

NEWSLETTER

Autumn issue, October 2007

No.187, Quarterly, distributed free to members

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

Website: www.brixtonsociety.org.uk



Our next appearance: Saturday 6th October Lambeth Archives Open Day

10 am to 5 pm at Minet Library, corner of Burton and Knatchbull Roads, SE5. This year's theme is sport and leisure, with related talks in the Michael Church across Burton Road. Another opportunity to check out the wide range of publications available from all Lambeth's amenity societies, ourselves included.

Thursday 11 October: The Heart of Brixton

A progress update on developments in Brixton Town Centre, including the Central Square, new transport links, the Railway Hotel and more.

An opportunity for members to comment on the emerging proposals and to ask questions.

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

Thursday 31 October: Book Launch

A joint event to launch two books – Steve Martin's account of local involvement in both the slave trade and its abolition, and the Brixton Society's publication on black people's contribution to British life in the 20th century.

7 pm at Brixton Tate Library – please book as for the walk on 20 October, or tell Glyn Kyle on (020) 7326 5070.

Planning Ahead

Although Lambeth Council has many policies for assessing planning applications, at present there seems to be no overall vision or dynamic for how the Town Centre should develop over the next 10 years, and no co-ordination of separate proposals within the Centre. Thus the Central Square plans ignore the likely arrival of new tram services. There are rumours a Master Plan exists but no-one seems to own it or follow it. In search of a better way, some of us have been in touch with the Prince's Trust to bring in experts for intensive discussions with locals to thrash out a Master Plan that we can feel we have a part in – more news on the 11th October.

Lighting up Time



We have secured funding via Capital Community Foundation to run a series of lantern-making workshops for both children and adults in the run-up to Christmas. These will culminate in a Peace and Light event on the evening of **Friday 21 December** in Tate Library Gardens. More details on flyers or our website next month.

More dates listed inside...

Brixton Society meeting dates

The Executive Committee usually meets on the second Thursday of the month to plan activities and agree our responses to local developments. All meetings **7 pm** at the **Vida Walsh Centre 2b** Saltoun Road, SW2. Contact the Secretary to confirm details.

- **11 October**
(open meeting)
- **8 November**
- **10 January.**

Brixton Area Forum

For meeting dates of the Forum and its working groups, contact the Town Centre office on (020) 7926 1077 or e-mail to: PAMathie@lambeth.gov.uk

Links with other groups

We suggest checking with organisers in case of changes since these details reached us. Some events may be charged for, and most groups welcome donations.

Saturday 13 October Henry Tate Gardens

In case you missed the tours in May, they will be repeated at 2-30 & 3-30 pm, around the gardens of Park Hill, home of Sir Henry Tate from 1880 to 1899.

Meet at entrance gate on Streatham Common North, near junction with Leigham Court Road, SW16.
Streatham Society.

Saturday 20 Oct. – Lambeth and the Abolition Walk:

Meet at **1-30 or 3 pm** outside Holy Trinity Church, Clapham Common, for a

guided walk around Clapham led by local writer Steve Martin. One of Lambeth's Black History Month events – bookings/enquiries to (020) 7926 0758 or by e-mail to blackhistorymonth@lambeth.gov.uk
Lambeth Libraries, Archives & Arts.

Sunday 21 October Autumn Walk:

Meet at **2 pm** by the clock tower in the centre of Brockwell Park.
Friends of Brockwell Park

Thursday 25 October Brain of Lambeth:

This general knowledge quiz now follows the popular pub quiz format, for teams of up to 4 people. 7-30 for 7-45 pm start, at Lambeth Town Hall (probably Room 125 but check at the door). Enquiries to John Moore on (020) 8677 6490 or e-mail: Moore309@fireflyuk.net
The Lambethans Society

Until 27 October

Departure 07:

Further Explorations in Print: this interactive exhibition explores various practices and allows visitors to join in creating their own artworks. 11 am to 6 pm, Mondays- Saturdays at Unit 7, Brighton House, 9 Brighton Terrace, SW9. See www.londonprintworks.com or phone (020) 7738 7841.
London Printworks Trust

Sunday 4th Nov.

Memories in Print:

Sift through a selection of magazines, newspapers and booklets from 30 to 70 years ago. Then discuss ideas for 2008 events – all part of the AGM, 2-30 pm at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road, SW2.
The Lambethans Society.

Monday 5th Nov. - The London Underground

Illustrated talk by Neil Lloyd, 8 pm at The Woodlawns Centre, 16 Leigham Court Road, Streatham SW16.
Streatham Society (local history group).

Tuesday 13 Nov. - Bermondsey Abbey

A report on recent excavations by Alastair Douglas of Pre-Construct Archaeology. 7 pm for 7-30 at the Housing Co-op Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1 (almost opposite The Old Vic Theatre).
Southwark & Lambeth Archaeological Society.

Tuesday 20 Nov. - Crime & Disorder

7 pm at the Karibu Centre (formerly the Abeng) 7 Gresham Road, SW9. With a review of current initiatives and players including the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel, dispersal zones, ASBOs and the Drugs & Alcohol Team.

Brixton Town Centre Forum.

Friday 30 Nov. - Christmas Lights switch-on

Official launch of the Brixton Town Centre lights in Tate Library Gardens (times and details to be confirmed).

Sunday 2nd December Winter Fayre

11 am to 3 pm in Brockwell Hall, in the centre of the Park.
Friends of Brockwell Park

Remember also to check our website in a month or so, for updates and later additions to this events list.

Local History Focus



Looking along Electric Lane from Rushcroft Road, May 1929, with the Coach and Horses pub on the right. Today, Charlie Chaplin House is on the left and the pub has become the Living Room bar. This is a relatively downmarket image for a postcard – most postcard views showed prestigious buildings or middle-class streets. (Landmark image 02970)

Picturing Old Brixton

We have had a few recent enquiries about sources of old pictures, so it seems worth repeating some previous advice.

Lambeth Archives has c.30,000 images in total, of or associated with local personalities and places around the borough. Since late 2003, a growing number – about a quarter by now – have been accessible via the Internet at www.lambethlandmark.com

This collection is normally the best place to start, but the content of any archive reflects what people thought was worth recording at the time, and to a lesser extent what their successors have been able to acquire since. Particular strengths are Council activities and donated material now reflecting a range of interests, starting before photos were commonplace with the Surrey Collection donated by Mr Minet with his original library building.

Schools, health services, transport and some of the older housing estates are better represented in the London Metropolitan Archives, which originated as the records of the London County Council and GLC, but which now embrace material from many London-based organizations, commercial and voluntary. LMA is run by the City Corporation and can be found at 40 Northampton Road, EC1 (tel. 020 7332 3820) or see www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma

Beyond these there are many specialist national collections to explore, but closer to home we have reprinted some old postcard views, mainly c.1910 vintage. As with the originals, we find that the more familiar views sell better, though the postcard books published by Sutton Publishing include some less prominent sites and streets too. Their titles covering this area are also stocked at Lambeth Archives.

150 years ago...

From the list of burials in the Parish of St.Mary Lambeth, in the County of Surrey in the year 1857:

August 23rd, a female unknown, age about 25 – found drowned at Brixton.

My thanks to Robert Holden for spotting this and passing it on. In the 1850s the River Effra was still open and ran alongside Brixton Road from the Police Station (then the Watch House) all the way to St.Mark's churchyard at Kennington. We can only guess whether this was suicide, foul play, or she simply fell in on the way home from the pub. Street lights were rare and early drawings show scarcely any fencing, even on the footbridges that linked houses on the east side to Brixton Road.

Another Brixton Boy

Our thanks to Barry Pearson for sharing his father's reminiscences with us...

My father Ernest Pearson was born and bred in Brixton. The Pearson family moved to Brixton from Hoxton in 1871. Ernest's great grandparents, William and Mona were both 33 years old at the time and had 5 young children. They had another 4 children while living in Cornwall Road, Brixton.

Ernest's grandfather, Arthur, the second-eldest, married Sophia Benfell in 1884 when he was 19 and their first son, also Arthur (Ernest's father) was born in 1885.

I always wondered why the family moved all the way from Hoxton to Brixton. After some research I discovered that in 1866 the Poplar shipbuilding industry collapsed with the loss of 35,000 jobs. In addition to economic decline, the Autumn of 1866 saw 4,000 people die when a cholera epidemic broke out in East London. It seems the choices were either get sick, the workhouse or get out – my family chose the latter.

Ernest's memories

I was born in 1912 at 31 Allington Street in Brixton (*now part of Blenheim Gardens*). I was the 4th child of Arthur and Mary Pearson (nee Rogers). We were

considered lucky as we had two bedrooms in the house. Mum and Dad had one bedroom and the two brothers and sister shared the other. Sometime after my two other brothers and sister were born, Mum and Dad slept in the downstairs "best room" and the boys and girls had a bedroom each. On the ground floor, in addition to the best room, we had a small kitchen and scullery. It was very basic, We had a kitchen table with 4 chairs and a built-in larder. In the scullery we had a large clay copper (boiler) and a gas stove. All rooms except the scullery had fireplaces. We did not have a bathroom, only a tin bath hanging in the backyard. In the yard we had a pigeon loft because my father raced them. When they became too old they ended up in the pot.

My first school was in Lyham Road, and then I went to a technical school to study plumbing, as it was expected that I follow the family trade. The school was near East Brixton Railway Station (closed in 1976) at the top end of Gresham Road where it connects with Coldharbour Lane. I did not like it much and did not complete the course. I also went to a Socialist Sunday School which I assume was organised by Socialists as an alternative to church.

The first job I had was with an ironmongers or oil shop, where I worked 6 days a week – until 9 o'clock on Saturdays. I stayed for a few years and then became a van boy with Belvedere Laundry in Acre Lane. Most of the washing was for wealthy families living in South-East London. At that time there were big houses in Brixton Hill, many with servants. Then war broke out. But first let me tell you what family life was like as I was growing up.

Life was hard but enjoyable. We all had our jobs to do and had to do them – no excuses – although we did try and cut corners. I remember my brother and I were expected to walk with a box of racing pigeons to the lavender and watercress fields on the borders of Streatham and Mitcham, a long way. We often walked only as far as Clapham Common (much nearer) then hung around for an hour or so before releasing the birds. We had to make sure we did not get back too soon because if my father found out he would not have been very happy!

The most important role was to make sure that there was food on the table. It was a

Local History Focus

hard struggle, particularly when my father was blacklisted for trying to recruit for the plumbers' union. He was a founder member of the old Brixton and Clapham Labour Party, and used to speak on a soapbox outside the Tate Library in Brixton. He had no work for nearly two years. I must have been around 10-12 at the time and remember eating lots of bread and jam. On some Sunday mornings my mother and father had smoked haddock and us kids had bread which we dipped in the fish water. We got most of our food from Brixton Market. My Aunt Florence, who was only 6 years older than me, went in the evening to the butchers for a hambone. She was told to smile at them and ask if they had any bits of spare fat. We picked up any discarded vegetables, cut off the bad bits and put it in the pot with the hambone – a meal for 3 days. We also used to collect any old boxes to use as firewood.

We used to get our bread from the local bakery. Sometimes we could get day-old bread and cakes very cheaply, but what was best was when my brother got a job at the baker's and "unofficially" broke bread. I was near the front of the queue when the broken bread was sold off very cheap. To save a few pence we also used to buy broken biscuits and spiked potatoes. Jam and pickle were bought by the pennyworth. A cup was taken to the grocers and the idea was to be as nice as possible to the grocer in the hope of getting a bigger portion.

I remember the many different tradesmen who came around the streets and from whom my mother bought things if she had a little spare cash (she always had to keep some back for the pawn shop). Milk was sold from the churn (I remember helping my uncle sell it when I was a child). Mussels were sold at two old pence a quart and you could buy sixpence (2.5p) worth of mixed fish – a real luxury. Another treat was fish and chips – one pennyworth of fish and a halfpennyworth of chips. A cat's meat man came round with half a pennyworth of meat on a stick. If he knew you were out he would put a very small piece of meat on the stick and drop it through the letterbox. When he came later for his money, he said the cat must have eaten the rest!

I used to collect horse manure and sell it for a halfpenny a bucket. Another way to

get money was the Rag and Bone Man. We used to prepare a bundle of rags for which we received so much per pound. Sometimes we made the rags in the middle a little wet to get extra weight.

Life was hard but good. Most people were honest – if not it was sorted out by "us" not the police. This happened very rarely as most of the street did not own anything worth stealing. My father was liked by everyone, although as a lifelong Socialist he did have some strange views. We kids had to go flyposting for him right up until the time we left home to get married. One incident I remember was him going down the road to a demonstration outside Brixton Prison in the early 1920s. Probably some Irish Republicans were inside. I know he took a piece of lead piping in a stocking with him, but as to whose side he was on I never found out. This was most unusual of him as he was not a violent person.

I got married in 1937 and it did not seem long before war broke out and I wound up with the Royal Dragoons in North Africa.

More next time about his war service and after, perhaps?

Where and When?

After we successfully identified the location of a tram outside Brixton Police Station c.90 years ago, P.Hotchin of Stanmore has followed up with a photo of a 109 bus parked somewhere off Brixton Road c.1965. There has not been time to scan it into this issue, but it will be displayed on our stall at the Archives Open day for your comments.

Celebrating Age Festival

For the 10th year, Age Concern Lambeth is co-ordinating a series of events for older people all through October. Reminiscence and nostalgia are well-provided for, or you could opt for health and exercise instead! You can pick up a copy of the full programme at the Vida Walsh Centre or at the library, or contact ACL on (020) 7733 0528.

The centrepiece is **Lambeth on Show Day** at the Town Hall on **Friday 12 October**, 10-30 am to 3-30 pm, including information displays, entertainment and free refreshments.

Community Activities

Helping with reading in a Brixton primary school

2008 is to be the second "National Year of Reading" (the first was in 1998). This will no doubt boost awareness of the importance – and the pleasures! – of reading, with special initiatives in schools from January and as yet unannounced public activities starting in April.

There are volunteers helping with reading and other activities in several primary schools in Brixton, as a result of an RSVP project that started last year. The new school year has started, and RSVP (the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme of CSV) would like to attract more volunteers in and around Brixton. A teacher in a Brixton primary school told me recently that individual help with reading is the best support, and she added, with feeling, that the school would welcome as many volunteers as possible! Individual attention provides a significant boost to a child's reading, confidence and willingness to learn. Volunteers are greatly appreciated by the teachers – and also by the children.

Schools present a great opportunity for older people, who often find that they have a bit of free time, to give a few hours a week as a volunteer. Most volunteers help in primary schools, though volunteers who want to help in secondary schools are very welcome. Local people in local schools, bringing people together across cultures and generations: everyone wins! And there is no doubt that it is rewarding. One Brixton volunteer says she has never felt more welcome than she is in "her" school. Another, who helps especially with children experiencing difficulties, knows it is worth it when she can say "I feel we're beginning to get there" with a particular child. Volunteers get to know "their" children, and really appreciate the progress that they make.

There are some dozen to fifteen primary schools in and around Brixton, providing education and cultural skills to the children of the area, and contributing in diverse ways to the vitality of the community.

Tony Bell

Readers interested in volunteering are invited to contact Tony on 020) 7652 4276; e-mail: tonybell-rsvp@ntlworld.com. Information about RSVP can be found on its website <http://www.csv-rsvp.org.uk/> and the CSV website: <http://www.csv.org.uk/>.

How to contact the Society

Editorial & Event Notices

Material for the next issue should be sent before 12 December to the Secretary, Alan Piper, at 82 Mayall Road, SE24 0PJ, or by e-mail to APiperBrix@aol.com
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.

Publications & Membership

Book orders, membership renewals and updates to the mailing list should all be sent to the Membership Secretary, Diana Linskey at 32 Stockwell Green, SW9 9HZ, or by e-mail to: wjdcl@globalnet.co.uk

Planning Issues

If you are concerned about a particular planning application, contact David Warner at david@scriabin.force9.net or on (020) 7924 0618. For wider plans and policies, consult Alan Piper as above.

And how to contact You?

We are gradually adding members' e-mail addresses to our database, so we can alert you to late programme changes or other developments between Newsletters – but please tell us when you change your e-mail, otherwise the message will not get through!

Every Action Counts, doesn't it?

*From Emma Montlake,
EAC co-ordinator at the Civic Trust.*

In a poll that appeared on the BBC news on 3rd July, it was found that of more than 2000 adults questioned, 56% believed that scientists were still questioning the advent of climate change. Further there was a feeling amongst respondents that the stories were being exaggerated to make money! This struck me on both a personal and professional level.

On a personal level I found the results of the survey depressing. The latest report of the International Panel on Climate Change couldn't have been more unequivocal: they found that it was now very likely that human activities are causing global warming. The reason why the climate change message is not penetrating as it should is not fully understood but these findings should be deeply worrying to government.

On a professional level, the results of the poll make me realise the uphill struggle of engaging with the public on this issue. My involvement stems from my role at the Civic Trust to manage their Every Action Counts campaign. This campaign envisages using the great networks established through voluntary sector organisations such as the Civic Trust to disseminate information and encourage everyday environmental actions from amongst their members. The hope is that through such campaigns more and more people will be encouraged to think about what it means to live within the planet's resources and to strive for sustainable, one planet living. No small task but the Every Action Counts campaign champions the taking of small actions by everyday folk that will ultimately have profound effects on reducing man-made green house gas emissions.

To better understand the interaction between my involvement with Every Actions Counts and Civic Societies, I have been reading a selection of newsletters from the vast array produced by Civic Trust affiliated societies and amenity groups. I was interested to see whether Civic Societies and groups were thinking about climate change issues, and whether the poll results were reflected in Civic Societies' own coverage of the issue.

From the numerous newsletters that I have thus far read, two articles struck me as representing the depth to which some Society members are considering these issues. They also span the climate change spectrum and encompass the issues at the root of the Every Action Counts campaign. I hope the authors won't mind if I mention them.

One was an informed and informative article in the Otter Valley Association newsletter for July 2007 written by Norman Crossland entitled "Climate Change and its Effects on the South West". This article gave a very good summary of the scientific background, causes and effects associated with climate change. The article ended with notification for members that the Association is arranging forthcoming events to raise awareness of climate change, including a screening of Al Gore's "An Inconvenient truth". This article clearly demonstrates one of the objectives of the Every Action Counts campaign - raising awareness.



The second was an article that appeared in The Ipswich Society Newsletter for April 2007 written by Mike Brain and entitled 'A Change in the Weather'. It presented the reader with the ethical questions that arise out of climate change and other associated issues. Those are the behavioural choices facing us: whether we choose to take individual responsibility, collective responsibility or chose to drop out of responsibility all together? Is this not at the very heart of civic society's debate itself? Again it is very much at the hub of Every Action Counts. It may also go some way to explaining the results of the poll; that is the interplay between personal responsibility and denial of truth. If the truth is too difficult, is it easier to drop out of taking responsibility altogether? But if we do need to take responsibility, how do we go about encouraging the sceptical 56% to take it?

This brings me back round to Every Action Counts. If it is about taking personal and collective responsibility, then here is a

Green Issues

ready made tool that can be used to encourage such degrees of action. Should Civic Societies be interested in encouraging members to effect change; to take personal responsibility that leads to collective responsibility that leads to change, to lead the way? My response to this is yes, Civic Societies should be at the forefront; part of the vanguard of change.

Three facets of Every Action Counts

First there is a website to be found at www.everyactioncounts.org.uk. When a society signs up to the Every Action Counts website there are opportunities for publishing and networking amongst other community action groups, plus tips, advice and an evaluator of your group's progress in reducing its carbon emissions.

Secondly, there is the appointment of Community Champions - those prepared to champion Every Action Counts and become its voice amongst their group. In order to develop engagement and delivery with the group, two days free training and a range of tools are provided.

And finally there are the 5 Every Action Counts themes around which change is hung. They are:-

- 1) Energy and climate change;
- 2) Resource minimisation and recycling;
- 3) Transport and travelling wisely;
- 4) Caring for where you live; and
- 5) Ethical and local shopping.

To quote a few examples of how Every Action Counts among Civic Societies, the Muswell Hill & Fortis Green Association has signed up to the "Founding Statement on Sustainability" which starts "Our lives, our communities and our society should be sustainable for generations to come". The Weald of Kent Protection Society prints their newsletter on 100% recycled paper. Hilary Porter, Chair of the Leatherhead Civic Society is a Community Champion. And we at the Civic Trust have signed up to the Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change which includes recognising the need for urgent action at all levels and adopting public plans to reduce carbon emissions.

What is your Society doing to combat climate change and raise awareness amongst its members? Is there an issue of

civic responsibility within the Civic Society movement to be doing something? Or is it an issue for others?

Training Opportunity

As part of "Every Action Counts", the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) is organising free training locally for those who would like to become Community Champions. If you are interested, contact Joanna Purkiss at LVAC on (020) 7737 9463 or e-mail to: lvac-acp-sdcmo@lambethvac.orh.uk

If there are enough people interested then BTCV will put on a course within Lambeth, otherwise courses will be held elsewhere within Greater London.

Recycling Buildings

The Brixton Society came into being in the mid-1970s when communities around Brixton managed to convince the Government and eventually the Council that their homes could be renovated or adapted to modern use more economically than tearing them down to start again. By comparison, the long and expensive efforts to remedy the deficiencies of the early-70s Angell Town and Stockwell Park estates shows we were right.

But once again the Government is getting interested in building more homes. We had always said that numbers could be usefully increased by dividing larger properties into small self-contained flats, and nowadays smaller households predominate, so there could be a good "fit". The alternatives are that either the larger houses are shared by several adults (to maximise the rent) or they get displaced by new purpose-built flats at higher density. We have usually preferred to retain the older houses for their character, but provided that insulation can be improved, there are now also "green" arguments for re-using the existing structures.

Of course there are practical limits below which sub-division is impractical and removes family-sized houses with gardens, so space standards need to be set with care. However, a general ban on conversions would encourage demolition and rebuilding to fit in more people.

ADP.