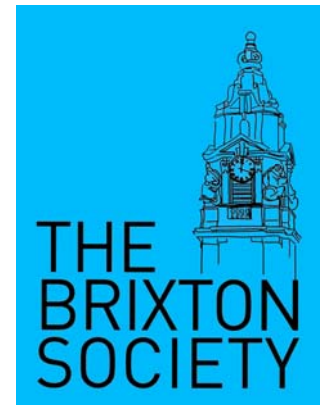


NEWSLETTER No. 211 COLOUR SUPPLEMENT

Renewal and Remembrance in Stockwell

Saturday 14 September 2013



One afternoon last month, while the skies threatened rain and wind swirled, the Mayor of Lambeth, Mark Bennett, unveiled a small blue plaque fixed to the wall of the rotunda in the middle of Stockwell's three-cornered roundabout. It marked the completion of a major project to renovate the World War One Grade II listed memorial clock tower along with other improvements to the site, including a complete repaint for the colourful mural.

The unveiling was the culmination of our long campaign to see that the clock tower, on which are carved 574 names of men who had lived in the area and served in World War One.

In 2009 when I, as an interested resident of SW9, joined forces with Sheila Dartnell, whose great-uncle is one of the names, to campaign for Lambeth Council to renovate the building, we knew we had our work cut out. Despite sincere support for our proposals, no one at Town Hall was able to put concrete plans in place. Each time a promise seemed around the corner, it turned to dust.

For Sheila, it began as a personal campaign. She had seen her great-uncle's gravestone in Belgium, where it is beautifully maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and was astonished that so little attention was given to his name at Stockwell. Christopher Dartnell had grown up in Hartington Road, one of eleven children. His brothers and father had also served, but he was the only one of them not to return. Now his name was in danger of being obliterated by the effects of neglect, pollution and decay.

To us, it was clear that to gain the support of the community, we needed an awareness campaign. We developed a plan of action. First Sheila started a petition to Lambeth Council. It grew quickly and by the time it was presented to the Mayor on our behalf by local councillor Alex Bigham, in October 2012, it had accrued over a thousand names. I, meanwhile, wrote and published a book on the lives of the men listed on the memorial. This took shape as *These Were Our Sons* (the title comes from the inscription above the name panels) and it quickly found favour with local residents and families of the dead. The third step was to set up a Friends group in order to work more closely with Lambeth.

We were delighted to hear in June 2012 that Lambeth Council had pledged over £50,000 to renovate five war memorials in Lambeth, including Stockwell. The Friends were included in the project group and were soon attending site to discuss new signage, replacement furniture, trees and shrubs and plans to clean and stabilize the stonework, renovate the dilapidated doors and install new windows.

The furniture, made bespoke for the site, was installed in October and ground cover was planted in November, followed two months later by the installation of eight new trees, which now form an attractive avenue leading to the clock tower. Then, in March the scaffolding went up and the clock tower disappeared behind protective coverings. When the structure was revealed in June, the clock tower was clean and beautiful. Some of the lettering had been recut but the touch was light. The aim was to keep the dings and dents in the stonework that describe its own history (my theory is that at least some of them are from wartime shrapnel), not to make it look as if it were laid yesterday.



When any building or area is refreshed, the structures around it begin to look shabby. The vibrant mural on the rotunda, first painted in 1999 and added to in 2005, was now peeling and faded. It was clear that it too needed attention. Luckily, Ruth Miller of the London Mural Preservation Society had Stockwell on its radar and joined forces with the Friends and with Lambeth to manage the project and to commission Brian Barnes, the original artist, to renew the design. He was helped by a battery of volunteers who turned out in all weathers. Many were professional artists but a good

proportion were amateurs, happy to contribute to the renewal of a local landmark.

Among the attendees at the unveiling of the plaque were several families of the World War One men, including three generations of the Dartnell family, many local residents, members of the Lambeth team, members of the Friends group, a representative of the War Memorials Trust, and many of the artists and volunteers who helped paint the mural.



Before the unveiling of the plaque the Mayor paid tribute to all who had been involved. He thanked, among others, Lambeth project managers Callum Brown and Tolu Fatogbe, the War Memorials Trust, which contributed grants to the project, as well as Brian Barnes and all the other volunteers, and the Friends of Stockwell War Memorial and Gardens.

He said, "My congratulations to all who have given their time and toil, their expertise and care, to bring the War Memorial and Mural back to a state that shows proper respect for so many who served and died, and proper pride in the history of Stockwell. As we approach the centenary of the outbreak of World War One, and rightly reflect on the human cost of all conflicts, the Memorial and Mural now stand as restored and renewed symbols of sacrifice and Remembrance."

Naomi Klein
Friends of Stockwell War Memorial and
Gardens

www.stockwellmemorialfriends.org.uk