

# The Brixton Society

Understanding the Past, Looking to the Future

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

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

## HOW CAN WE HELP WITH FAMILY HISTORY?

Over the past 40 years we have looked into many aspects of local life. We know how the area has developed and changed over time, and the different sorts of people who have moved in and out of the area.

Clearly if you want to know where great grand-dad lived, or went to school, official collections like Lambeth Archives or the London Metropolitan Archives will have detailed records. Where we can best help is telling you if his house is still standing and what the neighbourhood was like in his time. We may be able to find a picture of the street 100+ years ago, or clarify the contradictions between different sources. Different aspects of Brixton life have featured in our newsletters, in our books and on our website, so we may have covered ground which helps your own research.



*Electric Avenue as seen in 1910.  
(Db.2004-08-12.jpg)*

### The Changing Face of Brixton

Some 200 years ago Brixton was still a rural district, commemorated by a surviving windmill. The nearby Prison brought its own varied mix of residents.

Until the 1860s, Brixton grew slowly, with grand houses on the main roads for City merchants, and small cottages on the back lanes for tradesmen and labourers. This mix changed dramatically once railways sliced through the area, so the old fields

were quickly covered by streets of terraced houses and the first market stalls set up around the railway station. In 1877 the Bon Marche department store launched Brixton as a shopping destination, which continued to grow until the Second World War.

Brixton's new residents in the 1870s were mainly from the Home Counties, where agriculture was in decline, or from congested areas of Central London. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a growing Jewish business community, together with Music Hall performers, using the late-night tram service to get home from theatres across London.



*Brixton Road c. 1950 (Db-2007-12-08.jpg)*

Brixton was one of the early centres of West Indian settlement from 1948 onwards, but by the mid-1960s there was also a minority among them directly from West Africa. Portuguese residents and businesses are evident on the Stockwell side of Brixton, and several other émigré communities are also represented around Brixton.

By 1970, ambitious but gradual demolition of older streets created opportunities for squatting, often by educated young people creating their own alternative culture. Recent years have seen more professionals taking advantage of easy access to Central London to move back into the area, a return to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century pattern.

*ADP, rev. 30.10.19*

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