

# THE BRIXTON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring issue, March 2012

No.205, free to members, quarterly.

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

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

## **Windmill Festival and Parade, Bank Holiday Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> May**

Provisionally 1 pm to 5 pm, with stalls, music, theatre and food: Windmill Gardens are between Ramillies Close and Blenheim Gardens, off the west side of Brixton Hill, SW2. There will also be a carnival parade with a recycling theme, starting out from **Windrush Square** and processing up Brixton Hill.

See the FoWG website:

[www.brixtonwindmill.org](http://www.brixtonwindmill.org)

## **Open Garden Squares Weekend - 9 & 10 June**

On the Saturday we are encouraging community groups to join us in setting up stalls and displays in **Windrush Square**. 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](mailto:wjdc1@globalnet.co.uk)

On Sunday we have a guided walk, taking in some relics of Brixton's rural past and finishing with a brief tour of the windmill. Meet at **2-30 pm** outside Brixton Tate Library

### **More Guided Walks:**

We hope to have the list of guided walks from all Lambeth's amenity societies in time for distribution with this issue – but do check our website for late additions or changes.



*London to Brighton Veteran Car Run 2011  
passing Lambeth Town Hall*

## **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:apiperbrix@aol.com)

### **Invest in Brixton Energy**

Brixton Energy is a co-operative that grew out of discussions within Transition Town Brixton. They recently launched a share offer to raise funds for a solar power station in Brixton, which will consist of several hundred square metres of solar-pv panels on top of blocks of flats within the Loughborough Estate. These panels will generate income from sales to the electricity grid under the Government's Feed-in Tariff. Deadline to invest by is **20 March** – see [www.brixtonenergy.co.uk](http://www.brixtonenergy.co.uk) or contact [agamemnonotero@brixtonenergy.co.uk](mailto:agamemnonotero@brixtonenergy.co.uk) or Will Anderson on 07 739 121 648

# Spring & Summer Diary of Events

## 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).

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

## Forward Planning

*Dates to note:*

**Lambeth Country Show,**  
Weekend 15 & 16 Sept.

**London Open House**  
weekend 22 & 23 Sept.

**Lambeth Archives Open Day,** Saturday 29 Sept.

## 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](mailto:APiperBrix@aol.com)  
Phone/ fax (020) 7207 0347

## Brixton Windmill

A programme of guided tours resumes at Easter, on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> April, from 1 pm to 4 pm. The Windmill Festival will be held early, on Bank Holiday **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> May**, including a parade starting from Windrush Square. Enquiries to [info@brixtonwindmill.org](mailto:info@brixtonwindmill.org)

## Links with Other Groups

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

## West Norwood Cemetery

Introductory tours of the cemetery take place on the first Sunday of the month, from **1<sup>st</sup> April** at 2-30 pm to coincide with the Norwood Feasts along the main road. Gather inside the main gate on Norwood High Street. Plans are being made for an art trail and after-hours performance events from June onwards.  
*Friends of West Norwood Cemetery*

## Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> April –The First London Olympics

London is unique in hosting three Olympics – Kevin Kelly recalls the first, in 1908. 8 pm at Woodlawns, Streatham Darby & Joan Club, 16 Leigham Court Road, SW16.  
*The Streatham Society*

## Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April – A Hard Day's Night

The Beatles' film from 1964 concludes the winter season of British films from the

1950s and 1960s. 6-30 pm at the Minet Library.  
*Minet Film Club*

## Wednesday 18 April – Clapham issues:

Brief presentations on several current topics including the Common, the Gateway project and the new library, followed by discussion. 7-30 for 8 pm start, at Clapham Manor Primary School, entrance in Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ.  
*Clapham Society*

## Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> May – The Marshalsea Prison:

During Charles Dickens' childhood, this Southwark debtors' prison was home to his family. Talk by Stephen Humphrey, 7-30 pm, 7-45 start, Herne Hill United Church Hall, c/o Redpost Hill and Herne Hill, SE24.  
*Herne Hill Society*

## Thursday 17 May – Bygone Brixton

Alan Piper introduces some recent research on local buildings, 8 pm at the Phoenix Centre, Westow Street, SE19.  
*Norwood Society*

## Until 12 August – Migrations

An exhibition of British art on the theme of migration, from 1500 to the present day, tracing not only the movement of artists but also of visual language and ideas. Admission £6 (£5 for concessions), tickets can be bought at Tate Britain or Tate Modern, or call 020 7887 8888.  
*Tate Britain*

# Community Hubs

## Lambeth's Community Hubs Concept

In December, Lambeth Council agreed to explore the development of a network of "community hubs" over the next 4 years. One factor behind this is the number of Lambeth-owned buildings (about 100) occupied by voluntary organisations or community groups on a variety of terms. This also provides an opportunity for Lambeth to try its co-operative council model for real.

### The Libraries Angle

Meanwhile, Lambeth has committed itself to running only the Brixton and Streatham Tate Libraries itself, and is inviting Friends groups – or any other willing organisations – to run the other libraries as prototype community hubs. However, unless Lambeth continues to provide the librarians, the local library service could easily be displaced by other activities to cover the cost of keeping the buildings going. No thought seems to have been given to accommodating specialist services such as the Archives.

### Mixed Messages

The anxiety for groups using – or coveting – Council buildings is how far this policy initiative will extend beyond libraries. Lambeth has a track record of stringing groups along through feasibility studies and bidding processes, only to drop the community contenders in favour of a small quick profit from a developer. Thus the Railway Hotel is about to be chopped up by developers, and it looks as if Stockwell Studios in the old Annie McCall Maternity Hospital will go the same way.

### Still time to comment

We are trying to get a Council speaker to our April committee meeting to explain the proposals. If we know your e-mail address, we will tell you once we know for sure and you will be welcome to join us.

In any case, consultation on Hubs closes on **31<sup>st</sup> March** – to [jkerridge@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:jkerridge@lambeth.gov.uk) and to [cooperativecouncil@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:cooperativecouncil@lambeth.gov.uk) and **20<sup>th</sup> April** for Libraries – send to [cooperativelibraries@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:cooperativelibraries@lambeth.gov.uk)

## Brixton Green AGM

Brixton Green is continuing to pursue its plans for a community-led mixed development along the railway side of Somerleyton Road, SW9. The Annual General Meeting is on **Saturday 17 March at 11 am** at Hillmead School, Moorland Road SW9. Two shareholder trustees/directors are due to be elected to the board, and there will be progress reports on the current proposals. Further details are at [www.brixtongreen.org](http://www.brixtongreen.org)

## The Brixton Remakery

Originally promoted last year as the Brixton Re-use Centre, the Remakery is a community-led initiative to set up a shared workspace for re-use, creative recycling and "upcycling" enterprises. The Remakery will provide affordable workspace, access to materials and business development support. It will create employment, training and volunteering opportunities and save up to 200 tonnes of materials a year from being thrown away, including bicycles, wood, textiles, furniture and computers. The project was awarded capital funds of £100,000 from Lambeth's Your Choice scheme after receiving over 3000 votes from residents.

The Remakery has been offered a 15-year lease on 1000 sq.m of disused garage space below Council flats in Paulet Road, SE5. A planning application has recently been submitted and the proposals are on display in the foyer of the **Minet Library** in Knatchbull Road until **19<sup>th</sup> March**.

Enquiries to [hannah@remakery.org](mailto:hannah@remakery.org)

## Brixton Heritage Film-making

Chocolate Films are seeking members of the community who remember the riots of the 1980s. Working with a core group of young people, Chocolate will teach them the core skills of film-making, researching, writing and editing a short film. This work will include oral history sessions with those who remember the violence and the aftermath of the 1980s.

Aiofe Twomy would welcome enquiries and contacts, at [aiofe@chocolatefilms.com](mailto:aiofe@chocolatefilms.com) or phone 020 7793 4287 or 07 727 492 662



## Charlie Chaplin's Mentor

Recent media reports about MI5's inability to trace Chaplin's birth certificate prompted David Warner to track down the Brixton connection. Enthusiastic amateur researchers long ago discovered some 20 addresses in the north of modern Southwark and Lambeth where Chaplin lived in his younger years, but it was on the eastern fringes of Brixton that his career began to take off, thanks to a character called Fred Karno

## FRED KARNO'S FUN FACTORY

Fred Karno (born Fred Wescott, Exeter, Devon 1866) grew up in Nottingham. Apprenticed to a plumber, Fred had ambitions as a gymnast. Conveniently his apprentice master died, freeing Fred to team up with a local acrobat and then join a circus in Cardiff. This could be dangerous work - he later wrote of a circus appearance in Amsterdam '... the net stretched over the orchestra and came down too low. I used to finish off the act by doing a double somersault from the roof into the net. But when I did it on the first night in this hall, I landed just above the conductor's music stand and

crashed almost with the full force of my descent. They thought my back was broken but it wasn't quite as bad as that ...'

By the late 1880s Fred had started on the music hall circuit. He met his first wife Edith when they were appearing together at the Theatre Royal, Stockport. They were married at Lambeth Registrar's Office on 15 January 1889.

Fred became a successful promoter of touring Music Hall reviews, and by 1900 needed a suitable creative base. He bought two large houses in **Southwell Road** (then known as 22, 23, 26, 28 and 28a Vaughan Road), and knocked them into one to become his home, office, a nursery for stars, and a storehouse for stage properties. It soon became known as the 'Fun Factory' (pictured above). He announced: 'We'll turn you out anything theatrical from a pantomime, cast, scenery, dresses, everything complete, down to a property periwinkle.'

Karno bought himself a primrose and scarlet Rolls with the name 'Fred Karno' daubed on it. His income was now £600 a week. Carrying as many of his actors as the Rolls could manage, Fred would go on a pub crawl where he would treat everyone at the bar then leave behind a stack of playbills and posters. Landlords didn't mind the extra custom. And the Rolls would 'conveniently' break down in the middle of a crowded street and he would ask volunteers for a push before handing them a tip and more playbills and posters. Or he would have 'warders' chasing two escaped 'convicts' through a town's rush hour, anticipating the chases of the Keystone Cops.



Edith (pictured right) no longer travelled about with Fred and their last child named Leslie was born in February 1902 at Vaughan Road. Three weeks later Edith received a package through the post from Fred containing photographs of himself and a girl both naked and in various poses - Fred's way of informing his wife that he had a mistress! After a lot of tears and showing them to her son Freddie, who was old enough to understand, she wrapped the photographs up again, saying: 'I may need them.' Within an hour she had packed and left with Freddie and baby Leslie to take refuge a few miles away with one of Fred's top actors, Charlie Bell, and his wife Clara.

## Local History Focus



Soon after, Fred arrived at Vaughan Road with his mistress Marie Moore, (pictured left) one of the 'Amazonian Chorus' of His Majesty's Guests. Though opposite to Edith in that she was a big, raven-haired brunette with a large bust, a sexual extravert, and a shrewd business mind, she was similar to Edith in that she also loved Fred Karno. Marie would prove to be Fred's loyal standby through the bad times and Edith never took up with anyone else.

Edith sought a separation but Fred refused to pay any maintenance - he believed Edith would return to Vaughan Road to make up a menage-a-trois. When the case came to court in 1904, it seemed that Edith might lose and in desperation she produced the pornographic photographs. Edith won separation, £10 a week maintenance and custody of Leslie, while Fred won custody of Freddie.

Edith rented a house in Brixton Road and entertained a wide range of friends including Marie Lloyd, (pictured right) star comedienne of the stage. Fred Karno never stopped trying to wriggle out of paying her maintenance or trying to gain custody of Leslie.



Syd Chaplin had a permanent job with Karno and persistently pleaded with Fred to give a part to his brother Charlie who was out of work after appearing in the play Sherlock Holmes. Fred knew Charlie, having shared the same bill with him at the Nottingham Empire in 1901 when Charlie was appearing with the Eight Lancashire Lads. Karno later said: 'He was puny, pale and undernourished and frightened, as though he expected me to raise my hand to hit him. Even his clothes were too small for him.' Both Chaplin brothers appeared in London Suburbia while learning the Karno style of comedy during the day at Montpelier Theatre - the 'Fun Factory' by then was overflowing.

Charlie Chaplin starred in Karno's next production, the Football Match, appearing at Nottingham Empire in January 1910, but turned down the lead in the next production, Jimmy the Fearless, which was instead a resounding success for Stan Laurel. Later in 1910, Karno sent two casts including Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel to the USA with a sketch "A night in an English Music Hall" which played at Hammerstein's in New York for 8 weeks before touring the country. Mack Sennett saw the show in Los Angeles and lured Charlie away to a Hollywood career. Stan Laurel returned to the USA later to join the Hal Roach Studios and team up with Oliver Hardy.

In 1912 Karno embarked on an ambitious project for a combined hotel and entertainment complex – dubbed the Karsino - at Tagg's Island near Hampton Court, where he already had a houseboat he used as a weekend retreat. It opened in May 1913, but proved costly to run. During the First World War Fred still produced music hall shows – one contract with Moss Empires was worth £70,000 - but after the war public taste shifted to more sophisticated revues without the slapstick. The cinema too began to make inroads into the music hall takings, and with the Karsino dogged by too many rainy days, Fred was soon in financial trouble. The Fun Factory had to be sold when he was declared bankrupt in October 1926.

But Fred was not finished. He staged "Mumming Birds" as a Christmas attraction at the Crystal Palace in 1928, and after sending it off on a provincial tour, embarked for America. In Hollywood, both Chaplin and Laurel pulled strings for him, leading to a job with Hal Roach, but he was too used to teaching everyone else about comedy and returned to Britain after 6 months. Back home he produced a new type of touring show called Karno's Crazy Comics, which became the nursery for the Crazy Gang. He also directed 6 low-budget films for Ealing Studios before forming his own film company in 1935, but its first and only film was a financial failure. Aged 70, Fred finally gave up his show business career to run an off-licence in the Dorset village of Lilliput, set up with the help of a £1,000 donation from Chaplin. Fred died suddenly of diabetes on 17 September 1941, leaving little money but a lasting impression on the world of entertainment.

For a fuller account see <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/sherwoodtimes/karno.htm>

## TWO EMINENT VICTORIANS

The short note, right, opens a door onto two remarkable lives. Firstly, let us clarify what it says:

“Dear Mr Cross

Please accept my sincere congratulations on your appointment to the India Office. You will see from my daily London Letter, a copy of which I enclose, that I have already offered them in print.

Yours faithfully

Henry W. Lucy”

### Henry William Lucy

Sir Henry William Lucy (1843–1924) was a journalist. Born in Lancashire, he received an elementary education in Liverpool, leaving school at 13 to become a junior clerk.

Always keen on writing, he taught himself shorthand in order to get into journalism. By the time he was 21 he was chief reporter on the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*. Other journalist jobs followed, then a period of time freelancing while he was the secretary to a railway contractor. He spent much of 1869 in Paris, leaning French. On his return, he held posts in Exeter and London until, in 1872, he gained a regular job on the London *Daily News* where he quickly became manager of the parliamentary staff and writer of its parliamentary summary. He had found his metier; politics and parliamentary affairs became the bedrock of his immensely successful career which was to include writing for *The Observer* and *Punch*.

He also found time to write novels, short stories, biographies, political handbooks, and reminiscences, compilations of his work and for the “London Letter”. Since this latter is mentioned in our note, it had better be explained: “The *London Letter* was a regular feature of provincial newspapers from early in the nineteenth century... Such columns were written by a rum assortment of staff journalists on London papers, freelancers and hacks. [One] of the most respectable such writers [was] Henry Lucy.”<sup>1</sup>

Lucy was knighted in 1909 and when he died in 1924 he left over a quarter of a million pounds.

<sup>1</sup> “When the provincial press was the national press c.1836-1900” by Andrew Hobbs. Available at [www.uclan.academia.edu](http://www.uclan.academia.edu)

Manuscript letter from 158 Brixton Road

### John Kynaston Cross

John Kynaston Cross (1832–1887) was an industrialist and politician; born in Bolton into a mill-owing family, he was privately educated.

He became a town councillor and JP. He stood as a Liberal candidate in the 1874 general election and was successful. However, he was not politically ambitious and only spoke 8 times during his first five years in Parliament. Nevertheless, he established a reputation as an expert in Indian affairs. He favoured lower import duties to both help the Indian poor and the Lancashire cotton industry.

In 1883 he reluctantly accepted Gladstone’s offer to become Under-Secretary for India. The secretary of state was in the House of Lords so that Cross had to take all the flak in the Commons. He declined promotion to the Treasury in 1884 on health grounds and lost his seat in the 1885 general election.

Exhausted, suffering from diabetes and nervous depression, old beyond his years, Cross went on an extended continental holiday. This seemed to do him good but not enough - in 1887 he hanged himself. 10,000 people attended his funeral.<sup>2</sup>

*The most successful Victorian journalist and an MP who committed suicide - linked by a letter from Brixton.*

<sup>2</sup> Information on both men taken from The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. The Oxford DND is available free, on-line to members of Lambeth Libraries from: [www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/LeisureCulture/Libraries/OnlineResources.htm](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/LeisureCulture/Libraries/OnlineResources.htm)

# Caring for Buildings

## Cracking Up

As I type the final pages of this newsletter, it's been raining all day, but only a couple of weeks ago the Environment Agency declared the South-East to be in drought. Despite last year's disappointing summer, it's been the driest 2-year period in 90 years. This has raised fears of more homes being affected by subsidence.

But before owners of older houses panic, they should remember there may be other common causes for those cracks in the ceiling.

If you have had recent building work done, remember that cracks in relatively new plaster usually arise from shrinkage as the material dries out, especially at the junction of walls and ceilings. Victorian builders would mask the joint with a decorative cornice, whilst the plaster itself would be lime-based and mixed with horsehair, making it more resistant to cracking. Modern practice is to cover ceilings and partitions with plasterboard, masking the joints with a just a thin skim of plaster which can easily crack. New door frames and skirtings too may shrink once exposed to central heating, leaving cracks alongside plastered walls.

Any building over 70 years old may have experienced war damage, and possibly clumsy reinstatement. Old LCC War Damage maps

show cumulative bomb damage to streets up to May 1945, and also record hits by V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets (which penetrated the ground more deeply, potentially affecting the foundations). Some sites experienced air raids in the First World War, and more recently there have been instances of accidental gas explosions and terrorist bombs.

All these detonations can shake a nearby building, even if it appears intact from the outside. Typical damage would be cracked plaster ceilings and cornices inside, and exposed features like chimney pots or parapets being dislodged. Many older buildings have lost original decorative features as a result.



Despite the brick walls, most of the structure of a Victorian house is timber – the roof and most of the floors and partitions. Any of these may sag or twist due to extra loads, or fail due to decay. The result may be ill-fitting doors or cracks around window frames.

Once these causes have been eliminated, we can consider subsidence.

Most of South London is built on a subsoil of shrinkable clay. This will shrink and crack in dry conditions, but swell again when it becomes wet. This usually means an annual cycle of summer shrinkage relieved by more rainfall and less evaporation in the winter. Moisture does not percolate easily through clay soils, so the effects are more pronounced near the surface, with conditions more stable at greater depths. Hence a building with shallow foundations may settle as the soil dries out in the summer, and rise again as the ground is soaked by winter rains. A building with a basement should have the advantage of deeper foundations BUT if different parts of the house have different heights or foundation depths, they will begin to move separately, resulting in cracking. This is most often seen with bay windows or back additions.

These effects can be more pronounced if trees are growing close to the house, particularly deciduous trees which will take more moisture out of the soil when in leaf during the summer. You should guard against faulty gutters or leaky drains concentrating moisture under one corner of the building. It is better to have a continuous band of impermeable paving around the base of the walls so that shallow foundations are less exposed to fluctuations in the sub-soil moisture.

*Alan Piper*

# **BRIXTON**

## Neighbourhood Forum

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The next meeting will be on **Tuesday 24 April at 7 pm** at ACCORD, 336 Brixton Road, SW9.

The main topic will be Neighbourhood Planning, and members of other forums will be joining us to share information. All welcome.

### Governor elections for Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospitals

Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation Trust (GSFT) has a Council of Governors elected from amongst the local population, patients, staff and local stakeholders. This is a voluntary role. Governors advise the Board of Directors and are responsible for appointing the Chair and the non-executive directors. I have been a governor for four years and have found it very interesting to hear about the challenges faced by one of the largest foundation trusts in the country and to discuss the developments planned. It is in the interests of the local population that governors ensure that this hospital continues to provide a good service, as we will probably all need it as we get older!

Five public governors and five patient governors are due to be elected in May 2012. You need to be a member of GSTFT, in order to stand for election. You can become a member if you live in Lambeth, Southwark, Wandsworth, Westminster or Lewisham, or have attended Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals as a patient during the last 5 years. To be a public governor you must be in the former category and to be a patient governor in the latter. Deadline for nominations is **25 April**.

For more information on becoming a member, and the elections, see [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/home.aspx](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/home.aspx) Please contact me if you would like to know more about being a governor ([jennycobley@aol.com](mailto:jennycobley@aol.com)).

*Jenny Cobley, Clapham Society member*

### Picture this - Effra FC

Effra FC may sound like a local football club, but in this case the game is photography. The group was started by locals who met on Flickr, a popular photo-sharing website. Four years old in March, there are now more than 120 members who use the online group as a forum to show their work and support each other's photographic efforts.

To add regular interest, the group hosts an informal monthly competition in which the winner gets to set the theme (and tweak the rules) for the following month's round, and the group meets at a pub or other local venue on the last Tuesday of every month to hear the results and discuss photography. The group has also organised photographic tours and outings and held a successful exhibition of its members' best work.

Membership is open to anyone in the environs of the River Effra, or who has ever heard of it. There is no fee (a basic Flickr account is free too) and members do not need to be expert or professional photographers, just interested in sharing their view of the local area and beyond.

The group can be found at [http://www.flickr.com/groups/effra\\_fc/](http://www.flickr.com/groups/effra_fc/) and the collective pool of pictures (now over 4000!) is at [http://www.flickr.com/groups/effra\\_fc/pool](http://www.flickr.com/groups/effra_fc/pool)

And what does FC stand for? Nobody knows! It just seemed a good idea at the time – non-scurrilous suggestions are welcome!

*Coconino*

### News from London Forum

The London Forum of Amenity Societies provides us with regular news and comments on changes in planning policies and procedures. To see new updates from the Forum, see [http://twitter.com/London\\_Forum](http://twitter.com/London_Forum) and look below the sign-up box – but please bear in mind that links to individual items may not be valid for long.