

THE BRIXTON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Winter, December 2010

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Distributed free to members.

Registered with the London Forum of Amenity
Societies, Registered Charity No.1058103,
Website: www.brixtonociety.org.uk

Our next event:

Thursday 13th January:

Winter Social

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

Admission free to members, but to help
our planning, please confirm if you are
coming (and the sooner the better). Notify
Bill Linskey on (020) 7274 3835 or by e-
mail to wjdcl@globalnet.co.uk

Black Cultural Archives Update

At the following meeting on **Thursday 10th
February** at 7 pm, we have arranged for Paul
Reid of BCA and Vivek Malhotra from their
architects to give a short presentation on
proposals and timing for the remodelling of 1-3
Effra Road as the new base of the Black
Cultural Archives. This should revive a
neglected corner of Windrush Square.

Followed by an Executive Committee meeting

More dates inside...

We are trying to get this issue out before
Christmas to keep you informed, though we
expect to have yet more dates and news to
share next month, so check our website then
too. Meanwhile, seasonal greetings to you all.



Hambrook House, Brixton Hill, SW2



218-232 Stockwell Road, SW9



Former Denmark pub, Denmark Road, SE5

*Do any more buildings within the wider Brixton
area deserve protection? Are any of those
above worthy? Lambeth planners have invited
further suggestions for their "Local List" but we
must respond before the end of January.*

*Depending on the merits of the buildings, they
might even be worth promoting to the National
List, or at least including within Conservation
Areas. All suggestions to Alan Piper (contact
details overleaf).*

Dates for your new 2011 diary

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 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.

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).

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

Links with Other Groups

Dates are still coming in for 2011 events, but please check directly with the organisers if any queries over times or admission.

Monday 3rd January – Recent Discoveries in Local History:

A round-up of recent research by various speakers. 8 pm at Woodlawns, Streatham Darby & Joan Club, 16 Leigham Court Road, SW16.

The Streatham Society

Thursday 6th January – Business Archives:

Richard Wiltshire introduces the business collections held at London Metropolitan Archives.

Opens at 5-30 for 6 pm start at the London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, EC1. Free to our members but prior booking required (the Society is a member of AfL) to:

Nicola.Avery@cityoflondon.gov.uk

or tel (020) 7332 3816
Archives for London.

Tuesday 11th January – Edwardian Architecture of Lambeth:

Talk by Edmund Bird of Urban Design London, Opens at 7 pm for 7-30 start, The Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1 (almost opposite the Old Vic Theatre). *Southwark & Lambeth Archaeological Society.*

Friday 28 January – Next Steps for the Cooperative Council:

Launch of the Commission's report and the first wave of pilot projects. Open 9 am for 9-30 start, until 1 pm,

Coin Street Neighbourhood Centre, Waterloo, SE1. Free but book with Paul Morris at pmorris1@lambeth.gov.uk or tel. (020) 7926 9930.
Lambeth Council.

Wednesday 9th Feb. – The River Effra:

New light on an old river, by Dr Martin Heath of the Ecospheres Project. 7-30 pm for 7-45 start, Herne Hill United Church Hall, corner of Redpost Hill and Herne Hill, SE24.
Herne Hill Society.

19 & 20 February – The Listed Property Show:

At Olympia, London W14 8UX, details available at: www.listedpropertyownersclub.co.uk

Listed Property Owners Club.

Forward Planning

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.

So far, we are likely to be involved in some way in the following events later in the year:

London Open Garden Squares weekend,
11 & 12 June.

Lambeth Country Show,
Weekend 16 & 17 July.

London Open House
weekend 17 & 18 Sept.

Lambeth Archives Open Day, Saturday 24 Sept.

Planning Focus

Many editions of the **South London Press** on Friday, 10 December 2010 carried on their front pages the story that **Sport England** has lodged an objection to the planning application by Tesco to build a temporary ice rink on the site of the - currently being demolished - Pope's Road car park. Sport England "is the government agency responsible for building the foundations of sporting success" (according to its own website) and, among many other things, it is responsible for distributing the portion of National Lottery funds allocated to sport. Why have Sport England, the Brixton Society, many other local groups, very many individuals, one of the ward councillors and one of our local MPs all opposed this planning application? Read on ...

HISTORY

STREATHAM ICE RINK

"A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...": well, it almost seems like that. It is almost a decade since Tesco first mooted plans to build a new supermarket in Streatham. A convoluted process eventually resulted in agreed plans in 2008. A crucial element of the agreement - following the intervention of the Mayor of London - is that Tesco is required to build a new ice rink in Streatham before demolishing the existing one which occupies part of the site.

None of this had anything to do with Brixton until Tesco decided that it did not want to develop the site as agreed in 2008 but instead proposed to clear the whole site and build everything in one phase, because that is cheaper. This means finding a site for a temporary (for three years) replacement ice rink.

You may - or may not - be surprised to read that Lambeth has been prepared to go along with this, rather than hold Tesco to its agreement. Together they came up with Plan A, which was to site the rink on Streatham Common. Result: local uproar and Lambeth having to back down when it was explained to the Council that such a building on the Common was not lawful. Enter Plan B ...

POPE'S ROAD CAR PARK

The story of Pope's Road car park is one of disgraceful neglect by its owners - Lambeth Council. The lack of the most basic maintenance, such as replacing broken louvre windows, has resulted in the deterioration of the building to such an extent that it has been condemned as a dangerous structure and is having to be demolished.

The Brixton Master Plan had envisaged the car park being replaced one day by a mixed development including ground-level retail premises with floors of parking and flats above. However, this requires a private developer to take it on and none are forthcoming in the current climate.

It was therefore decided that, once the car park was demolished, surface level car parking would be provided to retain an, albeit smaller, car park in the centre of Brixton.

This is where the two stories meet. When the plan to build a temporary rink on Streatham Common had to be abandoned, someone came up with a cunning plan - build the rink on the Pope's Road site once the car park is demolished. Apart from the myriad other objections to the proposal, the site is too small!

OBJECTIONS

... to the Pope's Road proposal include: it would breach current Lambeth planning policies; it would reduce car parking in central Brixton; it would have a severe negative impact on local retail businesses which are already suffering from the lack of car parking; it would damage social cohesion by impacting disproportionately on ethnic businesses reliant on bulk sales; it would impact badly on local residents by being open for up to 20 hours a day and attracting mini buses and coaches carrying hockey teams; it would stretch local services; it raises concern over possible crime and disorder because the site will be more difficult to police than the existing Streatham site; and it would have negative environmental impacts, such as the extra travelling it would cause most existing users.

But surely we could put up with these little inconveniences (!) for a few years to help out our neighbours. Er no ... most Streatham skaters are adamantly against the plan. Because the Pope's Road site is too small, the rink cannot be built to modern, Olympic standards; opposing teams' supporters would not be separated from each other, the players and referees at hockey matches; and there would be inadequate facilities for the referee and teams' coaches.

All this, agreed by our council, to save Tesco (UK turnover bigger than the national defence budget) money. The application will be heard by the Planning Committee in January 2011. We will be there.

Walk this way?

It may seem far too early to be thinking about Summer Walks, but once again the local amenity societies will collectively present a series of guided walks on most Sunday afternoons through the summer. To produce a leaflet before the first walks start in May, we have to supply the details before the next Newsletter appears, so Alan Piper would like to receive your suggestions by mid-January.

A typical walk follows half of one of the 6 trails in our *Brixton Heritage Trails* book, but if you think other corners deserve attention, tell us! We are not limited to historic interest, so we have always been willing to include topical or contentious sites in our routes.

Historypin Update

Our July edition mentioned this new website developed by We Are What We Do. They recently sent us a progress report which highlights new features. By mid-September they had surpassed 7 million page views and received 26,000 uploads to the site. Anyone uploading pictures to the site now has the opportunity to create a profile of themselves or their archive, including a gallery of all images and a web link. An icon under each image now takes you to further copyright information about the photo.

There is also a monthly theme on the homepage – December has a festive theme. More updates are promised in the run-up to a US launch in April/ May 2011. Website refs:

www.historypin.com and
www.wearewhatwedo.org

Tracing a Family

Abigail Bernard is trying to trace relatives of Peter Harold Jackson, also known as Peter Weston, born c.1898-1902. He lived at 72 Barrington Road c.1933 (since demolished) and was at 18 St.John's Crescent, with his wife Winifred, in 1934. This large house is still standing, but back then was occupied by 7 households and the street was known as St.John's Road.

Enquiries to Abigail at forcegail1@yahoo.co.uk

New Brixton Plaque

In November, an article in the Council paper, *Lambeth Life* announced the unveiling of a plaque in Brixton commemorating Rudy Narayan, who served as a councillor for Ferndale Ward in 1974-78. However the article managed to avoid saying just where the plaque was! Most of us don't look up when passing through Brixton Town Centre – if we are not checking out the shop windows we are trying to avoid the usual pavement obstacles. However one of our members remembered that in the early 1990s Rudy was practising law from offices above 411-413 Brixton Road. Sure enough, there was the plaque above the San Marino cafe, on the wall of the first floor offices, just above the lettering for the present occupiers, Wainwright & Cummins.



There is strong competition for "official" blue plaques placed by English Heritage, so this one was organised by Nubian Jak Community Trust, with support from the Society of Black Lawyers, of which Rudy was a founder member.

A Forgotten Centenary

Among the anniversaries celebrated during 2010, little coverage has been given to the 16 centuries that have elapsed since Britain ceased to be part of the Roman Empire.

Perhaps this is because it happened by default – no official lowering of imperial standards or declaration of independence, just a brief message in 410 from Emperor Honorius to the leading citizens of Britannia to look to their own defence. After all, he had other things on his mind, with Rome itself on the point of being looted by angry Goths.

In fact there had been a declaration of independence back in 286 when the military governor, Carausius, decided to break away. He was the first to mint coins bearing the image of Britannia but after nearly 7 years he was assassinated by his finance minister, who in turn was soon ousted by imperial troops re-asserting central authority in 293.

Initially, Britain was a well-garrisoned province because of its exposed position, liable to raids from Celtic tribes north of Hadrian's Wall, and sea-borne raids from Ireland and from across the North Sea. Over the next century, several other local commanders staged revolts, usually with the ambition of taking control of Rome itself. Each of these adventures resulted in troops being moved from Britain to the Continent, but seldom being replaced to the same degree afterwards.

Changing Times

The most successful of these bids was by Constantine, whose father the Emperor Constantius Chlorus died at York in 306. Constantine led his troops back to Italy to assert his claim to the imperial throne, eventually defeating his rival at the Milvian Bridge in 312. This proved to be a change of direction for the whole Empire because Constantine championed Christianity as the official religion, after over two centuries of persecution, and he also founded a new capital at what is now Istanbul. This left Britain even more remote from the real seat of imperial power. Rome itself remained

nominally the focal point of the western half of the Empire but its wealth and territory were shrinking.

Originally, Rome had strengthened its ties with conquered provinces by building cities, but by the 4th century townspeople were bearing the brunt of the tax system, to the advantage of the country gentry, whose large estates worked by slaves could out-compete small peasant farms. These landowners became the dominant class, whether their family origins were as Celtic chieftains or as traders or ex-soldiers from distant parts of the Empire. After the last field troops were withdrawn from Britain in 407 to defend the heartland, Roman coins ceased to come into the province to pay military salaries, so the cash economy shrank. Even so, most towns survived in reduced circumstances unless abandoned in the face of epidemics or military disasters.

At first, the independent province seemed to be getting by. Despite giving up togas in favour of duffel coats, leading Britons were still committed to the Roman "brand" and Christian religion. Bishop Germanus of Auxerre visited in 429 to re-assert the Church's official teaching. In 432, St. Patrick left his British home again to found a church in Ireland, where he had been taken into slavery as a teenager.

Saxons South of the Thames

To counter such Irish raiding of the western coasts, the British authorities followed late Roman practice by engaging Anglo-Saxon mercenaries, granting them land in east Kent in 449 in return for their services. However, within a few years relations between the mercenaries and their British employers broke down. After the battle of Aylesford in 455, the Anglo-Saxons gained control of most of Kent.

What is now South London came into the Saxon (or should we say English) sphere of influence soon after, following the battle of **Crayford** in 457. An early entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that the Welsh (as they called the Britons) retreated behind the walls of the City of London after twelve of their nobles were slain in the battle. Local traces of this confused period are scarce, but **Walworth**

Local History Focus

signifies an estate that remained in Welsh hands long enough to be remembered in the name of the manor, whilst most other place names roundabout are of Anglo-Saxon origin. Following the demolition of **Tulse Hill School** in the early 1990s, a dig by archaeologists found signs of very early Saxon occupation on what later became Tulse Hill Farm.

Infrastructure from Rome's heyday can still be traced in the lines of **Brixton Road** and **Clapham Road** - though the line of the latter was soon modified at **Clapham North** to follow drier ground over Clapham Common instead of pressing straight on regardless in Roman fashion.

Legends are born

Over the following century, details and dates become less reliable, a few fragments on which legends would later be built. Faced by increasing English encroachment, the British organised their own fighting forces. The amphitheatre at the old legionary city of Chester was fortified as a central base sited to counter threats from different directions.

In the 470s, Riothamus even led a force from Britain into northern France in support of the faltering western Empire, but was mortally wounded in action near a town called Avalon.

On home ground, Ambrosius Aurelianus was succeeded as field commander by Arthur, leading a small cavalry force which fought off challenges from several directions. Twenty years of peace ensued, during which the surviving eastern Empire under Justinian attempted to rebuild links. This ended around 538 with the death of Arthur and his nephew Medraut in what appears to have been an internecine battle at Camlann, on Hadrian's Wall.

Now without a central authority backed up by armed force, the province began to fragment. Trade links with the Mediterranean had continued but an accidental import was the plague which was already ravaging the eastern empire in the late 530s. This impacted far more on British society than on the self-sufficient English settlers.

In the south, the end came in 577 when the West Saxons defeated the rulers of Bath,

Gloucester and Cirencester in a battle on the downs above Swindon. As a result, so many refugees from the south-west fled to north-west France that their identity and language marked the region thereafter as that of the Bretons.

In the north, a patchwork of mini-states continued to fight each other for dominance. The commanders of Roman forts had long since turned to private enterprise, collecting the old tolls and taxes to maintain themselves and a cadre of fighting men. In this region we first find the original of Merlin – not as a magician but as a bard or *griot* in the service of Urien, Prince of Rheged, an area centred on modern Lancashire. Despite the popular TV series, Merlin was probably a generation too late to have known Arthur, dying shortly after his conversion to Christianity by St. Kentigern in 599. His exploits were first recorded in Welsh under the name Myrddin, but this had to be modified for later Medieval romances aimed at French-speaking readers.

Alan Piper.

Restoring Brixton Windmill

Work started on restoring the mill on 25th October. The main contractor is Stonewest, supervised by Dannatt Johnson Architects. Specialist millwright services are being provided by Owlsworth IJP, who have already removed the sails for refurbishment in their workshops. You can follow progress on the web at <http://brixtonwindmill.wordpress.com>

An important element is setting up regular arrangements for public access and using the mill as an educational resource. Lisa Rigg started work last month as the part-time development & education officer (and we have already signed her up as a member of the Brixton Society). However to cope with tour requests and special events, a larger body of volunteer guides is being trained via Friends of Windmill Gardens. One training course was held in September and another is planned for early in the New Year. If you want to offer help, e-mail to info@brixtonwindmill.org or for more news, see the FoWG website at www.brixtonwindmill.org

Edition No.200

Since the Summer of 1975, we have managed to produce 200 editions of our newsletter. Looking back through the file of early issues, it's clear that some topics keep coming back, and improving the face of Brixton takes place very slowly...

In the beginning

Enthusiasm sometimes ran ahead of our skills so the first two issues are both labelled as Number 1! The first of these was two pages of A4 photocopied and folded to A5, dated Summer 1975 and including a list of events from June to December. The next issue followed on 24 October, two sides in a simpler A4 format, not much more than might go in a modern e-mail bulletin. Similar issues followed at least once a month, mostly produced by our then chairman, Chris Graham.

Your present editor first produced an issue in April 1977, but the single-sheet format was usual until 1983 when 3 or 4 pages became more common, settled into a publication cycle of 2-month intervals. No.136 in January 1995 marked our 20th anniversary, and began the present quarterly cycle which has allowed us to include more local history material and background information.

Enduring Themes

Recurring topics since the early days include the chronic inability of Lambeth Council to regenerate the Town Centre without doing more harm than good. Back in 1977 we were discussing our alternative plan for Brixton – perhaps that idea is worth reviving within the framework of the Localism Bill which has just been published?

Early issues also note the emergence of new groups and enterprises, some of which are now familiar. Thus in February 1978, issue No.26 reports a new cinema enterprise proposing to open in the old Classic Cinema, to be called Little Bit Ritzy...

Networking

In our early days, we were greatly encouraged by regular contact with other amenity societies already active in other parts of Lambeth. Such meetings were eventually subsumed into a grand Environmental Forum sponsored by the Council, but sadly this withered away once the councillors lost interest.

Although the present Parks Forum, Local History Forum and the Friends of Lambeth Libraries are all valuable, many other things that interest us are outside their scope, such as Planning. We have therefore been in discussion with other groups for several months to agree

the basis for a **Lambeth Civic Forum**. This came into being on 9th December when a constitution was agreed and adopted.

Keeping in Touch

At heart, newsletters are about keeping in touch with our members. We still have a nucleus of members from our first decade, even if some are now less active in local affairs, or have moved away from Brixton. Others we rediscover from time to time, such as Mark Frankel, a committee member in the late 1970s until moving in 1983. David Warner, who joined us in 1980, met him again on 2nd December at the launch of a book written by his late father, Hyman Frankel.

Rather like the Millibands, it was the father who held the strongly left-wing views, while Mark has worked in public services. Hyman was born in the Jewish East End in 1918, joining the Young Communist League in the 1930s in response to Mosley's Black Shirts. His diverse career included teaching and work as a trade union official. Hyman wrote 4 books, on philosophy, sociology and physics, the posthumous one being "Socialism, vision and reality". In 1986 he moved to Clapham and was a regular correspondent in the *South London Press* and political journals until his death in July 2010, aged 91.

Alan Piper.

Notes and News

Brixton Society stall success

We often run stalls at other people's events, but on Saturday 11th December we set up shop on Windrush Square, and it turned out to be very successful. Perhaps we caught people on their way to do their Christmas shopping, but we took £243 which compares well with a day at the Lambeth Country Show. We signed up a couple of new members, gave away all our leaflets and shifted about 230 postcards before the gathering darkness curtailed our efforts. One visitor asked "Are you here every week?" but our resources don't run to that – though we do aim to return within 6 months, for Open Garden Squares weekend.



Open Garden Squares weekend, June 2010

Safe Neighbourhoods Teams in Brixton

There are police teams covering each Council ward and liaising closely with Council officers over enforcement issues. Further information can be found at: www.communitysafe.gov.uk

The south-east quarter of Brixton comes under Coldharbour ward team, who have a series of street briefings to allow residents to raise issues with the team:

Monday 3rd January: 4pm to 5pm at corner of Effra Road and Trelawn Road.

Friday 7th January: 4pm to 5pm outside Kenwood House, Guinness Trust estate, Loughborough Park.

Wednesday 12th January: 12 noon to 1pm, Windrush Square, on Effra Road.

Friday 21st January: 4pm to 5 pm at Moorland Community Centre.



Children's Activities

Despite the old show business advice about never appearing with children or animals, many voluntary groups want to run activities for children, even if only once a year. There are many myths about what you should or should not do, but now clarity is at hand.

A free half-day event for groups active in Lambeth is being run on **Thursday 13th January** from 2 pm to 5 pm at the Coin Street Centre, Waterloo, SE1. Promoted by Lambeth's Safeguarding Children Board, the event will explain current requirements and pool experience about good practice. Early booking is advised, to Serena Tommasino on (020) 7926 7691 or e-mail: stommasino@lambeth.gov.uk

Looking London-wide

It's all too easy for us to focus on proposals and policies emerging from Lambeth Town Hall, but there are also important matters dealt with by the Mayor. The closing dates are approaching for comments on two draft new strategies:

Climate Change & Energy Strategy, deadline 5th January;

The Mayor's proposals for Managing the Capital's Waste, deadline 14th January.

See www.london.gov.uk and follow the links. We hope to say more about some of the London-wide strategies in our next issue.