

The Brixton Society Newsletter

Spring Issue : April 2025 : No.257



FIFTY YEARS ON

Our golden jubilee year could not have had a worse start. In January our long-serving Secretary, Alan Piper, suffered a medical emergency which, happily, he is able to tell you about on page 4.

We can now share our plans to celebrate our fiftieth anniversary. We will be mounting an exhibition in the Brixton Library from 28th July to the 9th of August. This will highlight the Society's involvement in key events in Brixton in the last half-century.

During the exhibition there will be a private viewing and celebration for members and invited guests only. An invitation will go out to members closer to the date. Please ensure our Membership Secretary has your up-to-date contact details.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Like so many organisations and individuals, we have recently felt it necessary to review our use of social media, in particular X (formerly Twitter).

Sadly, this has become a toxic brand in many people's eyes and some people in the society are no longer prepared to engage with it. As a charity, we take stands on issues within our remit and these can sometimes have a political edge, but we do not take political positions as such.

EDITORIAL

The difficulty with where X is now, is that "staying with" can be seen as just as much a positive choice as walking away; there is no neutral territory.

We have decided to no longer use X. We continue our use of Instagram and Facebook, and have now opened an account on Bluesky, which seems increasingly to be the platform of choice of refugees from X.

We are in good company; both the London and national bodies of which we are members, the London Forum and Civic Voice, have joined Bluesky

HISTORY WALKS

We have our usual full programme of walks planned for the forthcoming year. As ever, they are listed in the walks leaflet produced by the Lambeth Local History Forum, of which we are a member. This also includes other local walks by the Friends of Windmill Gardens and many other interesting walks around the borough.

A printed copy of the leaflet will be included with printed newsletters. An electronic (pdf) copy can be downloaded from:

bit.ly/LLHFWalks2025

or use this QR Code:



Diary & Events

BRIXTON COMMITTEE DATES

Our Executive Committee meets monthly at 7:00pm on the second Thursday, to plan activities and agree our responses to current issues. Meetings are at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road SW2 1EP, facing Windrush Square.

These meetings are open to any of our members, but if you want to join in or raise a specific issue, please contact the Secretary at least a week before at:

secretary@brixtonsociety.org.uk

Our Planning Committee meets on the Tuesday before each Executive Committee meeting. To raise a planning issue please email:

planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk

The next dates are:

- May 8th & 6th
- July 10th & 8th

June is missing because it is our AGM

BRIXTON SOCIETY AGM

NOTICE

The 2025 Annual General Meeting of the Brixton Society will be held on Thursday 12 June at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2B Saltoun Road, London SW2 1EP commencing at 7:00pm.

All members are invited to join us to review the past year and to plan ahead for the next 12 months. There will be refreshments and nibbles. Please do come along and get involved; sharing tasks spreads the workload.

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of last Annual General Meeting (13.6.2024) to be tabled at the meeting by the Secretary
3. Brixton Society Annual Report to be tabled at the meeting by the Secretary
4. Brixton Society Annual accounts for year ended 31.3.2025 to be tabled at the meeting by the Treasurer

5. Election of honorary officers and executive committee: Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Vice-Chair, Membership Secretary, and up to 10 other members.
6. Suggestions for priorities and events for the year ahead.
7. Any other business.

LOCAL HISTORY WALKS

The society runs history walks throughout most of the year with just a short winter break. The next ones are:

Brixton Market Heritage Walk

- Saturday 10 May
- Saturday 14 June
- Saturday 12 July

Thereafter our market walks will run on the second Saturday of the month until December. The dates will be confirmed in future newsletters.

If a group of people (minimum 6; maximum about 12) would like to have a market walk on a different day, please email:

marketwalks@brixtonsociety.org.uk giving as much notice as possible and we will see if we have a volunteer walks leader available to accommodate the request.

Other walks before our next newsletter are all on Sundays:

27 April	Stockwell Green
18 May	Brixton Artworks
15 June	Off the beaten track: Atlantic/ Railton Roads and Moorland Estate to Brixton House

For information on later walks by us and those by other societies, see the Lambeth Local History Forum leaflet flagged on the front page.

Details and bookings for all our walks: brixtonsociety.org.uk/events



Brixton Windmill

Future events include:

Monday 5 May, 1pm to 5pm

May Fest - celebrating seasonal folk traditions
We will have a stall at this event

Saturday 31 May, 11am and 2pm

Catch of the Day – Aerial Theatre

For details of these events and the regular activities at the windmill, see:

brixtonwindmill.org/all-events

LONDON NAIL BOMB ATTACKS 17TH APRIL - BRIXTON ACT OF REMEMBRANCE



MEET AT THE ICELAND STORE

ACT OF REMEMBRANCE 6 PM

Organised by **17-24-30 NationalHCAW**

<https://nationalhcaw.uk/april-acts-of-remembrance>

17-24-30 National Hate Crime Awareness Week (Charity No 1184819)

These events are open to anyone but please register so that the organisers know how many people wish to attend



The next free exhibition at Lambeth Archives is:

"Adesuwa Africa Spring Women Art Collection 2025"

Artists:

Melody Osagie Hyperrealism Artist

Sonia Ogbebor, Digital Artist

Curator:

Adesuwa Africa Charitable Foundation



Lambeth Archives, 16 Brixton Hill, SW2 1ET

Tuesday 15 April - Friday 17th May

During Lambeth Archives opening hours:
Monday 1-8, Tuesday 10-6, Thursday 10-6,
Friday 10-3, Sat 9-1 and 2-5pm

Just a walk in the park?



On Sunday 26 January, I turned out for a morning meeting of Brockwell Park Community Partners, which brings together all stakeholder groups active in and around the park. The hot topic was due to be the Council's summer package of big events, a week of commercial pop concerts to be followed by the Lambeth Country Show, using the same fencing and infrastructure, denying the public access to a large chunk of the park for several weeks.

However, we had not even reached this part of the agenda when I succumbed to a heart attack. I did not recover consciousness for at least 24 hours, but I gather that someone applied CPR until an ambulance crew arrived who cut away my clothes while applying treatment. Incidentally, my diary was lost in the confusion, which made it difficult to contact people afterwards to tell them my situation.

I then spent 24 days in Kings College Hospital, undergoing various procedures leading up to a pacemaker – my own personal defibrillator – being fitted. This was my first hospital stay since 1959, so I am immensely grateful to the series of visitors – mostly from the Brixton Society – who came in to share news and bring various creature comforts to make life more tolerable. Special thanks go to Tracey, Annick and Marilyn for helping me get settled in at home on my return from hospital. Not forgetting committee

members who have stepped up to keep Society business ticking over.

By the time you read this, I am due for another procedure to finish declogging my arteries. In the meantime, I have been taking things slower than I was used to, so don't expect to see me at quite as many events as before.

Alan Piper

Brixton Blog & Bugle Art Show

Entry is now open for the ever-popular Brixton Blog & Bugle Summer Art Show. The show is open to any artist – professional or self-taught – who is at least 16 years old and is based in or around Brixton.



For more information and the rules for entering the show, go to:

brixtonblog.com/2025/03/brixton-blog-bugle-art-show-2025/

The closing date for entries is Monday 12 May. All selected works will be exhibited in the Summer Art Show in the Brixton Tate Library between 30 June and 24 July 2024. The winner will be decided by a people's vote.

New Calls for Action on Anti-Social Behaviour

Action on ASB convened a well-attended meeting at Pop Brixton on Monday 24 March, to take stock of progress a year after the last public meeting. The group has 250 members signed up and continues to lobby for more resources.

Peter Impey stressed that this depends on people reporting issues, but there is a practical problem of knowing where specific problems should be reported, so better guidance is needed for the public and businesses.

CENTRAL BRIXTON

AoASB focusses on the four Central Brixton wards but also liaises with the Herne Hill Forum and the Friends of Brockwell Park. Issues have been raised with the three local MPs, and in the House of Lords, while more local councillors are getting on board.

The Town Centre Police team had been reinstated, and the Home Office had funded police action on the Angell Town and Moorland Estates. The Brixton Business Improvement District has encouraged the removal of redundant phone boxes, which have been used as cover for drug dealing.

Efforts are being made to set up quarterly meetings between all the responsible agencies, but Lambeth is still hesitating. Others yet to be engaged are mental health services, London Underground and British Transport Police.

BRIXTON BY NIGHT

One factor in levels of anti-social behaviour in recent times has been the growth of late-night

hospitality and entertainment venues as a major element in Brixton's commercial activity. For several years, residents have been complaining about disturbance from departing revellers, lack of public toilet provision and ineffective licensing control by the Council. There is also a suspicion that the volume of late-night visitors attracts drug dealers.

PEAK NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY

Recently there have been signs that the night-time economy may have peaked in Brixton. Brewdog has closed and there is high turnover of bars and eateries generally, perhaps because start-ups have been too ready to pay unsustainable levels of rent. And across the country, night-time industries from pubs to clubs are already feeling the pressure of rising overheads.

Meanwhile, Lambeth has been reviewing its Nighttime Strategy, which it expects to publish in June. Consultation has been fragmented, but there is finally talk of better safety for women and improving lighting and cleaning. Enquiries in the meantime to Celine Lessard at clessard@Lambeth.gov.uk

Linking Community Groups

Lambeth Council convened a networking event for representatives of its many voluntary and community groups on Thursday 27 March. This was well-attended by a wide range of organisations, and much interest in a repeat event. In the past, there have been a variety of networks, forums and consultative groups, hosted by different departments. Now there are moves to rationalise these and Lambeth has been reorganising its support staff into a single Community Partnerships Division. So this gathering may be the start of a regular pattern of meetings.

Women of Lambeth Cemetery

On 29 March, Tracey Gregory and Geoff Simmons led a walk of Lambeth Cemetery telling the stories of some incredible women buried there. A number of notable Brixton women were included on the walk:

- Entertainers Katie Seymour, a music hall comedy entertainer and acrobatic and wire walking mother and daughters the Gerettis (see article).
- Ada Bannister who is named on the civilian war memorial in the Cemetery with her son John and husband Arthur. They were killed when a bomb fell on St Lawrence Road 8 December 1940.
- Dorothy (Cherry) Groce who was shot by police when they entered her home in 1985. Dorothy spent the next 26 years in a wheelchair dying of her injuries in 2011.
- And orchid artist Nelly Roberts.



The walk was scheduled to coincide not just with the end of women's history month but also the 66th anniversary of Nelly's death and three years since a plaque was unveiled on her previously unmarked grave.

Brixton Immortals

Domino Club

The Brixton Immortals Domino Club is a non-profit, volunteer-led organisation that has been serving Brixton's African-Caribbean community since the 1970s, using dominoes as a tool for community engagement, cultural preservation, and intergenerational bonding.



They are currently organising four major community events in 2025 and are looking for volunteer support to help ensure the success of these initiatives. The events are:

- May Labour Day - Sunday 25th May
- Windrush Day - Saturday 21st June
- Jamaican Independence Day - Sat 9th August
- Black History Month - Saturday 25th October

They are looking for volunteers of all backgrounds and skill levels to assist with:

- Event Setup and Breakdown
- Guest Assistance
- Workshop Support
- Catering Assistance
- Entertainment Coordination
- Health and Safety Monitoring
- Marketing and Outreach
- Feedback Collection

If you think you may be able to help, email: BrixtonImmortals@yahoo.com

Notes and News

Mayday

Local elections are taking place in various parts of the country on 1st May. However, the next London borough elections are not until 2026.

Lambeth Council By-election

Long-serving Councillor Jim Dickson has finally stood down as a Lambeth Councillor, following his election as MP for Dartford in May last year. He joined the Council in 1990, became Council Leader in 1994, and latterly was Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities until the last General Election, while serving as one of the members for what is now the Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction Ward.

Consequently, a by-election for the Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction Ward will be held on Thursday 1 May.

Papa's Park



Papa's Park is a volunteer and community-run, open access park in the heart of Brixton, South London. The Pulross Area Play Association (PAPA) was set up in the 1990s to rescue a derelict former council-run play area and save it from developers. Papa's Park remains committed to sustaining a vibrant, safe and inclusive space where everyone can play, connect and thrive.

But the park and community buildings in it face an uncertain future, with the buildings becoming severely dilapidated, suffering from leakages amongst other issues. Despite this, the volunteer-run committee have recently been granted planning permission to rebuild the hall and café and desperately need funding to make the vision a reality and save the community space.

Please consider donating to the new café and hall, using this link:



crowdfunder.co.uk/p/papas-park-ltd

Grove Adventure Playground



This magical playground, which supports over 200 local children and young people, is facing a financial crisis because at the turn of the year two major sources of funding came to an end.

Fortunately, they have been selected to benefit from the Big Give's Champions for Children Campaign. This year, the campaign will run for two weeks from **Tuesday, 3rd June 2025 to Tuesday, 17th June 2025.**

Details of how to donate will be on their website: groveadventureplayground.com nearer the date. Please note the dates if you can help to make their June a little sunnier.

Cormont Road School: Update

DECAY

English Heritage Grade II listed Cormont Road School (formerly Kennington Boys' School and then Charles Edward Brooke Girls School) still stands netted and decaying, overlooking Myatt's Fields Park. The plight of the school and the inaction by owners Lambeth Council to undertake repairs and find a new use for the school was reported in our Summer 2024 newsletter No. 254.



The netted exterior of the school.

Photo courtesy of Dusty Sensor Photography.

The campaign launched by residents has prompted some action. A team (or officer) has been appointed within Lambeth Council Housing Delivery to take forward the project to identify a developer. Change of use for the school playing fields, the concrete area around the school, has now been granted by the Secretary of State for Education following a Section 77 consultation of schools within a mile radius of Cormont Road. No consultation for change of use of the building itself was required as it has not been used as a school for more than 12 years.

HOUSING

The priority for Lambeth Council is for new housing on the site. While the dire need for housing is understood by the local community, the preference for residents living close to the school would be for a mixed use for the site with some community facing activity, along with housing.

The New Homes Programme Report to Lambeth Council Cabinet 17 March 2025, noted the Charles Edward Brooke site (as it is referred to) could deliver c. 80 new homes. The report also notes, "the building is a listed (sic), and in significant disrepair, so is not simple to deliver and carries significant viability and planning risks".



A decaying classroom. As bad as it looks, it does not necessarily imply there is structural damage.

Photo courtesy of Dusty Sensor Photography.

FOR SALE

It is anticipated the building will be sold subject to planning conditions. Community organisations continue to push for urgent work to make the building weathertight and genuine consultation about how the building could be used in the future.

Tracey Gregory

Tesco, Acre Lane, Site

SAPD

As we reported in our January 2025 newsletter, last year Lambeth Council issued a Site Allocations Development Policy (SADP), a document local planning authorities are obliged to produce to identify potential sites for new housing.

EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

Earlier this year, the Lambeth SADP came up for examination by a government-appointed planning inspector. On 4th March the inspector chaired an examination in public of Lambeth's plans for three sites in the centre of Brixton - 330/336 Brixton Road, 14 Acre Lane (Tesco supermarket and car park) and 51-57 Effra Road (currently Halfords and PC World superstores). Vivienne Lewis and Alan Piper attended the hearing to speak for the Brixton society.

The longest and most contested discussion was about the Tesco Acre Lane site, where Lambeth have produced plans for a new supermarket building and eight residential blocks up to 32 metres (10 storeys) high. As the inspector pointed out in his opening remarks, these blocks would be considerably higher than any neighbouring buildings in Acre Lane which range from four to five storeys.

INDICATIVE

Worryingly, it emerged at the hearing that Lambeth's plans are only "indicative" and Lambeth planning officers have been in discussion with the site owner, HSBC, about

even taller buildings. The illustration below, which was included in evidence to the hearing from Montague Evans, consultants working for HSBC, give some idea of what we might see if a planning application comes forward.



REASSURED

On the positive side, the Brixton Society representatives and those representing local residents were reassured by the Inspector's willingness to listen to local objectors and it was clear that he had read our written submissions. Along with representatives from local residents' groups in Porden Road, Baytree Road and Arlington Lodge, we were able to speak at the hearing and raised concerns about the impact of the blocks on adjoining terraced housing and on views of the listed Town Hall building.

REPORT

The Inspector's report is expected in late spring or early summer.

Vivienne Lewis

Cases Round-up

SURGE IN PLANNING CASES

The last few months have seen a surge in the number of sites around Brixton where plans are being put forward or revised.

Several of these have been ticking over in the background for years, so their addresses may already be familiar to many of our members. But don't expect much building activity for a while yet.

SITE ALLOCATIONS – THE OTHERS

In addition to the Tesco site in Acre Lane, we also commented on the Halfords/Currys site in Effra Road and supported the retention of 336 Brixton Road for a coalition of disability charities. Our comments on Hardess Road / Wellfit Street were superseded because Lambeth had already granted permission for an even larger co-living development. Council plans for Sureway Ministries (opposite Loughborough Junction Station) seemed unduly fussy for a small site.

SOMERLEYTON ROAD SITES

After rejecting sensible proposals from Brixton Green several years ago, Lambeth Council put Homes for Lambeth in charge of development. Sadly, this proved to be a brake rather than a boost to getting homes built.

To get things moving, Lambeth recently made a deal with Higgins to act as developer, but the downside is that only 56% will now be affordable, either for social rent or shared ownership. In the meantime, safety requirements have changed, especially a requirement for second staircases in higher-rise blocks. As a result, the new blocks are taller, and the sheltered housing element moves to the former dustcart park beyond Somerleyton Passage.

BLUE STAR HOUSE – A HOTEL?



Developers continue to treat Brixton as part of a giant Monopoly board. Following the Premier Inn above the former Woolworths on Coldharbour Lane, there were proposals for hotels above SuperDrug and in part of the former Quin & Axtens block (above Brixton Plaza/Mall etc.) both of which appear stalled.

Now a proposal to adapt Blue Star House looks a bit more realistic, since the shallow floor-plan suits hotel rooms rather than flats. There will be some business workspace in new extensions at the rear, above Stockwell Avenue. What's not clear yet is how many floors will be added above the main office block – subject to what the existing frame can support – and vehicle access arrangements for supplies and laundry.

To see the details of their proposal, with the opportunity to comment, see their website:

bluestarhouseconsultation.co.uk

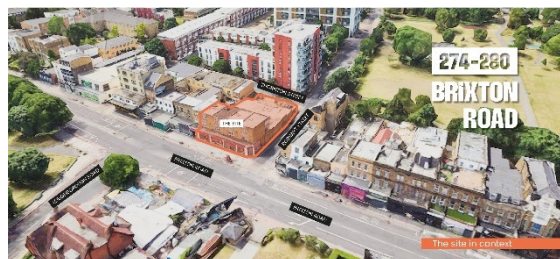
SHAKESPEARE SIDINGS

Proposed high-rise apartments on the site of a burnt-out warehouse were stalled for a while because the site was linked to progress on another development in West Norwood. Now we

Planning News

hear that ownership has been separated and the new owners are about to propose a redesign which is even taller than before.

CO-LIVING ON BRIXTON ROAD?



One of our concerns is the number of projects proposing non-standard formats, like co-living and larger houses in multiple occupation, rather than the family-friendly apartments or even terrace houses that are actually needed. By the time you read this, we will have seen the latest of these, intended to replace shops at 274-280 Brixton Road, at the southern corner of Robsart Street.

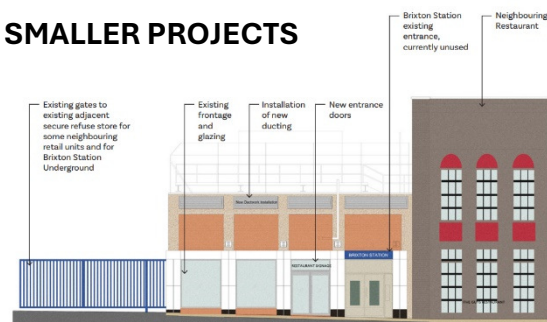
BELLEVUE MANSIONS



The Mansions at 289-307 Clapham Road are an early example of late-Georgian houses being remodelled as apartment blocks (completed in 1915). Hyde Housing have been considering options

for high-rise redevelopment, building over the recreation ground at the rear on Rhodesia Road. So far consultations have been limited to tenants of the Mansions and of Lambeth Self-Help Housing Association at 1-17 Grantham Road.

SMALLER PROJECTS



In **Electric Lane**, London Underground proposes to add a take-away outlet alongside the back door of the disused station arcade. We are inclined to support this because it might encourage re-opening of the rest of the 1970s arcade.

Also in the Town Centre, we have just heard that planters and seating are proposed on the forecourt of **409-411 Brixton Road**, on a similar basis to those in front of the San Marino Café. This is the northern end of the old Rush Common building restrictions, but Edwardian postcards show a cast iron glazed canopy overhead, with a family resemblance to the original Electric Avenue.

In **Myatt's Fields Park**, it's proposed to remodel the old depot building off Cormont Road to provide a community building with bin stores and cycle stands.

Friends of Windmill Gardens have been consulting on how to improve the rundown approach to the park and windmill from Brixton Hill, to improve both access and wayfinding.

Planning News

BROCKWELL PARK EVENTS

Lambeth has done a deal with commercial promoters for another series of big events in the park, to be followed by the Lambeth Country Show using the same fence and temporary structure. Since the overall use would exceed the permitted 28 days, a Planning Application is necessary, to which we and others have objected. Concerns include the cumulative damage to the park, which does not have time to recover from year to year, and a large chunk of the park being removed from public use for a couple of summer months during set-up and take-down operations.

COMMUNITY PARKLETS OFFER EXTENDED



A number of community parklets have been created in Central Brixton in association with existing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. Lambeth Council is now inviting ideas for further sections of kerbside parking spaces to be adapted, in Phase 4 of its programme. This will include sites around the periphery of Brixton, in Clapham East, Myatt's Fields, West Dulwich and Herne Hill/Loughborough Junction wards. Proposals required by 3rd May. More details on the Council website at lambeth.gov.uk/streets-roads-transport/community-parklet-scheme

BRIXTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

For over a year, the Brixton Neighbourhood Forum has been laying the foundations for a Neighbourhood

Plan for Brixton, to better reflect local preferences and needs. This has been supported by the Brixton Society and Just Space with students from the UCL/Bartlett planning course contributing research.

The Forum is on the point of applying to Lambeth for official designation to prepare a plan, which would set off a series of local consultation events. However, in the past few months, matters have been complicated by the Friends of Windrush Square pressing to prepare their own separate plan, while being vague about their boundaries and priorities. At the same time, the Friends are bidding to convert the disused underground toilets into an Arts Club Bar, which we would expect to keep them busy enough without wider ambitions.

LONDON-WIDE PLANS



We have been awaiting draft revisions to London-wide planning policies from the Mayor and GLA planners. In the meantime, the London Forum of Amenity Societies and the London Society have set up a briefing for their members on 23 April.

The London Forum have also shared a paper on London's population trends which you can see here:

www.londonforum.org.uk/2025/03/19/whats-happening-to-londons-population.

Alan Piper

CONTACT

To comment or raise any particular concerns, you can contact our Planning Subcommittee by email at:

planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk

Swedenborgian Churches

TWO CHURCHES

Brixton once had two Swedenborgian churches one on either side of Myatts Field Park.

MICHAEL CHURCH

Many readers of this newsletter will be familiar with the Michael Church in Burton Road because until 2017 the Lambeth Archives open days at the Minet Library and Longfield Hall featured talks given in the church, and tea/coffee and cakes in the church basement. The church is unusual in that it belongs to an American Swedenborgian denomination, who commissioned or “planted” it near to the existing Camberwell Swedenborgian “New Church” in Flodden Road in 1892. The rather pleasant Arts and Craft style of the Burton Road church is an unusual statement of difference.



*Michael Church, Burton Road
Image courtesy of Lambeth Archives*

CAMBERWELL SOCIETY OF THE NEW CHURCH

Only a third of a mile away, the opposite side of Myatts Fields park, at the top of Flodden Road was the Camberwell Society of the New Church building – erected in 1867 (demolished c. 1970).

The 1867 Flodden Road church belonged to the original New Church, the British Swedenborgian



Flodden Road, image courtesy Bill Linskey

church, but in America an Academy for training Swedenborgian ministers was established in 1876. The Academy had more fundamentalist views about scripture and Swedenborg’s theology, and they “planted” the Michael Church nearby presumably to offer an alternative to English liberal error!

Ministers at Michael Church have generally been supplied over the years from Philadelphia.

Currently the UK New Church states its first two beliefs as follows:

- We believe there is one God, who is the God of all religions.
- We believe there is a place in heaven for all who show love to God and to other people, whatever their religion.

This could be Unitarian, or even much of Church of England!

Flodden Road New Church continued until after World War II as part of the General Conference of the New Church UK and in 1970 the congregation merged with the Swedenborgian congregation in Anerley and the Flodden Road site was sold. A modern terrace was built.

We have no views of the inside of the Flodden Road church. It seems likely to have been similar to the Michael Church in having a small altar containing scripture: Bible or Swedenborg.

Local History

The story of the Flodden Road church is alluded to in Richard Lines' interesting article on the Norwood Society website:

www.norwoodsociety.co.uk/articles/the-concrete-church



The interior of the Michael Church in 1894, two years after it opened. Image courtesy of Lambeth Archives.



The interior of the Michael Church today. Although modernised, much of the original interior remains.

Image from their Facebook page:

facebook.com/MichaelChurchLondon

To read about the Michael Church today:

newchurch.org.uk/locations/london

Established in 1810, the Swedenborg Society is a registered charity with a website here:

swedenborg.org.uk

David Warner

The Geretti Family

Now forgotten but once well-known acrobats and wire walkers

ADELAIDE AND HARRY

Adelaide Amelia Geretti (nee Atkinson) (1850-1906) and her husband Henry (Harry) Geretti (1848-1909) were acrobatic performers. Hailing from Liverpool and Sunderland, they based themselves in and around Brixton from the mid-1870s when they weren't touring the UK and Europe performing.

Harry had a successful career on the slack wire and as the family grew Harry and Amelia performed on the wire and trapeze with their children as the Geretti Family. They advertised as the 'Acmes of Grace' in *The Era* in 1885, when they were 'at Liberty' in Calais having just completed a long-term appointment with the Grand Cirque Continental.

NINE CHILDREN

The couple had at least nine children, two dying in infancy. Their first child Henrietta, born on Merseyside died at a few weeks old in 1868. Son

William, sadly, didn't make his third birthday. Daughters Blanche, Lilian, Edith, Amelia and Minnie all became acrobats. They performed together in various combinations as the Sisters Geretti before developing their own acts. Son Ernest took a different path and became an upholsterer.

In December 1898 the Sisters Geretti were described as 'giving a marvellously clever display on the trapeze; their performance is marked by much gracefulness and they are recipients of a most enthusiastic recall at the finish of their show.' (*Music Hall and Theatre Review* 2 December 1898).

Eldest daughter Blanche became a successful solo high wire and trapeze artiste, performing across Europe. She possibly stopped performing after she married magician Edwin Joseph Sewell aka Jean Seul, *The Indian Mystery* at St Mary at Lambeth Church in October 1897.

Local History

STOCKWELL

Edwin and Blanche's daughter, Blanche, was born on 17 July 1898 while they were living at 38 Aytoun Road, Stockwell, a short walk from the homes of other members of the family. They were still living in Stockwell in 1902 when son John was born.

Lilian went on to become one half of Victoria and Ramoo, after her marriage to Alf Edwards in 1913. They performed an impressive sounding balancing and acrobatic act on a pyramid of glass bottles. The couple lived for a number of years at 8 Mostyn Road. In January 1916, they set off for a tour performing in South America, returning in June 1916 and moving back into 8 Mostyn Road.

FIRST WORLD WAR CALL UP

The following month, Alf was called up to fight in the First World War with his unit, the 3rd Battalion Yorks and Lancs. Victoria announced in newspapers that her sister (not sure which one) would take over as assistant and she would continue the act. In Sept 1916, Private Alf Edwards was declared medically unfit and discharged. Alf did return to the role of Ramoo and he and Lilian continued performing across the UK and Europe until the 1920s.

In 1914, Edith went solo with her 'novel gymnastic turn'. In the latter part of 1913 she had married Scottish comedian and dancer, John Cruden, who performed as Dan Crew. They were advertising alongside each other for bookings, in *The Era* in July 1914 from their home at 8 Mostyn Road. It looks like they were possibly living with Lilian and her husband Alf.

Very sadly Edith died just a few months later in January 1915 at 21 Mostyn Road. Maybe she

and John (Dan) had moved to their own place opposite her sister Lilian's home.

As the young women developed their own acts, father Harry went back to performing solo on the slack wire. In December 1892 in Sheffield his act is described as 'an original performance in which there seemed more than spice of danger, on the slack rope suspended from the roof, receiving a loud and well-deserved ovation'. (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 December 1892).

MATRIARCH

It is hard to find mentions of Adelaide, matriarch of the family, as an individual performer or even as part of the family act. My hunch is she did perform but was more of a manager for the

family. And of course, she was pregnant a lot of the time between 1868 and 1883. When she died in August 1906 at 3 Wiltshire Road, her passing was announced in *The Performer*. She was just 56 years old but left £2,600 to her husband, around £450,000 today. She is buried in Lambeth Cemetery with an impressive memorial stone of a large angel atop a plinth.

Harry is buried alongside his wife Adelaide Amelia. He died in December 1909, also at 3 Wiltshire Road, leaving £2,500 to his daughters Lilian, Edith and Minnie. Edith is buried in the plot, alongside her mother and father. Blanche, who died in Glasgow in 1927, and Ernest who died in Brighton, are

remembered on the headstone. It is thought Lilian remarried and possibly became a water colour artist. Maybe she placed the memorials to her sister and brother in the family grave or maybe that was Minnie who continued living in Brixton until moving to Sussex during WW1.



Tracey Gregory



Doorstep Library is a reading charity for children, dedicated to bringing the magic of books and the joy of reading directly into the homes of children who need our support. With one in four 11-year-olds leaving primary school unable to read or write properly, we recruit and train in-person and online reading volunteers to go into disadvantaged areas of London and beyond to help introduce young children (aged 0-11 years) to the pleasure and benefits of reading.

Doorstep Library are looking for volunteers to join their team to bring the magic of books and the joy of reading directly into the homes of families in Lambeth across Brixton and Tulse Hill!

They also run projects in Hammersmith & Fulham, Camden, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea alongside online sessions.

You could be visiting the same families on a regular basis and hand pick books to fuel children's natural love of stories, fire their imaginations, and encourage their appreciation of reading. You could help to not only improve literacy and confidence in children but also increase family wellbeing and bonding through the joy of sharing stories. This kind of tailored support and unique home-based approach enables us to help prepare children for school and broaden their opportunities in life.

Visit their website to find out more and register your interest: doorsteplibrary.org.uk/volunteer/

About the Brixton Society

Understanding the past, looking to the future

Member of Civic Voice and the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

Registered Charity No. 1058103

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Joining the society on-line:

www.brixtonsociety.org.uk/join-us

Ordinary membership

£10.00 per annum

Unwaged / over 60s

£5.00 per annum

Corporate

£25.00 per annum