

THE BRIXTON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring issue, April 2011

No.201, free to members, quarterly.
Registered with the London Forum of Amenity
Societies, Registered Charity No.1058103,
Website: www.brixtonociety.org.uk

Our next open meeting
Thursday 9th June:
Annual General Meeting

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

Time again to report on what we have been
doing over the past year, collect ideas for the
year ahead, and elect committee members to
carry them out. Agenda details from the
Secretary, Alan Piper on (020) 7207 0347 or
by e-mail to apiperbrix@aol.com

Open Garden Squares Weekend - 11 & 12 June

This year we plan to host two events on
Windrush Square: On Saturday our
theme is **Growing in Brixton** with stalls
selling plants and promoting green ideas.
On Sunday we switch to **Art in Brixton**,
showing the work of local artists and
encouraging you to have a go yourself.
Details are still being settled but watch the
website for updates.

If you can spare some time to help, or want to
run a stall for your own group, please call Bill
Linskey on (020) 7274 3835 or by e-mail to
wjdc1@globalnet.co.uk

More dates inside...



Windmill re-opening

A year ago, our newsletter reported that the
Heritage Lottery Fund had agreed to support
the restoration of the mill. Since then it's made
the front cover of *Local History* magazine, as
above. Now the Friends of Windmill Gardens
present a series of events, with guided tours
inside the mill offered on each date.

May Day Launch Parade, 2nd May:

A theatrical parade starts from Windrush
Square at 2 pm and proceeds to the mill
for its official re-opening. Ends 4-30 pm.

Open Day, Sunday 12 June:

Windmill open 2 pm to 4 pm.

Windmill Festival, Sunday 10 July:

Provisionally 1 pm to 5 pm, with stalls, music,
theatre and food.

Art in the Park, Sunday 14 August:

Practical art activities for all ages, plus tours.

Windmill Gardens are between Ramillies
Close and Blenheim Gardens, off the west
side of Brixton Hill, SW2. See website:
www.brixtonwindmill.org

Diary of Events, Spring & Summer 2011

Society Meetings

The Executive Committee usually meets on the second Thursday of the month to plan activities and agree our responses to current issues. These meetings are at 7 pm at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road, SW2 (at the Effra Road end, facing Windrush Square).

- 14 April,
- 12 May,
- 9 June (AGM)
- 14 July,
- 8 September,
- 13 October
- 10 November

Editorial Notice:

Space permitting, we try to feature local events and publish reminiscences or enquiries in our newsletter. We welcome news and comments from all interested in the Brixton area, so opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the Brixton Society.

All material should be sent before **18 June** to the Secretary, Alan Piper, at 82 Mayall Road, SE24 0PJ, or by e-mail to APiperBrix@aol.com
Phone/ fax enquiries to (020) 7207 0347.

Links with Other Groups

If you would like the Society to take part in some local event you are running, it helps our planning if you can contact us with the date as soon as possible.

For events listed here, check directly with the organisers if any queries over times or admission.

Saturday 16 April – The London Maze:

London's biggest free history fair runs from 10 am to 4 pm at the Guildhall, London EC2. The whole Guildhall complex is opened up for stalls, talks and tours, including the Roman amphitheatre in the basement. Half-hour walks cover nearby City streets.
City of London Corporation

Thursday 21 April – Notable Sportsmen in Norwood Cemetery:

An illustrated talk by Colin Fenn, 8 pm at the Phoenix Centre, Westow Street, SE19. *Norwood Society*

Wednesday 11 May – A Magistrate's Tale:

Kevin Fitzpatrick JP on his experiences as a local magistrate. 7-30 pm for 7-45 start, Herne Hill United Church Hall, corner of Redpost Hill and Herne Hill, SE24.
Herne Hill Society.

Thursday 19 May – Brixton & Stockwell:

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

Saturday 21 May – Orchestra Concert:

Mozart's Jupiter symphony (No.41) and Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde, 7-30 pm

at All Saints' Church, Rosendale /Lovelace Roads SE21 8LN. For more dates and details see website, www.lambeth-orchestra.org.uk
Lambeth Orchestra

Sunday 22 May – Circle the City:

Sponsored Walk of 6 km or 8.5km round the City, for Christian Aid Week. Register from 1 pm at St.Mary-le-Bow EC2 or All Hallows by the Tower EC3: Details (020) 7523 2321 or www.christianaid.org.uk/walks
Christian Aid – London South-East Team.

Sunday 5th June – Tree Celebration

Meet at 2 pm by the clock tower in Brockwell Park for the annual dedication of recently donated trees.
Friends of Brockwell Park.

Monday 6th June – Bygone Streatham:

Presented by John Brown, 8 pm at Woodlawns, Streatham Darby & Joan Club, 16 Leigham Court Road, SW16.
The Streatham Society

Wednesday 15 June – Clapham Portraits:

Short talks by members on some eminent Clapham residents of the 19th century, 7-30 for 8 pm start, at Clapham Manor Primary School, entrance in Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ.
Clapham Society

Summer Highlights



Setting out our stall

In addition to the Open Garden Squares weekend featured on the front cover, we also have the opportunity to run stalls at several events this year. Fortunately a grant from the Big Lottery Fund enables us to supplement our display kit, but we will also need enough members to help out:

Myatt's Fields Park is hosting a Summer Fair on Saturday 18 June, from 1 pm to 5 pm.

Brixton Windmill Festival will be on Sunday 10th July (as noted on front cover).

Lambeth Country Show will be over the weekend 16/17 July, 11 am to 6 pm in Brockwell Park.

Lambeth Archives Open Day has slipped back into October to ensure the nearby Michael Church is available for the programme of talks – we expect to have confirmation of the new date by the end of April. That might even enable us to appear at the **Stockwell Festival** if it happens in late September again.

Summer Guided Walks

Once again a variety of guided walks are taking place around Lambeth this summer, but we may not have the full programme in time to enclose with this newsletter, so here's a few leads to get you started.

Sunday 8th May – London Bridge to Gabriel's Wharf:

Meet at **2-30 pm** at the foot of London Bridge (corner of Duke Street Hill, outside Evans Cycles) for a walk exploring Bankside, led by Alan Piper. *Lambethans Society*.

Saturday 14 May – Dulwich Trees:

Meet at **2-30 pm** at the Old College Gate of Dulwich Park, College Road, SE21. Walk led by Letta Jones of the Dulwich Society. *Part of the Dulwich Festival*.

Sunday 12 June – Brixton Murals:

Meet at **2 pm** at Stockwell Tube Station, for tour of murals around SW9 and SW2 led by Ruth Miller of the London Mural Preservation Society.

Walks on the Wild Side:

Aly Mir is leading some guided walks along the South Bank of the Thames – meet outside Bermondsey Tube Station at 11 am. No need to book, just turn up and pay £5 to the guide on the day – he'll be wearing a green cap! See also www.walksonthewildside.net

Sundays 15 May, 12 June, 19 June

Sunday 15 May – 5 Parks Walk:

A self-guided route round local parks, starting from Brockwell Hall in Brockwell Park at **10 am** *Friends of Brockwell Park (events fundraiser)*.

Evening Walks:

Tuesday 14 June – Blackheath: meet at 7 pm at Blackheath Station for walk led by Richard Buchanan.

Southwark & Lambeth Archaeological Society.

The Clapham Society are contributing two evening walks (see next issue for final details).

Wednesday 20 July – Historic Clapham, Wednesday 17 August – Clapham Common South Side.

Local History Focus

Plaques - Blue and Otherwise

In our last Newsletter, we reported on the installation of a plaque to commemorate lawyer, councillor and activist, Rudy Narayan. This is not a "Blue Plaque" installed by English Heritage under their scheme. It is perhaps not widely understood that anyone can (subject to appropriate permissions) pay to have a commemorative plaque installed. Some boroughs, such as Southwark, run their own plaque schemes, as do some civic societies. Unfortunately we are not sufficiently well-endowed to be able to do so at the moment.

We have been asked by English Heritage if we can let them have information about plaques, other than theirs, in our area. All Blue Plaques are listed on their website (www.english-heritage.org.uk/discover/blue-plaques) but they do not know about plaques such as the Rudy Narayan one unless someone tells them.

HELP NEEDED Now, here comes the admission - we do not have a comprehensive list of plaques in our area; but I hope to compile one with your help. If you know where there is a commemorative plaque in or around Brixton, will you please let me know the address of the property it is on and the name of the person it commemorates? Either email me (bill@linskey.org.uk) or telephone 020 7274 3835 and leave a message if necessary. Many thanks.

Bill Linskey

BLUE PLAQUES IN OUR AREA

BAYLIS, Lilian (1874-1937)
27 Stockwell Park Road

ELLIS, Henry Havelock (1859-1939)
14 Dover Mansions, Canterbury Crescent

JAMES, C.L.R. (1901-1989)
165 Railton Road

LENO, Dan (1860-1904)
56 Akerman Road

SZABO, Violette, G.C. (1921-1945)
18 Burnley Road

Remembering Brixton

A function at the Stephen Lawrence Centre in February prompted Devon Thomas to record some of his early experiences at the sharp end of "regeneration"...

I have been involved in urban regeneration for many years. In fact I can say I was drawn into direct activism 44 years ago when my family received a letter from Lambeth Council telling us they wanted to knock down our family home and replace it by a 55-storey Council housing block. It was part of a futuristic vision that Lambeth and the GLC's architects had dreamed up for us, without having asked us about it. The same thing was happening to black and working class communities all round the country, for example in West London, where the Department for Transport was emptying out multi-occupied houses in the North Kensington/ Notting Hill area to demolish them and build the new Westway.

While accepting that the housing conditions in all these areas needed improving, the thoughtless and cack-handed way that this was dealt with left a legacy of resentment and anger, that returned in the "uprisings" or riots some years later. Families like mine who had worked hard to establish themselves in this country since the war, and who had scrimped and saved and overcome racist practices to acquire a family property, were now given paltry sums for their hard-won homes and pushed back to the foot of the housing ladder. This understandably ignited a lot of resistance, organised by people such as John Newbiggin, a neighbour of mine on Rattray Road at the time and a youth worker at Lansdowne Youth Club. After about 5 years, new people were voted in and a recession took hold, leaving no money for grandiose regeneration schemes, so the planners moved on in a huff, feeling that we hadn't sufficiently appreciated what they were trying to do for us!

Brixton was left to continue quietly rotting down, and the local economy to slide slowly down the drain. It really hit home when I came back from studying at college and joined the largest community development agency then operating in the Brixton area, the Central

Local History Focus

Lambeth Project. The young people that I was increasingly working with were homeless, jobless and directionless. Prospects of jobs, training or a future seemed remote. My response as a long-time activist was a practical one – help to provide the basics.



The former Black Horse pub in Brixton Road – closed c.1966 and the upper part later used as offices by the Central Lambeth Project.

By this time, large areas around Brixton were populated with empty properties awaiting an uncertain future. With the help of an African named Ade Yonyin who'd learned the art of squatting in the East End of London, we quickly accumulated a property portfolio of 50 houses. We did basic repairs to them and let them to homeless people. We negotiated an agreement with Lambeth Council to give us the legal right to occupy the houses, and set up a basic management system with rent books and all the other accoutrements of an efficient administration.

It didn't always run smoothly. Myself and two other colleagues – Dave Davis, a motor bike loving practical Englishman from Shropshire, and Rasta Brother Neville Warsop, a Brixtonite since arriving with his parents in the 1950s – toured our empire every Friday night, to collect rents from all the houses. This was an absolute necessity because we could not

maintain the houses or fix up new ones unless we had a regular income stream. The old houses were in continual need of repair, so we tested our collective knowledge of "do it yourself" to the limit.

The Friday rent round could be horrendous. We would meet up at my house in Rattray Road, reasonably central to the houses that we controlled, and before leaving we would fortify ourselves with a strong beverage. We had houses in Mayall and Railton Roads, Arlingford and Brailsford Roads, and back to Stockwell including Hubert Grove and Landor Road. We also had a block of houses that comprised the Rasta community in St. Agnes Place, by Kennington Park. These were our most serious problem as one would have to enter into an extended reasoning session with the residents about why it was necessary for them to pay rent, because "Rasta no deal with Babylon". In principle they would not pay, so the problem was insurmountable! Their houses were rapidly falling into disrepair, and we could not use other residents' rents to fix their properties. Worse, one of the brethren, who lived in a room at the top of one house, decided to light a fire made from wood chopped from the trees in the nearby park, in the middle of his room. Of course the house nearly burnt down with him and several others in it, so we decided to call a halt.

The Rasta would have to take over responsibility for the houses themselves and negotiate with "Babylon" or at least Lambeth Council. We set up meetings and some dialogue took place but the Housing Department was so intimidated by the dreadlocked brethren – there were no black staff in those days – that the Rastas were left to tend their gardens for the next 30 years, only belatedly being evicted by Lambeth a couple of years ago. If they had only been able to deal with Babylon, they could have claimed ownership of the houses due to the length of time they had occupied them!

The only other major incident that occurred, before the organisation merged with Ujima and became a registered social landlord, was when we became aware that some of the tenants in a house in Arlingford Road had

Local History Focus

invited Sir Coxson to play at the house one Saturday. We spoke to the people concerned on the Friday and pointed out their responsibilities under their tenancy with us, and that the house was not in good enough condition to withstand such treatment. They decided not to heed our warnings, and after returning home in the early hours after finishing the rent round, I received a phone call from a neighbour summoning me to the site urgently. I threw my clothes back on and rushed round to find that the frail old house had not been able to withstand the Sir Coxson bass culture and a hundred pounding feet – the first floor had fallen into the basement! Fortunately there were no serious injuries, but there could have been fatalities.

Times are now very different and work with young people today happens at places like the Stephen Lawrence Centre, certainly not any kind of short-life property. It's a first class facility, trying to equip youngsters for a career in creative industries, just as earlier we tried to equip young people with skills in the building trades.

Parallel Lives

The pitfalls of family history research on the worldwide web

On a rare quiet afternoon between Christmas and New Year, I fed my own name into Google to see what came up, and discovered a whole series of doppelgangers scattered around the country. It's always a risk with a "trade" surname that unrelated people with the same or similar names will show up when family historians search through any record system.

It's not obvious how many Alan Pipers there are with a web presence, or which is which. After all, entries embrace not only the day job but also leisure interests, publishing, politics, and re-union links from school, college or military service. So several interwoven biographies are building up on the web as more references are added, but it can be difficult to unpick the different strands.

Surely the proprietor of the Sun Hotel in Coniston is not also running a sand and gravel

business in Devon? Certainly neither is moonlighting as Director-General of Western Australia's Department of Justice. At least two of us are academics, in ecclesiastical history at Durham and at Staffordshire's University in business studies. Other careers that I could have had include electrical engineer, hypnotherapist, trade union official, pensions consultant, RAF air traffic controller and film cameraman. I am listed as a company director in Berkhamstead (Hants.) and Southwold (Suffolk). What other selves do in Stevenage, Watford and Newcastle-upon-Tyne is unclear.

Perhaps I could borrow highlights from some of these "parallel lives" to enhance my own CV, since I appear to have distinguished myself variously in professional cycling, korfbal, clay pigeon shooting, bowls and bridge, which could be why I am also listed as president of a community sports centre in Bristol. Schools or colleges in Eltham (SE9), Sheffield, Edinburgh and North Wales all claim me as a former student. However, I deny any knowledge of the Brackley & District brass band, and I cannot recall the time spent in Wincanton, restoring the bodywork on a 1927 Sunbeam Tourer.

Allan Piper features as a photo journalist in a recent crime novel, which could embarrass the real journalist who spells his name that way too. That coincidence suggests the scope for creating an alibi for myself by borrowing a namesake's identity. Thus I can prove I was at a meeting of the SE Counties superannuation officers' group on 15th March 2009 – after all, my name is recorded in their minutes!

Even without relying on modern websites, it's all too easy to pick up the wrong trail and muddle two biographies. Several years ago we were sent a carefully-researched monograph on Henry Budd, who is commemorated on that big stone memorial between the Town Hall and Windrush Square. Sadly the author had picked the wrong Budd, so to speak, which is why we did not publish it, but it's a lesson to bear in mind for your own researches.

Alan Piper.

Open Gardens

To the east of Brixton, the Dulwich Society has run an Open Gardens scheme for several years, now with an excellent guide book to what's open and when. The scheme has begun to spread beyond Dulwich itself, so we ought to mention those in easy reach

Just beyond Brockwell Park at 323 Norwood Road, the **South London Botanical Institute** has openings on:

Saturday 7th May (plant sale) 11 am to 1 pm;

Thursday 26 May (open evening) 6 pm to 8 pm.

Sunday 12 June. 2 – 5 pm;

Sunday 26 June, 2 – 5 pm (an NGS opening at £2).

93 Palace Road, SW2 will open its garden from 12 noon to 5 pm on **Sunday 3rd July** (NGS opening at £3).

The smallest entry must be Linda Jackson's balcony herb garden at **199**

Dumbarton Court, Brixton Hill SW2, open **Saturday 23 & Sunday 24 July,** 2 pm to 5 pm, admission £1. Enter from Felsberg Road SW2.

Linda has recently written a **Herbal Teas Recipe Book** published at £5 (+ p & p) by authorhouse.com and also available via Amazon (and perhaps soon via Lambeth Libraries, ISBN 978 1 4389 3867 7).

Contact her on 07 951 252 089 or islinda2004@hotmail.com

Myatt's Fields Park update

The recent renovation of the park included setting up the Little Cat Cafe in a little building near the bandstand. So far opening times have depended on the availability of volunteers, but recently the Walcott Foundation and the Big Lottery Fund have agreed to support staffing the cafe and developing local sources of food. The cafe will now be open 1 pm to 5 pm Thursday to Sunday each week.

Brixton Green keeping it local

We have been trying to get to grips with several of the ideas in the Localism Bill which has begun its journey through Parliament. Much stress is placed on planning for and by Neighbourhoods but without defining what they are. It looks as if just two or three people could claim to act in the name of a neighbourhood without asking their neighbours! In Brixton we no longer have even a local forum like those in Streatham or Herne Hill as a basis for consensus.

Brixton Green has bold ideas for the south side of Somerleyton Road, SW9. They are trying to broaden local support by offering £1 shares to up to 5000 local residents. Shares available from Opus Cafe at 89 Acre Lane, SW2, or see www.brixtongreen.org

Recycling

Lambeth has made several changes to domestic refuse collection arrangements, to boost the percentage of waste that goes for recycling rather than land-fill. At last we can recycle a wider range of plastic containers, but strangely not aluminium foil (once a by-word for salvage drives) nor cooking oil – though people are starting to run vehicles on it!

However it's better described as one step forward and two steps back. Lambeth has threatened to take a tougher line over what goes into which bin, but in the negative Council way that gives recycling a bad name. It's now declining to haul wheely-bins out of front gardens, so we can look forward to even more of them obstructing the pavements. And why are most of them 240 litres size when most of our waste can go for recycling instead? Surely the best incentive to recycle would be a return to the traditional size dustbin of 90 litres? Then you would have to be selective about what went into it. Or even give us separate bins for recycling, as other councils already do?

Surely a second step back is charging for garden waste collection. A real incentive to return to the traditional garden bonfire instead – never mind the extra carbon dioxide and fumes arising!

A LATE REMINDER

During Friday, Saturday and Sunday, **15-17 April at Brockwell Hall** in Brockwell Park, selected pictures from Lambeth Archives collection will be on display. The original drawings, paintings and prints were shown at the last Archives Open Day, but otherwise are rarely seen. Open 10-30 to 4-30 pm daily, on the ground floor adjacent to the cafe.

A few more short art exhibitions will be taking place in the Hall later in the year – see the programme at www.madforbrockwellpark.com *Friends of Brockwell Park*.

Libraries Review

Although Lambeth Council had highlighted some branch libraries for closure, for the time being it's business as usual while a review of the whole Library service is carried out.

Decisions are now due in July, but by then a quarter of the financial year (and funds) will have gone, so the cuts could be even more drastic unless the Council switches resources from elsewhere. Lambeth was planning to cut £75,000 a year from its libraries budget. Only 5% of the budget is spent on stock – not just books but also CDs etc., which explains why the choice of titles is so thin these days.

Upkeep of library buildings has also been under-resourced for years, about 20%. The biggest element is staff, so library opening hours are likely to be at risk even if outright closures can be avoided.

Friends of Tate Library Brixton

Friends are meeting on **Wednesday 20 April** at 6 pm. Although the Library will be closed at that time, we have permission to meet then. We will share the latest news on the Council's plans for its libraries, and try to form a proper committee. Vanessa has had to give up the role of Secretary due to work commitments, so we need to share the tasks of organising the group.

London on Film

The Film Club at Minet Library has a summer series of monthly screenings of films with a London background, all free at **6-30 pm** on the first Tuesday of the month:

Blow Up – Tuesday 3rd May:

Antonioni's film of 1960s London, with many South London settings – look out for a brief appearance of Stockwell Road when most of it was painted bright red!

Young Soul Rebels – 7th June:

Another film featuring a murder in a South London Park, but the context and music have moved on to 1991.

10 Rillington Place – 5th July:

Sombre times in post-war Inner London, with Richard Attenborough as the landlord and murderer.



London Mayor Boris Johnson joined in a ceremony on Sunday 10 April to dedicate the site for the Black Cultural Archives fronting onto Windrush Square. Building work starts shortly with a view to opening in 2012. For updates see www.bcaheritage.org.uk

Vida Walsh Centre Open Day

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of Saltoun Road... Age UK Lambeth (as they are now called) have been managing the Centre since July 2009. They are holding an Open Day at the Centre on **Saturday 30 April**, from 1 pm – 4 pm. There will be an Arts and Crafts Fair on the lawn in front of the block, and refreshments served in the Centre itself.