

THE BRIXTON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Winter, December 2015

No.220, Quarterly issue,

Distributed free to members

Registered with the London Forum of Amenity Societies, Registered Charity No.1058103,

Website: www.brixtonsociety.org.uk

Our next event:

Thursday 14th 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 if you wish to bring a guest). Notify Bill Linskey (Chair) at wjdc1@globalnet.co.uk or on (020) 7274 3835.

Christmas Market & Carols

A final reminder about two events around the bandstand in Myatt's Fields Park on **Sunday 13 December**. The Christmas Market runs from 3 - 5 pm, with Christingle making for children in the cafe from 4 pm, then carol singing from 5 pm. After dusk, use Cormont Road gate opposite St.Gabriel's Manor. *Myatt's Fields Park Project*

More dates inside...

We aim to deliver this issue before Christmas, to give you ample notice of the Winter Social, and there are more dates on page 2, but do also check our website in the New Year as news trickles in of further events. In the meantime, seasonal greetings to you all...

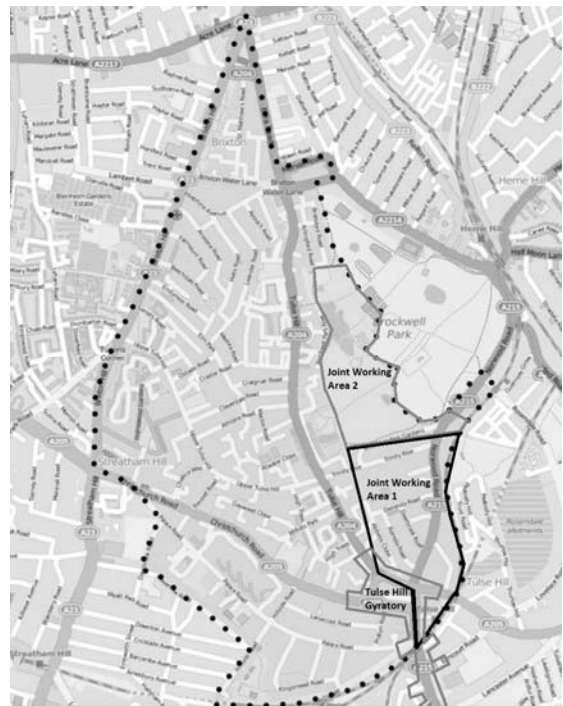
Focus on Tulse Hill



CrG-Vu15-06.jpg

Hope for Cressingham Gardens

We have been working with other amenity groups to limit the damage that "densification" would do to Brockwell Park, but a recent legal challenge by residents of the estate has revived the prospect of refurbishing the existing estate. It would certainly be a quicker and cheaper way of providing the mere 23 extra homes that Lambeth would gain from its preferred option of complete rebuilding.



JW in Tulse Hill.jpg

On the other hand, not much peace and goodwill around the fringes of Tulse Hill lately, following proposed boundaries being published for a Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Plan (see map above).

Full story on page 7...

Diary of Events, New Year 2016

Society Meetings

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

- 11 February
- 10 March
- 14 April
- 12 May
- 9 June (AGM)

Market Walks

Our guided walks round the market area continue on the second **Saturday** of every month, at £3 including the illustrated booklet of the route. Walks start from Brixton Station Road at **2-30 pm** and take about 90 minutes. Tickets are best booked in advance through marketwalks@brixtonsociety.org.uk

Sunday Walks

We put on guided walks on most Sunday afternoons from May onwards, jointly with other amenity societies around Lambeth. However, to agree the dates, we need to send in proposals by the end of January, so do tell us sooner if you want a special piece of Lambeth included.

Brixton Windmill

Guided tours and other events will resume in April – see the Friends' website for dates and details: www.brixtonwindmill.org/visit

Links with Other Groups

Please check directly with the organisers if any queries over times or admission.

Saturday 19 December – Angell Town's Local Market

If Brixton Market is a bit far from our northern fringes, this could be easier to reach – 12 noon to 5 pm at St. John's Church, Angell Town, corner of Wiltshire Road and Angell Road, SW9. See also www.itsyourlocalmarket.co.uk

Saturday 19 December – Father Christmas at the Windmill

Father Christmas and his sleigh are expected from 1 pm, and will be on site until 4 pm, supported by animals from Brixton City Farm. There will also be a card-making workshop, face-painting and a children's entertainer. Visits to Santa's grotto cost £2 per child. *Friends of Windmill Gardens, with support from Blenheim Gardens RMO*

Until 16 January – New Ideas for Housing

Exhibition of the top 100 ideas for tackling the Housing Crisis, through building quicker/ higher/ denser/ cheaper to land reform, easier finance and more joined-up planning. New London Architecture gallery at the Building Centre, 26 Store Street, WC1E 7BT (closed Sundays). *The Building Centre*

20 & 21 February – The Listed Property Show

At Olympia, 10 am to 5 pm, more details and tickets from www.lpoc.co.uk *Listed Property Owners Club*

Monday 22 February – Clapham South Deep Shelter Project

In 1948 some of the first West Indian immigrants were housed temporarily in the underground air raid shelter at the southern end of Clapham Common. Now Transport for London propose to open it up for tours, with a museum at ground level. Chris Nix of London Transport Museum will describe the plans. Starts at 8 pm (doors open 7 pm) at Omnibus, the former Clapham Library, 1 North Side, SW4.

Clapham Society



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 who are 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, 82 Mayall Road, SE24 0PJ, or by e-mail to APiperBrix@aol.com Phone/ fax (020) 7207 0347



Residents gather in Minet Library to campaign against Lambeth's "Culture 2020" package on 19th October. IMG 2888.jpg

Legal help sought over Lambeth library lunacy

After losing one judicial review over the Cressingham Gardens Estate, Lambeth faces another over its controversial plans to cut back libraries and replace at least 3 with fee-charging gyms. Again the issue is the lack of consultation. Friends of Lambeth Libraries says the Culture 2020 package was launched in January with a slanted consultation process. It then produced radically different plans which were rushed through Cabinet in just 10 days, with no consultation at all. Residents all over the borough are strongly opposed. They have signed petitions in their thousands and marched in their hundreds in the rain. The self-styled "co-operative council" is shown to be nothing of the kind.

The case is being brought by Public Interest Lawyers on behalf of a Lambeth resident who depends on the Carnegie Library. The claimant is just one of hundreds of vulnerable people who will lose vital services if Lambeth forces through its plan to gut 5 of its 10 remaining libraries. A major point is Lambeth's refusal to even consider a viable bid from library managers to run all 10 libraries, fully-staffed, within the financial limits set by the Council. The Friends say they have gone through all Lambeth's democratic processes but Lambeth refuses to listen. It is still open to Lambeth to re-think, and accept an alternative that residents support. There is still time, as its own plan is barely worked out – and many serious questions remain unanswered.

FoLL – contact Lswaffield1@gmail.com

Are perverse finances the source of the problem?

Lambeth claims to be short of money for staff salaries and upkeep of buildings, but it seems to be getting good cash-flow from Community Infrastructure Levy, charged on most building developments now, and from property sales. It has already ear-marked some £6 million to spend on the Brixton Rec, to bring it up to current standards over the next 4-7 years, while also considering more ambitious improvements for the longer term. Even the Brixton Rec User Group says the need for, or value of, the long-term proposals is unclear.

Meanwhile up the Hill, Lambeth is dragging its feet over the proposed education building for Windmill Gardens that it promised earlier this year, so access for school parties to the Windmill is likely to end soon as ad hoc arrangements with the adjacent nursery run out.

Windrush Square is feeling the pressure

Working with the Friends of Windrush Square, the Brixton Society hosted a meeting on 11th November to bring together stakeholders and review problems which seem to be increasing. Apart from the original design faults which make it hard to maintain, street drinking and anti-social behaviour have been increasing. Like the rest of the Town Centre it suffers from the Council's failure to provide toilets to match Brixton's 24-hour economy, despite interest from two entrepreneurs in re-opening the underground toilets. Bureaucratic processes are a deterrent to the community events that could discourage the anti-social elements. We will be following up early in the New Year.

Loughborough Junction: - the madness is over!

While planning the Myatt's Fields North and South Estates in the mid-1970s, Lambeth included a "Brixton by-pass" in the form of a local distributor road linking Loughborough, Akerman and Lothian Roads. The final link through to Camberwell New Road was never finished because it cut across other plans for refurbishing the Regency terraces lining the main road, so it petered out in an untidy one-way system. Nevertheless it provided a useful route and eventually a bus service, the P5.

Roll forward 40 years and new enthusiasms have gripped the transport engineers. Lambeth decides to block the "by-pass" at its southern end, not only Loughborough Road but also alternatives via Barrington Road and Lilford Road, channelling traffic into the surrounding estates and restricting access to businesses in the railway arches around Loughborough Junction. Despite the wide area affected, only residents around the Junction are consulted, and businesses not at all. Inevitably there is uproar as people in the surrounding area wake up to find their roads obstructed and confused drivers trying to get through Loughborough and Angell Town Estates.

In the end it took several interventions by local councillors, big petitions by residents and a decisive 72% of its online survey to persuade Lambeth to admit its mistake, with most of the closures only being removed on 25 November. Apart from the increased pollution from the traffic tail-backs, it's a relief that there were no fatal accidents on the estates affected.

Another Interchange: New Plans for Vauxhall Cross

It may be outside our catchment area, but many of us use it as an interchange, so we ought to remind you that TfL are consulting on a new plan for re-shaping the intersection. Earlier proposals for sweeping away the bus station attracted a lot of anger – is this version any better? Have your say at www.consultations.tfl.gov.uk/roads/vauxhall-cross

Brixton Christmas Lights on!

Brixton's Christmas lights were officially launched on Friday evening, 4th December, with appearances by the Mayor, Cllrs Donatus Anyanwu, April Jackson of Three Little Birds restaurant in Coldharbour Lane, Devon Thomas, Chair of Brixton Neighbourhood Forum and Michael Smith, Director of Brixton Business Improvement District. Musical support was provided by Divine Steel on steel pans, and singers from the Rapture Ministries Church, in Norwood. Better pictures than mine can be found on the Brixton Blog – see www.brixtonblog.com/brixton-switches-christmas/34529



The next general meeting will be on **Thursday 28 January**, from 7 pm at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road (facing Windrush Square) SW2. An update bulletin and agenda will be circulated after the Christmas break, but expect reports back on the Neighbourhood Plans issue, regeneration efforts, and the opportunity to share with other members what your group has been doing.

The following meeting is pencilled-in for 24 March (to be confirmed shortly) and the AGM is expected in late May/ early June.

LVAC AGM on 18 December

Lambeth Voluntary Action Council (LVAC) is holding its Annual General Meeting on Friday 18 December, from 6 pm to 8 pm at St. Mark's Community Centre, Montgomery Hall, Kennington Oval SE11. Spaces are limited, so please e-mail to melaniekrt@aol.com to reserve a place, by 14 December.

Oval House Theatre move

Oval House Theatre has received backing from the Theatres Trust for its Somerleyton Road move, but the 2016 season will still be at the old site next to Montgomery Hall (above).

Norma Williamson



Norma at the Brixton Society AGM 2012

Norma came to London from Jamaica as a young girl. She lived, initially with her mother, in Stockwell which was to be her home for the rest of her life.

After school she had a variety of interesting careers. She worked for the law firm founded by the Brixton-born lawyer and Labour politician Victor Mishcon, rising to become office manager. She had worked for a time as a tour organiser, spent a year in Spain and learned the language. Her final career was in the health service which ended when she retired as Director of Human Resources (HR) at The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

Her post-retirement life was just as varied. She continued to use her HR skills running a consultancy specialising in mediation work. A great passion of hers was a concern for the elderly. Used to Jamaican extended families, she was appalled by the isolation of many older people and, typically, she did something about it. Firstly by befriending and helping vulnerable neighbours, she then got involved in what is now Age UK Lambeth. She became a trustee and quite an organiser of activities.

Norma was a tireless volunteer at the Brixton Society, recruiting members, organising events, writing publications and she was our Treasurer for some 16 years.

As if this were not enough, she was always ready to try something new. A course on perfumery and before you knew it she was selling her own made perfumes and toiletries in Brixton Market.

Her funeral took place at the South London Crematorium on 7th July. It was notable for both the number and variety of attendees: family (her son and many cousins), friends, neighbours, old work colleagues, friends from Age UK and, of course, from the Brixton Society.

Norma Elaine Williamson
1 September 1947 – 16 June 2015
R.I.P.

An obituary for Brian Bloice of Lambeth Local History Forum appears on page 8.

Brockwell Park Events 2016

The Friends of Brockwell Park have planned their main events for the year ahead. There will be 3 guided walks around the park, the first being a History Walk on **Sunday 17 April**. There will also be some small group tours of the walled garden in the summer.

The FoBP Car Boot Sales in the Lido car park will start up again in April and continue on the second **Sunday** of the month, so the first will be on **10 April**. More details in due course on www.brockwellpark.com

Promoting Creative Brixton firms
Brixton's Business Improvement District aims to boost local involvement in the **London Design Festival** next September, building on last year's Brixton Design Week.

Changes to Porden Road

As from **15 December** pedestrian and cycle access at the Brixton Hill end will be blocked to allow work to start on the demolition of Town Hall Parade and Hambrook House. Buckner Road will be closed soon after, in connection with the "New Town Hall" project, so the main section of Porden Road will become a cul-de-sac with 2-way traffic.

Local History

Winifred Atwell

Some readers, who have seen the terrific images of local heroes which have adorned the windows of the Brixton Advice Centre in Railton Road since their unveiling at the end of October as part of Black History Month, may have wondered what is the connection between Winifred Atwell, one of the people so honoured, and Railton Road. Some may even have wondered, who was Winifred Atwell?

Winifred Atwell was born in about 1913 (her year of birth seems somewhat uncertain) in Trinidad. She was the daughter of a pharmacist and a district nurse, took a degree in pharmacy and worked in her father's chemist shop. She might well have inherited her father's business, provided great services to her local community and have never been heard of more widely. But she had a greater talent: she played the piano from the age of four and studied classical piano in New York and London where she met her husband, Lew Levisohn, who gave up his own career to become her manager. She became a true megastar.

Unknown until she played a charity concert in 1948, by 1952 she was playing at the first Royal Variety

Performance for the new Queen Elizabeth II. In the days when record sales charts still meant something, in 1954 she became the first black performer to reach number one. She also became the first black artist to sell a million records. By 1960 she had had eleven top ten hits and was the most successful female instrumentalist ever to grace the charts.

She was to perform at two more Royal Variety Performances, all over Europe and in

Australia. She had her own television shows, firstly for ITV in 1956 and then for the BBC. Another first – having a series on both channels (yes, there were only two then!).

What about the music? Winifred, the trained concert pianist, always had classical music as her first love. Indeed, a recording she made of a Rakhmaninov piece reached number 9 in the charts. But the music that made her a megastar was not played on a concert grand, it was played on her “other piano” – an old upright said to have been bought in a Battersea junk shop and never properly tuned – and on it she played ragtime: songs such as *Britannia Rag* (her first chart entry), *Let's Have Another Party* and *Poor People of Paris* (both number 1s) and *Black and White Rag* (to regain fame in the 1970s as the theme to the snooker programme *Pot Black*).

Railton Road? In 1956 when Winifred was, perhaps, at the height of her career she was approached by a stranger who pointed out that there were no hairdressing salons for black women in the country and so she opened one in Railton Road on the corner of Chaucer Road.

Our top photo shows Winifred (standing, centre) with a customer. The lower one shows some of the very “modern”, not to say risqué for its times, interior design. It was sold in 1961.

Winifred Atwell's star faded in the 1960s as the new pop music boomed but she remained popular in Australia where she settled in the 1970s until her death in 1983.



Neighbourhood Planning

My Plan or Yours?

Tulse Hill's Neighbourhood Plan starts off by annoying its neighbours...

When we set up the Brixton Neighbourhood Forum back in 2011, we aimed to include a wide area around Brixton, not just the commercial town centre. We already have an agreed Brixton Town Centre Plan (or SPD) which is only a few years old and broadly acceptable, so we have not hastened to create a replacement Plan of our own. Our problem has only been the Council's tendency to relax the policies when a developer offers a large enough financial inducement.

It would be possible for the Neighbourhood Forum to lead on developing a Neighbourhood Plan which covered other parts of Brixton, such as Brixton Hill, but it is a major project which would take at least 2 to 3 years, and so far we have not had members clamouring to do it, so it has not been a priority.

Suddenly this all changed in mid-October when, out of the blue, an advert appeared in the Weekender announcing the Tulse Hill Forum's intention to start on a Neighbourhood Plan and to designate what turned out to be a very wide area for it.

Forums in Lambeth

A Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum has been in existence since 2012, and earlier forums in Streatham and Norwood survive from Lambeth's old system of Town Centre forums. All these Neighbourhood Forums aim to be sounding-boards for local opinion, and have taken on a variety of other activities in different areas. Several forums are promoting local regeneration and Herne Hill Forum even runs a Sunday market outside Herne Hill railway station. There is no such forum yet for Clapham, though there is one for Clapham Park which grew out of the Clapham Park New Deal for Communities project, centred on the South Circular Road west of Brixton Hill. All the forums are members of the Lambeth Forum Network, but nobody thought to use it to consult before the application was made.

Until then, the different forums had been rather vague about their catchment areas, but once a forum embarks on a Neighbourhood Plan, then the Localism Act requires that definite boundaries are set. This is because the Plan can vary existing Council planning policies within those boundaries, and highlight how particular sites should be used or developed, influencing how future planning applications are decided.

A Neighbourhood Plan will go through several stages of development and consultation, but the ultimate test will be a referendum in which all residents of the designated area will vote to approve it (or not). Therefore you would expect the promoters to propose a core area where they can be confident of local support, rather than claiming large areas where they are scarcely known, or residents are opposed from the outset.

Disputed Boundaries

The more controversial parts of the proposed area included a slice of Brockwell Park and perversely, the Brix, where only last year the Brixton Forum met to discuss plans for remodelling the churchyard. Several objectors have pointed out that both sides of Brixton Hill should be considered together to promote, say better crossing facilities, rather than reinforce it as a barrier dividing the community.

Brockwell Park Community Partners have agreed that the park should be treated as a single entity, and in the face of competing territorial claims from the four forums around the park, we have suggested that it should be excluded from all of the NP areas and continue to use the Community Partners for planning the future of the park and resolving issues between different stakeholders. South of the park as far as Tulse Hill Station, there are objections from both Herne Hill and Norwood Forums.

Ultimately it lies with Lambeth to settle the boundaries, and these are likely to be decided at the next Cabinet meeting on Monday 11 January.

*Alan Piper, Secretary,
Brixton Neighbourhood Forum.*

Heritage Market Stalls

The traditional 4-wheeled market barrow, with wooden wheels, iron tyres and leaf springs, has become an endangered species within Brixton Market. Space to store them nearby – much less repair them – has dwindled as more railway arches have been put to other uses, and critically the skills to make or replace the wheels are now rare.

The Brixton Townscape Heritage Initiative is now working with the Market Traders Federation to support restoration of several barrows, attracting extra funding from the Heritage of London Trust and sourcing a skilled craftsman to work on the barrows in a nearby arch.

Loss for Lambeth's local history scene

All of us active in local history around Lambeth regret the death of Brian Bloice on 29 October at the age of 76. Brian was widely known in recent years as Chair of the Streatham Society, and of the Lambeth Local History Forum, the umbrella body for all groups in Lambeth active in this field. He had also been a leading member of the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society (SLAS) since its formation in 1965, and was a regular speaker on local history topics. Many of us first came to know him as a lecturer at various adult education institutes, including Morley College, South Lambeth Institute and latterly Lambeth College.

These interests were in addition to his career as an analytical chemist in local government, pursued from 1957 until Southwark Council closed its analytical service in 1991.

Brian actually grew up in Stockwell, originally in Combermere Road and then Hubert Grove. He attended Santley Street School in 1944-50 and then Henry Thornton Grammar School in Clapham in 1950-57. It was only in 1976 that he moved to Woodmansterne Road on the Norbury fringes of Streatham. Building on his experience in archaeology, he was soon involved in the Streatham Society's local

history group and helped organise the local history walks which have since grown into a borough-wide programme.

Brian was the author of several publications for the Streatham Society, and his research helped protect several landmark buildings, notably the Streatham Silk Mill, Henry Tate's old home at Park Hill, and the facades of the Streatham Hill Theatre and former ABC-Regal Cinema.

His funeral at Norwood Crematorium on 18 November attracted a large number of friends and colleagues, not only from Streatham but also from Lambeth and Southwark in general.

Alan Piper

The man behind Bovril

As a follow-up to one story in our last issue, I noticed while waiting for Brian Bloice's funeral, that the inventor of Bovril, John Lawson Johnston, is buried in West Norwood Cemetery, in a substantial family vault with eminent neighbours – Sir Henry Tate on one side and the Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon on the other, by the chapel door.

200 years of Waterloo Life

From the Dark to the Light is the theme of a talk by Chris Everett on **Tuesday 9th February** at the Housing Co-op meeting room, 106 The Cut, SE1, almost opposite the Old Vic. Open from 7 pm for 7-30 start.

Southwark & Lambeth Archaeological Society

Croydon Recreated:

3 collections, 9 locations, 100 years

Many Brixtonians have moved south over the years, so it's worth mentioning a current exhibition in the Museum of Croydon Exhibition Gallery at the Croydon Clocktower, which runs until **9th April**. Admission free and open 10-30 am to 5 pm Tuesday to Saturday (excluding public holidays). It aims to recreate 9 locations around the borough as they were about 100 years ago, using material from 3 of the museum's collections.