

# NEWSLETTER

Spring issue, April 2008

No.189, Quarterly, distributed free to members

Registered with the Civic Trust and the London Forum of Amenity Societies; Registered Charity No.1058103

Website: [www.brixtonsociety.org.uk](http://www.brixtonsociety.org.uk)



*An artist's impression of Future Brixton from over a century ago – this design was runner-up to the present building in the competition for the new Lambeth Town Hall. (picture from the competition designs in Lambeth Archives)*

## **Sunday 13 April – Brixton Town Centre Walk**

A guided walk to follow up the recent Future Brixton consultations, led by Alan Piper. Meet at 2-30 pm outside the Tate Library, Brixton Oval, SW2. *More walks dates inside...*

## **Annual General Meeting Thursday 12 June, 7 pm**

at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road, SW2

We aim to bring you up to date with local issues and the community-led projects we have supported. This time, we are also seeking your approval to updating the constitution, to match current charity law and the range of activities that we are increasingly being asked to take part in or even lead.

## **Town Hall Centenary**

**Tuesday 29 April, 2 pm to 6 pm?**

The actual centenary of the Town Hall being officially opened will be marked by an **Exhibition & Reception** in the Assembly Hall in the afternoon. Displays will probably re-appear at the Lambeth Archives Open Day in September.

## **Lambeth Country Show Weekend, 19/20 July**

11 am to 7 pm daily in Brockwell Park. Arrangements are still fuzzy due to a 3-month delay in Council planning, but once more we hope to have a stall – and as usual we are asking members to spare us an hour or two so we can staff it through the weekend. Offers welcome at the AGM. In any case, we hope you will all stop off at our stall and renew your membership for the year ahead!

## Diary of Events, Spring & Summer 2008

### **Brixton Society Meeting dates**

In addition to our special events, the Executive Committee usually meets on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month to plan activities and agree our responses to current developments. Meetings are at 7 pm at the **Vida Walsh Centre**, 2b Saltoun Road SW2, facing Windrush Square.

- **10 April**
- **8 May**
- **12 June (AGM)**
- **10 July**
- **11 September**
- **9 October**
- **13 November.**

### **Links with other groups**

*We also list here events by other local societies that may be of interest. We suggest checking with organisers in case of changes since these details reached us. Some events may be charged for, and most groups will welcome donations.*

### **Sunday 20 April – Spring Walk:**

Meet at **2 pm** by the Clock Tower in the centre of Brockwell Park, for a walk including the history and wildlife of the Park.  
*Friends of Brockwell Park*

### **Wednesday 23 April – Restoring the Southbank Centre**

Ian Blackburn, project director, describes the recent restoration of the Royal Festival Hall, and the continuing work to adapt the 21-acre South Bank arts centre as a whole. 7-30 for 8 pm start at Clapham Manor

Primary School, Belmont Road, SW4.  
*The Clapham Society.*

### **Sunday 27 April – Spring Plant & Garden Fair**

Open 10-30 am to 5 pm, admission £3 (£2.50 for concessions) Museum of Garden History (in the former St.Mary's Church) Lambeth Palace Road, SE1.  
*Museum of Garden History.*

### **Sunday 4 May – West Norwood Cemetery:**

General tour of the cemetery – meet at 2-30 pm inside the main gate on Norwood High Street.  
*Friends of West Norwood Cemetery.*

### **Saturday 10 May – Spring Sale**

At Trinity Hospice, 30 Clapham Common North Side, SW4. Details from Laura Williams, (020) 7787 1054 or [enquiries@trinityhospice.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@trinityhospice.org.uk)

### **Thursday 15 May – Tulse Hill & Brixton Hill**

Illustrated talk by Alan Piper at 8 pm at the Phoenix Centre, Westow Street, SE19.  
*Norwood Society.*

### **Saturday 17 May – Nunhead Cemetery Open Day**

Open 11 am to 5pm, Linden Grove, SE15.  
*Friends of Nunhead Cemetery.*

### **Monday 19 May – A history of the Domestic Kitchen:**

Illustrated talk by Brian Bloice, 8 pm at Woodlawns Streatham Darby & Joan Club, 16

Leigham Court Road, SW16.  
*Streatham Society.*

### **Saturday 24 May – Dulwich Woods**

A small fragment of the old Great North Wood has been turned into a nature reserve by the London Wildlife Trust. Meet at 2-30 pm at gate of Dulwich Upper Wood Reserve near the lower end of Farquhar Road, SE19. (Bus 3 to Dulwich Wood Park, or other routes to Crystal Palace Parade.)  
*Lambethans Society.*

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> June – Brockwell Park Tree Celebration**

Dedication of the year's donated trees – meet at 2 pm by the clock tower in the centre of the park.  
*Friends of Brockwell Park*

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June – River Wandle Walk**

Led by Doreen Heath and Alan Piper, picking up connections with the Ashby windmill at Brixton. Meet 2-30 pm at Mitcham Tramlink stop, London Road, CR4 (buses 118, 201, 280, 355).  
*Lambethans Society.*

### **Summer Walks**

A fuller listing of guided walks in and around Lambeth will be available from local libraries and participating societies by the end of May.

### **E-mail updates**

If we have a current e-mail address from you, we will try to advise you of any extra events or changes. Just send a quick e-mail to [APiperBrix@aol.com](mailto:APiperBrix@aol.com) and we will amend our list.

## FUTURE BRIXTON

*These comments were submitted on behalf of the Brixton Society, based on the Council's questionnaire. In the current "Future Brixton" cycle, the Society held meetings on Town Centre issues on 11<sup>th</sup> October (with a presentation from Cllr. Paul McGlone) and on 14<sup>th</sup> February (which the Council speaker missed!). Our comments have also been informed by contacts with ABC Brixton, Brixton Market Traders Federation, the Create Brixton group and members of the Brixton Area Forum.*

### Priorities for Regeneration:

**Encouraging Visitors:** If this were a priority, then logically efforts should also be made to:

- Safeguard Brixton's character (because without it, there is little reason to visit).
- Reduce crime and increase the sense of safety (again necessary to encourage visitors).
- Provide a more pleasant streetscape.
- Reduce crowding at pinch points (not just on the "High Street").

**Improving the Economy:** This has been the biggest weakness in recent planning and seems to have received scant attention in the latest proposals. First, it is important to understand that there are several strands to local economic activity, and each faces specific challenges.

**Retail including markets:** Greater London has many competing centres, but Brixton has been left way behind in conventional shopping terms, while failing to develop any significant niche position. Brixton's long-term decline has been driven by outdated and neglected infrastructure, combined with active discouragement of car-borne trade.

Most of the Town Centre has suffered intermittent planning blight, so that property values are high in hope of future development potential, but shop tenants are forced to take a short-term approach, limiting the range and quality of goods on offer.

While Tesco, Lidl, Carpetwright, Currys and Halfords all still have a presence in Brixton, as self-contained satellites with their own parking, they make no contribution to the critical mass of the Town Centre itself.

**Leisure and Entertainment:** These uses have partly offset the decline in retail trade, but the Council has still not thought through the implications of the late-night economy. The revival of residential uses within the Town Centre is beginning to limit locations for late-night uses.

**Creative industries:** Public bodies are belatedly recognizing the economic benefits of a wide range of creative activities, including graphic arts, music and media, but there needs to be a critical mass of such businesses in a neighbourhood to encourage symbiotic business relationships. However, opportunities for such firms to develop or even start up locally are rapidly diminishing as more business space gets taken up for housing development, increasing rents for what remains. As a result, the talent and employment potential are going to other boroughs, and Lambeth loses out again.

**Office provision:** Demand remains mainly local and for small-scale suites. Public sector demand has been in long-term decline and office rents have been too low for new office development to be viable.

**Services:** A variety of small businesses cling on locally, including small-scale manufacture, car repairs and warehousing, largely dependent on railway arch premises. Their collective profile is low but they are an important element in Brixton's economic life.

Overall however, the greatest challenge is the displacement of local employment and amenities by housing development. If market forces are left unchecked, Brixton will lose most of its shops, jobs and character in favour of high-density housing. Any Master Plan must address this or fail.

### **Sustainability:**

The brochure pays lip-service to the idea but we doubt if the concepts are really understood. Proposals need to reflect that:

- Existing buildings represent considerable embodied energy and investment of resources.
- Brixton's public transport links are inherently good and would be a major asset if interchange could be improved.
- In the design of public buildings and spaces, running costs and ease of maintenance are more important than first-cost or fashionable materials.
- Green spaces reaching into the Town Centre from north and south are valued assets, which should be conserved and improved.



### **Brixton-wide Projects:**

Most of the proposals listed were too vague to endorse, but a few things stand out as essential for success.

**Management & Maintenance:** This has long been the most obvious weakness of the Town Centre "offer". No amount of shiny new shop-fronts will redeem public spaces that are neglected and scruffy. The Council has hesitated for too long over the future role of its Town Centre Managers – they must be given the resources and authority to tackle problems, instead of being left in isolation.

**Attracting Visitors:** This needs to take a holistic approach, to encourage repeat business. It is not enough just to advertise.

There must be **public toilets** to allow people to stay a little longer.

There must be signposted **parking** facilities, so that shoppers are not limited to what they can carry onto a bus or train.

Promotion also needs to extend to

**attracting new enterprises** to the Town Centre, in order to improve the mix of shops and services. It is a major weakness that nobody is responsible for this.

### **High Street area**

**Mix of Shops:** We all know that the quality and range of shops is limited, and declines sharply away from the central section of Brixton Road between Coldharbour Lane and Ferndale Road. However no firm proposals were shown for tackling this, and we doubt if the Council team really understands the problem.

**New Shops:** We would welcome any retail or service uses that are missing or under-represented at present. We are aware that the strongest demand is from cafes, take-aways and bars, but the retail element in the core area must not be diluted too much.

**Night-time Uses:** Late-night uses are more likely to be acceptable on Brixton Road itself, rather than on side streets where residential uses are more prevalent.

**Music Quarter:** It would be a mistake to confine music-related uses to sites within one block. Creative people do not work that way – a range of different types of premises are needed, and location within or close to the Town Centre should be sufficient for networking purposes.

**Setting-back Shop-fronts:** We see no justification for destroying the existing shopping frontage between Electric Avenue and Coldharbour Lane. This includes some good examples of 1930s development. Current proposals by TfL for modest widening of existing pavements in Brixton Road will be welcome.

### **Brixton Hill**

The vagueness of the proposals casts a blight over the area around the Town Hall and Tesco. We are anxious that existing homes and businesses are safeguarded.

**Roads as Barriers:** Over the past 50 years, most established town centres

have been sub-divided by the volume of traffic on their main roads, so traditional high streets have found their shops split into two halves, rather than functioning as a whole entity in the traditional way. Some centres have coped by traffic diversion or pedestrianisation schemes. Brixton at least gained some more pedestrian crossings in the 1990s, but there is still room for improvement.

**Civic & Cultural Quarter:** We have no objection to more civic and cultural activities around the Town Hall but it would be damaging to the Centre as a whole to limit new cultural uses to sites within this one block.

**Night-time Use:** We would strongly oppose allowing late-night uses below Arlington Lodge on Brixton Hill and below 10-16 Acre Lane, because of the disturbance to flats above.



### **Brixton Station Road**

We see no point in changing the colour or windows of the Recreation Centre, but remodelling to provide a less-intimidating access would be welcome.

### **Future of the Multi-storey Car Park:**

The Council has dithered for 15 years over the future of the Car Park. As a result it suffers from neglect and blights its surroundings, although the parking facilities as such are still effective and useful. The existing structure represents considerable embodied energy, and it should not be removed without considering alternatives. There must be a full assessment of parking demand and capacity before decisions are taken.

**Pedestrianising Brixton Station Road:** Some 30 years ago we

advocated a “horse-shoe” pedestrian route from Brixton Road through Electric Avenue, crossing into Pope’s Road and then left into Brixton Station Road to rejoin Brixton Road. It is also worth including part of Electric Lane (between Electric Avenue and Coldharbour Lane). Anything more extensive would make deliveries more difficult and strangle retail trade.

A general weakness of the present Town Centre layout is that it is not clear which areas are actually pedestrianised. A distinctive surface treatment would be helpful, provided it was amenable to pedestrian use – no more cobbles!.

### **Opening up Archways through the Viaducts:**

Many years ago we suggested opening up the first arch from Brixton Road as an extra pedestrian route, in order to improve pedestrian flow between the north and south sections of the “High Street”. However, opening up other archways runs the risk of splitting the footfall so it is insufficient to support new retail businesses or even to reassure pedestrians of their personal safety. The present archway route below the railway station is neglected and unattractive. Wider consideration of improving access to the railway station would be welcome.

### **Brixton Exchange**

The most distinctive feature of proposals for this block is the creation of another “Central Square” but without clearly defining what it is for, or why anyone should go there. The drawings show a large space, 7 arches deep. We prefer the proposals from Oval House Theatre, which provides a real evening destination and a smaller forecourt which could still accommodate additional stalls to the existing layout. Two to three arches deep should be quite enough.

**Tall Buildings:** Naturally developers are keen to maximize the number of flats on any site, but it is the Council’s responsibility as Planning Authority to set sensible policies. There should be some guidelines on tall buildings for the Town Centre as a whole. Daylight and sunlight implications for

existing buildings must be considered. Tall “point” blocks are less likely to block sunlight than more “barrier blocks”.

#### **Access between Tube and Rail**

**Stations:** The naming of this “development block” implies that someone started to think about Transport interchange issues, but the published proposals fail to follow through or deliver any improvements.



#### **Brixton Markets**

##### **Future of the Indoor Markets:**

The indoor markets are essential to the distinctive character of Brixton and we are implacably opposed to development on these sites. In business terms, the indoor markets complement the street market by providing an opportunity for street traders to move up to lock-up premises more cheaply than taking on a complete shop unit.

##### **Routes through Markets:**

Care needs to be taken in retail layouts that pedestrian footfall is not split or diluted if this is avoidable. A link route was opened between Market Row and Electric Avenue some 10 years ago, but failed to prosper. However within Brixton Village/ Granville Arcade, the Second Avenue could be usefully extended to link into Pope’s Road. This would revive retail activity in this part of the arcade, and provide a less-congested route into the heart of the street market than the present doorway on Pope’s Road.

**Size of Units:** No objection is seen to existing units being combined or reconfigured to offer a greater range of sizes to traders. This may help encourage a wider range of

businesses. However, some small units must remain, to provide opportunities for start-ups and niche businesses.

#### **Somerleyton Road**

We are concerned at this block being headlined “the route to the south-east”. We strenuously object to any attempt to open new routes for through traffic, or to demolish parts of the Guinness Trust or Moorland Estates to gain access to Herne Hill.

**Mix of Uses:** We understand the site of the Adult Training Centre will be used as temporary accommodation pending completion of the new Academy on the Shakespeare Depot site. Longer term, this is the most relevant site for providing any ancillary or overspill functions to support the markets or other Town Centre services.

We are anxious that Carlton Mansions should remain.

Beyond these sites there is still only limited scope for new residential development, given the uses of most existing premises in supporting local services.

#### **Other Comments**

The published proposals are weak on Brixton’s heritage. The Conservation Area needs to be re-appraised and protection strengthened. Any new development should fit in with the present “urban grain”.

*Alan Piper.*

#### **Changing the Rules**

*Future Brixton is only one of the big Town Planning issues that we have had to respond to recently. Borough-wide policies are also under review, with a new “Local Development Framework” being developed. At the national level, further changes are emerging from the Planning Bill, and a wider range of “permitted development” for single-family houses was expected as we went to press. And every week brings a fresh batch of notices about individual planning applications on our patch...*

## Bygone Brixton

*Former resident John Burton managed to get back for our social in January and also supplied these insights into Brixton's social, sporting and political life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. With the impending elections for Mayor and Greater London Assembly, and even recent concerns about gentrification, they seem curiously topical...*

An old friend, Nicholas Dewey, lent me his (great?) grandfather's book of newspaper cuttings because it contained some Brixton stories from the 1890s.

"The Brixtonian" reported in October 1896:

*One of the most tasteful and eminently popular weddings that it has been our duty to chronicle took place at St. Margaret's Westminster on Wednesday afternoon last, the contracting parties being Charles Hayter Dewey, of Brixton, and Miss Grace Haydon, the eldest daughter of Mr Wm. Haydon, the senior member for Brixton on the London County Council. The ceremony was timed for two p.m., and in anticipation of seeing the charming bride a large number of onlookers assembled at "Sunnyside", Loughborough-park, the residence of her parents, to witness the departure of the wedding party. As the splendidly equipped carriages drove down Brixton-road they attracted considerable notice, and many acknowledgements passed between the bride and her popular parent as they were recognised by some of the leading tradesmen. Not the least noticeable feature was the number of persons on tramcars and 'buses making their way to Westminster . . .*

Charles Dewey was a keen sportsman – cricket, football, athletics and gymnastics – and there are several interesting sports stories.

"The Brixtonian" October 1898:

### **FOOTBALL IN BRIXTON**

*At last! Lovers of the "soccer" game will be glad to hear that at last Brixton has risen to its sense of duty with regard to*

*football. That such a thriving suburb as Brixton should be without any representative club has long been a reproach to the neighbourhood. Mr W. Haydon, one of our County Councillors, has again shown his interest in local sport, and has consented to allow football on the Brixton Cricket Ground, Poplar-walk, Loughborough-junction, of which he is the proprietary holder. The newly formed Brixton Football Club and Major Stokoe's team of Old Londonians will share the ground, and offer lovers of football an interesting list of fixtures. Both clubs are entered for the Surrey County League and Cup matches. A small charge will be made for admission, ladies being admitted free. Gentlemen in the neighbourhood desiring to support this attempt to localise football are invited to become season ticket holders, the price of which is only 3s. 6d. and can be obtained from Mr Charles H. Dewey, 440, Brixton-road, the hon. Manager of this enterprise, which should command the support of all lovers of our national winter game.*

Charles Dewey founded the "Lambeth Polytechnic Minstrels" who held their first concert on Thursday, November 29<sup>th</sup> 1888 at the Lambeth Polytechnic in Ferndale Road, S.W. Dewey sang the ballad "Little Sweetheart come and kiss me".

After his marriage, Dewey moved to 16 Thornton Avenue, Telford Park, S.W. (then in Wandsworth) and became involved in Wandsworth local affairs. He also aspired to playing his part in national and international politics, there are cuttings from 1899 about demonstrations on the Dreyfus case and the Boer War.

On September 25<sup>th</sup> "The Star" reported:

### **THE PLINTH CLIMBER**

*Mr C.H. Dewey, the six-foot gentleman who was thrown off the plinth at Trafalgar-square yesterday afternoon by a five-foot Socialist, is a member of the Wandsworth Board of Works. He lives as No. 16 Thornton Avenue, Streatham, in a pretty home, and has a pretty wife.*

*In the absence of the gentleman, a STAR MAN saw the lady this morning and asked if she had her husband sent back to her last night in an ambulance or in a board dust collection cart.*

*But he walked home with nothing more serious than a limp and a big black bruise on his leg.*

Under the headline "The Trafalgar Square Fiasco" in the St James's Gazette, Dewey refutes the lurid reporting of The Star and other papers:

*"In common with thousands of other residents of the suburbs, I went to Trafalgar-square yesterday to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. . . . Meeting two members of Parliament and two or three members of the Moderate party on the London County Council, and also several colleagues on the Streatham Vestry, we framed an amendment to the resolution of the Little Englanders, and I proceeded to the base of the monument to hand it up. But a hand being outstretched, I next found myself on the platform, and tried to obtain a hearing."*

### Another Victorian Resident

Soon after receiving the above piece, news arrived of a recent book about another colourful character who started life in our area. **Arthur Pember** was born at 4 New Park Road, Brixton Hill in 1835, and then lived at "Langlands" in what is now Kings Avenue, part of the Clapham Park Estate. Both houses are long gone but we managed to supply an old picture of New Park Road. After a privileged education and adventurous youth, he distinguished himself as an undercover journalist in the USA with the New York Press. He led the way in establishing the game of soccer in the 1860s, and is best remembered as the first president of the Football Association.

**Arthur Pember's Great Adventures** is available from the writer/ publisher, John Blythe Smart at Trails End, Bay Road, Freshwater, Isle of Wight PO40 9QS, tel. 01983 753914, [jb.smart@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jb.smart@tiscali.co.uk) 320 pages with 4 8-page picture inserts, £11.99 plus postage.

### Brockwell Park Sketching Group extends to Brixton.

- Mondays, 1 pm to 3 pm.
- Sketch and walk around the town.
- Bring your own sketching equipment – Marilyn Rogers will encourage you to share in a creative session of drawing, thinking and making.

We usually meet in the café in Brockwell Park at 1 pm on Mondays, and put any notice of change of venues on the café and Friends of Brockwell Park noticeboard. Enquiries to Marilyn Rogers on 07 742 561 359, [mrsd3@tesco.net](mailto:mrsd3@tesco.net) For more park events see [www.brockwellpark.com](http://www.brockwellpark.com)

### Open Garden Squares Weekend, 7/8 June

For the past 2 years we have organised events in Tate Library Gardens as part of this London-wide weekend. For 2008 we held back, expecting the Central Square remodelling work to be underway, but so many details are still to be sorted out that now work will not start until October at the earliest.

At least that gives you more time to look at the other 140 squares and gardens that will be open that weekend, and perhaps bring back some ideas that we can use locally. Tickets £6 in advance from 020 8347 8230 (9 am – 6pm weekdays) or at [www.capitalgardens.co.uk](http://www.capitalgardens.co.uk) or £7.50 from participating gardens during the weekend.

### Contacting us...

Publication orders, membership forms and mailing list updates should be sent to the Membership Secretary, Diana Linskey, at 32 Stockwell Green, London SW9 9HZ, or e-mail to [wjdcl@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:wjdcl@globalnet.co.uk)

General enquiries and material for the next newsletter should be sent to the Secretary, Alan Piper, 82 Mayall Road, London SE24 0PJ, tel. (020) 7207 0347.

*We welcome news and comment from all interested in the Brixton area, so opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the Brixton Society.*