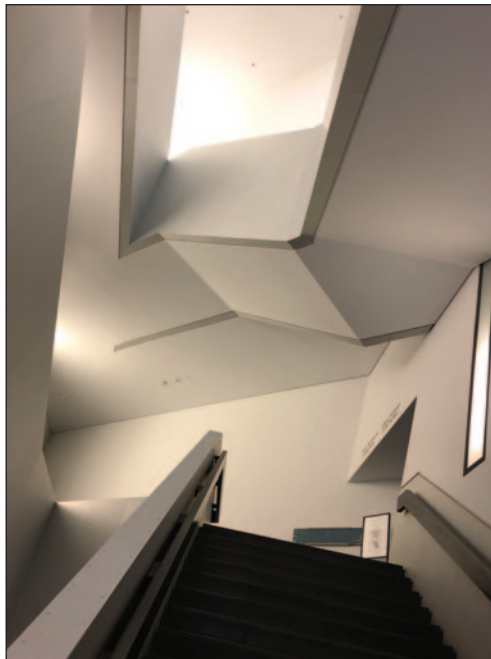
Voted the best food market in the world in 2012 by the National Geographic, it is still stunning. 120 different vendors and massive variety. We wanted rice and found ourselves confronting a wall of self-serve boxes, containing not only the regular brown and white, round, long grain, basmati but a dozen others beside, the same 'stall' similarly sold what looked like one hundred varieties of herbs and spices – procurable, in any quantity from 5–500+ grams. One cheese stand sells over 700 varieties from across the world. Another sold only their own homemade but from water buffalo milk as well as the more familiar cows, sheep and goats.

Market trading often cuts out middlemen. The vast piles of every vegetable and fruit imaginable, far outshone my memories of Covent Garden but the traders' livelihoods are sometimes precarious and

Simon has been fighting to get them a better deal. As I walk round the market with him their respect and affection is obvious.

Museums weren't really on my bucket list. But I wanted to see Daniel Libeskind's extension to the Royal Ontario Museum; my professional home for 36 years was the V&A in London, which awarded Libeskind the contract for their own extension in 1996. I feel grateful that despite the then director's enthusiasm it never got off the ground, but I was intrigued to experience a real-life manifestation of his challenging vision. Completed in 2008, the ROM extension is now undergoing what online search

engines implicitly report as 'improvements', but those on the ground, like my brother and sister-in-law, recognise the work as very necessary repairs; wall panels now collapsing, thanks to the gravity-defying design. Inside, the structure was clinical almost, but refreshing, different indeed from what I remember from my last visit in 1973 when indigenous peoples had been represented by mangy-looking mannequins dressed up like actors on a stage in dingy cases with dusty-looking accoutrements. However, the original entrance lobby with its cavernous vaulted ceiling was still in place. Sitting on a handy



bench I unkindly noted unmeted vulgarity and boringness in its mid-1930s mosaics. Riffing on my disdain Alice decided they were really a very cutting edge "get-ready-to-yawn-now" installation – to prepare the philistine visitor for the belly of the building.

Niagara, of course, but multi-story hotels, car parks, eateries and souvenir shops now fringe up as close and personal as possible to the amazing natural phenomenon; if in the UK, it would likely have been protected from such exasperating commercialisation by the National Trust. But we saw it, and mused on

A photograph of a market stall displaying various mushrooms. The mushrooms are arranged in several cardboard boxes. In the foreground, there are large white button mushrooms and smaller brown cremini mushrooms. Behind them are more varieties, including some with orange gills and others that look like porcini or shiitake. Price tags are visible throughout the display.

who had died at the grand old age of 90 or so, told us that her fridge was a temple to penicillin. "Poor Mummy" Emzi sympathised, familiar with my *modus operandi*, "the back of the fridge is one of your favourite places isn't it? You love to hang out there." ■



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2025/26 Season

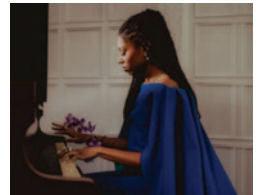
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Friday 12 December

Isata Kanneh-Mason (piano) plays Beethoven, Ravel and Tabakova

Isata Kanneh-Mason, described as "*a born musician with a virtuoso technique*" renowned for "*her ability to engage your emotions from first note to last*" will give the latest in the sequence of outstanding St Luke's piano recitals. Her programme will include works by Beethoven, Ravel and the contemporary Bulgarian-British composer Dobrinka Tabakova. This concert is bound to sell out fast so get your tickets early!



Note that this concert is on a Friday.

Saturday 10 January 2026

Samuel Staples and Friends

Violinist **Samuel Staples** will be joined by fellow young string players to launch us into the new year with music with a distinctly Scandinavian flavour, including works by Grieg and Sibelius. Samuel, a graduate of the Yehudi Menuhin School, has long local connections with Battersea and now, in addition to directing the Alderney Chamber Music Festival, is building an international reputation.

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Saturday 24 January

Orsino Wind Quintet

The **Orsino Wind Quintet** features five instrumentalists each of whom is a distinguished soloist in their own right resulting, as *The Guardian* has put it, in "*all-star playing of the highest level*". Some of them have already made solo appearances in previous St Luke's seasons. Their debut appearance as a Quintet will feature a varied programme covering Beethoven, Ravel and twentieth century music.

Saturday 21 February

Jess Gillam Trio

Jess Gillam (saxophone) with Zeynep Özsuca (piano) and Sam Becker (double bass)

We are delighted to welcome back St Luke's favourite **Jess Gillam** for what is sure to be a sell out concert, this time accompanied by her friends and collaborators **Zeynep Özsuca** and **Sam Becker** to give us a programme ranging from the baroque to the contemporary.

Tickets £20 ♦ £15 concessions
except 12 December (£25 / £20)

Doors open at 6pm. Tickets include admission to a pre-concert talk at 6.30pm
St Luke's Concert Series St Luke's Community Hall 194 Ramsden Road London SW12 8RQ

Lost Knowledge

Jack Powers

King John lost his jewels in the Wash. Careless lad. I sometimes lose things in the wash too, but not the Crown Jewels, for goodness' sake!

However, on a more serious note, one of the things which distinguishes humans from the animal kingdom is that we can communicate using speech and we can preserve what we say and also our amazing ideas in written text. No other species can do this.

That is what makes the loss of the literature, history and music of ages past such a shame. Often, this is the result of war, or the collapse of societies. We have some written works which (so far) have defied understanding. A case in point is the enigmatic book, the Voynich Manuscript. This book is written in an unknown language and is profusely illustrated. It is European in origin, though no one knows for sure where it comes from and what it means is now lost. Ancient Linear A from Crete is similarly undeciphered.

As regards the great works of the Classical Greek and Roman era, as many as 400,000 books were stored in the Library of Alexandria in Ancient Egypt. This repository was burned down and its precious contents lost forever. However, in case you think that that is an end to the matter, an astonishing find at Herculaneum may offer hope that what was once lost may (possibly) be rediscovered in years to come thanks to cutting-edge technology. In the remains of what is, for obvious reasons, called the Villa of the Papyri, large crates of scrolls were found, packed, it would seem, to save them from the eruption of Vesuvius in 79AD. They never made it, but were carbonised by the immense temperatures from pyroclastic flows which killed everyone who remained and which, accidentally, preserved the scrolls. Many were destroyed by clumsy attempts to unroll them, which simply made them crumble into dust. Now, however, an American computer scientist, Brent Seales, using papyri from the

Villa, has developed a technique for reading the text on the incinerated, warped scrolls without unrolling them. Many of the lost works of literature and philosophy of which we know from surviving books, may soon be rediscovered, thanks to IT.

The ancient world was far from being a place of ignorance, as a number of discoveries show. The Ancient Greeks had not only worked out that the world was round, but also its size! In a similar fashion, museums discovered that gold artefacts from the Middle East were much lighter than they should have been and that they were, in fact, gold-plated. There were ways in which this could be done, using mercury. However, archaeologists from the 1930s to the present day have theorised that certain ancient artefacts may have actually been used for electro-plating and mimicking electric “batteries”!

Creating an electric current is not something we would associate with the world of the pre-Christian era and yet, the vessels allegedly used to create such an electric current would seem to have produced such an effect by decidedly normal means, such as using wine and vinegar in association with a ceramic pot, a rod of iron and a copper tube. These artefacts were discovered in Selucia (modern Iraq) in 1936. Wilhelm König, director of the National Museum of Iraq at the time suggested that the objects functioned as a galvanic cell. Indeed, Willard Gray (no relation to the Editor!) reproduced this experiment by reconstructing the design and using grape juice!

Of course, we don't know for sure that that was the method used to gold plate artefacts.

Echoing what we might consider a more modern technology is the invention of Heron of Alexandria. Known to English speakers as “Hero of Alexandria”, Heron invented something revolutionary. It was a means of opening and closing the doors of a temple by using steam

power! Although it has been pointed out that it is not a predecessor of the steam engine used in the Industrial Revolution, had its use been more widely disseminated, it is entirely possible that there could have been further developments, leading to something akin to Stephenson's steam engine and the earlier steam boat, "The Comet", which first sailed on the Clyde in 1812.

History is full of cul-de-sacs like that, seemingly leading nowhere. Think of the incredible machine called "the Antikythera Mechanism", which was discovered in an Ancient Greek shipwreck. No one knew what it might be until it was subjected to computer x-ray tomography and high-resolution scanning. This showed that it was a device with toothed wheels which showed the course of the moon and would have predicted eclipses. It may even have shown the cycles of Venus and Saturn! It was found in 1901, so well before any chance of someone faking it. It was probably constructed in the second century BC and is described as an analogue computer!

Astonishing as that may seem, in the UK, in more recent times, a man called Charles Babbage created a "Difference Engine", a mechanical device which was also an early form of computer. This occupied him for much of his life. It was initially funded by the British Government from the 1820s, but the funding eventually dried up and the machine was never completed during his lifetime. In fact, it was not until Tommy Flowers, a Post Office engineer built "Colossus", that the world's first electronic computer appeared in the 1940s. It was used to crack the German "Tunny" codes at Bletchley Park and could make huge numbers of calculations almost instantaneously. Amazingly enough, part of Babbage's machine, Difference Engine Number 2 has since been built (in 2002 and to be seen at the Science Museum) proving that it worked, which means that Britain could have been a computerised world power over 150 years ago!

From rediscovering ancient texts thought to have vanished for ever to finding lost ancient technology, delving into our past never ceases to fascinate me. ■

A Free Day from the Freezer

It's black Friday today
With bargains galore
For one and all
In the Stores
Which seems to be a way
Of making all of us worse off
Than we already are
But with the weather getting colder
There's little need or incentive to go out
shopping
For 'Bargains Galore'
As most of us have enough in our
freezers
To live off
For a couple of months
We can use the stuff
Most of which is out of date
And save the electricity
Keeping it frozen
Year after year after year
As a result of our ingenuity
And frugality
We could afford to stay
In a Convalescent home
Like this one by the sea
Much longer
Which is recommended by everyone
For its sang-froid
Adding composure and calmness
To our active busy lives
Helping to slow us down
And to live longer as healthy oldies
Saving the NHS
Enormous amounts of much needed cash

By Eddie Forde

Tooting Common's Dynamic Flora

by Roy Vickery

Although I'd wandered around Tooting Common for many years since the mid-1970s, I didn't start recording its flora until 2000, and this activity became something of an obsession after my retirement in 2007.

I often hear people, some of whom consider themselves to be botanists, saying they like, or even need, to get out of London and 'see plants'. I've never really understood this, much of the countryside is covered with monocultures of wheat or sugar beet, and even colourful hills and mountains have relatively few species. Conversely urban habitats are often constantly disturbed, allowing new species to come in. And, on urban commons you can wander wherever you like, there's no need to remain on footpaths.

On Tooting Common (or Tooting Bec and Tooting Graveney Commons, to be more correct), we have an amazing assemblage of plants, each species with its own story. Approximately 700 species of flowering plants and ferns (only eight of the latter) have been recorded. Of course, not all of these are present all of the time; some disappeared

more than a century ago, some are introduced when damaged areas are resown and persist only for a year, and some have arrived recently and thrive.

The earliest record we have from the Common is of gorse. In 1688 a Tooting householder



took more than the 100 bundles of gorse which he was permitted to remove from the Common, and was punished by being banned from collecting gorse for three years. Of course in those days the Common was much more extensive than it is today and presumably included the area now known as Furzedown. Gorse continues to grow in the Common, though the rarer dwarf gorse, of which there is a

herbarium specimen collected in 1876, became extinct in the 1920s.

Although written records are interesting, herbarium specimens – labelled pressed plants mounted on sheets of paper – are also important, as they can

be examined and their identity confirmed. The oldest known specimen from the Common is one of water violet, collected by Muriel Saunders in 1848, and now in Aberystwyth University herbarium. It seems that this species was present throughout most of the nineteenth century, but it has long since disappeared.

However, the majority of herbarium specimens are of brambles. These plants usually produce seeds without pollination taking place, thus each seedling is an exact replica of its mother, leading to the production of a large number of 'microspecies'. Between c.1880 and c.1920 many bramble specimens were collected on the Common, and these are now in the herbaria of the Natural History Museum and the South London Botanical Institute, both of which collections were extensively revised by D E Allen, an authority

on the group. In all 24 microspecies have been recorded, but no recent collections have been made, so we don't know how many persist; I suspect very few. Dandelions also reproduce in the same way, but those on the Common have never been critically examined; it's always something I mean to do next year ...

Although each species has its own story we often don't know these stories. Particularly intriguing is annual buttonweed, noticed on the pavement of Emmanuel Road at the north end of the Common in 2020 and persisting until 2025, though recent pavement works may have extinguished it. How did this tiny plant, native to New Zealand, arrive there, and how does it manage to survive?

We have native plants which have persisted since the Common's earliest days, and trees and other plants which have been deliberately planted. These include honey locust trees, one of which was planted by the London County Council in 1893, and of which a local botanist in the 1930s complained, it's 'a native of the Eastern United States, which seems to me, to have no claim or right of any sort on an English common'. However, in 2003 honey locust was considered to be one of three noteworthy tree species on the Common (the other two being a European white elm which continues to thrive, and



Bramble, *Rubus rhombifolius*, collected by C.E. Britton, July 1904; in the herbarium of the South London Botanical Institute

three dotted hawthorns which appear to be moribund). At the east side of the Lake are plants which remain from when this was planted with ornamentals: rose-of-sharon, winter honeysuckle, and, until recently, pampas grass.

Other plants have escaped from, or have been thrown out from (people with gardens surrounding the Common seem to think it's acceptable to dump garden waste over their fences). The Chilean potato vine, growing in a patch of brambles at the back of Hillbury Road, probably arrived from seeds carried by birds from a nearby garden. First recorded in 2015, the potato vine was thought to be lost when the area was

cleared during the 2019-20 winter, but it reappeared in 2021, only to disappear again when the area was again cleared; we wait to see if it will reappear.

Plants introduced by people feeding birds tend to only persist until the following autumn, often without producing flowers, such plants include sunflower, barley, and, very rarely, cannabis. When areas are resown, as several were following excessive trampling during the covid pandemic, a variety of 'new' species, such as corncockle and corn chamomile can appear, but these rarely persist.

Sometimes people sow seeds or plant plants in an attempt (in their minds) to beautify the area, thus pot

marigolds were planted at the base of small-leaved limes, planted where the Chestnut Avenue formerly stood.

In addition to the flowering plants and ferns, we have an extensive list of microscopic algae recorded from the Lake by Hilary Belcher and Erica Swale in June 2004; records of nine bryophytes (mosses and liverworts), and approximately 140 fungi. Holger Thüs, a former curator of lichens at the Natural History Museum, lived in Tooting and compiled a list of c.70 species of lichen. ■

A complex list of the plants recorded on the Common is available from roy@plant-lore.com

The People of Wardley Street

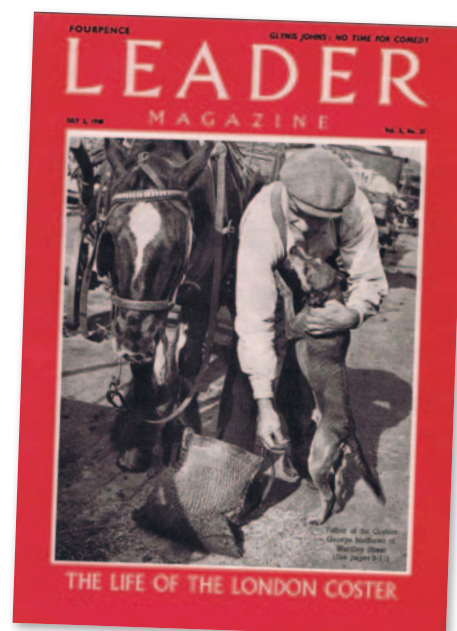
Geoff Simmons

The stretch of Wandle Valley near where I live has a cluster of Victorian cemeteries with enough history to keep any graveyard sleuth fully occupied for several lifetimes. They each have a different charm, but running up the hill towards Wandsworth Prison and the Common, between the railway line and Magdalen Road, Wandsworth Cemetery seems upon first impression, more regimented and less interesting than the others. Little pockets of colour do however spectacularly illuminate it. Whether it's the flowers, brightly-coloured ribbons and bows on elaborate wreaths or grave-side ornamentation symbolic of horses and life on the road, they catch the attention and make you want to stop and say hello. One very striking collection of graves are those of the Hilden family, close to the entrance near Beatrix Potter School. They speak of much-loved family members and cherished memories of lives lived well. Often accompanied by photos of the deceased, the graves are well-tended and frequently

populated with fresh flowers. In many cases there is a seat or somewhere to rest. The headstones and surrounds will most likely bear the symbol of a horse or caravan, or some other motif indicating the heritage of the people who are buried here. Many of them are what I have come to know as *'The People of Wardley Street'*.

In the midst of so much gentrification, development and change it is barely believable that this history endures today, through two small permanent Traveller sites in secluded pockets along the River Wandle. They are so discreet that many local residents may not even know of their existence. A number of homes around the area display horseshoes, a wheel or some kind of garden ornament alluding to this history. It's not unusual to see a horse and trap go past but the days of a rag and bone man walking his horse and cart up and down the roads off Garratt Lane have passed. It was a common enough occurrence twenty years ago and that lingering memory, the presence of the sites and the graves, made me want to seek out why there is such a strong Romany and Traveller tradition in this part of Wandsworth.

There are a few bits and pieces in the local archives but very little in the local history books. What I found however was a lively online presence in 'Romany Roots' forums and chat groups, with so many of the memories centred around one particular road, Wardley Street. It's still there, much-changed, nestling between two pubs, the Jolly Gardeners and the Grosvenor Arms. Largely



demolished in the late fifties, only three of the original houses remain. A fourth house has been converted from former stables. Unlike almost all urban terraced streets from this period, these houses have unique back-access to the yards. They were purpose-built for a community that worked with horses. The Summerstown182 First World War centenary project researched a couple of soldiers with connections to Wardley Street and I started featuring it on my guided walks. So many people seemed to have had a relative there and spoke proudly of them and the community they came from. When we started commemorating 'forgotten' history in this area through putting up plaques, 'The People of Wardley Street' seemed an obvious contender.

Things really came to life with the discovery of a lively four-page article in a 1948 magazine called *The Leader*. On the cover was a photo of George Matthews, 'Father of the Costers' tending his horse. There were loads of photos and quotes from





residents, some of the names I was already familiar with from the graves in the Cemetery. Here was confirmation that Wardley Street was something special. It was a refreshingly positive and optimistic article about the lives and work of these 'costermongers'. The usual mentions of 'horses being kept in houses' or policemen only visiting the street in pairs were noticeably absent. It focused on the great pride of the people, their hard work, long hours and a world of flower-selling, horses, family and community. It hinted that things might soon change and within ten years the houses began to be demolished. A self-sufficient world of mobile shopkeepers and recyclers, people who moved with the seasons, providing flowers and fruit and veg in the summer, logs for the fire in winter, was all but gone. We also found out that a BBC Radio Programme called 'The People of Wardley Street' was made the same year. We've hunted high and low to find this priceless recording which many families remember but have so far had no success in locating it.

Through connecting with the 'London Gypsies and Travellers' organisation we met extraordinary people like anthropologist Anna Hoare. We held an event at the Anchor Mission Church on Garratt Lane

just before Covid descended upon us in 2020. On a dreary winter afternoon, over 100 people piled into the tiny Church to listen to a talk and presentation. So many of them recognised their ancestors or family members in the Leader article. One of them, Noah Hilden, photographed as a little boy taking the reins on a horse and cart in 1948 was present. I've lost count of how many other people have discovered

ensuing well-attended Walks raised donations. The interest of the wider public clearly confirmed that local people were keen to see this heritage acknowledged and more widely known.

Lockdown put things on hold for a while but in October 2022 we organised a plaque unveiling event. The greatest honour was that we had 'Romany Royalty' there on the day to participate in the ceremony – the Hilden family, including Noah and Betsy Cooper, one of the last residents, whose photo we used in all our publicity. Betsy's recollections have invaluable been recorded by her daughter Dee.

Wardley Street is a survivor, a remnant of another age and a different way of life. The plaque will ensure this history is known by many more people, it acknowledges its value to wider society and will, we would hope, add to understanding. It was a very great honour to



ancestors featured in that magazine; Penfold, Hilden, Gumble, Matthews, Anderson, Botton, Bassett, Hughes...

At the event, we first raised the prospect of a historic plaque celebrating 'The People of Wardley Street'. The response was wildly enthusiastic and

commemorate it in this way and pay tribute to all the people who have passed through it or made it their permanent home.

A longer version of this article can be read here:
<https://summerstown182.wordpress.com/2022/04/02/the-people-of-wardley-street/>

Nothing appears to have changed in the Marondera Club since I left thirty years ago. The Saturday evening ritual, when all the local farmers and their families gather together, must date back far earlier than that. For some, it's a lifeline; their only chance all week to talk to a fellow white. At the club the men, some in ties and long trousers, stand together beside the bar talking crops and weather. The women sit knitting. Their children, supervised by nannies in white doeks, run wild.

There's a man standing alone as if he's been deliberately put into Coventry. I go over to the bar and order a drink. He tells me his name is Leo, that his wife is dead and he never sees his daughter who is living in Bulawayo. He strikes me as the loneliest person I have ever met.

In the olden days the family was the *crème de la crème* of Rhodesian society. It was an honour to be asked to their parties. As the brother of a baron, Leo is aristocracy. 'I'm the black sheep' he would joke. 'I'm a remittance man. Younger brother sent abroad. They actually pay me; give me an allowance to keep me out of the way. Ha ha.'

Then, out of the blue, his brother dies. Leo doesn't go back to England to claim his title but chooses to stay in Zimbabwe.

Sir Leo asks me if I'll have a drink. To my relief he doesn't want to talk about the past or the iniquities of the government. Instead, he tells me proudly that he's a new father. 'A son. Not bad at seventy-two eh?'

'Congratulations. What's his name?'

'Willoughby. It's a family name.'

I don't ask Leo what exactly had happened to Lady Foster but I'm assuming it's the drink that did for her. She must have got through all Leo's spare cash because my friend tells me that he's broke and living like a native.

'Why not come to my house for a sherry tomorrow?'

Curious to know what's going on, my friend offers to lend me her car. 'I can't be seen to associate with him' she says. 'You'll see why. But you're an outsider. You can.'

Leo's house turns out to be a small bungalow looking like an English country cottage. Painted white, it stands alone; an outcast, in the middle of the dry African veldt. At one end of the veranda a woman sits by a knitting machine, at the other a tall handsome man sweeps the veranda. It feels as if the house belongs to them. Leo is not around so I sit down to wait.

Mary or the house he's after ha ha.' Leo doesn't hide his mortification.

'She won't sleep with me anymore' he says while showing me round. The sheets in the bedroom look grubby.

I think of Willoughby being brought up in an African township. This is where he will go to school and make his friends, where he will feel he belongs.

'I've not got much money' Leo says as

The Remittance Man

Veronica Cecil

Eventually I see Leo in the distance. Despite his age, he strides through the field of young mealies. When he arrives, he apologises, with the courtesy of an English gentleman, and takes me into the living room. It's a mixture of English furniture and pieces knocked together locally. Nothing of any worth except for four splendid Chippendale chairs.

After the servant has brought in the tea, I ask him where his son is. 'Tell Mary we have a visitor' he says. 'My friend wants to meet Willoughby.'

Halfway through the tea his 'wife' comes in. She has a baby tied to her back. Its skin colour has been diluted and its hair is a frizzy orange rather than black. 'This is Willoughby' he announces. The child looks at me with terror and begins to cry.

'Willie, Willie' Leo says indulgently. 'What's the matter with you. That's no way to treat a visitor.'

But there's no pacifying Willoughby and when I hold out my arms to take him, he clings to his mother. She hands him over. He has no nappy and he shits down my dress. There's consternation and Mary takes him away.

'I've bought her a house in the township, which is what she asked for.' Leo tells me. 'This morning a fellow came to see me and asked if he could marry her after I'd died. Not sure if it's

if he's reading my mind. 'But I'm leaving Willoughby the television.'

I don't ask about the Chippendale chairs. I envisage them being chopped up, after his death, and used as firewood.

Mary comes to ask me if I'll give a friend of hers a lift back to town. Her room is in the old servants' quarters and is tiny. Advertisements from glossy magazines are stuck on the walls. Mary finishes suckling her baby.

Outside the tall man is doing a dance. It's a raw, sexual, almost indecently erotic dance. We go round to the front of the house to say goodbye to Leo. I'm aware of the skin under his bloodshot eyes hanging in folds; his sparse hair; his skinny arms and legs. He's an old man and he's being taken for a ride.

'Please. Please come again soon.' His voice begins to falter.

What will happen to him? What will the English relatives make of Willoughby when he inherits the title? Blood is blood and they're sure to come looking for him. Will he be taken back to England, sent to a boys' prep school and be expected to live the life of a country gentleman? Everyone will be aware of his skin-colour but won't say anything.

'I couldn't go back home now' Leo says. 'England isn't what it was.'

There is a wail from Willoughby. ■

Rambling on my Mind

I refer not to those wonderful 10-mile walks along muddy brambled South Down trails but those random trains of thought that pop into one's head as we ripen? So here are some Rambling thoughts that raised my interest.

Local Music Venues

Our members include many music lovers and indeed active past or present aficionados of all kinds of Classical Music including Opera, Chamber, Choral and Baroque. Indeed, the Society's soirées have been well attended across five decades. But within the borough boundaries and just across them are some of the country's foremost venues for a wide selection of music genres. They are summarized below but check their websites for more info and you'll find most have You Tube presence. I feel Wandsworth's music represents something of a community asset and should be cherished and encouraged even if some of it is beyond our borders.

Half Moon Putney: Famed rock & blues venue frequented by bands from UK & US inc: Rolling Stones, John Mayall, Spencer Davis, John Martyn, Bo Diddley, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGee, Small Faces, Ralph McTell, Yardbirds (Clapton/Page/Beck) and more recently the top Texan blues guitarist Josh Smith and Greg Koch and many tribute bands as Fleetwood Mac and Led Zeppelin tribute bands.

Bull's Head Barnes: equally celebrated as one of our greatest jazz venues having lapsed under new ownership recently is now offering a full programme of jazz focussed bands including Alan Price, Katriona Taylor, Art Themen and leading soul & funk bands plus a Crusaders tribute band amongst many others.

606 Club: Across the river in front of Lots Road Power Station. This long-established basement music club is open to non-members for modestly higher prices than members. It features Jazz & Blues overlapping with the Bull's Head but perhaps more varied in origin,

Quecumbar is sadly no longer. It was home to legendary Gypsy Jazz. So, Django Reinhardt, Hot Club of Paris style jazz has had to look for a new UK home. Its replacement should be encouraged in Wandsworth.

Local Church Choirs: I was astonished at how many members over the years belonged to choirs some large and well known. I remember a concert long ago, I believe in St Luke's Church Battersea when the choir outnumbered the audience creating a unique atmosphere.

Music Schools: In spite of the closure of ALRA (Academy of Live & Recorded Arts) we still boast The Opera School and the Royal Academy of Dance Ballet School – both survive, the latter in new premises. There's also Studio B for adult students of Ballet. Schools sometimes do public performances – check their websites or You Tube.

Hampton Hub & Sunbury Cricket Club (30mins drive): Although a half-hour's drive west along the Thames, Hampton Hub offers live music every night in all sorts of rather more modern genres. If you want to rock'n'roll with folks not unlike us, look out for the '60s All Stars who appear monthly for a two-hour set of good rocking hits. They're music pros who played with bands like the Kinks and Nashville Teens etc, liked by locals and one or two folks like us from further afield.



The Rollin Stoned at the Hampton Hub. Sounded like the real thing – almost

Sunbury Cricket Club is a mile further down the road and its host, an ex-EMI music pro hosts a monthly gig of similar bands who all enjoy reliving their heyday and entertaining an appreciative but mature audience. They also offer a great value meal from their kitchen whereas the Hub is limited to a good bar and samosas. It surprised me that it was worth the journey listening to Jerry Lee Lewis, Beatles, Stones, Chuck Berry et al played by grey haired pros who enjoy playing together. So sure, I'll get on the floor for a few numbers, but dancing is optional.

20's Plenty?

Having driven for half a century aware that in urban areas the speed limit was invariably 30mph, one did not have to think too hard to comply and variations were few. But today in London you have to be sharp eyed and extra cautious to spot the numerous 20mph limits imposed seemingly at random on every type of road that



Dino Baptiste & friends at The Bulls Head. Honky Tonk like you've never heard it before

bring councils £49m pa. Their logic is not often obvious and the signage inconsistent or often poorly sited. Why do I care? Yes, you guessed, I have transgressed by doing jogging pace over 20mph on camera. No one's fault but mine and as TfL research indicates it saves lives and injuries, while emitting less noxious gases – and that is reason enough for compliance – I and our Society Transport Group I'm sure would agree.

But interestingly it is very difficult to verify as TfL's data is presented in a way that makes extrapolation difficult to see and maybe warrants our Transport Group's attention if for no other reason than the extra share of ones attention to other road users is diminished if you need to check every block to see if the limit has changed, or remember to turn on the speed sign reader now on many dashboards. That there was a downward trend for some years prior (excluding Covid's impact) perhaps requires more detailed analysis and knowing why a 20mph trial in Manchester was abandoned as results were unclear.

For many Active but Elderly, (not to be confused with A&E) driving remains the only viable option for reaching key destinations apart from kamikazeing around on an electric scooter – tempting but probably terminal, although we must nevertheless still do our 7000 steps a day to reach our cohorts average LX (life expectancy).

Big Corporations are watching you

Many recently made 'common' cars are fitted with speed limiters and speed sign-reading cameras – now indispensable in London – if you remember to turn them on! But you may not be aware of the extent your

car also records driver behaviour, location, speed, braking etc. Why? For commercial, legal, marketing and development purposes. I doubt that many who work on the retail side would be able to explain exactly what they scrape from your cars sensors and whether they identify the owner/driver or comply with privacy laws – when it is sold on, but it must be in the tens of thousands.

By a truly amazing coincidence I have just received an email from the Showroom that sold me my car to say they have suffered a data breach, and my car info and contact details are up for grabs. That my number plate was recently cloned onto an almost identical car meant I had to

fend off about a dozen penalties of various kinds, its knowing (or unknowing) driver accrued – a sad symptom of our times.

Swimming the Channels

Another telling sign that most friends and family are now considerably younger than many of us is the issue of communication. Why? Surely there are more accessible channels of personal coms than ever – but that is the problem. Once upon a time you could pick up a purpose built dedicate thing called a phone and amazingly talk to anyone who also had one. If you were engaged people tried to call later. Today I continue to cling to the simplicity of 'if you want to say something to somebody, you picked up your phone'. Now I'm regularly berated for not returning messages. But by the time you've checked telephone messages / text messages / emails / WhatsApp / Facebook / TikTok / Instagram / X Twitter / Snap Chat etc, etc. that's a lot of channels, and new ones frequently appear. How long will it take to check your social media message notification – every ping? Or do you do an hourly sweep?

Then there is the choice of direct one to one contact or broadcasting to your various circulation lists – family, younger family, seniors etc. Of course, one can see the convenience of keeping all contacts informed. But if it means you come over all faint if you are not clutching your mobile then you know digital communications will change the very nature of mankind. Problem is it is both for the better and for the worse.

Have I rambled over the limit? Probably, so Happy Christmas. ■

Bruce St.Julian-Bown

The Railways of Wandsworth

This article is a short summary of a presentation made to the Wandsworth Society in June 2025.

Clapham Junction Station has a rich history, evolving from early railway developments into a major transport hub. The London and South Western Railway opened its line from Nine Elms to Woking in 1838. Clapham Junction station itself opened on March 2, 1863, as a joint venture between multiple railway companies. Meanwhile railways from Victoria to Clapham Junction and suburban destinations opened progressively from the 1850s, running through to Croydon in 1862 and then to Brighton, and serving the newly opened Clapham Junction station by 1878. The station is actually not located in Clapham but in Battersea, Wandsworth.

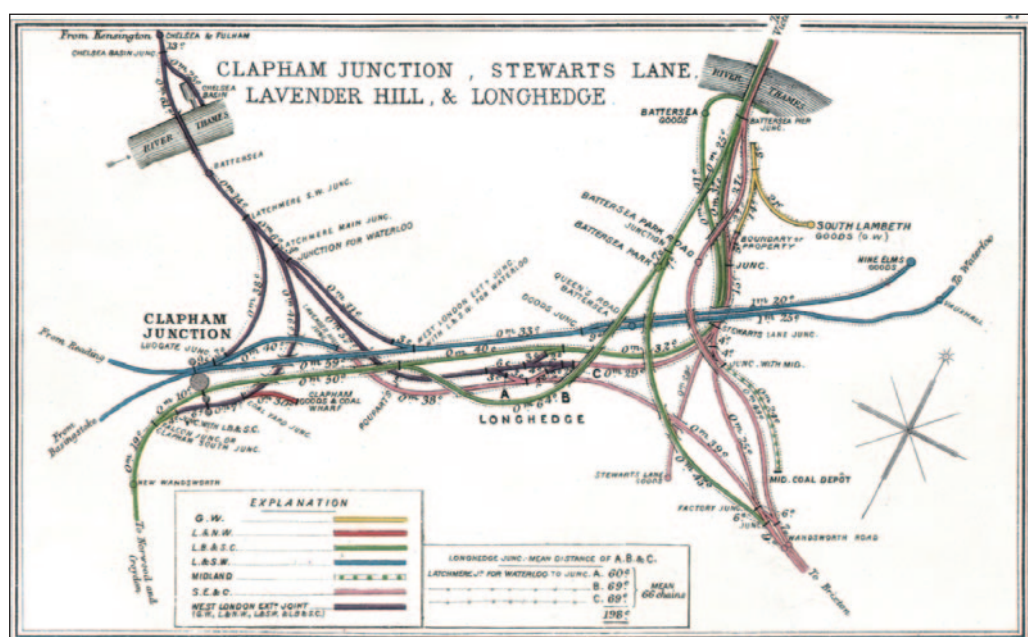
From Clapham Junction a passenger can reach key destinations in London including termini at Victoria and Waterloo, Stratford, and Highbury and Islington, and many intermediate destinations.

Heading south and west, trains will take you to Exeter and Southampton, Brighton and other parts of the South Coast as well as more local places such as Wimbledon and Croydon.

There are several other stations in the London Borough of Wandsworth, forming a vital part of the local transport network. The current stations are Balham, Battersea Park, Clapham Junction itself, Earlsfield, Putney,

Queenstown Road, Wandsworth Common, and Wandsworth Road. I visited each of these for the Wandsworth Society meeting and described some of their more interesting features although space does not permit me to repeat those details. Clapham Junction is claimed to be the busiest station in Europe by train frequency, with between 100 and 180 trains per hour. There are also several London Underground stations which are not described in this article.

fields, celebrated as being the first place in which asparagus was raised in England, and it still supplies vast quantities of vegetables for the London market. The railroad passes for a considerable distance through these market gardens. The rising ground on the left is in the parish of Clapham and to the right about three quarters of a mile distant, Chelsea hospital is distinctly seen. Clapham Church situated on the common is now broadside upon our left. The houses on



Railway Clearing House Map of Clapham Junction Area (Source – internet)

Clapham Junction is a complex interchange station with multiple lines and services. Opened in 1863, it serves as a major interchange for the South West Main Line and Brighton Main Line. The station is served by numerous routes, including the South Western Railway, Southern, and the Mildmay and Windrush lines of the London Overground. In Freeling's Guide to the London & Southampton Railway it was said 'We enter upon the Battersea

the same side upon the acclivity are in the Wandsworth Road, many of them are handsome villas, the residences of opulent London traders. The ground below is under low watermark and is consequently not infrequently invaded by floods.'

The West London Line has a significant history, evolving from freight services to modern passenger transport. It originally reached Kensington Addison Road in 1844 and



The view from Wandsworth Road station (Michael Woods)

connected to Clapham Junction in 1863. There were many different services on the line including electric LMS trains which ceased in 1940 when the third and fourth rails were lifted as part of the war effort, after bomb damage. The line has seen various services, including the unadvertised 'Kenny Belle' shuttle and current services. Since being upgraded and re-electrified for Eurostar, it now has a frequent electric train service as part of the London Overground Mildmay line to Stratford in East London. It is also an important freight artery with capacity for containers and aggregate traffic much of which is routed via the railway yards in Acton and Wembley.

The tragic Clapham Junction rail accident highlighted significant safety issues within the railway system. On December 12, 1988, a double collision resulted in 33 fatalities and 484 injuries. The accident was caused by a malfunctioning signal due to outdated wiring, leading to major safety reforms in the industry. One of the root causes was worker fatigue, and the background to this was outlined by my colleague Greg Morse, who, like me, works for the Rail Safety and Standards Board, in his book *The Clapham Rail Accident*, published in 2023. I had a hand at describing the institutional and safety changes put in hand by British Rail's Safety Panel in the years following which led to a new

approach on how to value – and justify – investment in safety improvements.

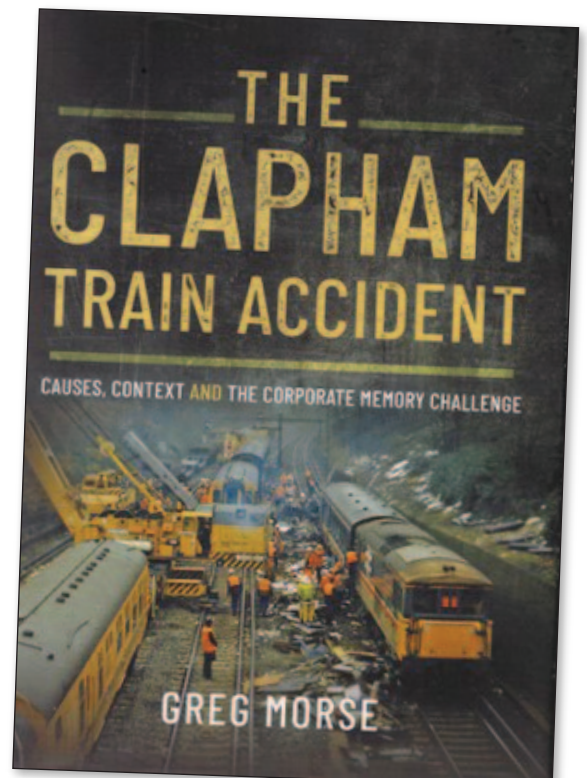
I was also heavily involved in the construction of a depot for Eurostar at the quaintly named North Pole International which can still be accessed via Clapham Junction and the West London line, although it is now used for trains on the Great Western services from Paddington. This required the upgrading and electrification of the link from Waterloo to the West London line (from West London Junction to the Latchmere No 2 Junction) and the upgrading of the Chelsea Harbour (Battersea) Bridge which now allow services to shuttle between Clapham Junction and beyond to Stratford. Later on I helped design the new station just over the Thames at Imperial Wharf. Another link to further Overground services was implemented in 2012 when the line from Clapham Junction to Highbury and Islington via Hackney, now called the Windrush Line, replaced the South London Line from Victoria to Clapham.

Proposals for the redevelopment and upgrading of Clapham Junction get into the news quite frequently but it is such a complex location

and built on two curves to the west with very complicated grade separated junctions on the eastern side that it will continue to be a challenge, even if unlimited funding became available. There have also been a number of suggestions that the new London Underground branch of the Northern Line which reached Battersea Power Station station in 2021, should be extended to Clapham Junction but again cost would be a considerable issue and there is a fear that bringing even more numbers of people to interchange at Clapham Junction could create extreme overcrowding and become a potential safety issue. However I don't think we've heard the last of either of these ideas.

There are many books and atlases which describe the history and development of the railways in this area. As well as Greg Morse's book I would also recommend *Rail Centres: Clapham Junction* (1991) by J N Faulkner and the series of London railway atlases (2018 etc) beautifully created by Joe Brown who has worked for many years on the London Underground. ■

Michael Woods





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Wandsworth Prison

Wandsworth Prison is a place of hardship that is nastier than most people expect, especially anyone who has laughed at Ronnie Barker in *Porridge*.

It is always worth spending a minute thinking about what you would feel like, your own clothes and watch packed away, wearing an ill-fitting grey track suit for the first time, and shown into a cell to share with someone you had never met before, and who might be charged with the sort of crime you most dislike, and who might not be entirely sane.

You will be there some days for 22 hours, sometimes you may be let out for an hour or two, sometimes longer. There will not be much certainty when the doors will be opened. There will be no access to a library, you will have to wait for a PIN number to be given to you in order to make calls home – and some people wait 3 or 4 days, some longer than a week, for their PIN.

You will eat all meals with your new 'spouse' in the cell and will be horribly aware of one another's eating habits. You will have to decide between you who sleeps on the bottom bunk and who has the top bunk (there is no ladder). One of you will probably have charge of the television programmes and will decide what time the lights go on and off at night, and you will quickly learn the workings of the other man's bowels. (The toilet is in the cell beside the bed and there is often no privacy curtain.) There is no way to describe how shocked and frightened and anxious a Newby can be in prison, and even men who have done time before can find settling in almost impossible.

Now I have frightened you witless...

What is the latest news from a reliable source about simple conditions?

The report from the Independent Monitoring Board issued in October 25 describes a place where severe shortages of staff meant that prisoners were frequently denied any time out of their cells, or enough time to speak to an officer and get a kit change. Long 'bang ups' impacted the time spent on exercise, the ability to have showers, access the

system which allows prisoners to ask for help, request education and on occasion get access to medical care. Food was often served at the cell door rather than even allowing men to walk down the wings to the servery – so not even the shortest time to see and converse with anyone beyond their cellmate.

During the day, the prison was often run by fewer than 85 officers, and at night there is sometimes only one support officer per wing with a limited central team for extra help, if and when needed. Inquests have shown that this resulted in tragedy for some prisoners and long-term regrets and misery for officers inadequately prepared and supported. Suicide is not uncommon.

Broken windows and the failing buildings meant that conditions were dangerously cold in winter and unacceptably hot in the summer. The IMB reported that in January 2025 the boilers broke down and there were prolonged periods without heating and temperatures of 10 degrees centigrade on the landings.

Following the formation of the Wandsworth Prison Improvement Campaign and a series of articles in the newspapers and Channel 4 news, the prison closed a wing for refurbishment and reduced the number of men it held – down from about 1600 to about 1450. But that wing is still not opened and whilst some showers have been refurbished, the IMB still report rubbish and rat droppings and vermin in showers, thick mould on the ceilings and broken shower doors.

For me, access to books is always an issue. There was one working library in the year, and the average monthly attendance was 137 men – approximately 5 men a day – and these were mostly men who came from the adjoining workshops and classrooms – there were simply not the officers to get regular trips to the library. As a result, men locked in cells for long hours cannot pass the time reading, and they are thrown back on endless daytime television.

So, what is the good news? Is it all doom and gloom? No, the Governor team are trying to improve conditions as are many officers.

There is a project to support men at release. The aim is to give men leaving the prison – especially those leaving found innocent, or charges dropped, the clothes, bags and necessities to go out dressed warmly with things they need.

Wandsworth Prison Welfare Trust – Christmas Appeal

The Wandsworth Prison Welfare Trust is running a Christmas appeal to give the release unit all new underwear, pants, vests, socks, and track suit bottoms they need.

Why not help us dress a man in basic comfort as he attempts life outside often homeless?

Just imagine that you are buying for someone you know and like – just new underwear and a soft jogging bottom. Size and colour don't matter but remember that most men are very conservative and like plain (but not black joggers because that makes difficulties for the prison).

Thank you for reading such a gloomy piece and for any help you can give. ■

Liz Bridge (www.wpwt.org.uk)

A Gownless Evening Strap

My big sister is a retired nun. I say “retired” because she was asked to “take early retirement”, at the age of 85 at that. I may as well tell you that she'd sneaked a Seeberg jukebox into her cell and had built up an extremely fine collection of the music of her late 1950s youth, notably rock 'n' roll and doo wop. Of necessity she played the music as loud as she dared and the acoustics ensured a bit of echo like many of the 45s of that period.

Strict personal hygiene has been instilled into all members of our family and we all had to recite the basic principles at bedtime.

They went like this:

*Wash down as far as possible
Wash up as far as possible
Then wash possible*

We all have a possible don't we? Pass the soap.

One of my five brothers has recently started to keep a goat called Lily (as she's white) and, although her quarters are officially the rather narrow balcony of his thirty-ninth floor flat in Brisbane, in the event of increasingly frequent requests from Lily to be allowed at least enough space to turn round, she has taken to resting under her master's bed. When the lift is working and a visitor arrives the faint aroma as the door is opened grows appreciably as the guest moves nervously into the interior. Some have been known to ask about the smell and my brother simply replies “She'll get used to it”.

We have a great uncle – he married into my mother's side

– who enjoys being called Ghost Hurtle, supposedly his stage name though he's never acted in his life, but he was a notorious public speaker. At this point readers of a sensitive nature may wish to skip the rest of this paragraph because he claimed to have invented the verb to zuffle. What does it mean, you wonder? And he never failed to explain that it meant to wipe your old man on the curtains after sex in a posh lady's house. If you're none the wiser you probably are the sensitive sort.

His other favourite remark was “Who's been sleeping in my porridge?”

If you're familiar with this accusation you probably know Great Uncle Ghost and he may even know you.

Jonathan Joe Jeeps

When Wandsworth Said Farewell to its Trams

Vic Meredith

As the son of a London Transport bus conductor here is my account of my father's 'fifteen minutes of fame' in 1950. Londoners were always ambivalent about their trams. There were times when those clattering, lumbering monsters could produce a state of quiet resentment that sometimes bordered on outright anger, especially when the tram tracks were constructed in a narrow street, and yet when the trams were finally withdrawn in July 1952, great crowds lined the route to say their fond good-byes and cheer the last one on its way. Wandsworth, though, didn't have to wait that long. The big changeover had already been completed two years earlier in the autumn of 1950, when my father, David Meredith, worked as the conductor on the final tram to make the trip from central London to the depot at Jew's Row, just north of Wandsworth Town station.

Plans to phase out London's trams had been on the cards for quite a time. Trolley buses had replaced them on a number of routes in the Wandsworth and Battersea area as far back as September 1937, and there is little doubt that the process would have been completed right across the city by 1940 if the Second World War had not made it essential to keep every available vehicle on the roads. But the end was inevitable, and in

September 1950 London Transport recommenced its project to phase out the last of its trams. This was to be undertaken in nine stages, the one in which my father was involved being the first of them. The publicity build-up was considerable, enhanced by maudlin accounts of what would happen to the vehicles when they were eventually taken out of service. A piece of wasteland in Charlton, south-east London, and widely referred to as 'the graveyard', had been set aside for the purpose, and there the old trams were to be stripped of their motors, and then burnt on vast bonfires. This macabre image touched a nerve with the general

public. In an editorial on 27 September 1950, *The Times*, adopting its characteristic high tone, praised as 'signs of a new spirit' the burgeoning construction activities at the Festival of Britain site on the South Bank, and applauded the fact that '[London's] trams – those clanging symbols of the Victorian age – are at long last on the way out'. Less than a week later, however, the paper was talking of Londoners mourning their passing, and of people 'who have been fascinated by trams' showing signs of real regret. Indeed, the one that my father travelled on for the final trip had chalked on its rear panel, 'This tram not for burning', a rather droll



A press photo showing the first crews to handle the changeover from trams to buses in the autumn of 1950. Conductor/instructor David Meredith stands on the left, while tram driver Henry Lancaster stands shaking hands in the centre of the picture. (Evening News)

echo, presumably, of the title of Christopher Fry's hit play of 1948, *The Lady's Not for Burning*.

The changeover date was set for the night of 30 September / 1 October 1950. Admittedly a number of other routes in the Wandsworth area were also involved at the same time, but the most evocative surviving accounts relate to the trip my father worked – the last tram on service 31. At twenty-three minutes past midnight, and with 59-year-old Henry Lancaster at the controls, the great red tramcar left Bloomsbury and headed along the Embankment towards Wandsworth and its final destination in Jew's Row. On board that night was a reporter from the *News of the World*, presumably a man, and maybe we should let him take up the story.

No bells tolled for us; no cheering crowd gave us a great exit. For we were just the late-night workers – the printers, the reporters, the girls in the late-night cafés – the strange flotsam and jetsam of late-night endeavour that choose to work while others play.... [The tram] rattled; it lurched; it shook unmercifully in the dark drizzle – but it got us there. And what greater gift after all can you give to the night worker of London who expects so little?

The reporter spoke to my father, who had worked 'on trams' since 1917 and was aged 47 at the time, and he asked him for his view on the changeover. His reply was stoical. 'Sure I'm going on buses,' he said. 'We're all going on buses. I've no real feelings one way or the other.' To which the reporter added:



Jew's Row Bus Garage, Wandsworth, in June 2008. (Vic Meredith)

Maybe that's the view of most of us. But here and there you may find a real mourner – a 'dyed in the drizzle' Londoner who has taken the 'last night tram' for two decades and will feel the wrench when offered a bus.

And sure enough, he did find 'a real mourner' on the tram, a compositor. Perhaps he was one of his colleagues, because he came up with a neat and evocative line for him to quote: 'Maybe we'll miss these rattling ****s when they've gone. We've got so used to cursing them.'

Tram 31 was replaced by bus route 170 and, according to the press coverage, those final tram crews transferred over to buses that same afternoon. The Jew's Row depot, originally a set of horse-car sheds built in the 1880s by the South London Tramways Co., also made the transition. It is still in existence, having been granted Grade II-listed status on account of its special historic value, and it still functions as a bus garage. It is no longer surrounded by terraced housing, though; instead, it now

shares the neighbourhood with a large Mercedes-Benz dealership and an 'open 24 hours' outlet for McDonald's hamburgers. Yet once it provided stabling for 1200 horses, once it had the capacity to shelter 103 tramcars, and once it greeted my father early on a wet Sunday morning at the end of his 'fifteen minutes of fame'.

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