

THE BRIXTON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Autumn, October 2015

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Welcome from the Editor

It's catch-up time again for those who have not been able to get to every meeting or event that we have highlighted. Following on from September's Lambeth Heritage Festival, we have given more space to local history topics in this issue. However, there are still some big Regeneration issues continuing to trouble us.

Due to this being compiled and distributed in various members' spare time, unavoidable absences mean this will reach most of you a week later than usual. By then Lambeth's Cabinet should have agreed a way forward on its Culture 2020 package. At the time of writing, only the Library proposals had been unveiled, with the future of parks, recreation centres and arts still unclear. Of course you can get more frequent updates from our website and – if you supply me with an e-mail address – occasional internet bulletins.

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 ideally by e-mail to APiperBrix@aol.com
Phone enquiries to (020) 7207 0347.



Pop Brixton hosted the launch of the Brixton Design Trail last month, marking Brixton's involvement in the London Design Festival, which we hope will develop. (BDT-15-01.jpg)

There's still time to discover Lambeth's Hidden River!

Lambeth Heritage Festival month has now passed, but there's just time to catch the exhibition at the **Morley Gallery** in Westminster Bridge Road SE1, until Friday **23 October** (11 am to 6 pm, closed Sundays). It features Lambeth's Thames riverside over time, and also illustrates the full length of the River Effra which rises in Norwood and feeds into the Thames by Vauxhall Bridge. The exhibition has already generated extra interest, to the extent that we had to arrange a hasty reprint of our little booklet on the River Effra, in order to keep up with demand.

Also note our **Market Walks** will continue into December - details on the diary page overleaf.

Diary of Events, late Summer 2015

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).

- 12 November
- 10 December (tbc)
- 11 February

Market Walks

Our guided walks round the market area continue on the second **Saturday** of every month, to coincide with the Makers' Market in Brixton Station Road. 2-30 pm start but prior booking advised.

- 14 November
- 12 December

Please book places through marketwalks@brixtonsociety.org.uk

Links with Other Groups

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

Tuesday 27 October – Should Brixton Rec be listed?

Talk on the cultural and architectural significance of the Recreation Centre by Philip Boyle of DoCoMoMo, 6 pm in the conference suite on level 5 – please RSVP to recusergroup@btinternet.com
Brixton Rec User Group

Thursday 29th October - Brixton

Neighbourhood Forum
Agenda to be confirmed, but will include funding from Lambeth Forum Network, Forum boundaries, a report on community-owned assets in the African-Caribbean community and Big local North Brixton fund
7-9pm at Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road, SW2 (Entrance faces Windrush Square)

Monday 2 November – A Tooting War Memorial

Talk by Geoff Simmons on saving the Summerstown Memorial, 8 pm at Woodlawns Centre (Streatham Darby & Joan Club) 16 Leigham Court Road, SW16
Streatham Society

Tuesday 10 November – The Complications of History

Talk by Stephen Humphrey, historian of Southwark, at 7-30 pm (doors open 7pm) at the Co-op Housing Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1 (almost opposite the Old Vic). £1 for non-members.
Southwark & Lambeth Archaeological Society

Wednesday 11 November – King's College Hospital in World War I

Open 7-30 for 7-45 start, at Herne Hill United Church Hall, corner of Redpost Hill and Herne Hill, SE24.
Herne Hill Society

Saturday 14 November – Mushroom Walk

Advice on identifying types of fungi - departs at **2 pm** from the clock tower in the centre of the Park, but reserve a place by e-mailing fabriceboltho@gmail.com
Brockwell Park Community Partners

Monday 16 November – Battersea Dogs and Cats Home

Shaun Opperman, Veterinary Director, describes the work of this long-standing institution. 8 pm (doors open from 7 pm) at Omnibus, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4.
Clapham Society

Saturday 21 November – Gideon Mantell

The work of the pioneering fossil collector and theorist, one of the eminent Victorians interred in Norwood Cemetery, will be recounted by Prof. Joe Cain. 2-30 pm at Chatsworth Baptist Church (use family centre entrance on Idmiston Road) SE27.
Friends of West Norwood Cemetery

Sunday 6 December – Winter Fair

11 am to 3 pm in Brockwell Hall, Brockwell Park SE24. To reserve a stall for your group, contact info@brockwellpark.com
Friends of Brockwell Park

Unpicking Lambeth's latest Culture package

By the time you read this, Lambeth's Cabinet should have agreed the overall strategy for its wide range of Amenities services, not only Libraries and Parks, but also indoor recreation centres and support for arts and community activities generally. However, that is far from the end of the story because several critical issues have to be sorted out by next April in order for the strategy to start reducing the running costs of all these services.

Lambeth Council has proclaimed the revised proposals as "saving" more libraries, but the future of several is still in doubt. The Cabinet have little grasp of what libraries are for, and have latched onto a proposal from GLL (who manage Brixton Rec) to run Carnegie, Minet and Tate South Lambeth libraries as "healthy living centres". Apart from the library functions being squeezed into smaller space to make room for exercise classes, the sting in the tail is that all 3 would be closed for refurbishment from next April before eventually reopening in the new format. At least Brixton Tate Library will continue as a "town centre library" for the present, without some of the wilder ideas for sharing its space.

It's been recognised that Lambeth Archives need further thought, and they will remain at the Minet Library at least until April while other sites are belatedly investigated.

The Council takes a narrow view of parks as places for active sports or entertainments, but quiet recreation and connecting with nature seem to be disregarded. While no parks are slated for closure, yet reliance on off-setting running costs from hire charges for extra commercial events will inevitably reduce how much free access residents will have to their parks. The cabinet report remained vague about Friends groups or others taking over the running of individual parks.

Levies on new private housing development may make it easier to find money for capital improvements, some of which may then generate more income by other means. So in

Brockwell Park, the Council will embark on the first stage of a Heritage Lottery Bid for more active use of the Hall, stable block and the yard between.

Elsewhere, the plan seems to be to retain Brixton Rec and the smaller Ferndale and Flaxman Sports Centres. The Brixton Domino Club at 297-299 Coldharbour Lane will be renovated to include a base for the Brixton Soup Kitchen. Capital funds are finally being committed to provide community facilities and business start-up space on the Angell Town Estate, where they lapsed some years ago.

For more recent fall-out from the Cabinet meeting, check local papers, and the websites www.brixtonbuzz.com and www.brixtonblog.com as well as our own.

Myatt's Fields Park Project AGM

Myatt's Fields Park is one where the local community project has put in a bid to manage the park on behalf of the Council. Interesting times ahead make their Annual General Meeting more important than usual – 7 pm on **Wednesday 18 November** at Longfield Hall, Knatchbull Road SE5 (opposite Minet Library). Enquiries to enquiries@myattsfieldspark.info

Friends of Tate Library Brixton

Friends of Tate Library Brixton are extremely concerned by the Council's response to the Culture 2020 consultation. Brixton will survive as Town Centre Library but staffing and book purchasing powers will decline, so involvement of Friends is essential, to ensure that libraries of the future are inclusive, affordable, local and most of all, still function as a library. The repercussions of the Cabinet decisions will affect all our communities.

We are planning an exhibition from mid-November to December on the Past Present and Future of the library, drawing on material from archives and the Brixton Museum project by Anchor and Magnet.

We are also co-operating with the Friends of Windrush Square and library staff to add some planters on both the street frontages of the library.

Marilyn Rogers, foftl@gmail.com

Black Georgians

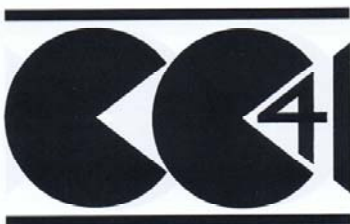
The latest exhibition at the Black Cultural Archives focuses on black people in Britain in the 18th and early 19th centuries. While slavery prevailed in the colonies, individuals occupied a wider range of social roles in the Mother Country, with occasional distinction, not only in sports, but also in business or literature. Curated by historian S.I.Martin, the exhibition is open Tuesday- Saturday, 10 am to 6 pm, and runs through the winter until 9th April.

BCA, 1 Windrush Square, SW2 1EF

Remembering Claudia Jones Walk on Sunday 25 October at 11 am

Claudia Jones was a community organiser, founder of the West Indian Gazette, mother of the Notting Hill Carnival and a political campaigner. She was born 100 years ago and lived and worked in South London between 1956 and 1964. This walk is a Community Support project for Black History Month, and gives some background to her life,

Meet outside Brixton Tate Library at 11 am, walk finishes at Oval Tube Station. To book a place phone (020) 7582 8248 or e-mail to communitysupport@email.com



If you remember this clothing label, then Carmen Whiteley would like to hear from you! A student at Wimbledon College of Art, she is researching women's clothing between 1939 and 1955, so not only the Second World War but also the ten years after. She is interested in how women viewed fashion at those times, and keen to talk to anyone involved.

Contact her at c.whiteley1@arts.ac.uk or phone 07 596 400 193 or write to 130 Southcroft Road, Tooting, SW17 9TP.

A Bovril connection?

We have often been asked if the Bovril sign above Windrush Square has any local significance. The simple fact is that this is the last survivor of several advertisements painted on the gable end wall of the Rushcroft Road flats, above what was once the car park for the Prince of Wales pub. However the old brand name does have South London connections.

Bovril was the invention of John Lawson Johnston, the nephew of a Scottish butcher and apprenticed in the trade at his uncle's shop, eventually taking over the business. He decided to use surplus beef trimmings to make his own meat glaze – a beef stock, concentrated by heating to become dark brown and viscous, giving it a long shelf life. The young Johnston also studied dietetics at Edinburgh, mentored by the university's professor of chemistry, Lyon Playfair. Johnston went off to Canada in 1870 and established a factory in Quebec. One of his aims was to develop "marching rations" for troops, and he was assisted by an order from the French Army in 1874 to help re-provision their forts after the disastrous Franco-Prussian War. At first the product was called "Johnston's Fluid Beef" but was soon re-named Bovril, derived from Latin Bos for ox, and Vrill from a life-force or power so-called in a popular science fiction novel "The Coming Race" by Bulwer-Lytton published in 1870.

The product was a great commercial success, actively promoted by Johnston. Manufacturing was expanded in Britain but he sold the company in 1896, buying Kingswood House in Dulwich and transforming the house and its grounds. He refitted the interior and added turrets and crenellations to the exterior, so that it soon became known to the locals as "Bovril Castle". Johnston died on his yacht in Cannes in 1900. Kingswood House passed through several hands, serving as a hospital for Canadian troops during the First World War before acquisition by William Vestey, who had made his fortune in canned food and shipping frozen meat from South America. In the 1950s the grounds were developed as a housing estate by the London County Council, and the house became a public library, still open.

Just two of the lives lost a century ago...

Summaries of recent articles in other societies' journals which highlighted two former Brixton residents who perished in the First World War:

Mrs Louisa Tearle

Louisa was born in 1878 at 22 St. Alban's Street Lambeth (since replaced by the China Walk Estate). By the 1901 Census, Louisa was working as a waitress and living with her widowed father, Arthur Lees, at 70 Union Road, Clapham, along with a younger brother and sister. In 1902 she married Henry Tearle, initially renting rooms in Dalyell Road SW9, before moving to Hampton Hill near Kingston. Her husband worked for Elder Dempster, a steamship company serving West Africa, and Louisa also joined the company before Henry's untimely death in Nigeria in 1914.

By this time Louisa had 5 young children, so she moved back to Lambeth where she had friends and family. Her last address was 88 Railton Road, above a confectioner's shop (now Brixton Housing Co-op) between Chaucer and Spenser Roads. Louisa was engaged as a stewardess on the RMS Falaba, a 4,800 ton liner built in 1906. It sailed from Liverpool on 27 March 1915, bound for Sierra Leone with 95 crew and 147 passengers. Only the following day, the unarmed ship was intercepted by a German submarine, U28.

The prevailing rules of warfare were that the ship should be ordered to stop and its occupants given an opportunity to abandon ship before the ship was sunk. At noon the U28 signalled the Falaba "abandon ship immediately", and the Falaba came to a stop at 12-05 and began to lower its lifeboats. At 12-10 the U-boat fired a torpedo, resulting in a direct hit that sank the ship within 8 minutes, and the loss of 104 lives – 57 passengers and 47 crew including the captain and Louisa.

She is buried in Newquay New Cemetery, near where her body was washed ashore. At the resulting inquest, the jury members donated their attendance fees to her orphaned children. Louisa also has her name on the Merchant

Navy memorial at Tower Hill, one of the few women listed there.

Herne Hill Society, Autumn 2015, p.19.

Gustav Kaye

Gustav's background shows the conflicted loyalties that some faced with the outbreak of the Great War. His parents were Prussians, and his father was already established as a merchant in England when they married in 1877. Gustav was born in May 1883, when the family was living at 65 Angell Road, Brixton. He was educated at Dulwich College, and by 1911 the family was living at 143 Tulse Hill, a 12-room house, with 2 servants. In 1912, his parents having died, Gustav was living at Buckingham Gate SW1 and carrying on business as a merchant in the City of London.

In October 1914, Gustav changed his surname by deed poll from Koenigsfeld to Kaye. Gustav eventually enlisted in a Territorial Reserve battalion of the Black Watch, at Ripon. He was promoted lance-corporal and sent to France in June 1916, but contracted pneumonia in December and was invalided home in June 1917. After convalescence, he joined the 7th Battalion of his regiment in Ireland before returning with them to the Western Front in September 1917. He died of wounds received near Cambrai on 23 March 1918, aged 34, during the Germans' last big offensive. He lies buried in Moevres Military Cemetery in France, but is also commemorated on the Koenigsfeld family grave in West Norwood Cemetery.

From the newsletter of the Friends of West Norwood Cemetery, May 2015 p.10.

Stockwell War Memorial update

A new website was launched last month, which will lead you to the Friends group, and to information about many of the people named on the memorial:

www.stockwellwarmemorial.org

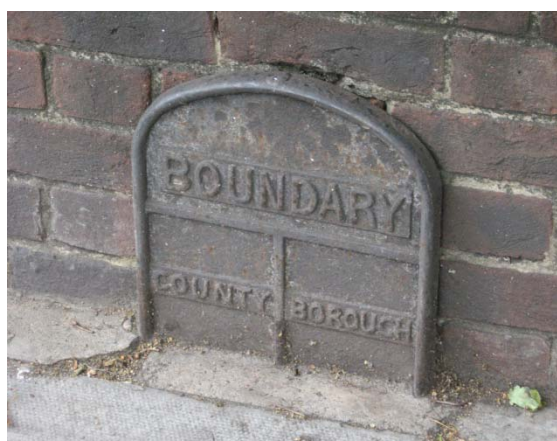
Electric Avenue Revival

Plans have largely been worked out for a new layout to stalls in this part of the street market, partly funded by the Mayor, complementing current work on the Townscape Heritage Initiative. Expect more news soon...

Brixton's Members of Parliament by Simon Adams

Our latest publication was launched at our open meeting in September, a booklet by Simon Adams which traces the various MPs who have represented our area over the centuries. Early parliaments were based on "two knights from every shire and two burgesses from every borough" and Brixton was merely a rural corner of the County of Surrey. The story becomes more complex after the Reform Act of 1832, which began to create new "borough" constituencies to give representation to growing urban areas. Boundaries changed as Lambeth's population grew or shifted. Thus the south-east corner of Brixton became part of Norwood constituency well before 1900, with a Brixton or Lambeth Central constituency covering the rest for about a century. Today we have 3 MPs whose constituencies intersect in the centre of Brixton, possibly an advantage.

We had hoped to publish this before the General Election, but once Parliament was dissolved, the usual contact arrangements were in abeyance so it took ages to get clearance for using the photos of current MPs which appear on the back cover. Copies are available from our market bookstall, or via the website, at £2.50 each.



Several of these cast iron boundary markers survive in SW2 and SE24 to show the southern edge of the old Lambeth borough constituency as it was until 1885.

BTC-V09-05.jpg

Lambeth Architecture 1965-99

The final volume of the series on Lambeth buildings of the last century was published last month – and Alan Piper was in at the beginning...

In April 1965 Lambeth became a London Borough, with its boundaries enlarged to take in Clapham and Streatham, and greater responsibilities. During its first year, Ted Hollamby built up a new department of architects and planners from what had been a small off-shoot of the borough engineer's department. An experienced nucleus came from the old London County Council, itself subsumed into a wider Greater London Council, whilst some of us came in fresh as trainees or assistants.

New building by both Lambeth and the GLC was at its height in the first ten years, and their designs account for about two-thirds of the book, including several which have already been swept away, though you will be paying for them for another decade or two via your Council Tax. Housing dominated, including two distinctive styles of Lambeth tower block built in 1967-68. Growing aversion to high-rise next led to high-density "groundscraper" estates such as Angell Town and Stockwell Park, with all pedestrian movement at 1st floor walkway level and cars in basement garages. The same concept was to be applied to the rebuilding of Brixton Town Centre, leaving the Recreation Centre with intimidating access arrangements to this day. Nevertheless the quality could be good where density was a little lower or the access less daunting, such as Cressingham Gardens.

It was always a gripe among local authority architects that only the chief officer's name appeared on the plans or publicity material but Edmund Bird has identified several of the leading designers within Ted Hollamby's large department. There is though one important omission – amongst the frenzy of new building Hollamby identified several fine early 19th century terraces to retain, but John Hine led

Publications News

the group which turned these into acceptable Council housing.

Opportunities for building large new estates dried up once residents convinced Central Government that the remaining Victorian neighbourhoods were capable of being refurbished more economically. Yet many opportunities for infill development remained, though post-1979 and the "Right-to-buy", the main effort was being left to housing associations. Local examples include Vining Street (1989), 1-31 Akerman Road (1990) and Gresham Road/ Canterbury Crescent (1992).



The Southwyck House "barrier block" being fitted with new lifts and entrances in 1991-92. (BS-EBx-92-03.jpg)

Some of the original harshness of the early "brutalist" estates has since been softened by time, tree growth or deliberate interventions. Lambeth's dreary Moorland Estate (1970-77) was given a face-lift in the late 1990s by Metropolitan Housing Trust, restoring the features that were cut out on the drawing board due to initial cost limits. Similarly, the adjacent Southwyck House "barrier block" received access improvements from local architects Greenhill and Jenner in 1991. The

light industry soon to be replaced along the railway side of Somerleyton Road was based on the early brutalist Hunstanton School designed by Alison and Peter Smithson back in 1949-54.

This book manages to flag up almost all the buildings completed in the last third of the 20th century, appropriately closing with the London Eye (originally the Millennium Wheel) opened officially on 31 December 1999. It's available to buy at Lambeth Archives or any (surviving) Lambeth library for £10 (by Edmund Bird and Fiona Price, published by Lambeth Local History Forum, ISBN 978-0-9926695-3-9)

Alan Piper worked in the Architect's departments of Lambeth Council in 1965-67, and Lewisham Council in 1975-91.

Herne Hill Heritage Trail

The healthy number of publications now being produced by local societies means sometimes new titles pass our notice. It was 2 years ago now that the Herne Hill Society made a major revision of their Heritage Trail book, increasing the number of sites featured from 120 in the 2003 edition to 157 now, and enhancing many entries. Notably there are more in the part of SE24 on the Brixton side of Herne Hill Station, so worth dipping into for coverage of Railton Road, and also for a couple of pubs on the fringes of Loughborough Junction.

(Published for the Herne Hill Society by Local History Publications, 2013, ISBN 989-187-3520-91-8)

Home Movie Day is coming

The Cinema Museum is hosting London's 8th annual Home Movie Day on **Saturday 7th November**. If you have some old home movies at the back of a cupboard, bring them along for advice and a chance to see them. 8mm, Super 8, 9.5mm and 16mm formats are all catered for, with advice on transferring them to digital formats for easier home viewing. This is a free event, including a special screening of Home Movies from Hollywood Stars at 12-30 to 1-15 pm. Open 11 am to 4 pm, 2 Dugard Way, off Renfrew Road, SE11 4TH.

Your New Town Hall is everywhere else...

Lambeth Town Hall closed last month so the builders could start work remodelling it, and all the offices and meetings have been moved elsewhere. The Mayor's Parlour is now in Olive Morris House, while International House is hosting more of the day-to-day meetings. Major meetings are being dispersed more widely around the borough, such as the recent Cabinet session on the Culture 2020 proposals held at Dunraven School in Streatham. The Impact Hub for start-up enterprises has been relocated from the Town Hall basement to Pop Brixton – see www.brixton.impacthub.net

In spite of objections from Historic England, Lambeth approved the 14-storey tower block on the corner of Porden Road, which will dominate the settings of St. Matthew's Church and the listed Town Hall itself. Buckner Road and the Brixton Hill end of Porden Road will be closed from 15 December to allow building work to get underway. Replacement of Olive Morris House will follow only after the new Civic Offices and Town Hall are ready.

Reverse the Road Closures now!

Taking our display kit to Lambeth Archives Open Day last month was more arduous than usual, due to a series of road closures around the east side of Brixton. Access to Longfield Hall meant evading the road blocks and avoiding long traffic tailbacks in Coldharbour Lane. Cars weaving through Loughborough Estate increased local traffic, and even the P5 bus was diverted for the day.

On 1st October, at a public meeting on the estate, 350 people unanimously demanded an immediate end to the "experiment". So far, the Council has resisted objections from residents and businesses, though it has brought forward its review of the scheme. For the latest position, check with local campaigners at ljroadmadness@gmail.com

Is it English Heritage or Historic England?

English Heritage split into 2 new bodies in April. The old name is retained for a charitable trust which just runs the historic sites, such as Stonehenge and Eltham Palace. The official functions of listing historic buildings and providing expert advice are continued by **Historic England**. For further details of their services and publications, see the website: www.historicengland.org.uk

We have Plans for you...

At last we have a single overall Lambeth Plan, as adopted by the Council on 23 September. This should make it easier to assess planning applications, without referring back to lots of "saved" policies from earlier plans.

Consequent on this, Lambeth has also adopted a more coherent version of its policy guidance or SPD on Building Alterations and Extensions. These account for the majority of planning applications on our patch. Despite welcome changes, there remain several issues arising from the Lambeth Plan itself, such as a failure to set clear criteria for overlooking distances and perverse policies on residential conversions.

Current Planning Cases

We have been collaborating with other local groups to mitigate the adverse impact of the rebuilding of the **Cressingham Gardens** Estate. Further to the report in our last issue, plans have been unveiled for rebuilding part of the **Fenwick Estate**, off Landor Road SW9. We have been in touch with developers to discuss their proposals for building above and behind **Superdrug** in Brixton Road, and on the coach depot opposite Brixton East at 88 **Gresham Road**.

We have been following **Somerleyton Road** plans for some time, so no major concerns, though the new blocks near Coldharbour Lane will be of similar scale to Southwyck House. A Neighbourhood Plan for **Tulse Hill** was being announced just as we went to press.