

THE BRIXTON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Autumn, October 2016

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Welcome from the Editor

It's catch-up time again and we have included a quick round-up of some of the Regeneration issues which continue to trouble us.

Following on so closely from September's Lambeth Heritage Festival and the Brixton Design Trail, we have not had time to prepare all the pages we would like, but we aim to provide more in the next issue.

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.

Of Plans and Master Plans

You have just missed one MasterPlan, but there will be another one along shortly...

This issue coincides with the closing date for comments on the Loughborough Junction Master Plan, but next month Lambeth is due to launch its latest ideas for Brixton Central Sites including Pop Brixton, the railway station and the old Tesco site between the railway arches. Keep an eye on Lambeth's website!



Disappearing Brixton: the former Empress Theatre at the corner of Brighton Terrace and Bernays Grove, as seen in 1987 when it was the Granada Bingo Club. It was demolished in 1992. See page 5 for some more examples. (BS-BYC-87-01.jpg)

150 years of Blue Plaques

This scheme of marking the homes or workplaces of notable people from the past has now been operating for 150 years. Begun by the Royal Society for the Arts, it was soon adopted by the London County Council and then the GLC, but in 1986 it was inherited by English Heritage, who tried to apply it more widely, but lacked the resources to meet the demand. Consequently many local or special plaques have since been organised to supplement the official provision.

One of our local plaques commemorates Trinidad-born CLR James, now the subject of a documentary, **Every Cook can Govern**. The film will be shown at Brixton Tate Library on **Friday 11 November** at 7-30 pm, introduced by the film's director.

Diary of Events, Autumn 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).

- 10 November
- 9 February

Our Winter Social

Plans are still to be settled, but it's very likely that we will use our slot at the Vida Walsh Centre on Thursday **12 January** for our Winter Social – we aim to confirm the details to all members by Christmas.

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. Tickets are best booked via marketwalks@brixtonsociety.org.uk. Walks start from Brixton Station Road at 2.30 pm and take about 80 minutes.

Walking into 2017

Each summer, we also offer 3 longer guided walks round other parts of Brixton. We have to decide on dates and topics early in the New Year, so if you have any preferences for places that we should include, please tell us soon!

Links with Other Groups

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

Friday 28 October – A Taste of Africa

A combined celebration for Black History Month and the Celebrating Age Festival, an afternoon of food, stalls and live music, hosted by the Vida Walsh Centre, Saltoun Road SW2. 12 noon to 4 pm enquiries (020) 7326 1780. *Age Concern Lambeth*

Sunday 30 October – Halloween Horrors

Children's event at Brixton Windmill including story-telling and face-painting – free but bring a pumpkin to carve! **2 pm to 5 pm.** *Friends of Windmill Gardens*

Tuesday 1 November – Future Food sustainability

Talk by Richard Allen of Kew Gardens on using seed collections to cope with climate change: 7 pm at SLBI, 323 Norwood Road, SE24, Non-members £3. *South London Botanical Institute*

Monday 7 November – 50 years of Roman Archaeology in London

Brian Bloice memorial lecture by Dr Harvey Sheldon, 8 pm, Woodlawns Centre (Streatham Darby & Joan Club) 16 Leigham Court Road, SW16 *Streatham Society*

Tuesday 8 November – Booth's Camberwell

Talk by Bob Reeves, based on Charles Booth's survey of the Camberwell area 120 years ago, 7-30 pm (doors open 7pm) at the Co-op Housing Hall, 106 The Cut, SE1 (opposite the Old Vic). £1 for non-members of SLAS.

*Southwark & Lambeth
Archaeological Society*

Saturdays 12 Nov. & 10 Dec. – Cinema Museum Bookstall

Books, magazines and even surplus museum items, free admission, 2 pm – 5 pm, 2 Dugard Way, Renfrew Road, SE11 4TH *The Cinema Museum*

Thursday 17 November – South London on Film

Illustrated talk by Tony Fletcher, 8 pm at the Phoenix Centre, Westow Street, SE19. *South London Local History Group*

Monday 28 November – Slavery, Commerce and the Hibbert family

The Clapham Sect anti-slavery campaigners had a formidable local opponent, George Hibbert MP. Talk by Dr Katie Donington, starts at 8 pm (doors open 7 pm) at Omnibus, former Clapham Library, 1 North Side, SW4. *Clapham Society*

Sunday 4 December – FoBP Winter Fair

Open 11 am to 3 pm in Brockwell Hall – if you want to run a stall, please contact info@brockwellpark.com *Friends of Brockwell Park*

Windrush Square

Capital Clean-Up Event

Annick Alet, Marilyn Rogers, and Diana Linskey working as Friends of Windrush Square ran a 2 hour clean-up event on Friday 30 September. This helped give impetus to our campaign to clean-up Windrush Square. We worked with Lambeth Parks, Lambeth Youth Offending Services (YOS), Tate Library Brixton, Black Cultural Archives, the local Police Safer Neighbourhood Team and had support from Age UK Lambeth. At the event we had 2 local councillors join us, plus the Coldharbour Police team, a local journalist and other visitors and supporters from the local area plus active work by 14 volunteers.



*Kevin (Lambeth Parks), Liz (Tate Library),
Diana, Sharron & Annick (Volunteers)*

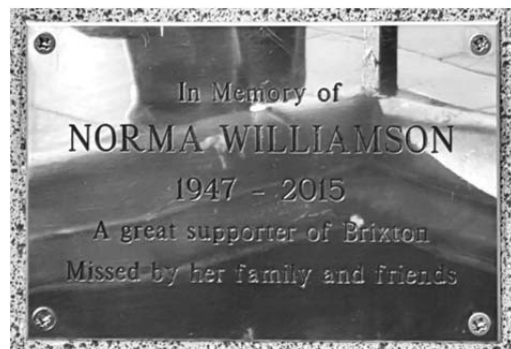
We achieved moving and filling and planting a couple of planters; weeding the Budd Memorial and a commitment to regular maintenance to keep it clear of weeds; use of YOS to move planters and barrow compost with a commitment to help similarly on a future event for bulb planting; litter picking the Square; watering the planters and the grass area with the new hose funded in part by Capital Clean Up which can be regularly used now Lambeth have mended the tap. This will make the Gardening Group activities more sustainable.

Lambeth's Pressure washing team were out early on the day. They have done more on the Square since we started planning this event and parts of the Square have improved in cleanliness. However there is still much to be done which is not within the capabilities of residents but needs to form part of Lambeth's routine cleaning schedule.

Norma Williamson Green Memorial



On 8 September a group of some 40 friends and relatives of the late Norma Williamson gathered on Windrush Square at the corner of Rushcroft Road. The Tate Library gave permission for the Brixton Society to put a new planter within the railings with a brass memorial plaque to Norma. A conical bay tree filled the planter, reflecting her interest in herbs. On the day her son, Stuart, unveiled the plaque and then joined us at the Vida Walsh centre for tea, chat and memories. The memorial is modest and classic, and the brass plaque can be seen reflecting the sun throughout the day.



Constituency Boundary Changes

FACTS

The Boundary Commission for England is conducting a review of parliamentary constituencies because Parliament has decided to reduce the number of constituencies, and therefore MPs, from 650 to 600. In England, the number of constituencies will reduce from 533 to 501; in London the number of constituencies will reduce from 73 to 68. As well as reducing the number of constituencies, Parliament decided that the numbers of voters in each constituency should be more nearly equal than at present. Every constituency – apart from two specified exceptions – must have an electorate that is no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507.

Details of the proposals can be found on the Boundary Commission website here: www.bce2018.org.uk.

Nationally, these proposals are politically contentious between the parties, which is not something we will go into here. We will only address purely local issues.

To help address the local issues, we have produced a map showing the borough's wards and how they fit into the proposed new boundaries. A copy is enclosed with this newsletter as a colour supplement.

Lambeth as a whole is divided between six different constituencies. Brixton, depending upon where you think the boundaries of Brixton are, is divided between two or maybe (if you count parts of Vassall as Brixton) three constituencies. It is noticeable that "Brixton" does not appear as part of any of the new constituency names.

OPINION

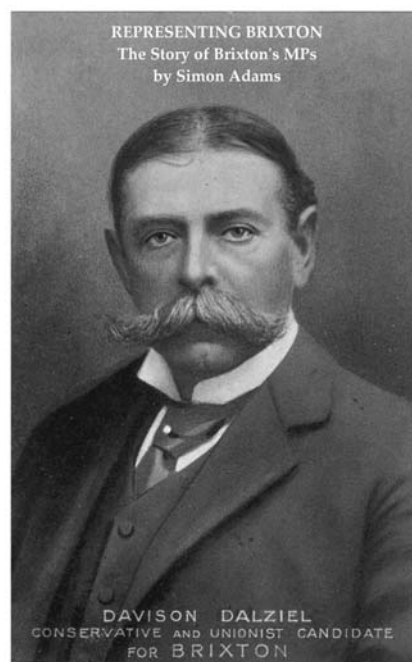
There was a period of time when Brixton was a Parliamentary constituency in its own right; now it does not even rate a mention with somewhere else in a combined constituency name.

However you look at it, the bulk of Brixton is contained in the proposed Clapham North and Stockwell constituency. Today it is very much divided between Vauxhall, Dulwich & West Norwood, and Streatham constituencies and so it appears to be less fragmented in the new proposals than it is now.

But why does it have to be fragmented at all? The constraints placed on the Commission mean that more emphasis has to be given to creating constituencies of more-or-less the same size rather than constituencies that reflect voters' sense of place. Perhaps we should, at least, press for the new name to be Clapham and Brixton.

CONSULTATION

A consultation on the proposals is open until 5 December 2016. Details are on their website.



If you are interested in the history of Brixton's representation in Parliament, from the 1832 Great Reform Act to the 2015 General Election, our book, *Representing Brixton*, is available for £2.50 plus postage.

Email: publications@brixtonsociety.org.uk

Bill Linskey, Chair

Bygone Brixton - Local History and Heritage

Disappearing Brixton

At our September meeting we highlighted some of the buildings which have disappeared or drastically changed over the years. Here are a few more examples to stimulate memories or just surprise you with how things used to be...

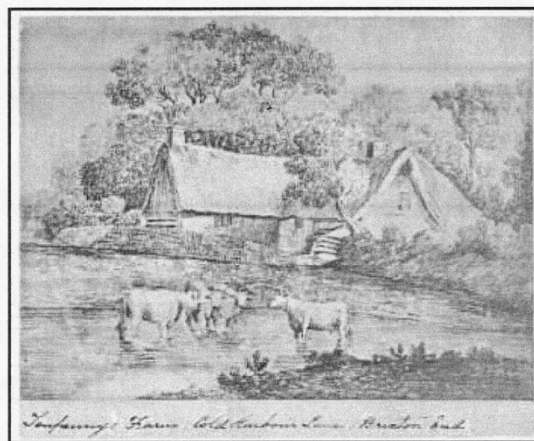
Below is the East side of Brixton Road, around Electric Avenue, before rebuilding in 1935-39.



Loughborough Road and Angell Road in 1966, seen from Brixton Road before the Angell Town Estate was built. (Bx-LR1.jpg)



John Myland's French polish works, at junction of Broomgrove and Stockwell Roads, c.1930.



Really ancient – Tenpenny's Farm, c.1800 in Coldharbour Lane (from Ideal Homes website).



Demolition of 1820s cottages in Sussex Road to make way for the Moorland Estate, 1974 (BS-EBx-74-01.jpg)

Spin-offs from Black History month

The 1981 Uprisings @ 35

One-day conference for community groups, policy-makers and academics to reflect on the 35th anniversary of the Scarman Report on the Inner City troubles of 1981: 10 am to 6 pm at Queen Mary University of London, People's Palace (Lecture Theatre 1) Mile End Road.

Free but please register via

www.eventbrite.com/e/the-1981-uprisings-35-criminal-justice-community-and-the-state-tickets-28396385353

Crowdfunding for “Keep Calm” film

Bogdan Hristov has been compiling a full-length documentary on 3 generations of Afro-Caribbean people in Britain, and now seeks a little more funding to finish the work. See the trailer on <https://vimeo.com/keepcalmdocumentary/trailer> or on Kickstarter: tinyurl.com/KeepCalmDocu

Lambeth Heritage Festival

The Lambeth Heritage Festival, which ran throughout September, was the Brixton Society's most successful yet.

Saturday 3rd

We did well at the Lambeth Archives Open Day: meeting new people and old friends and selling many of our publications.

Thursday 8th

Our talk on the Lost Buildings of Brixton, illustrated by magic lantern slides; 35mm slides and a modern digital projector, drew an audience of about 50.

Saturday 10th

Our market walk saw another dozen people wend their way through the market area.

Friday 16th

Over 20 people came to the tour of Brixton fire station in Gresham Road in this, the London Fire Brigade's 150th anniversary year.

In addition, our Secretary, Alan Piper, officiated at another three events for other societies.

Monday 5th

His talk on Brixton Buildings and People was a sell-out at the Streatham Society.

Sunday 11th

Some 30 people joined his Old Lambeth walk for the Lambethans.

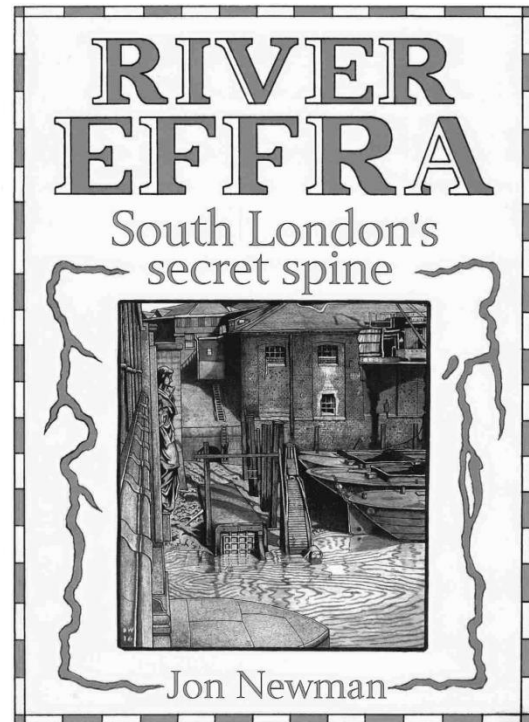
Thursday 15th

A dozen people enjoyed his talk on Lambeth Riverside for the South Lambeth History Group at Norwood.

Sunday 4th

Our Chair, Bill Linskey, led 14 people on a heritage walk around Stockwell Green for the Stockwell Village Association.

And that's just what we did! What our colleagues at the Friends of Brixton Windmill did to celebrate its 200th anniversary would fill another column.



The final event of the Festival took place on Friday 30th in the Tate Library Brixton when Jon Newman, Lambeth Archivist, entertained a large audience with a talk about his new book on the river Effra.

The book examines the natural course of the Effra and how that was modified by man from as early as the Middle Ages. The last, great modification came about as a result of the creation of London's sewer system in the middle of the 19th century since when the river has been hidden underground.

After dealing with the origin of the name "Effra" and some of the many myths and stories surrounding it, the book has a fascinating chapter showing, through a series of images, where the river flows beneath our feet today.

Well illustrated, including 8 pages of colour illustrations, this is both a work of scholarship (with extensive footnotes referencing original sources) and an excellent read.

Paperback £9.99 from Lambeth Archives.

Planning for Visitors

Starting 150 years ago, Brixton developed rapidly as a major shopping centre due to the combination of good public transport links and “magnet” stores like the Bon Marche. It lost ground through the 1970s while planning blight discouraged commercial investment, but since the late 1980s, revived entertainment venues have brought visitors back, and Brixton now has a buzz about it again. Yet planning policies and infrastructure have failed to keep up with the changing pressures on the Town Centre. Concentrating the night economy in Central sites took the pressure off surrounding residential enclaves, but new problems are emerging as more people move back into flats in the Town Centre.

The Public Toilets Challenge

The most acute problem is the lack of public toilets within the Town Centre. Provision needs to catch up with the scale and timing of the night economy. Right now, it's minimal even for day-time visitors, discouraging them from staying around to spend money with local businesses. Ever-reluctant to avoid doing anything helpful, Lambeth Council has advertised the disused underground toilets in Windrush Square for rent, with tenants asked to include some token toilet provision. Several expressions of interest were received, with a decision expected by the end of this month.

Streetscape Strategy

The Council seems to be hoping that the gaps left by its shrinking resources will be made up by the Brixton Business Improvement District (BID) taking on greater responsibilities for the Town Centre. A recent sign of the times was that the BID led on the commissioning of consultants to prepare a strategy for improving the streets and open spaces within the Centre. The aim is that this will allow separate parts to be brought forward as funds become available, particularly where new developments can contribute.

Atlantic Road re-vamp

The first part of this strategy to be followed up is the review of Atlantic Road. Brixton Design

Trail left some colourful crossings, but now Lambeth has commissioned Metropolitan Workshop and BWB to design a broader scheme as the basis of a bid for TfL funding. For decades there has been talk of making Atlantic Road one-way, or pedestrianised, but it plays a vital role in allowing goods deliveries to Electric Avenue and the market arcades. The nearby butchers and fishmongers, and even the newer cafes, all depend on daily deliveries, while other use patterns vary between daytime and evenings. Consultation will start first with nearby traders and then with a wider range of residents and users. Network Rail's clumsy estate management has created a gap by evicting established traders from the arches west of the station, but many other stakeholders remain close by.

Electric Avenue progress

Work is well-advanced in repaving the street, and the illuminated Electric Avenue sign is in place above Boots. New shelters for the market traders are expected soon, and some of the old market barrows have been restored. In parallel with this, the Townscape Heritage Initiative is starting to take effect in supporting repairs to selected shopfronts and the facades above. This means some scaffolding and builders' clutter will line the street for a couple of years ahead, though we hope the results will be worthwhile in the longer term.

Green Flag Results

In the 20th year of the Green Flag scheme, run by Keep Britain Tidy, 12 of Lambeth's 65 public open spaces achieved the Green Flag quality standard. Locally, these included Brockwell Park, Myatt's Fields Park and Milkwood Community Park.

Changes at St. Matthew's

For many years this landmark church building has been managed by The Brix Trust, renting out a variety of spaces in order to maintain the building as a whole. We hear that St. Matthew's Parochial Church Council has recently taken management of the building back into its own hands and dissolved the trust. This seems to put paid to the earlier

Regeneration and Amenities

proposals by the trust to take over care of the churchyard from Lambeth Council and reconfigure the layout.

Open Air Theatre in Brockwell Park?

At the beginning of August, Lambeth Parks officers invited Brockwell Park Community Partners to comment on a proposal they had received for building a 1000-seat open air theatre within Brockwell Park. "Let's do the show right here" may have sounded great in the movies, but real life is more complicated. In fact the promoter's timing could not have been worse. Across Lambeth, park user groups are very sensitive to any increase in events or activities which involve closing off part of the land and charging for admission. Lambeth's Events Team, with targets to meet but unrestrained by councillors, has been stepping up the number of commercial events in parks. There is increased wear on surfaces and damage is slow to be repaired. As a result, there is now widespread opposition to substantial areas of our parks being taken over by external organisations for extended periods. Lambeth's approach is reducing the available public open space at a time when it is coming under greater pressure from a growing local population, due to residential "densification" also encouraged by the Council.

Now a thousand seats is only 10% less than the Olivier within the National Theatre, itself based on the ancient Greek open-air theatre at Epidauros. Although the promoter soon scaled this down to a demountable structure of 400 seats, a season of 27 weeks was still proposed. It remained difficult to see how this could be viable within the local market for theatre seats and performance space. Apart from the National and the Old Vic at the north end of the borough, and small venues like the Landor and White Bear, we already have the Oval Theatre moving to Brixton, and the South London Theatre Centre moving back from the Stanley Halls to their old base at the original West Norwood Fire Station. Look beyond the strictly theatrical and we also have major performance venues on our patch at the O2 Brixton Academy and the Electric Brixton.

Consequently we doubted that ticket sales would be enough to make a net contribution to park resources, after meeting operating costs and reinstating the site at the end of the season.

Existing plans for performance space within the park are more modest and flexible. The HLF bid being prepared for Brockwell Hall will include a performance area/ function space within the old stableyard, for smaller audiences but with no loss of existing public open space.

Waterworks on hold

Our previous report of the demise of the Brixton Hill Waterworks was premature. The application from Roca Investments was only to replace a run-down industrial block just outside the waterworks gates. However, long-term increases in property values have made both the waterworks and the prison ripe for sale to housing developers, and we all need to start thinking about what would be acceptable and even beneficial for their replacements. Scope perhaps for another Master Plan?

News from Windmill Gardens

Meanwhile, immediately to the north of the waterworks, Lambeth Council has finally given approval to funding the community/ education building to sit near the windmill. The Friends of Windmill Gardens will be granted a 3-year lease to run the building for educational work with local schools and for its other activities. The design is being progressed by Squire & Partners for opening in Summer 2017. Heritage Lottery funding is also being pursued to recruit a centre manager.

Libraries & Archives static

We would love to give you some good news about re-opening of the mothballed libraries or the future of Lambeth Archives, but Lambeth appears to have done little for months. The only glimmers are that the consultants have devised some options for the Archives, and the groups competing for control of Carnegie Library have begun to talk to each other.

Compiled by Alan Piper.