

# The Brixton Society Newsletter

Autumn Issue : October 2024 : No.255

## EDITORIAL

### NPPF

The new government certainly got off to a flying start, at least as far as planning matters go. It was elected on the 4<sup>th</sup> July; on the 30<sup>th</sup> July the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government published a consultation on “Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system”.

The draft NPPF they consulted on ran to 84 pages. The associated questionnaire ran to more than 100 questions. One of the supporting documents, “Changing our planning rules What do you think?” billed itself as being, “This is an Easy Read version of some information. It may not include all of the information but it will tell you about the important parts.” was 109 pages.

And they produced all this in less than four weeks from the election! Surely much of this was prepared before.

We responded to the consultation but only to those questions that seemed most relevant to us in Brixton. You can read it on our website: [brixtonsociety.org.uk/test-site/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/NPPF-Consultation-September-2024.pdf](https://brixtonsociety.org.uk/test-site/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/NPPF-Consultation-September-2024.pdf)

One of our responses, about the use of brownfield sites for housing, states: “[It] should make clear that the presumption in favour of housing applies only to vacant / previously occupied brownfield sites, and does not over-

ride local policies protecting existing employment uses which meet the needs of local business and employees”

The last newsletter reported the AGM decision to join Civic Voice. We have done so and started playing a part in its activities. A number of committee members joined an on-line discussion of the NPPF consultation and the need to protect business uses was one of our inputs. We feel confident that Civic Voice has responded fully and well to the consultation.

### IN THIS ISSUE

We have a very full report on the many events in Brixton that were part of September’s Lambeth Heritage Festival. We have done this partly because it was such a good festival this year but also looking to the future.

We hope that, if this year’s festival passed you by, you will look out for next year’s programme in August. There should be printed copies in libraries and there will be a copy on our website. More than that, perhaps you will be inspired to suggest events we might put on next year, in the festival or otherwise; because 2025 will be a very special year for the Brixton Society.

Next year is our 50th anniversary; the society having been inaugurated in 1975. By way of a curtain raiser, Becca Thackray has written an article about someone who was a committee member from the very beginning, has been a lynchpin of the society ever since, and is still our secretary today: Alan Piper.

## 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](mailto: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](mailto:planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk)

The next dates are:

- November 14<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>
- December 12<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>
- January 9<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>

### LOCAL HISTORY WALKS

The society runs history walks throughout the year. The next ones are:

Brixton Market Heritage Walk

- Saturday 12 October

Railton Road

- Sunday 13 October

Brixton Market Heritage Walk

- Saturday 9 November

Brixton Market Heritage Walk

- Saturday 8 March

Details and bookings for all walks: [brixtonsociety.org.uk/events](http://brixtonsociety.org.uk/events)

If you would like to suggest history walks in our area, please email [info@brixtonsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@brixtonsociety.org.uk). Perhaps you feel you could lead one yourself? Email the same address to discuss.



### BROCKWELL PARK COMMUNITY GREENHOUSES HARVEST FESTIVAL

Sunday 27 October 12.00 to 3.00 pm

Discover what we grow and what can be made with it. From tasty pickles and preserves, warming comfort food and refreshing drinks, you will have the opportunity to try and buy.

For details of this event, and much else besides, and booking, visit:

[www.brockwellgreenhouses.org.uk](http://www.brockwellgreenhouses.org.uk)



### Dr BIKE FREE CYCLE MAINTENANCE

At Dr Bike sessions experienced mechanics check everything on your bike from wheels, brakes, gears and tyre pressure to lights, racks, pedals, saddles and more.

#### WINDRUSH SQUARE

- Saturday 19 October 12.00 to 4.00 pm
- Tuesday 5 November 4.00 to 7.00 pm

#### BROCKWELL PARK HERNE HILL ENTRANCE

- Saturday 26 October 12.00 to 4.00 pm
- Saturday 16 November 12.00 to 4.00 pm

#### RUSKIN PARK

- Saturday 2 November 12.00 to 4.00 pm
- Saturday 23 November 12.00 to 4.00 pm

#### KENNINGTON OVAL

(island opposite Oval Tube)

- Tuesday 29 October 4.00 to 7.00 pm
- Tuesday 26 November 4.00 to 7.00 pm

## Diary & Events

### BRIXTON WINDMILL

Events in Windmill gardens include:

#### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

#### FRIENDS OF WINDMILL GARDENS

will be held on Wednesday 16th October, starting at 7pm at Brixton Windmill Centre. All members and volunteers are invited to join us at the AGM to participate in the discussion on FoWG's achievements over the past year and our future plans for the new Windmill Centre beside Brixton Windmill.



#### HALLOWEEN AT BRIXTON WINDMILL

Sunday 27 October, 1pm to 4pm

a free family event including a lantern carving workshop, spooky stories for children, and arts & crafts activities.

#### WINTER MARKET AND SANTA'S GROTTA

Sunday 8 December, 12 noon to 3.30pm

Buy gifts from local makers (including the Brixton Society), visit Father Christmas and enjoy a festive atmosphere with Christmas choirs and music, and food and drink.

#### MILLING AND BAKING EXPERIENCE

Sunday 20 October 2024, 10.30am to 4.30pm

A unique full day experience making flour and bread with our Brixton Windmill millers and bakers. Make your own traditional stone ground flour in London's last working mill and use it to make your own loaf of bread.

For full details of the above, and much more including Pilates, Tai Chi, and gardening visit: [brixtonwindmill.org/all-events/](https://brixtonwindmill.org/all-events/)

### BLACK CULTURAL ARCHIVES

EXHIBITION: *RACE TODAY:*

*BLACK HISTORY IS BRITISH HISTORY*



This exhibition explores the profound legacy of the Race Today journals, with a focus on the influential period from 1973 to 1988 when the Race Today Collective spearheaded its publication.

The office of Race Today was at 167 Railton Road which now houses the Brixton Advice Centre. The building has a blue plaque for Darcus Howe, the magazine's first editor, as well as his relative, C. L. R. James, who lived out his final years there.

The exhibition opened on Friday, 4 October and runs until Sunday, 2 February 2025.

#### OPENING TIMES

Thursday, Friday and Saturday: 10.00 - 18.00

Sunday: 12.00 - 17.00

#### EXHIBITION ENTRY

General admission: £5

Concessions: £3

## Diary & Events

### 198 CONTEMPORARY ARTS AND LEARNING

198 Railton Road, SE24 0JT



#### EXHIBITION

Friday 11 October - Sunday 15 December

'Slippage' - the Caribbean in flux

a new exhibition with new bodies of work by four of the most exciting emerging contemporary artists from Jamaica and Trinidad.

The aim of the exhibition is to challenge thinking in ideas around historical memory, contemporary identity, (not)belonging, and the possibilities that alternative histories/stories hold for the cultural imagination in post plantation societies.

GALLERY OPENING HOURS:

WEDNESDAY to FRIDAY: 11AM – 5PM

SATURDAY & SUNDAY: 12PM – 5PM

[www.198.org.uk](http://www.198.org.uk)



#### THE LONDON SOCIETY

COMPETITION: Love Letters to London

THEME: Dreams for London

There's more than £4,000 in prize money up for grabs in this free to enter writing competition.

Full details and rules:

[www.londonsociety.org.uk/page/loveletters](http://www.londonsociety.org.uk/page/loveletters)

Closing date: noon, 20th December 2024

### GARDEN MUSEUM

Lambeth Palace Road

Opening Hours

Monday – Sunday 10am – 5pm

#### EXHIBITION

Lost Gardens of London

23 October 2024 - 2 March 2025

will reveal the secret history of some of London's most beguiling forgotten gardens.



Thousands of gardens have vanished across London over the past five hundred years – ranging from princely pleasure grounds and private botanical gardens, to humble allotments and defunct squares, artists' gardens, eccentric private menageries and the ecological parks of the twentieth century.

#### HARVEST FESTIVAL

Sunday 20 October 2024 10:00am-4:00pm

Their first ever Harvest Festival this autumn: a day full of workshops, talks and stalls inviting visitors to discover the diversity of UK-grown food.

#### BEAUTIFUL & USEFUL CRAFT FAIR

Sunday 1 December 2024 10:00am-4:00pm

a curated collection of Britain's best designer-makers selling bold, bohemian and thoroughly beautiful handmade ceramics, textiles, art prints, jewellery, and homewares.

Check their website for full details of the above and other events:

<https://gardenmuseum.org.uk>

## Black History Month

### October is Black History Month

Although Black History Month has started, if you were not aware of it, there is still much to engage with during the later part of the month.

The full programme is here:

[lambeth.gov.uk/black-history-month](http://lambeth.gov.uk/black-history-month)

It will be no surprise that many of the events are in Brixton.

#### Exhibitions

The Black Cultural Archives has an exhibition *Race Today: Black History is British History* which has started, runs throughout the month and continues into the new year; see page 3.

The 198 Gallery has an exhibition '*Slippage*' – *the Caribbean in Flux* which also has started, runs throughout the month and continues into the new year; see page 4.

Here are a few of the events which have caught our eye:

#### **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> 6.30 to 8.00 pm** **The Persecution of the Black Community in Nazi Germany**

In Lambeth Archives, using the Wiener Holocaust Library's collections, Yasmin Gledhill explores the persecution of the Black community in Germany by the Nazi regime, exploring the origins of Black Germany, pre-war experiences in education and daily life and the position of Black people in the Nazi 'racial' state.

We have all heard of the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust and the Nazi persecution of other groups such as gay people, but how much have we heard about the fate of Black people under the Nazis?

#### **Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> 10.30am - Tree Planting in memory of Benjamin Zephaniah**



To remember Benjamin Zephaniah, a poet of our times, there will be a tree planted at Minet Library. The planting is part of the boroughwide Lambeth Tree Planting Programme

Those close to Benjamin, who died in December 2023 said:

*"We recommend, that if you want to, please plant something like flowers or trees anywhere you wish and name them as Benjamin Zephaniah in memory of him"*

#### **Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> 6.00pm to 8.00pm** **Brixton Black History - Wikipedia Edit-a-thon**

Ever been curious about contributing to the world's biggest online encyclopaedia but didn't know how? Brixton Tate Library's monthly Wikipedia meetup can show you! If you like learning about and contributing to the recording of Black history in your community then this is a great place to get involved.



We will be working with Wikimedia UK for this edit-a-thon, to write about and enhance articles about Black people, history and society.

## Brixton Market for Sale

It has been widely reported that “Brixton Market” has been put up for sale but not all the reports are consistent in describing exactly what is on sale. It seems that Brixton Village and Market Row are included but some reports have referred to the Pope’s Road site, adjacent to Brixton Village, on which the Hondo Tower was proposed. However, the Standard explicitly states that that site is not included in the sale. We will watch developments with interest.

## Who owns “Brixton”

It has also been widely reported that Brixton Street Wear, which has a shop in Brixton Village, has been threatened by a Californian company, Brixton LLC, over their use of the name Brixton.



They have been fundraising to fight the threat: [gofundme.com/f/save-brixton-street-wear](https://gofundme.com/f/save-brixton-street-wear)

Readers may remember that for many years this shop sold wigs. Some may also know the story of when Warner Brothers, who had made the famous film “Casablanca”, made threatening noises at the Marx Brothers who were working on a film to be called “A Night in Casablanca”. Groucho Marx wrote them an hilarious letter saying that if the Warner Brothers thought they had a prior claim to the name Casablanca, the Marx Brothers had a prior claim to the name Brothers, as they predated them. They heard no more about it.

## Old Films

Talking of old films:



The Cinema Museum is having a Home Movie Day on October 20, 2024, from 10.30 to 16.00. Bring your old home movies on 8mm, Super8, 9.5mm and 16mm along for inspection by professional film archivists.

But if you do not have any old films, there will still be much to enjoy at this free event. There will be special screenings, refreshments on sale and the museum itself to see.

The Cinema Museum

2 Dugard Way (off Renfrew Road)

[cinemamuseum.org.uk/2024/home-movie-day-2024/](https://cinemamuseum.org.uk/2024/home-movie-day-2024/)

## Angell Town Alcohol Licence

The proposal by Lambeth to offer a lease to Londis to open in units in Fairfax House, Overton Road on Angell Town has caused concern to residents in the area. Whilst a supermarket may be welcome, the application to sell alcohol from 7am to 10pm was opposed by a large number of residents, Helen Hayes MP, and the Safer Neighbourhood Panel for Brixton North.

There were concerns about the current levels of anti-social behaviour and street drinking in the area, which is close to Max Roach Park, a school and a church, and that the opening of a new outlet for alcohol sales would add to it.

At a hearing of the Licensing Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> August the application was agreed subject to curtailing the hours alcohol could be sold to 11.00 am to 10pm each day, a list of conditions aimed at preventing street drinking behaviours and requiring the manager to attend Safer Neighbourhood Panel meetings and supply a contact number for residents to raise any issues to be dealt with.

### Opening up the Rec

It was first announced in March 2019 that the London Mayor would help fund the conversion of disused space behind the Station Road shops to provide workspace and training facilities. This has finally come to pass with the completed premises being inaugurated on 30 September in the presence of the London Deputy Mayor, Jules Pipe, Lambeth's own Mayor, Cllr. John-Paul Ennis, and local MP Helen Hayes.



*London Deputy Mayor, Jules Pipe (left) tours the new Photofusion print facilities  
Photo: Alan Piper.*

The new space opens off Beehive Place and is shared between Photofusion and the Advocacy Academy. A lift has been included to ensure that the split-level interior is wheelchair-accessible. The Advocacy Academy have a much larger suite of spaces than their old shopfront in Vining Street, with more break-out spaces and a dedicated co-working area.

Photofusion have about 20% more space than their previous base in International House. The last time we saw the present space it was a still a repository for discarded Council office

furniture, and one piece has survived – Photofusion salvaged an adjustable drawing board for their print studio!

### Planning Policy Changes

We recently sent in comments on the Government's proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (or NPPF). This is a wide-ranging document but we focussed on the need for genuinely affordable housing. Sadly the new administration expects building for home ownership to remain the main source of new homes, but in practice this has peaked and there needs to be more building for rent, whether by councils, housing associations, housing co-ops or institutional investors.

We also highlighted the need to protect key business areas, both to ensure local employment and to provide essential services to support small specialist industries, building refurbishment and distribution.

Issues such as the Green Belt and wind farms which are less directly relevant to Brixton we left to our friends at Civic Voice to respond to.

As a follow-up, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has opened a survey on views on the balance between demolition, redevelopment and retrofit of buildings. This has long been a concern of ours and we need to respond by 31 October. Tell us your views, or for groups that want to respond directly, the link is: <https://horizons.confirmit.eu/wix/p563510324781.aspx>

Also on the horizon is a review of the Mayor's Plan for London as a whole. Already the Mayor has invited proposals for sites for housing development, but at least the Government has slightly reduced its targets for home-building in Greater London, while increasing them almost everywhere else.

### Brockwell Hall progress



The new function room taking shape between the Hall and the old stable block.  
Photo: BPCP

Ann Kingsbury, Chair of Brockwell Park Community Partners (BPCP), came to Brixton Neighbourhood Forum's meeting last month to report progress on the refurbishment of Brockwell Hall in the centre of the park. Building work is due to finish around Christmas, followed by fitting out, with a view to the enhanced spaces being available for use from next Spring. In addition to a relocated café, there will be a range of spaces available for hire, some within the old house and also a large function room opening onto the old stable yard.

### Climate Action Partnership

Lambeth set up the Partnership with a nucleus of local institutions, to support innovative action to tackle the climate crisis and reduce emissions. Businesses and other organisations are now being invited to join and share expertise in this field. More details at: <https://lambethclimatepartnership.org/get-involved/businesses-and-organisations>

### Our Shrinking Schools

In recent newsletters we have flagged up closures and mergers among local schools, so far without comment from our members. The

latest proposal we have heard about is the closure of the Deaf resource base at Jubilee Primary School on Tulse Hill, intended for next July.

Until 1990, schools across Inner London were run by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) with a variety of special schools and centres to support pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Since then, each borough has struggled in isolation and economies of scale have been lost. Other factors are a shrinking pool of children because fewer families can afford to live in these parts, and efforts to integrate more SEND children into mainstream schools.

Lambeth has a survey open for your comments until Sunday 27 October here:

[www.lambeth.gov.uk/lambeth-send-local-offer/send-news](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/lambeth-send-local-offer/send-news)

### Night Time Strategy

Lambeth Council are running a consultation on the Night Time Strategy.

They say they are “looking for Lambeth residents’, visitors’, workers’, organisations’ and businesses’ views on their experience of Lambeth at night – between 6 pm and 6 am. Your feedback will shape the Night Time Strategy, which will set out our vision for making Lambeth more welcoming, inclusive, safe and equitable at night.”

The consultation closes on 30 November.

<https://haveyoursay.lambeth.gov.uk/en-GB/folders/night-time-strategy>

We will respond to this consultation, so please let us know what you think.

Also, if you think there is a planning issue we should raise, or there is a case locally that we should take up, please contact us directly at: [planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk](mailto:planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk)

Alan Piper

## **Able Seaman Robert Paul Evans**

### **Stockwell War Memorial**

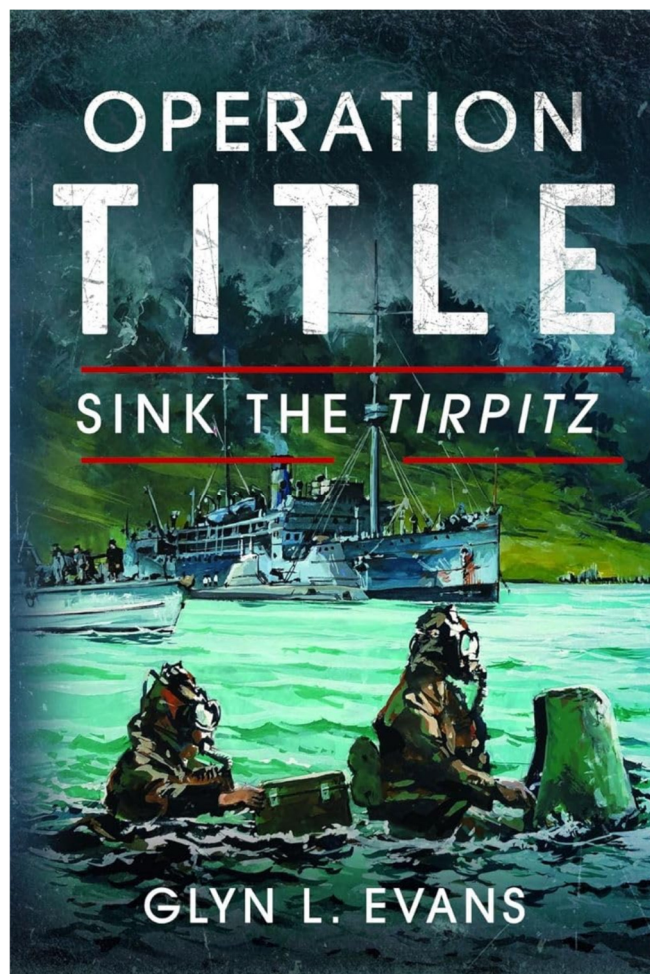
An article by Alan Piper in our July 2022 Newsletter about the centenary of the Stockwell War Memorial included the following:

Nearly 80 years ago, on 8th December 1942, Mr R.Evans, of 33 Foxley Road SW9, received a letter from the Royal Navy at Devonport to advise that his son, Robert Paul Evans, had been posted as missing. In September 1945 the Admiralty confirmed that he had died on active service on 19 January 1943. As Able Seaman Evans, he had been taking part in one of several desperate attempts to sink the German battleship Tirpitz, then based in a Norwegian fjord. Their mission was based on the use of “human torpedoes” conveyed by trawler from Shetland, but the mission failed and Evans was wounded and captured when the party attempted to escape over the border into Sweden.

In line with Hitler’s directive of 18 October 1942 that commandos and saboteurs should be executed, the 21-year-old Evans was shot by SS prison guards in January 1943. His body was later recovered from a common grave and interred in a Commonwealth war grave at Oslo.

Glyn Evans (no relation) is researching a book on Operation Title, the failed mission against the Tirpitz. It’s a long shot, given population changes over the past 80 years, but he would welcome contact from any surviving relatives. If you have any relevant knowledge, he can be found at [evans19191@btinternet.com](mailto:evans19191@btinternet.com)

Coincidentally, the Empire Windrush, which is now familiar for bringing the first settlers from the West Indies, had been a supply ship for the Tirpitz before being seized as a prize at the end of the war.



The book about the mission has now been published by Pen & Sword Maritime (28 Aug. 2024); ISBN: 978-1399050197

The cover photo shows one of the two amazingly fragile craft, called Chariots, in which the brave crews attempted to attack the Tirpitz in Norwegian waters. Unfortunately, bad weather did for them and the small boat named Arthur that took them there. All the crews initially survived and all except Evans succeeded in crossing into Sweden.

Operation Source in 1943, using midget submarines, was more successful, putting Tirpitz out of action for six months. She was finally sunk by Lancaster bombers on 12 November 1944 with the loss of about 1000 seamen.

## *Local Hero*

### **Alan Piper, RIBA**

#### **Understanding the past, looking to the future**

Brixton Society's strapline is as valid as ever.

At the core of the Brixton Society is Alan Piper, a lifelong resident of Mayall Road. His mother was the youngest of nine and the Pipers were subtenants of his Uncle Bill.

Alan attended St Jude's School (then on Railton Road opposite the Hamilton Arms pub) so Alan didn't have to cross any busy roads to get to school. At Henry Thornton School (now Lambeth Academy) he went on summer camps with the Air Cadets and remains interested in aircraft and drone technology.

Two events in the 1970s sharpened Alan's focus on Brixton history, its future, and his.

Firstly, the family received a compulsory purchase order along with 650 others around Railton Road. Nothing like the shock of a letter through the door to galvanise a campaign. Stockwell Park and Angell Town estates were then being completed and Lambeth Council planned to continue rebuilding around the Town Centre, including 50-storey tower blocks on Mervan and Wiltshire Roads.

#### **Diploma in Architecture**

Secondly, Alan needed a project to complete his Diploma in Architecture at the Brixton School of Building (now South Bank University). After researching census data, deprivation, housing finance and Victorian house types, he drew up an alternative neighbourhood plan for the Railton Road area.

This was used to support residents' objections at a Public Inquiry in 1974, assisted by the Brixton Advice Centre, then led by Hartley Dean. In fact, around this time, demolition was successfully resisted in several areas near the Town Centre.

The residents' action groups had begun to work together to promote refurbishment of older housing, but no-one was speaking up on behalf of the town centre itself.

#### **The Brixton Society**

Finally in 1975, the various groups came together to form the Brixton Society, led by Chris Graham from Rushcroft Road with Alan on the Committee. The Society began with planning and housing campaigns, but soon began local history walks, research and publications.

Alan started work in 1965 with Lambeth Council's 'Maintenance and Improvement Group' and later with Lewisham Council during his career as a Chartered Architect. Local authorities designed their own council housing until the 1980s, when new building declined under Conservative Governments. By the time he left in 1991 housing developments were left to housing associations and property developers.

Alan's commitment of his time, expertise and insight in Brixton enables him to react to Planning Applications in an informed way. He shares invaluable guidance with others on how to make specific objections weigh in with Lambeth Council.

#### **History of Brixton**

Alan's understanding of the history of Brixton forms the basis for the Heritage Walks. He has witnessed the area evolving from a time of costermongers selling fruit and veg, bakeries and steam laundries, Orange Luxury coaches and several redesigns of what's now Windrush Square. We're now lucky to share Brixton's history, well documented at Lambeth Archives on Brixton Hill, formerly in Minet Library.

## Local Hero

Brixton had its prominent proponents: Courtney Laws (1931-1996) was an inspirational support to what became known as the Windrush generation arriving from the Caribbean in the 1950s, Olive Morris started Brixton Black Women's Group, Darcus Howe became a spokesman for justice in the media and then there was John Major who was a Lambeth councillor for a decade from 1968 and Linda Bellos upholding the human rights from a lesbian feminist perspective as Leader of Lambeth Council in 1986 and Nigel Young defending Gay Teachers in the mid 1970s and Jonathan Blake connecting Gay Rights to the Miners' Strike.

Alan recalls the Empress Theatre on Brighton Terrace which became the Granada cinema and then a bingo hall; the Astoria became O2; Pulman became the Ritzy, the ABC on Brixton Hill is now Electric.

Fly-tipping existed then as now but there were more abandoned cars, vacant shops on Railton Road becoming informal drinking dens like Pearls at 103 Railton Road. There was a shooting in 1977 and an unsolved murder in 1989 when Jeanette Kempton (1957-89) disappeared. Alan's knowledge of the area was called upon by the Eastern Daily Press to trace her likely route from Loughborough Hotel (now San Mei Gallery, cafe and flats) to Grand Union pub (now Hope & Anchor) if she ever arrived there; her body was found in Suffolk.

Alan has seen the rise of interest in the hidden River Effra, Open House weekend, the creation of some low energy housing schemes, the gradual transformation of a wartime reservoir into the present Dexters playground, the listing of local buildings and the campaign for a community-run Brady's (Railway Hotel).

He recalls the Ram Jam Club (named after Geno Washington's band), formerly Burtons, the tailor, who often had a billiard hall and dance studio above their shops; the Street Parties for the Coronation in 1953 and Silver Jubilee in 1977.



Alan witnessed Olive Morris and her contemporaries resisting eviction - 121 Railton Road created an international guide to squatting - and The Gay Housing Association developed. After the 1981 uprising, Alan saw thoroughfares and buildings around the 'Frontline' were reconfigured and the 198 Gallery developed.

The Brixton Society's first book was on Real Ale in Brixton, long before microbreweries emerged. Alan provided the maps for a set of Brixton Walks devised by Ken Dixon and first published in 1984. Alan has been leading walks for the Society since then, though other members are now sharing the workload. The routes will continue to change as Brixton evolves.

There've been many controversial developments - such as the Hondo Tower - and changes in styles: Pop Brixton created out of shipping containers. Alan Piper continues as a consultant on regeneration and renovation projects. He still paces the street at a great rate of knots to contribute to meetings.

Fred Taggart, founding Trustee of Brixton Advice Centre observes: "Alan has for years been part of the backbone of civic society in Lambeth. He is held in high regard throughout the community sector, not least for years of unsung work as a brilliant activist. Alan is an unassuming man but one who instinctively knows the issues and the right side to be on."

Becca Thackray

# 200 years of Brixton's St. Matthew's Church

### St. Mary Lambeth

For centuries the old parish of Lambeth was served by St. Mary's Church, next to Lambeth Palace and now used as the Garden Museum. This worked well while the built-up area remained north of what is now the Oval, but by the mid-1700s, people were beginning to spread further south. For their benefit, a "chapel of ease" was opened at Stockwell Green in 1767, later to become St. Andrew's Church.



The Church Building Commissioners were set up in 1818 to ensure enough Anglican churches would be provided for growing urban areas. For Lambeth they proposed 4 new sites which became St. John's at Waterloo, St. Mark's at Kennington, St. Matthew's at Brixton and St. Luke's in West Norwood. These are sometimes referred to as the "Waterloo Churches" from the battle which ended the Napoleonic Wars.

In Brixton, the recent enclosure of Rush Common had left vacant plots at the junction of Brixton Hill and the new Effra Road in the hands of the Rector of Lambeth and the Archbishop of Canterbury. To these was added another plot bought from Robert Stone, then owner of Effra Farm, to provide a site large enough for a church and burial ground. A private Act of Parliament was obtained in 1821 to amend the 1806 Inclosure Act and allow the church to be built.

The architect of the church was Charles Porden, and work started on the foundations in Autumn 1821, with the official foundation stone being laid by the Archbishop of Canterbury on

1st July 1822. The original builder became insolvent soon after, and three other contractors were involved in completing the building. The church was finally consecrated on 21 June 1824 by the Bishop of Winchester.

The completed church was traditionally oriented, with the altar at the east end and the entrance doors at the opposite end for access from Brixton Hill. Following the prevailing fashion for a Classical portico, the tower was placed at the further (east) end, with a large window included to light the altar. Internally, galleries were provided on 3 sides, bringing the total seating capacity up to 1,926.

### The Dead Centre of Brixton

One of the attractions of Lambeth's new generation of suburban churches was that they offered new burial space when Central London churchyards were full to overflowing.

Many well-to-do families were moving into Brixton in the first half of the 19th century and took the opportunity to reserve burial space for members of their extended family in the new churchyard or in the crypt below the church.



Almost all those headstones and memorials were removed in two stages, firstly in the late 1930s and then at the end of the 1970s, first to create a public garden and then to enable remodelling of the original crypt. Consequently, only the two largest monuments remain outside, with very few left inside the building.

## Local History

The most prominent is the Budd memorial, at the north end of the churchyard. This was designed as a family vault by R.Day in 1825, the first burial being of Richard Budd of Russell Square. Several memorials of similar scale can be found in West Norwood Cemetery, which from 1837 gradually supplanted local churchyards for burials.

A more modest survivor is the Ward tomb to the right of the church portico. It has twice been restored after damage from delivery vehicles. William Ward (d.1881) endowed the City of London School for Girls, but his heir spent the rest of the family fortune and instead the City Corporation has obligingly contributed to the repairs.

### Parish Buildings

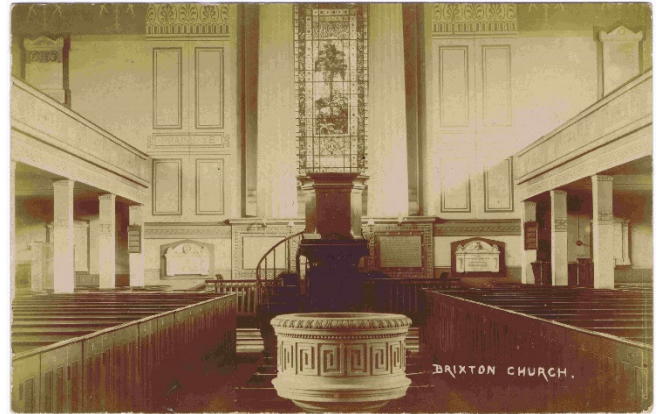
The original vicarage was at 1 St. Matthew's Road, a site tightly restricted by the Rush Common building lines. At some stage in the mid-1800s the vicar relocated to a house on Tulse Hill, but the vicar and curate now operate from numbers 3 & 5 St. Matthew's Road. Both these and No.1 were built between 1825 and 1827. No.1, with its generous garden, was sold by the Diocese of Southwark some 20 years ago.

During the 19th century, parish churches were increasingly involved as sponsors of education and social work in their communities. St. Matthew's School opened in 1828 on the west side of St. Matthew's Road, roughly where Dray Gardens is today. It was rebuilt in 1871 with a capacity of 600 children but was heavily damaged during the Second World War and not re-opened.

To accommodate a wider range of activities and meetings, a church hall was built on the corner of Talma and Probert Roads in the 1880s, after an initial period of operating from parish rooms at 8 Mayall Road. The hall premises were eventually sold in the mid-1960s to the St. Vincent de Paul Catholic charity, who still operate the building.

### Matt's Place and The Brix

From 1977 the vicar, the Rev. Bob Nind, began an innovative project to remodel the church for a wider range of uses to enable use 7 days a week rather than just one, to cover the costs of keeping such a large building going.



This began with remodelling the crypt, which had already seen use as a wartime air raid shelter, a Home Guard rifle range, and a youth club. Funds were gradually found to sub-divide the main church with new floors and insert a central lift shaft and stairway. The architect for the overall remodelling was Raymond Hall.

However, the funding model was undermined by a series of cuts in public funding for voluntary and community services, and the original St. Matthew's Meeting Place Trust was wound up in 1989.

A new trust was launched a few years later, as The Brix, with more emphasis on commercial tenancies, introducing restaurant and club uses in the former crypt. There were even ambitions to expand into greater use of what was by then the Peace Garden, when Lambeth was considering devolving management of its public open spaces. Yet once again the trust struggled financially, and the church took back responsibility for managing the building a few years ago.

Alan Piper

*Image credits: Banner, Alan Piper, photo; Church exterior and interior, Bill Linskey, Edwardian postcards.*

## Local History

### John Thomson

#### English Heritage Blue Plaque



At a ceremony on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> August, an English Heritage blue plaque was unveiled on the house at 15 Effra Road. The house, now owned by Lambeth Council, had the address 12 Elgin Gardens when John Thomson lived there.

Five speakers addressed quite a substantial crowd in the gardens in front of the terrace of houses which includes number 15.

First up, Rebecca Preston, London blue plaque historian with English heritage, explained why here. Thomson was born in 1837 in Edinburgh. In his early career as a photographer, he travelled widely in Asia but when he later settled in England, he chose Brixton, only later moving to Tulse Hill and then Streatham where he died in 1921; he is buried in Steatham cemetery.

It was while living here that he published his collection of 37 photographs *Street Life in London* in 1877.

Jamie Carstairs from Bristol University library had nominated Thomson for a plaque because he was such a pioneering and gifted photographer.

Betty Yao MBE told us about his work in Asia. She rediscovered his glass slides which had been sold to the Wellcome Collection after his death; they had been safely stored but unregarded. Initially she took 6 months off work to take an exhibition to China and 12 years on was still mounting exhibitions.



*Amoy, Fukien province, China: two Manchu soldiers with John Thomson. Photograph by John Thomson, 1871. Wellcome Collection.*

Lambeth Mayor, John-Paul Ennis, hoped that the plaque would be an inspiration to young people.

Finally, Caroline Thomas, a descendent of Thomson, spoke of how *Street Life in London* is still so relevant today.



*L to R: James Carstairs; John-Paul Ennis; Rebeca Preston; Donatus Anyanwu; Caroline Thomas; Betty Yao; Adrian Garden*

*Photos of the day: Bill Linskey*

## Local Events

### September

#### Lambeth Heritage Festival

From its first year in 2013, the Lambeth Heritage Festival has been held every September, albeit that 2020's was only on-line because of Covid.

By common consent, this year's was the best so far with over 80 events around the borough including very many in, and around, Brixton. You were spoilt for choice, quite literally on some days when events organised by different groups clashed. Add in a couple of local events as part of London Open House and this was a month to remember.

#### Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> Urban Sketching

Something new from the Brixton Society for the festival, and the first event in the programme. It was led by Ashleigh Gill, Pam Williams, and Nick Weedon who wrote this review:



We had the benefit of a bright warm day with the architecture and people in sharp relief. The Recreation Centre provided a notable point of interest to many of the sketchers, providing some challenges with its complex shapes and setting opposite the railway arches. The corner of Popes Road and Atlantic Road posed a different challenge, with the shops

overlooked by the railway bridges crossing each other at different angles.

At ground level the activity of shoppers and passers-by provided a dynamic scene in which the sketching needs to be fast and loose to capture something on paper. It takes the mind to another place to be continuously observing and committing lines onto paper - a dance

between absorbing and creating. The participants appreciated the opportunity to do something that takes in the surroundings in a different way and take part in something that one may not consider doing alone.



*Some of the dozen sketchers that joined us, sketched by Pam Williams.*

*Photo of Nick Weedon left by Ashleigh Gill*

#### Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> – Loughborough Road Pubs

If you cannot imagine getting a very entertaining – at times, hilarious – talk out of just five pubs in the Loughborough Road, then clearly you missed Tracey Gregory's talk to a packed San Mei Gallery.



The San Mei Gallery occupies part of the old Loughborough Hotel. The only one of the five pub buildings which is still a pub is the Hero of Switzerland which is due to be demolished with a new Hero emerging in the new development, or so we are promised.

## Local Events

### Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> – The History of Oval House



In the new Brixton House theatre Deborah Bestwick, director of Oval House before it re-located and became Brixton House, talked the audience through its eventful history.

Its surprising origin as a youth club supported by an Oxford college gave

rise to a stroke of luck, without which, the theatre's move to Brixton would not have been possible.



The club occupied land originally leased from the Duchy of Cornwall, but King Edward VIII signed over the freehold to them. Being able to sell the land so close to the famous cricket ground decades later was a key enabler of the move.

Deborah related the roller-coaster history from the theatre emerging from the youth club in the 1960s, through the financial problem of the 1980s, to the impact of 2010s gentrification. Mentioning on the way many later famous actors who started there including Pierce Brosnan who visited the building work in progress in Brixton.

### Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> – the Local History Fair

This year's fair was held in St Leonard's Church Streatham where we had a stall. It was very successful: we spoke to many people and had nearly record publication sales.

### Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> – “The Island of Brixton”: In the Wake of the Empire Windrush

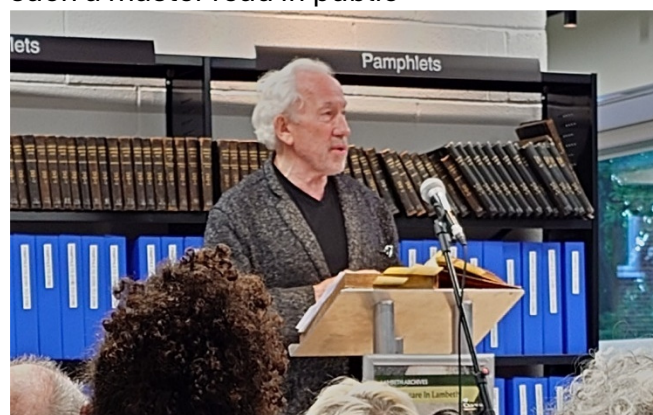
Kelly Foster led a walk around Brixton focused on the Empire Windrush passengers who made their homes here.

### Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> – Blenheim Gardens: the story of a Brixton estate.

Any talk by Jon Newman, Lambeth Archivist, is a sure winner; this was no exception. It was held in the Brixton Windmill Centre, close by the estate. With many informative slides, he took the audience through the estate's history.

### Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> – Simon Callow CBE reading from the Lambeth Shakespeare folio.

Lambeth Archives has retrieved the three folios of Shakespeare's plays originally donated to them in 1920s, but subsequently loaned to the British Library in 1950. They invited Simon Callow to celebrate their return by giving some readings from the folios. A pleasure to hear such a master read in public



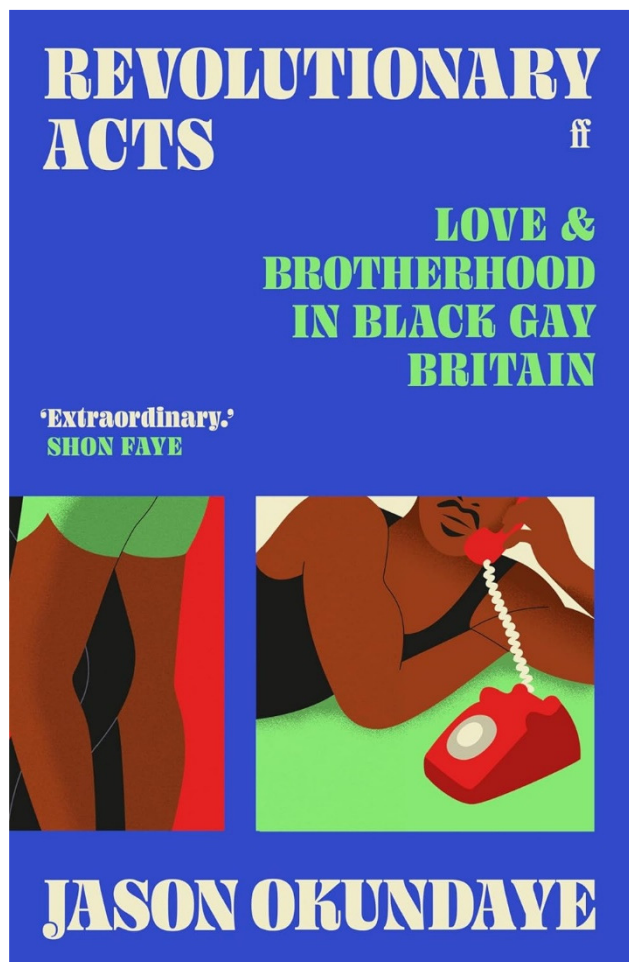
They have also put on an exhibition of Shakespeare in Lambeth which will run until the end of October. Open Mon-Sat but times vary; check at:

[lambeth.gov.uk/libraries-0/lambeth-archives](http://lambeth.gov.uk/libraries-0/lambeth-archives)

## Local Events

### Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> – Author Event Jason Okundaye

This was the Brixton Society's flagship event of the festival. We were very lucky to be able to have Jason Okundaye come and talk to us about his book: Revolutionary Acts: Love & Brotherhood in Black Gay Britain. Some 60 people filled the gallery room in Brixton Tate Library to hear him.



It is not obvious from the title that this has any particular association with Brixton. However, when researching his book one name kept coming up, Marc Thompson. He introduced Jason to a group of Black gay older men who had been part of a vibrant subculture in the Railton Road area of Brixton between the 1970s and 1990s. They had survived racism, homophobia and the Aids crisis.

After the talk Jason signed copies of his book. If you missed this, copies are still on sale at Round Table Books in Brixton Village.

### Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> – Brixton Market Heritage Walk

Our regular market walk was included in the festival programme. For future walks see: [www.brixtonsociety.org.uk/events](http://www.brixtonsociety.org.uk/events)

### Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> – Brixton Advice Centre Open House

Brixton Advice Centre is an ordinary building with an extraordinary life. The only building in Lambeth with two blue plaques, the last building squatted by Olive Morris, final home of CLR James, windows by legendary designer Jon Daniel. The oldest Advice Centre in London. Offices of the Race Today Collective.



Nikky Catto, Chair Board of Trustees, led two local walks during the day themed around the iconic images on the windows of the centre.

### Saturday & Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> Guided Tours of Brixton Windmill Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> – Guided Walk of Brixton Hill

These events, organised by the Friends of Windmill Gardens, happen at other times of the year as well as during the festival.

To find out about them, and all the many other activities they organise, see their website: [www.brixtonwindmill.org/all-events](http://www.brixtonwindmill.org/all-events)



## Local Events

### Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> – West Brixton Walk

Alan Piper led this walk for the Brixton Society exploring the Ferndale Road and Trinity Gardens conservation areas.



*Brixton's first fire station in Ferndale Road*

### Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> – Stockwell Green Walk

Bill Linskey led this walk for the Brixton Society around the oldest settlement in the area. In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Brixton area was open fields, the good burghers of Stockwell Green were building a Chapel of Ease which was to become, a century later, the parish church of St Andrew's.



*St Andrew's Stockwell. Photo: Bill Linskey*

Sadly, the church has been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that it is now boarded up, mothballed, no longer in use. It seems likely that the next steps will be deconsecration and sale.

### Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> – Brixton Recreation Centre London Open House

One of the highlights of this year's London Open House Festival was the opportunity to join guided tours of the Brixton Recreation Centre led by Brixton Recollectors and MUF architects who have been working together since 2021 to restore this much-loved local landmark building.

The Brixton Recollectors, their motto "Your memories, Our History", created an exhibition for Open House weekend with photos and sound recordings sharing the memories of people who worked at the Rec or used the Rec since its opening in 1982. You can view some of their images here using this link:

[revisitingbrixtonrec.org.uk](https://revisitingbrixtonrec.org.uk)



Since 2021 they have been working with MUF architecture/art, commissioned by Lambeth Council to oversee the repair and restoration of the Rec, to ensure that changes to the building respect its history and take account of what local people want from building.

The work is ongoing but those of us on the tour could see four big improvements already.

1 The previously unused and dead basement area between the main entrance and Beehive Place has been opened up to provide accommodation for Photofusion - continuing the tradition of the Rec providing start-up opportunities for local businesses. (See the article on their opening on page 7.)

## Local Events

2 The large, illuminated signs on the façade of the of the building, removed in 2010, have been restored thanks to the Brixton Recreation Centre Users Group which had been storing the signs on site.



3 The entrance ramp from the street level up to the main entrance now houses a series of plaques - known as the Hall of Fame – which record individuals important in the history of the Rec.

4 Improvements to the shop fronts in Brixton Station Road under the canopy, replacing a muddle with a more consistent design, while

working with tenants to improve the appearance of their shop units, for example, by stripping out false ceilings which reduce natural light. *Report and photos: Vivienne Lewis.*

If you use the Rec you can contact the Brixton Rec User Group via: [brixtonbrug@gmail.com](mailto:brixtonbrug@gmail.com) Their Autumn 2024 Newsletter sets out further improvements needed to the Rec, not least of which is improving disabled access.

### Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> – Nelly’s Lambeth Walk Cemetery Tour

A walk, not in Brixton, but much of it about Brixton, led by Tracey Gregory and Geoff Simmons. He Nelly of the title being Nelly Roberts, the orchid artist who lived and worked in Loughborough Road where there is a blue plaque commemorating her life.

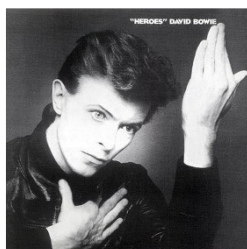
### Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> - Harvest Festival at Brixton Windmill

A fitting end on the last day there were events in this year’s festival.

## London Mural Festival

The London Mural Festival ran from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> September across London with the aim of creating 100 new murals.

One of them, shown on the right, is in Leeson Road on the side wall of the house at 56 Mayall Road. David Bowie fans will not need to be told that the words are from his song “Heroes” on the album of the same name.



The photograph is by Becca Thackery. For her article about Alan Piper on pages 10 & 11, she photographed him in front of Brixton’s most famous mural, “Nuclear Dawn” in Coldharbour Lane.



# Brixton Society Christmas Card



Our colourful Christmas card features a playbill from the Empress Theatre, Brixton, for their 1949 Xmas Pantomime Goldilocks and the Three Bears. As the playbill says, they actually had three live bears on the stage!

Inside is printed "Merry Christmas" in black. On the back there is a potted history of the theatre:

The Empress Theatre opened on Boxing Day 1898 on the corner of Brighton Terrace and Carlton Grove (now Bernay's Grove) It was revamped in Art Deco style in 1931 It became a Grenada Cinema in 1957 Other uses followed later until the building was demolished in 1992

Each card is A5 size and printed on heavy (350gsm) card. Cards are in a pack of 5 with envelopes and are priced at £5 plus £2.50 for p&p (one pack). Additional packs are charged at an extra 0.75p p&p each. We will arrange free delivery or collection locally in Brixton where possible.

Alternatively, come and buy at our stall at the Brixton Windmill Winter Market (see page 3).

Contact: [treasurer@brixtonsociety.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@brixtonsociety.org.uk)

## 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](http://www.brixtonsociety.org.uk)  
✉ @BrixtonSociety

Contacts:

General Correspondence: [secretary@brixtonsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@brixtonsociety.org.uk)  
About the newsletter: [newsletter@brixtonsociety.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@brixtonsociety.org.uk)  
Planning issues: [planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk](mailto:planning@brixtonsociety.org.uk)  
Membership: [membership@brixtonsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@brixtonsociety.org.uk)

Joining the society on-line: [www.brixtonsociety.org.uk/join-us](http://www.brixtonsociety.org.uk/join-us)  
Ordinary membership £10.00 per annum  
Unwaged / over 60s £5.00 per annum  
Corporate £25.00 per annum