

The Brixton Society Newsletter

Autumn Issue : October 2025 : No.259



FIFTY YEARS ON

We had a good response from members to our invitation to the private viewing of our 50th Anniversary exhibition in Brixton Library.



Photo: Annick Alet

The Mayor of Lambeth, Cllr. Adrian Garden kindly accepted our invitation. He made a short speech and then cut our birthday cake.

Subsequently, we had a good turn out of visitors who left many complimentary comments in the visitors' book that was open. The exhibition was scheduled to run from 29th July until 9th August but then we had a piece of good luck when we were told that there was not another exhibition ready to come in until September and we could stay up until 31st August.

A number of people thought that we should have a permanent record of the exhibition, which seemed a good idea, especially considering the amount of effort it had taken to put it together.

EDITORIAL

We have produced an A5 booklet which shows all the images and captions from the exhibition. If you enjoyed the exhibition and would like a souvenir of it, or if you missed it but would like to see it, our souvenir brochure is now on sale for just £2 (plus postage where applicable).

Find out more here:

brixtonsociety.org.uk/publications/books/

or visit our eBay page:

charity.ebay.co.uk/charity/i/Brixton-Society/104352

ON OTHER PAGES

There was so much in and about Brixton in this year's Lambeth Heritage Festival that we just had to celebrate it with a review article. It's not just blowing our own trumpet; there were many events put on by our good friends at the Brixton Windmill and by others.

On much more sombre note, with so much conflict in the world there is an article reminding us of when war arrived on our own doorstep, sparked by the discovery of a WWII Anderson shelter in a back garden.

STOP PRESS

Further to our report on Bellevue Mansions, this article: southwarknews.co.uk/area/south-london/residents-of-62-victorian-homes-are-being-asked-if-they-will-agree-to-demolition-and-move-into-a-new-development-of-450-flats/ reports residents' views of the plans.

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 Monday before each Executive Committee meeting. To raise a planning issue please email:

planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk

The next dates are:

- November 13th & 10th
- December 11th & 8th

LOCAL HISTORY WALKS

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

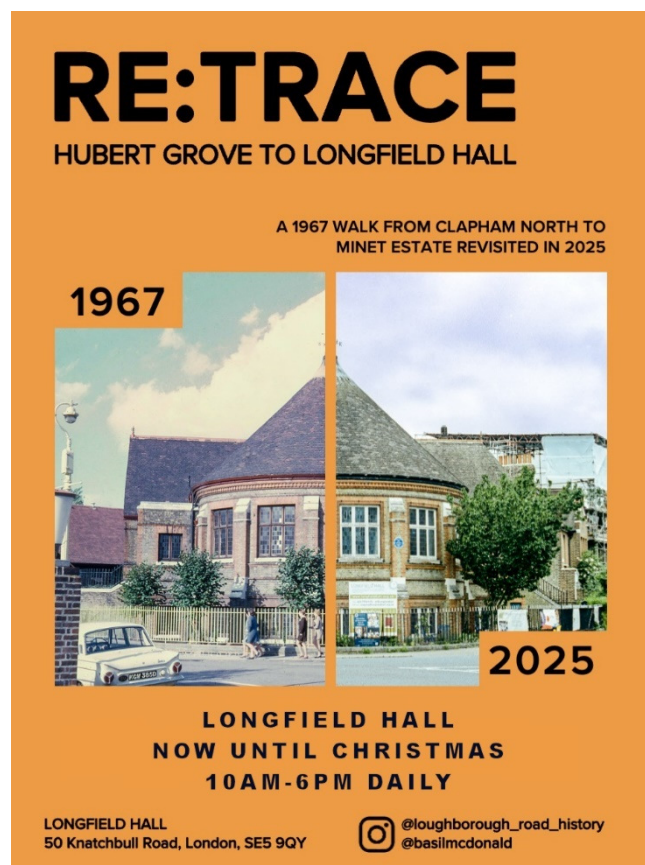
Brixton Market Heritage Walk

- Saturday 11 October
- Saturday 8 November
- Saturday 13 December

Our winter break means that this walk will not be held in January or February. It is planned to recommence in March; to be confirmed in our January newsletter.

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.



RE:TRACE
HUBERT GROVE TO LONGFIELD HALL

A 1967 WALK FROM CLAPHAM NORTH TO MINET ESTATE REVISITED IN 2025

1967



2025

LONGFIELD HALL
NOW UNTIL CHRISTMAS
10AM-6PM DAILY

LONGFIELD HALL
50 Knatchbull Road, London, SE5 9QY

@loughborough_road_history
@basilmcdonald

This exhibition was part of the Lambeth Heritage festival and was scheduled to close on 28 September. Happily, it was then extended to the end of the year.

A series of views photographed by the late Brian Bloice in 1967 were reshot by photographer Basil McDonald earlier this year. They repay close scrutiny: it is fascinating what has changed and what remains the same.

The exhibition is FREE to visit.



FREE Dr Bike Sessions CYCLE MAINTENANCE

Marcus Garvey Way (corner of Railton Rd) SW9
Saturdays 11th October & 8th November
12.00 noon to 3.00 pm



Brixton Windmill

Annual General Meeting 2025

Wednesday 15th October
starting at 7pm at Brixton Windmill Centre.

Halloween at Brixton Windmill

Sunday 26 October, 1pm to 4pm
Free family Halloween event in Windmill Gardens including: Lantern carving; Spooky stories for children; Halloween arts & crafts Shop and Café.

Santa's Grotto & Festive Fair

Sunday 7 December, 12 noon to 3.30pm.
Visit Father Christmas; Christmas choirs and music; café and shop open; free arts and crafts activities for children; Christmas wreath making workshop for adults. PLUS: Santa's Grotto.

For full details of the above and information about regular events at the windmill visit:
www.brixtonwindmill.org/all-events/

GARDEN MUSEUM

Beautiful & Useful Craft Fair
at the Garden Museum
Sunday 7 December 2025

This festive season the Beautiful & Useful Craft Fair is returning to the Garden Museum with a curated collection of Britain's best designer-makers selling bold, bohemian and thoroughly beautiful handmade ceramics, textiles, art prints, jewellery, and homewares.

For full details of the above and information on their other events visit:
<https://gardenmuseum.org.uk/events/>



My Mother-in-Law's Dresses

A reminiscence workshop dedicated to the memory of Girleyvine - a Windrush Pioneer - showcasing some of her beautiful dresses and photographs, documenting her arrival from Jamaica to West Norwood in 1958. Hopefully her dresses and personal photos will bring back those lost memories. Girley has left behind a wealth of memories for her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to share and remember her by.

Bring your own photographs, bring the family and that favourite dress, come along, and share your memories, share your stories, we have already lost too much.

Workshop by Sonia Winifred

Windrush Campaigner
former Lambeth Councillor and Cabinet Member.

A special event, not to be missed.

In Brixton Library

Saturday, 18 October 2025, 2.00pm to 4.00pm

FREE but book via Eventbrite:
www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/my-mother-in-laws-dresses-tickets-1616351704459

LAMBETH COUNCIL CONSULTATIONS

The consultations below are open for comment at the time of going to press

BUDGET ENGAGEMENT SURVEY 2026/27

Lambeth Council is facing the most significant financial challenge in its history, driven by over a decade of central government underfunding, rising costs and unprecedented demand for vital services such as temporary accommodation, adult social care and children's services.

We need to identify £84 million in savings over the six months. This is on top of £99 million of savings already agreed.

This will inevitably require tough decisions about the future of council services and how we continue to provide support our most vulnerable residents.

We have launched a borough-wide public engagement campaign, including a short and accessible survey, to hear from as many residents, partners and organisations as possible.

Consultation open until: 19 October 2025

<https://haveyoursay.lambeth.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/budget-consultation-2026-27>

CONSULTATION ON THE APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION OF BRIXTON NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM AND AREA

On 16 April 2025, an application was received to designate Brixton Neighbourhood Forum and Neighbourhood Area.

We are now seeking your views on this application for a period of 6 weeks, from Monday 8 September to Friday 24 October 2025.

Consultation open until: 24 October 2025

<https://haveyoursay.lambeth.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/consultation-on-the-designation-of-brixton-neighbourhood-forum>

SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (SADPD) MAIN MODIFICATIONS CONSULTATION

On 31 October 2024, the council submitted the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD) to the Secretary of State for examination. Public hearings were held as part of the examination in February and March 2025.

The council is now consulting on proposed 'main modifications' to the SADPD. These are modifications to the submission version of the plan that are considered necessary to ensure the plan is sound and legally compliant.

Consultation open until: 27 October 2025

<https://haveyoursay.lambeth.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/sadpd-main-modifications-consultation>

PARKS BYELAW BREACHES CONSULTATION

London Councils are running a consultation on behalf of Lambeth Council. We are asking residents and park users for their views on how Park byelaw breaches are managed in the future. We are keen that our stakeholders comment on the proposed change.

Consultation open until: 31 October 2025

<https://haveyoursay.lambeth.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/parks-byelaw-breaches-consultation-1>

PARKS USER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2025

The Lambeth Parks Team manage over 80 parks and open spaces in the borough. Please help with our annual satisfaction survey, we would like to hear from our residents on how we are performing and what we could do better.

Consultation open until: 30 November 2025

<https://haveyoursay.lambeth.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/parks-user-satisfaction-survey-copy>

ROUND UP

IT'S CATCH-UP TIME

Planning applications trickle in week by week, but the most recent will have to wait due to a computer glitch just as the editor's deadline approaches. However, there are several ongoing cases to catch up with, starting with the area-wide proposals.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

This proposal from the Brixton Neighbourhood Forum has been long in preparation but needs approval from Lambeth Council before the serious plan-making can start. The boundaries and who leads the process are out for consultation until Friday 24 October. The Council may then take until Christmas to decide, so little can happen until the New Year.

In the meantime, the Forum is meeting on Thursday 13 October, 7 pm at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road, so you can make suggestions and raise concerns. Or contact me direct at apiperbrix@aol.com

LONDON-WIDE PLANS

Planning jargon is one of the challenges we all face in responding to official documents, and the London Mayor has recently published an "easy-read" version of the plans published in May. This is open for comments until 2nd November, so please tell us if we should add to what we said in June.

Read our June 2025 comments here: bit.ly/NLPcomments

Find the London Mayor's consultation here: consult.london.gov.uk/towards-a-new-london-plan-in-easy-read

TELEPHONE KIOSKS

Following the report on new-style kiosks in our last newsletter, several have been refused permission by Lambeth. So far, appeals have been lodged for 2 in Brixton Road and one in Loughborough Road (opposite Ridgeway Road).

SITE ALLOCATIONS DOCUMENT

In the Spring we gave evidence at a Public Hearing into Council proposals to redevelop several sites around Brixton. We have received the Inspector's report and are considering if any further representations would be worthwhile. The closing date for this is Monday 27 October. Contact us for any enquiries or comments at planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk



*Bellevue Mansions, Clapham Road
Photo: Alan Piper*

BELLEVUE MANSIONS AND THE THREAT TO PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Hyde Housing is going ahead with its ballot of residents of Bellevue Mansions, which may even have ended by the time you read this. Regardless of the outcome, the biggest risk is that they could go on to replace the recreation ground at the rear on Rhodesia Road with a new tower block.

Alan Piper

UPDATES

SOMERLEYTON ROAD

This has been a long tale of raised hopes thwarted by the failure of the Council's Lambeth Homes subsidiary. Finally Lambeth did a deal with Higgins Partnerships, and last week approved a revised design reflecting the higher fire safety standards that now apply

The proposed blocks will be higher than the original scheme, resulting in excessive density, while more trees would be lost than we like to see. As many as 12 flats per floor will only be single aspect, instead of benefitting from through ventilation. There will be several business units along the road at ground floor level, but these may be slow to let. A block of factory units in the centre of the site remains in private ownership after a fire sale of Council property 30 years ago.

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE AND POP BRIXTON SITES

Current plans allow for the numerous enterprises and organisations to remain on site until March 2027, but the Council is beginning to realise that a lot of business users could suddenly leave Brixton. The latest design is based on International House becoming a wholly residential tower with a few extra storeys, and alternative business space being provided on the lower floors of the Pop Brixton replacement block. Two residential towers would rise above this, potentially to 16 storeys. We felt this was too high for the context and also suggested ground floor changes to keep an active frontage at the Popes Road corner. A planning application is still awaited.

BLUE STAR HOUSE

A planning application for Blue Star House 234 - 244 Stockwell Road was made in August this year to extend and convert the old office block into a hotel, together with a rear extension which is almost a mirror image of the nearby Bellefields Road offices. This extension would include some replacement office space on the lower floors.

We have objected to two elements:

Firstly, the proposed height. They want to add 5 storeys onto the existing 11-storey block, which we think is excessive, and we are concerned about the load-bearing capacity of the old concrete frame.

Secondly, we have concerns about access (for deliveries, laundry collections and drop-off of visitors) proposed for the rear of the building bringing traffic to residential streets via a circuitous route. The Stockwell Road frontage has a forecourt which once housed a petrol filling station. This could be used as the access for the new building.

A DISTURBING TREND

The above cases reflect a disturbing trend in recent years of Lambeth Planners' enthusiasm for high-rise buildings. This is despite the current version of the Borough Plan restricting them to riverside areas and selected parts of Brixton Town Centre. Nationally, residential towers went out of favour in the late 1960s after the Ronan Point disaster, and the more stringent building regulations introduced after the Grenfell Tower fire should have made them a rarity on cost grounds alone.

Nevertheless, towers continue to proliferate, with Lambeth Planners encouraging developers to choose the taller option at the expense of daylight for the neighbours. The Hondo Tower was only stopped at a late stage because the GLA's own planners advised against it.

The Stockwell Park Estate already has a 20-storey tower looming over the skateboard park, while a 14-storey tower spoils the settings of the listed St. Matthew's Church and the refurbished Town Hall. More is planned for the nearby Tesco site. Permission has been given for an 18-storey tower on the Lambeth Hospital site in Landor Road, and a decision is imminent on increasing the height of proposed towers on the old waste transfer site in Shakespeare Road. Hyde Housing plans a 20-storey tower to replace a playground in Rhodesia Road.

Housing

CRESSINGHAM GARDENS

OPEN HOUSE

Over a weekend in September, as part of the annual London Open House festival of architecture, residents from Cressingham Gardens welcomed visitors to the estate, offering an exhibition in the Rotunda and guided tours.

Visitors who joined the tours, while they loved the estate – its low-rise buildings and green open spaces - were dismayed to see so many void and boarded up properties.

I went back after the last tour and did a count. On an estate of 306 properties, I found 22 void flats and houses all with metal plates across the doors and windows.

VACANT FOR MONTHS

The photos here, taken on 12th June 2025 and on 14th September 2025, show that at least some of these properties have been vacant for over three months, with no sign of any work being undertaken to bring them back into use.

It's difficult to square this with Lambeth's Empty Homes and Voids Action Plan, launched in February 2025, which sets out the steps the Council said it would take to speed up the turnover of its housing stock so as to meet the desperate need for affordable housing in the borough.

OPTIONS APPRAISAL

And what news of the Cressingham Gardens Options Appraisal?

In March 2024, when Lambeth Council shelved plans to demolish Cressingham Gardens and two other estates, it announced that a new multidisciplinary team would be set up to investigate all options for the estate, from repair and refurbishment to redevelopment.

Somewhat surprisingly, the residents I spoke to, who included a committee member from the estate's Resident Management Organisation, reported that to date they have been given no information about the Council's future plans for the estate



On the left:
Photographs
taken on 12
June 2025



On the right:
Photographs
taken on 14
September
2025



Text and
photographs
by Vivienne
Lewis



Lambeth Heritage Festival 2025

Lambeth Heritage Festival

A BUMPER YEAR

Brixton always makes a major contribution to the Lambeth Heritage Festival, which runs every year throughout September, but this year was a bumper year with events put on by us, our good friends at Brixton Windmill, and others.

ARCHIVE EXHIBITION

Running throughout the month was an exhibition at Lambeth Archives titled: *Building "Homes for Tomorrow": Lambeth's Public Housing, from 1965-1980*. Our secretary, Alan Piper, was a major contributor to the exhibition. His early study of the Railton Road/Mayall Road area showed that wholesale demolition of the, admittedly run-down, housing was not necessary; much of it could be refurbished.

On the 21st, Alan led a walk of the area: *Rebuild or refurbish: 50 years of change...*



Photo: Tracey Gregory

...and on the 25th he was on the panel at a well-attended round table discussion at the exhibition in Lambeth Archives.

LOCAL HISTORY FAIR

This year's fair was held on the 6th in the Clapham library. Our stall did well: talking to visitors, selling our publications, renewing memberships, and gaining new members.

Of the four talks, one was by Tracey Gregory about performing animals in theatres with examples from Brixton. Another by Deborah Ireland was about the photographer John

Thomson who is commemorated by our latest blue plaque on 15 Effra Road.

Both talks were to a packed room with audiences of 50-plus.

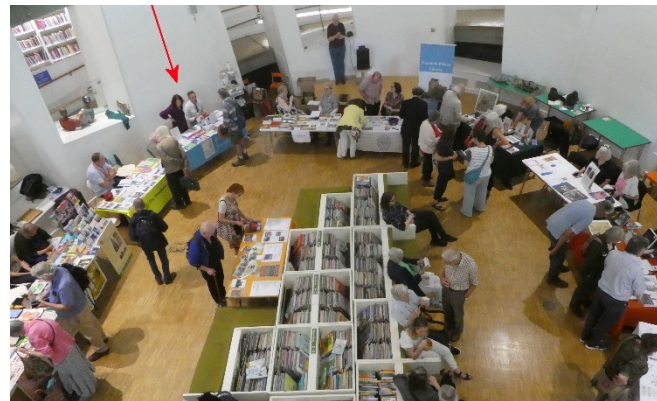


Photo: Nick Weedon. Our stall marked by red arrow; with Vivienne Lewis and Douglas Pinheiro in charge.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Inevitably, some days, especially at weekends, had multiple events to choose from; on Sunday 7th there were three in Brixton.

Two by us were *Urban Sketching* in the morning and a *Brixton Art Tour* in the afternoon.

Ashleigh Gill organised a small, but keen, group of sketchers in an event (so far) unique to the Brixton Society.

The Brixton Art Tour was a stroll around central Brixton, taking in 17 public artworks from the 1970s to the present day, led by Vivienne Lewis. Highlights of the tour included the four station statues on the platforms of Brixton overground station. Nearly 40 years after the statues were installed, they are now accompanied by an explanatory plaque on the eastbound platform unveiled this summer.



Lambeth Heritage Festival 2025

Also in the afternoon, Simon Morrow, coordinator of the Brixton Music Memories project, led a guided walk through Brixton's rich post WWII musical heritage. It was all fascinating, but one jaw-dropping moment (for people of a certain age) was to hear that Nico (of Velvet Underground fame and much else) once lodged on Effra Road.

RE:TRACE

On the 9th an exhibition opened in Longfield Hall showing photographs by Basil McDonald who retraced the route and reshot the photos taken by local historian Brian Bloice in 1967. The comparative images in this exhibition show how streets have changed but also that many things stay the same.

The exhibition was due to close at the end of the festival but happily is now going to remain open until the end of the year.

TWO DAYS RUNNING

Nicholas Weedon not only has a very busy architectural practice, but he also chairs the Friends of Windmill Gardens and is vice-chair of the Brixton Society, but that did not stop him giving two talks on two consecutive days.

On the 10th he gave the Annual Windmill Talk: *12 Windmills of Lambeth - Then and Now* and on the 11th, he spoke for us on *200 years of the Waterloo Commissioner's Classics*.

He has written summaries of his talks; too long for this review article, you can read about the churches in the *Local History* section of this newsletter.

MARKET WALK

One of our regular Brixton Market Walks on 13th was included in the festival programme. A good turn-out was led by Nicholas Weedon – yes, his third contribution in a week! He deserves a medal.

WINDMILL AGAIN

The weekend of the 13th and 14th saw guided tours, workshops, and walks in and around the windmill.

LAMBETH CEMETERY

On the 14th, Tracey Gregory led a walk in Lambeth cemetery with a focus on musicians, comedians, dancers, acrobats and artists, many of whom worked and/or lodged in Brixton. The rain was not going to stop Tracey or her audience.



WINDMILL TO WINDRUSH

Lambeth Tour Guide Diana Bromwich led a local walk on the 19th taking in monarchs, authors, influencers and places of worship, even an unsolved murder. If you missed it, she is repeating the walk in October and November. Find her on Eventbrite.

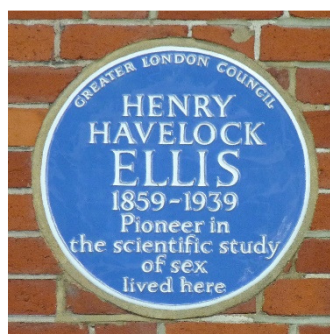
WHITE HORSE

The indefatigable Tracey Gregory gave a talk on the 23rd called *Exploring changing pub culture: the history of the White Horse and other Brixton neighbourhood pubs* in the White Horse as was, now called The Jamm. Not only the buildings, but who ran them and what went on in them enthralled a large audience.

UNEXPECTED RAIN

Rain was not forecast for Sunday 28th, but rain it did. Fortunately, that did not seem to put a damper on the Harvest Festival event at the Brixton Windmill that afternoon. We had a stall there which did very well.

The same afternoon, Bill Linskey led a walk around *Brixton's Plaques (Blue and Otherwise)*.



The rain did not deter the audience from hearing about plaques that commemorated not just people, but events, and even station statues!

200 years of the classical Commissioner's churches

INTRODUCTION

As reported in our review of this year's Lambeth Heritage Festival, Nicholas Weedon, our vice-chair, gave two talks and led a heritage walk all in the space of a week.

Here he reflects on his talk about the Waterloo churches.

DAY JOB

I didn't set out to give two talks during this year's Heritage festival, having first started on the one about 200 years of the classical Commissioner's churches. My day job brings me into regular contact with three of Lambeth's examples in the form of conducting quinquennial condition inspections during which I access rarely visited spaces within roof voids, rooftops, the towers and crypts.

BICENTENARY

The bicentenary provided the motivation to show some of these unseen spaces and to reflect on the history of the buildings. I initially thought that the background of their procurement through the Church Commissioners and the reason for the classical Greek style would get a passing mention but, on researching further, found much of interest in how a handful of people were influential in shaping this, including how we got the four apostles equally spread out through Lambeth.

TIGHT RULES

The commissioning architects set down very tight rules on budgets and how the buildings should be simple and easy to maintain. No elaborate naves, transepts, chancels and side aisles; they were to be simple rectangular single-space preaching boxes with the fancy stonework reserved for making a grand entrance and a tower to provide civic presence and differentiate them from secular Greek Revival buildings.

When the commissioning was transferred to the less prescriptive Incorporated Church Building

Society after the first few years, the classical style fell out of favour very swiftly to the benefit of the Gothic Revival. It was a backlash reminiscent of how in the C20th post-war years, the Victorian Gothic was seen as dark, cold and grimy and only became loved again after cleaning up and preservation in the latter years.



Nicholas giving his talk in the Brixton library.

Photo: Tracey Gregory

Within a generation, the interiors of the four churches were altered to become more 'churchlike', with St. Matthew's Brixton remaining the most unaltered until over a century later when it received the most radical and un-churchlike treatment in the 1980's. It must be the stage for memories of countless people who have attended the variety of community groups and entertainment there – equally vital heritage.

SKYLINES

I received much comment on a series of photos facing away from a couple of the buildings. I have photographed the skyline during each of the last three 5-yearly condition surveys, and it shows how although these buildings have changed to keep up with the times, they haven't changed nearly as much as the city around them.

Nicholas Weedon

Revealing Brixton's Wartime Story

When spades struck metal in our garden in St Saviour's Road, our first fear was, *is it an unexploded WW2 bomb?* Thankfully not. Instead, it was a perfectly preserved Anderson shelter, one of millions of small air raid shelters that became a fixture in British gardens during the Blitz. *But how did we come to have them in our gardens?*



St Saviour's Road Anderson Shelter Discovery, 2024

PREPARING FOR WAR

By April 1939, newspapers were urging people to prepare for air attacks as WW2 began to unfold. The Advertiser declared it "a matter of urgent public interest" that every household should "provide adequate shelter," warning "everybody is going to be in the front line" and protection "must be regarded as an individual responsibility." Anderson shelters even began appearing in property letting ads as a selling point alongside standard amenities. Officials favoured small household shelters over large communal ones, fearing mass sheltering would concentrate casualties where bombs hit. The government's Anderson shelters were free to those with a garden, earning under £250 per year (£22,700 today), otherwise they cost £7 (£636 today).

The Ministry of Home Security issued detailed shelter construction pamphlets for one penny, with easy-to-follow plans for shelters accommodating six people. They advised families to wear warm clothes and bring money, important papers, battery lamps, hot drinks in hay-wrapped bottles, thick blankets and a candle in two flowerpots for heat.

Government films tried to maintain morale, acknowledging families might be "chilly, uncomfortable" with "everyone getting temperamental" on long winter nights. Toys, books, tea and biscuits were recommended to help families "spend a comfortable night undisturbed by the Blitz," ready to "carry on work in true British style" the next morning.

Despite the official guidance, some made other choices. One resident said "the kitchen table was enough protection." Another in nearby Clapham wrote "I slept in my bed

only throwing the bedclothes over our heads whenever the engine stopped." Shelters often flooded, and many found the familiarity of their own homes more comforting.

WARTIME LIFE & THE V1 CAMPAIGN

John Kenny from Brixton Hill, described how children adapted, "we were to spend our days looking for shrapnel and our nights being woken by Air Raid Sirens, watching the searchlights crossing the dark sky." The routine became familiar. The wail of sirens, the dash to shelters in nightclothes, the "crump crump" of bombs falling, and finally the All Clear. Life continued despite regular bombing. One wedding announcement recorded: "the bride and bridegroom took cover in the Anderson shelter" during the reception.

Local History

But between June 1944 and March 1945, V1 Flying Bombs brought fresh challenges. In that time, 83 died from 21 V1s falling on SW2. On 18 June 1944, the first V1 in Brixton struck Lyham Road between the prison and Dumbarton Road, killing 5. Others later hit Beechdale Road, Brockwell Park, Acre Lane, Baytree Road, Trelawn Road, Brixton Water Lane and Effra Parade.



Rescue at the Information Centre Acre Lane, June 1944 Flying Bomb incident, where 25 died

Known as 'Doodlebugs', they had a distinctive buzzing sound. Once the noise stopped, there was just 12 seconds before 1,900 pounds of high explosive hit the ground. They came around the clock in all weathers. Lucy Awdry wrote, "the first day we did not know what they were... our own gunfire was incessant and far more terrifying." One resident described waiting through those "alarming few seconds till the succeeding crash," as "nothing like the Blitz, but we are all three years more weary."

THE CLOSEST CALLS

In Brixton the reality of war was ever-present. When the V1 struck between Baytree Road and Sudbourne Road in July 1944, demolishing 20 houses and killing 3, the residents of our shelter would have heard the devastating blast.

Some experienced multiple strikes. Robert Bullen's home on Endymion Road was first hit by incendiaries in March 1941, which his father extinguished. Then in June 1944, a V1 blew the back off the house.

But it wasn't just headline-grabbing flying bombs that destroyed homes. Countless incendiary bombs rained down during the conventional Blitz, starting fires that could consume entire streets if not quickly extinguished. Unexploded bombs were also a constant threat, requiring regular visits from bomb disposal teams, including at the end of St Saviour's Road.

ANDERSON'S PROTECTION

Over 3.6 million Anderson shelters were distributed across Britain. The corrugated iron construction was designed to be partially buried, with curved shapes deflecting blast effects. The corrugated design made them exceptionally strong. A 1939 local newspaper stated, "fragments flying horizontally from exploding bombs would hold scant peril for the occupants, blast would affect them but little." They needed to be covered with at least one foot of earth, "the thicker the better" to "absorb shock impulse occasioned by the detonation." Official guidance recommended positioning shelters away from buildings, with doorways facing away from houses, to prevent exits being blocked by debris. This placement was crucial because the risk of falling buildings was considered as significant as the bombing itself. These structures were never bomb-proof against direct hits, but they could "resist a 50kg bomb falling six feet away," and protect against shrapnel and falling anti-aircraft fragments. As the 1939 Advertiser warned: "everything that goes up has got to come down again," with shell fragments striking the ground at 800 feet per second.

Local History



Flying bomb incident at Ellerslie Square, Brixton, 24th June 1944, showing the damaged but still standing Anderson shelter in the foreground. Behind lies the devastated Sunlight Laundry, which employed 400 staff before the V1 attack.

SURVIVAL AND LEGACY

By May 1947, Lambeth Council offered families the chance to buy their Anderson shelters for £1. Unclaimed shelters were considered "government property and must not be retained." But behind this bureaucracy lay many human stories.

The 1939 census reveals the residents who used our garden shelter during the Blitz were Olive Griggs, her children Owen (policeman), Enid (drapery saleswoman), and Doris (bank clerk), and her uncle Alfred Dance. In January 1940 Owen joined the RAF, but by 1942 was captured and held as a Prisoner of War until it ended in 1945.

Remarkably, he and his family back in Brixton all survived the war. Their Anderson shelter is a reminder of the local, ordinary families who endured extraordinary times and the thousands Brixton households who faced each day uncertain whether their neighbours, neighbourhood, and lives would still be there tomorrow.

IMAGE CREDITS

- 1: St Saviour's Road Anderson Shelter Discovery 2024 Courtesy of Lucie Branczik
- 2: Lambeth 00225: Flying Bomb incident showing a woman being rescued from rubble at the Information Centre Acre Lane. 26th June 1944. Courtesy of LB Lambeth Archives
- 3: Lambeth 00176: Ellerslie Square Brixton, 24th June 1944 Flying Bomb incident. Courtesy of LB Lambeth Archives

Lucie Branczik

BIBLIOGRAPHY

If you are interested in reading more about this subject, the author supplied an extensive bibliography with this article.

It is too long to print in our newsletter, but you can find the article with the full bibliography on our website here:

brixtonsociety.org.uk/local-history/articles/

RAILWAY HISTORY

PUBLICITY

There has been much publicity in the past couple of months to celebrate the bicentenary of passenger-carrying railways. Officially, this all began with the opening in 1825 of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in the North-East, bringing together the key elements of self-powered locomotives, pulling trains of wagons on steel tracks.

However, the Surrey Iron Railway came sooner, opened in 1803 and connecting Ram Creek in Wandsworth via Merton and Mitcham to Pitlake in Croydon. This was the first public railway, but only horse-drawn. It operated on a toll-road principle with users providing their own horses and wagons. Branch lines were added to Carshalton and Merstham by 1805, but it closed in 1846 as steam railways became more competitive.

INTER-CITY

The first inter-city service ran between Liverpool and Manchester from 1830, its main purpose being to transport bales of American cotton to the steam-powered mills of Manchester.

The first suburban service in London began early in 1836, running in from Greenwich initially to Bermondsey, and reaching London Bridge Station (the first terminus in the capital) by the end of the year. The remains of a carriage ramp survive at Deptford, so that private carriages could be transported on flat-bed wagons.

This line set the pattern for rail services across South London, with most of the tracks being carried across marshy fields and market gardens on a series of brick-built arches. An early attempt was made to adapt these as dwellings, but

they proved too exposed to rainwater percolating through the tracks, so most have been used as workshops and stores ever since.

In 1838, London gained its first inter-city connection when the line from Birmingham terminated at Euston, though its distinctive archway is only recorded as a motif on the platforms of the Victoria Line.

THAMES TUNNEL

One of the oldest surviving elements from the early days is the between Rotherhithe and Whitechapel. It was designed by Sir Marc Brunel as a foot tunnel, opened in 1843. It was later incorporated into the Underground network as part of the East London line and now carries the Windrush branch of the London Overground service.

The London & South-Western Railway from Southampton was the first line to impinge on the current borough of Lambeth, reaching Vauxhall c. 1845. A misunderstanding during a visit by the Russian Tsar led to the name being adopted across the Russian Empire to describe a terminal station. To this day, the station at Samarkand bears big blue letters saying Voksal Samarkand.

That same year, LSWR received approval to extend the line up to Waterloo, which opened in 1848, and then as more tracks and platforms were added, the old village of Lambeth was gradually swallowed up.

The first railway further south within the borough was originally the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway, which was authorised in 1853 and opened in 1856. Significant stations were at

Local History

Streatham Hill and West Norwood, starting to sow the seeds for later suburban development.

LONDON CHATHAM & DOVER

At last, in 1863 the London Chatham & Dover Railway Company pushed their line in from Kent via Herne Hill, where the service divided, one line running due north to Farringdon and the other north-west to Victoria. Brick arches were still the norm north of Herne Hill, but in 1864 nineteen arches at Brixton collapsed when the timber centering was removed.



Squeezed between railway viaducts, the former Railway Hotel, Atlantic Road.

Photo: Alan Piper

Locally, links and branches were still being added up to 1872, often by competing companies. Thus, the London Brighton & South Coast line oversailed Brixton to serve that

company's own station at East Brixton (closed 1976).

CITY AND SOUTH LONDON

Later lines were limited to the electric Underground services, beginning with the City and South London Railway from Bank to Stockwell, opened in 1890. This was extended to Clapham in 1922 and eventually out to Morden as part of the Northern Line.

During the First World War, retrenchment began to set in, less due to Wartime pressures than rising competition from motor buses. This saw the closure of several Inner London stations, including Camberwell, and Brixton lost its platforms alongside Brixton Station Road serving Peckham.

After 1945, what had been numerous coal depots and freight sidings also began to disappear, to be eagerly taken up for new housing or the occasional supermarket.

Alan Piper.



A Third Class, Brixton to Victoria Return Ticket of 1895.

6d. is about £2.87 today.

Ticket actual size: 3 x 3 cm.

Bill Linskey collection

Welcome to our new members!

So far this calendar year more than 40 people have joined the Brixton Society. We are delighted to have so many new members joining us and a big welcome to all of you. It sometimes comes as a surprise to people when we explain that the Brixton Society doesn't have any paid staff and all our activities are carried out by our volunteer members. So, whether you've joined the Society recently or have been a member for many years, do please let us know if you think you could help with our work, by contacting us at:

info@brixtonsociety.org.uk.

This could be anything from writing an article for our newsletter, telling us about a planning issue in your neighbourhood, or helping to run a stall at a community event. All members are welcome to attend our monthly committee meetings – you can find details about these elsewhere in this newsletter.

Vivienne Lewis, Membership Secretary

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

www.brixtonsociety.org.uk



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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