

HERNE HILL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY ♡ ISSUE 153 ♡ Spring ♡ 2022 ♡ £3.00



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A HIDDEN HISTORY
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The Magazine of the Herne Hill Society



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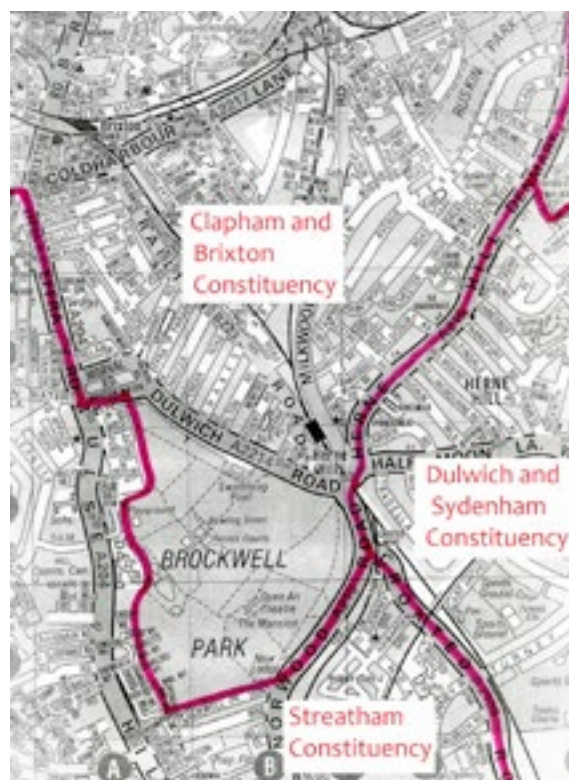
Borderlands

An ongoing Parliamentary Review will fix our constituencies for the next general election. The objective is to match population movements with the UK's 650 parliamentary seats by amending constituency footprints so that each MP represents a similar number of voters: around 74,000 each. The result could be a spider's web of boundaries leaving Herne Hill without cohesive representation at either Borough or Constituency level.

The current proposals are for the Dulwich and West Norwood (DaWN) constituency to be abolished and its voters to be apportioned between four other constituencies: Clapham & Brixton; Dulwich & Sydenham; Streatham; and Peckham. As individuals, it will make little difference. Not much beyond getting used to a new constituency name, locating a different polling station and, eventually, a change of MP. But for community groups like the Herne Hill Society and the Herne Hill Forum, the current proposals are more problematic.

Herne Hill, broadly the SE24 postcode and neighbouring areas, is already divided between Southwark to the east and Lambeth to the west. The boundary runs through the town centre along Herne Hill and Norwood Road. As a result, the community is peripheral to both councils despite the best efforts of our councillors. Fortunately, at the parliamentary level, Herne Hill is currently entirely within the Constituency of Dulwich & West Norwood. The Constituency is therefore the only local representative political structure to cover the whole neighbourhood. As a result, the MP's role in Herne Hill is unique and can be vital. Of our representatives, only she has responsibility for the whole of our neighbourhood, has a vested interest in our community and the authority to bridge the Borough boundary.

For example, in 2013 a broken Thames Water main turned Herne Hill junction into a lake. Over 20 businesses were flooded, some in Lambeth and more in Southwark. Because the DaWN MP had responsibility for the whole of Herne Hill, she was able to



The proposed division of Herne Hill

coordinate the Boroughs and force the utility company to address the issue of compensation. Had it not been for her involvement, it is very unlikely that Thames Water would have contributed £200,000 towards the relief fund put in place by the Boroughs.

Like the flood, issues like traffic congestion, poor air quality and large festivals in Brockwell Park require a "whole Herne Hill" approach. Without the support of a single MP with an overall appreciation of our neighbourhood and community it is less likely that the community's efforts to address such issues will succeed.

George Hornby



The sight of bulldozers at work on a sizeable area of land next to Brockwell Hall is at first alarming. Closer inspection reveals what is going on. Lambeth are investing in a decarbonisation project that will generate heat from a network of underground pipes feeding into a ground source heat

Bulldozers in the park

pump. Lambeth has affirmed a commitment to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 and the radical reduction of the carbon footprint of historic buildings such as Brockwell Hall, built 210 years ago, will be an essential part of this policy. The heat pump scheme aims to reduce Brockwell Hall's emissions by 80%. It is funded mainly by a grant from the government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Other organisations such as the National Trust are also embarking on similar schemes for their historic houses. The ground source heat pump in Brockwell Park will also be able to provide low carbon, energy efficient heating for the stable area next to the Hall, to be developed as part of the extensive improvements to the Hall made possible by a successful £3.3 million bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The proposal is that the refurbished Hall, with a new café, will function as a venue for community activities, weddings and corporate bookings, with improved accessibility and landscaping.

Transport News

March saw another update from Southwark Council on the Dulwich Low Traffic Neighbourhood affecting Dulwich Village, Burbage Road and Townley Road, confirming the changes made in February half term. These modifications included reducing the “Bus Gate” penalty camera times, and opening Court Lane and Calton Avenue to emergency vehicles. These will be confirmed as permanent in April, despite the widespread local objections to the original scheme. The sharing of the “Dulwich Square” space between pedestrians and cyclists has been changed again, with cyclists now emerging sometimes uncontrolled into the otherwise signalised junction. A codesign process to review the working of the Court Lane/ Calton Avenue restrictions is promised for June 2022.

The railway tunnel (nearly 2 km long, opened in 1863) between Sydenham Hill and Penge East on the Victoria to Beckenham Junction line through Herne Hill will be closed completely between Saturday 23 and Sunday 31 July, to allow the replacement of the tracks. Herne Hill will not have any Victoria to Beckenham Junction services over this nine-day period.

The Thameslink services through Herne Hill will continue – under their current franchisee! As reported in the previous Magazine, the Victoria services were removed in October 2021 from the franchisee Govia because of serious financial irregularities, and the “South Eastern” services allocated to the Government run Operator of Last Resort – effectively renationalised. The Thameslink services meanwhile, also run

by Govia, were due to be put out to a new contract process, but instead the expiring Govia contract has been extended for a further three years from April 2022. Despite complaints and requests for some oversight, this process has been shrouded in mystery, and several Freedom of Information requests on the whole contract extension process prior to the announcement have been refused. There are now few performance standards on Govia, and their staffing problems and the reduced service standards continue.

Some outline design options to greatly increase the cycle facilities through the main Herne Hill junction were commissioned by the Herne Hill Forum last year, but have only recently come to light. Given the lack of any quantitative work, or prior local consultation, it is difficult to make comments on these initial ideas, but:

- Since the ideas appear to reduce the capacity of this junction by 20% or 30%, they are unlikely to be considered feasible by the signal operator TfL, the bus operators, or indeed vehicle drivers or crossing pedestrians;
- The principle seems to be to focus cyclist activity on this busy and strategic South London junction complex, rather than providing cycle-friendly traffic calmed routes round it; and
- The lack of any prior consultation or stakeholder consensus building means that polarised views might be taken on the basis of little firm evidence.

This all is in stark contrast to the very successful 2010 collaborative efforts to redesign the Herne Hill junctions and their surroundings, which resulted in the creation of Station Square.

The Herne Hill Society has yet to formally consider the ideas.

Bil Harrison

Regeneration Stage 2?

Twelve years on from the first very successful Junction Regeneration Project is this to be Stage 2? These screenshots are taken from the presentation commissioned by the Herne Hill Forum and referred to in Bil Harrison's article above. The full video can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPBxm8qbfPw

The scheme will clearly be welcomed by cyclists and all those who prefer a life without car-dependency. Motorists, bus users and others will see it differently, since the amount of space beneath the railway bridge for motor vehicles will be considerably reduced. The blocking off of Milkwood Road for motor traffic will increase pressure on remaining roads. The debate has only just begun.



View from Dulwich Road



View from Half Moon Lane

Society launches Excellence Awards

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Herne Hill Society, we want to draw attention to the people, organisations and businesses who are contributing to the Society's three priorities of Community, Heritage and Environment.

There is so much going on in SE24 and the surrounding area to enhance the locality and helps create the community well-being that makes Herne Hill such a great place. With this in mind, the Herne Hill Society is launching its Excellence Awards at the start of May 2022 to shine a light on worthwhile recipients.

The Awards will be open for nominations and applications between May 2022 and the end of September 2022. Three Herne Hill Society judges, Sheila Northover, Colin Wight and Pat Roberts, will decide the winners in each category



in December 2022, and the Awards will be presented at the 2023 AGM, at the end of our 40th anniversary year. Each of the three categories of Community, Heritage and Environment will have

a winner and two runners-up. Winners will be presented with a crystal award and they and the runners-up will receive a certificate and will be featured in an edition of *Herne Hill* magazine.

Members are encouraged to consider which individuals or groups could apply or be nominated for an Excellence Award. So if you know of an initiative that is exciting, new, having impact, enhancing the community, encouraging local engagement or promoting civic pride in Herne Hill, get nominating. See the Herne Hill Society website for full details of how to apply or nominate in each of the three Award categories.

Rebecca Tee

The Society's AGM

The Society held its AGM via Zoom on 31 March. The event was attended by 38 people. The Society's chair Rebecca Tee gave a fluent summary of activities in the past year, including a focus on the Society's making of small grants to local projects, the work of Nigel Thorpe in arranging for banners to highlight the *Herne Hill Heritage Trail* in the Station Underpass, the ongoing work of the Society's planning group and the successful completion of the Society's most ambitious publication project to date with the appearance of *Sunset over Herne Hill* in November 2021. Martyn Hall, Treasurer, ran through the accounts and was able to present a healthy outlook for the Society. Thanks were expressed to Carol Boucher who is stepping down from the Committee, but remains willing to help out.

The Society would dearly like to see more people coming forward to join the committee.



The following were elected (nem con):

Chair – Rebecca Tee
Vice chair – Laurence Marsh
Treasurer – Martyn Hall
Secretary – vacant
Committee – Henry Ferguson, Rosalind Glover, Lin Proctor, Nigel Thorpe (resigned 5 April)

Remembering Bill Kirby

On 8 April a memorial service was held at St Paul's for Bill Kirby, long delayed by the pandemic. Bill holds a special place in the history of the Society. One of its earliest members, a stalwart supporter, for many years a committee member and latterly the Society's President, Bill died at the age of 100 in February 2020.

At a very well attended service his life was remembered, with many memories also

permanently recorded in the History Hear project in which Bill talked to the Society's former Chair Colin Wight. Among his many recollections were the burning down of the Crystal Palace, his experiences as a soldier in the invasion of Europe in 1944, and his lifelong support of Dulwich Hamlet FC. At the service Sheila Northover also reminded us of Bill's gift for friendship and his charitable work over many years with Muscular Dystrophy.



PLANNING & LICENSING

Apart from intensive engagement with the issue of the future of 10 Dorchester Drive (see page 9), the Society's planning group has commented on the following planning applications:

Lambeth 22/00174/FUL, 222 Railton Road (Station Square)

We objected to a mansard roof extension on the building that was once the Cinema Grand. We considered such an addition in this particular location to be wholly incongruous and from some sightlines not obscured by the tall pediment of the old cinema façade. Lambeth have given permission.

Lambeth 22/00166/FUL, 138 Lowden Road

We objected to a roof terrace on a single-storey rear extension on grounds of overlooking and loss of privacy. Lambeth has refused permission for both the roof terrace and the extension itself.

Lambeth 21/04199/ADV, Banners in Dulwich Road and Norwood Road

We objected to an application for the mounting of 37 banners mounted on lamp-posts along the perimeter of Brockwell Park. We saw them as "street clutter" and a form of "street furniture" that did not complement the use or function of the public space and introducing an unnecessary and unattractive visual intrusion into the street-scene. The banners proposed should be contrasted with the banners that have in the past been attached to lamp-posts, an initiative by the Herne Hill Forum. These banners were very specific to the locality and highlighted places of cultural, educational and heritage interest or information relevant to the Herne Hill community. The banners proposed

in the application would appear to be entirely commercial in purpose, the subject of an agreement under which the applicant would pay Lambeth for the opportunity to advertise. We also objected to a number of the banners being within the Brockwell



Proposed banners on Dulwich Road

Park Conservation Area, a fact ignored in the application. The Brixton Society has submitted a similar objection. A decision is awaited.

Lambeth Site Allocations Development Plan (SADP) We responded to the consultation on the draft of the SADP, which included two local sites: (1) the site on the border of Herne Hill/Loughborough Junction where the recent Two Towers application failed (2) the site on Coldharbour Lane adjoining the extensive Peabody scheme that is now proceeding. Lambeth clearly envisage a much denser, bulkier and taller form of housing development for these sites. We submitted that these were inappropriate objectives for these particular locations and not supported by the evidence advanced. **Laurence Marsh**



A Welcome Return!

Prominently sited at a corner in this quiet enclave of Herne Hill/ Loughborough Junction/ Camberwell (depending on your preference) two years ago the Cambria looked as if it might have closed for good. It had been going since 1880 and was the sole survivor of the many pubs that used to serve the area. It is

therefore especially pleasing to be able to report that this popular pub in Kemerton Road SE5, close to Ruskin Park, re-opened in March having undergone a full top-to toe refurbishment by the new owners Heineken and operators Prospect Pubs and Bars.

Open all day, every day, the traditionally finished bar and lounge offers a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere for drinking and dining, or you can choose to be in the leafy garden room with its retractable roof and sides or the adjoining festoon-lit terrace. A classic pub menu is on offer alongside a selection of international

small plates and old-fashioned puds. The on-tap beers include Brixton Brewery's hand-crafted, small batch beers and their logo is featured on the terrace wall. Fairtrade teas and coffees are also on offer.

With so many hospitality businesses struggling or even closing over the last couple of years there were fears locally about whether the Cambria would remain as a pub, so the major investment in this much-loved and well-sited local venue is particularly welcome at this time. On recent lunchtime and evening visits there were plenty of customers enjoying what the Cambria has to offer, so it looks like this local has not only returned but is now here to stay!

It's dog-friendly too.

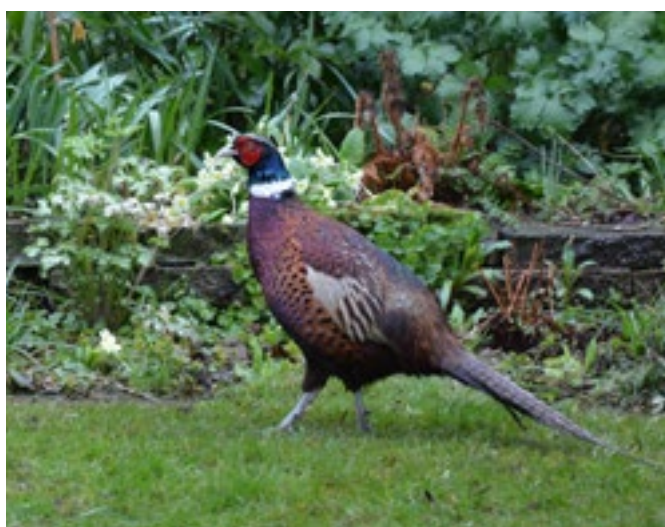
Carol Boucher

www.thecambrialondon.co.uk/ for offers and promotions



Fawnbrake visitors

Our pictures show three less usual visitors to two Herne Hill gardens, both in Fawnbrake Avenue. The sparrowhawk was very busy eating something, allowing time to take the photograph. The fence was recently cleared of mounds of ivy and it seems, unfortunately, very probable that an exposed bird's nest was what had the sparrowhawk's undivided attention. The pheasant was attracted by what fell from a bird feeder. He has not been seen again and one is bound to wonder, with so many foxes in residence, what fate awaits him. As to the heron, he would seem to be enjoying a change of scene from ponds in local parks.



Pheasant



Sparrowhawk



Heron

Supporting Ruskin Park

One thing events of the last two years have taught us is the vital value of our parks. Data published by the Office for National Statistics show that more than 40% of adults consider visiting local green and natural spaces has been even more important to their mental wellbeing. At a time when local authority budgets remain under relentless stress it is therefore good to learn that Lambeth are committed to a capital investment in the park. It was announced at the beginning of the year that Lambeth would be investing £950,000 in the park. There are many priorities, which include: refurbishment of the paddling pool and the playground next door, renewal of the "redgra" area, refurbishment of both toilet blocks, repairs to lamp standards, drainage works and better signage. To achieve all this will without doubt outstrip the funds promised, but a start can be made and further funds will surely be applied for. And the local community and other bodies are pitching in, helped by the determination of Friends of Ruskin



Park to see their much-loved park continue to thrive.

Last year the Friends launched a drive to secure funds for the paddling pool. No less than £16,000 was raised from the local community, including £500 from the Herne Hill Society under our small grants scheme. With, in addition, £20,000 from Lambeth and £10,000 from estate agents Urban Village it has been possible to undertake substantial improvements and it is planned to have the pool operating from late May to September. But more funds will be needed, so too volunteers to help with regular maintenance of the pool. More information on crowd funding and volunteering is available on the Friends' website: www.friendsofruskinpark.org.uk/paddling-pool-refurbishment-begins/

Another enterprising addition to our appreciation of the park has been a "Ruskin Tree Walk" promoted by the Camberwell Society. In a series of short essays, published on the Society's website, six particular locations in the park are linked to the ideas of John Ruskin. The Herne Hill Society also made a grant to this project. More details here: www.camberwellsociety.org.uk/treewalk3/

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A lifeline for Number 10

Not Downing Street – though a lifeline may have sometimes appeared necessary in recent times – but Dorchester Drive. In the last issue of the Magazine we featured an article about this fascinating house, on the market for the first time in 60 years. The article attracted interest, not least from the C20 (Twentieth Century) Society, whose chair, Ian McInnes, former Chair of the Dulwich Society and member of this Society, was keen to take forward the idea of getting the building listed, the best means of ensuring its protection. This was exactly what we wanted to hear and we indicated our strong support for a listing application by the influential C20 Society to Historic England. They moved swiftly to prepare the application. Events took a dramatic turn on 17 February when we learned through reliable local intelligence that the house had been sold and that the new owner was intending to demolish the house and build a new, larger house on the site. An application to Lambeth to demolish and replace with a new house would take some time, but meanwhile there was nothing to protect the interior of the house. The well-preserved interior is an important part of the building's heritage value and its destruction could very well jeopardise its chances of being listed.

The placing of a skip in the front garden and resulting damage



Was this damage necessary?

to the garden wall were worrying signs. Swift action was required, in which the Society was closely involved, alongside the C20 Society, local councillors and other concerned individuals.

Fortunately, Lambeth's Conservation Officer Doug Black and Head of Planning Rob Bristow were persuaded that the house deserved protection while the application to Historic England proceeded, and the Council issued a Building Protection Notice (BPN) on 24 February. This is far from a common occurrence. Nothing can be done to alter the building while the BPN is in place and should any such action take place a criminal offence is committed.

A meticulously prepared application has now been made by the C20 Society to Historic England. The Herne Hill Society has submitted its own detailed submission supporting the application. We have been very fortunate in being able to call on the specialist expertise of Society

member Edmund Bird to help us with that submission and with our response to Historic England's initial factual report. Historic England will in due course make a recommendation to the Secretary of State. Now we can but keep our fingers crossed that 10 Dorchester Drive will be joining the valued group of buildings in Herne Hill that enjoy listed status and contribute so much to our area's special heritage.

Laurence Marsh



When Herne Hill Station opened its doors to passengers in 1862 there were just two platforms, one directly adjoining a large first floor waiting room and the other an island platform. The waiting room was accessed by an exterior staircase at what is now the entrance to the underpass – it would be another 32 years before the underpass itself was created. The creation of further platforms led to the waiting room losing its original function after 1925. It came to be used for offices and storage but this large space in more recent times languished unused and neglected. In 2019 the Herne Hill Forum secured a grant of £55,000 from the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund. Since then the old waiting room, now reborn as "Station Hall", has emerged as a valuable community asset at the heart of Herne Hill and has made possible a huge variety of events arranged by a wide

The Birth of Station Hall

range of local groups and organisations. Day to day management of Station Hall rests with Hayley Byfield and Bill Uden, supported by four trustees.

One recent enterprising example was a fund-raising event last February in the form of a talk by Edmund Bird, heritage advisor to TfL, on how London's transport has shaped the growth of the city. The talk was given in memory of Ruby Fuller, who died aged 18 in 2020 from a rare form of blood cancer. Ruby had lived all her life in Herne Hill and was a pupil and head girl at the Charter School on Red Post Hill. After her death Ruby's family joined with the charity Children's Cancer and Leukemia Group in raising funds for research into childhood and teenage cancers. Station Hall provided a most appropriate venue for the transport-themed talk, delivered by Edmund Bird with his customary aplomb and mastery of the subject and significant funds were raised. The JustGiving page for Ruby Fuller is at

www.justgiving.com/remember/787532/Ruby%20Fuller.

Now all that is needed to complete the Station Hall project is a lift for improved access.

A refuge from Ukraine?

You now have to be 80 or more years old to have any direct personal recollection of war in Europe on the scale we now witness in Ukraine. Peace in Europe was something we had come to take for granted. So the events since the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February are both shocking and deeply unsettling. Fortunately, there are many thousands of people in this country whose first reaction to these events has been to offer a home to Ukrainian refugees. More than 4 million have fled the country, mainly women and children and the elderly. The greatest number of refugees, more than 2.5 million, are now in Poland, with another 670,000 in Romania. Neither of these countries has placed any significant obstacles in their path and have started the detailed processing once the refugees are in the country. The policy of the UK government is rather different and has received widespread critical coverage in the media. This Magazine is non-political, but we will always seek to reflect what is happening in Herne Hill. For this reason we bring a story recently featured both in *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*.

Mike Rundell is an architect living in a large house in Herne Hill. He applied in March to be allowed to accommodate a mother and her three children, her husband remaining in Ukraine working with the army. They had been able to reach Germany and were now sleeping on the floor of a church outside Cologne. The UK government's sponsorship scheme requires a complex online application to be completed

and documentation to be provided by the refugee family in order for visas to be issued. Assuming that hurdle can be surmounted, it is then a question of waiting. Mike describes his increasing dismay with the bureaucratic obstacles that keep the family shut out while there is a comfortable house waiting to welcome them with a garden for the children to play in. Lambeth Council say they are required by the government to approve the suitability of accommodation. Mike then learned that his house would need fire alarms on each of its three floors, a "gas safety" certificate



Mike Rundell offers a home

and window locks on all windows. Mike's response is that "bureaucratic rigidity is failing people in real need ... the system is completely cynically designed to stop people from coming to this country ... I have lived in [my house] for 15 years without requiring these things. It's totally safe for my children and they are not legal requirements ... This is an emergency, the family is desperate to get somewhere where they can start to live a normal life again, and a more flexible and less bureaucratic approach is simply essential."

Since this story appeared in the national press Mike Rundell's house has been "approved" as appropriate accommodation, but, at the time of writing, the family is still waiting for visas. On the most recent available figures less than 10% of the visa applications under the UK sponsorship scheme made by people wanting to provide a home for refugees had been processed by the Home Office.

Summer Festivals Return

With Covid now a thing of the past (officially, though the reality seems rather different), it is perhaps not surprising that this summer sees a resurgence of Festivals in many London parks attracting paying audiences numbering tens of thousands. The debate about how public parks can be equitably shared and the extent to which local authorities should use them for raising revenue is a long-running and familiar one. We do not attempt to set out here the many aspects of the argument. What we can do is remind those who rely on Brockwell Park for rest and relaxation that the park will be host to significant festival activity in May and June.



However, it will be concentrated within a relatively short period, with events taking place on 27, 28 and 29 May, and on 2, 3, 4 and 5 June (the Platinum Jubilee Bank Holiday). Activities have to cease at 10.45 pm at the latest under the licence issued by Lambeth. The following month will see the return of the Lambeth Country Show on the 16 and 17 July, an event that remains free to all.

The Society has in the past taken a stall at the Show, but we fear it is unlikely that we will be doing so this year. The reality is that it is a commitment over two long days requiring resources that the Society simply does not have – though if volunteers in sufficient numbers were to step forward ...

Hungry again

Herne Hill's food and drink outlets continue to proliferate, confirming the area as a South London destination for refreshment and informal socialising.

THE SICILIAN DELICATESSEN

In February 2022, long before spring deceived us with its broken promises, a shop opened in one of the refurbished but long-vacant units at the pedestrian end of Railton Road. Signs on the window, followed by a vivid blue repainting job, heralded



the arrival of The Sicilian Delicatessen, keeping company with the gift shop Lark which opened during the first phase of Covid and is now well established.

Some of us had heard that there was already (since February 2020 in fact) a successful delicatessen of the same name near the southern end of Rosendale Road in West Dulwich. Indeed it had been there. So we welcomed the owners' expression of confidence in opening another branch here in Herne Hill.

Visitors to the new shop soon realise that this is truly a delicatessen rather than a coffee shop in danger of attracting laptop squatters, although they do inevitably sell coffee either to take away or to consume – weather permitting – at the pavement tables outside. The deep but narrow indoor space has no tables but is dedicated to a long counter offering a range of pastries (including



Carlo Saraniti

Summer mornings hold the promise of a very Sicilian breakfast

cornetto, the butter-light equivalent of croissant), panini, Italian cured meats, cheeses and some prepared dishes, all with a definite Sicilian flavour. The shelves along one wall offer, for instance, pasta from wheat grown on the foothills of Mount Etna, and a range of tomato-based pasta sauces made in Sicily by the owner's family from their own sun-rich tomato harvest each summer, naturally sweet without the need for the added sugar which lurks in many mass-produced tomato sauces. There is also bread baked on the premises, some Sicilian olive oil and wines and a selection of fresh vegetables.

snack, an Italian style brioche to accompany an ice-cold helping of granita. Other food items will become available throughout the summer including a wide range of snacks and more comprehensive picnic bags.

The owners profess themselves delighted with the early success of their new venture. Footfall in this busy and flourishing centre of Herne Hill is inevitably much higher than in the quieter, genteel reaches of Rosendale Road, and our new and perfectly sited Sicilian offering has clearly struck a chord with residents, commuters and visitors in SE24.

The business is owned by Carlo Saraniti who is Sicilian and Stephen Vullo who is an English lawyer. Carlo (pictured) is the manager you are more likely to see in the shops.

The Sicilian Delicatessen, 313 Railton Road, www.thesicilian.com

There are still two larger empty retail units, managed by the Arch Company, waiting to be let in Station Square. A small restaurant chain had expressed an interest in the smaller of these units but has since withdrawn. The large shop which curls round the corner to the bridge has always seemed a very demanding prospect for any new tenant, and has not, to the best of our knowledge, attracted any interest yet.

However, just under the bridge, another long-empty unit is now occupied.

ELSEWHERE

This, the smallest Arch Company unit, is the long-empty railway arch recently taken over by Elsewhere Coffee. This early-opening, small but already popular coffee shop is tucked away right underneath the railway bridge on Half Moon Lane (once occupied, many moons ago, by a newsagents business) and now offering fresh beverages, snacks, breakfasts and light lunches and hand-roasted coffees.

Elsewhere Coffee Roasters, based in Deptford, started as the in-house roastery for Social

Espresso, an events company that delivers coffee to conferences and exhibitions across Europe and the UK and now also sells roasted coffee beans wholesale to other restaurants and bars and to individual consumers. This is their first bricks and mortar shop, and naturally serves their excellent coffee along with other (mainly vegetarian) breakfast snacks and light meals.

Elsewhere, 1A Half Moon Lane, www.elsewherecoffee.com

Pat Roberts



Dancing back after the pandemic

South London Dance School moved to the former Royal Mail Sorting Office in Herne Hill back in 2009 and has since become a well-established local institution.

A wide range of dance classes are offered for children from 18 months to adults of all ages and levels of experience. The school prides itself on catering for a range of abilities, providing the best possible classes for each child to enjoy dance as well as develop cognitively and socially.

The school recognises the mental health issues many young people face, especially now and how dancing and the dance studio environment can help.

Principal Zoe Dawson was honoured to be given the rights to adapt *The Scarecrows' Wedding* by Julia Donaldson. Composer and musician Stuart Rush and Zoe created

a one-act ballet which was choreographed by the ballet teachers at South London Dance School.

It was a thrill for the young dancers to perform in front of a live audience after so long on Zoom; and for family, friends and teachers to enjoy the spectacle crafted for the occasion. Staging the show in early January was a great fête of discipline and determination for all, to overcome the obstacles presented by Covid-19 in putting on the show safely and successfully.

During the pandemic the School filmed individuals dancing at home and editing it into a group dance piece. This became the backdrop to a live piece once they were again able to perform expansively on stage. This moving piece highlighted the feeling of isolation and confinement that so many children had experienced during the

pandemic; it resonated strongly with the audience.

Thankfully, lessons at the school are finally back to normal and student numbers are once again increasing. Students are grateful to be able to dance with their friends without the need to distance from one another or dance in a restricted space of their own.

Zoe and her team are now planning for future shows, competitions, auditions, examinations and performances in 2022 and beyond. They are currently busy preparing for several days of ISTD (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing) examinations in July and the All-England Dance festival regional finals in May. You can catch some of their students at Dulwich Park Fair on Sunday 15 May at 1pm.

Zoe Dawson & Becca Thackray

For more information about South London Dance School's ballet, tap, modern, commercial, street, national and contemporary dance classes, go to www.southlondondanceschool.co.uk or call 020 7978 8624.



Premiere of 'The Scarecrows' Wedding'



'This is Me', performed by 180 students in January at the Langley Park Theatre



March 2022 – after two years parents are finally able to see their children's progress first-hand



PSYCHO-GEOLOGY

Finding a new book focused on London's history and culture isn't hard; capital book shops specialise in it. But to discover one offering a fresh look at this great city from a unique perspective – while holding Herne Hill at its spiritual heart – is a rare and special find indeed.

London Clay: Journeys In the Deep City is written by ex-Herne Hill resident Tom Chivers, self-described writer and arts producer. He's also a poet, mystic and tour guide extraordinaire, who taps into the mysterious, hidden, undiscovered underbelly of the city to present it in a bewitching new light

There's no outward indication of *London Clay*'s debt to Herne Hill and its environs; flyleaf notes describe it as a 'psycho-geology' of London, a 'lyrical interrogation of a capital city, landscape and our connection to place'. It's all that, but much more too.

In this spellbinding account Chivers is led by his own, intricate exploration of London's hidden depths; its geological strata (which for years he's mapped in a Streetfinder as 'silt', 'sand', 'clay', 'gravel' and so on). He also follows the trail of long-lost islands, Roman ruins, abandoned tube stations, forgotten tunnels and, more particularly, 'lost' rivers, as he guides us around the capital.

It's in pursuit of the River Effra that, thrillingly, Chivers first diverts to Herne Hill ('a geological crumple zone'). He was born at Dulwich Hospital, living in Dulwich, then Tulse Hill, before 'settling into a three-bedroom Edwardian house in Frankfurt Road, Herne Hill'. His penetrating knowledge of the area is manifest, although he now lives in Rotherhithe.

Chivers' journey through time delivers a beautiful evocation of Sunray Gardens, Brockwell Hall, the P4 bus from Brixton, the

Chinese takeaway on Half Moon Lane, the old Blockbuster store near Olley's and a vivid, latter-day trip to his boyhood hangout: Dulwich Wood.

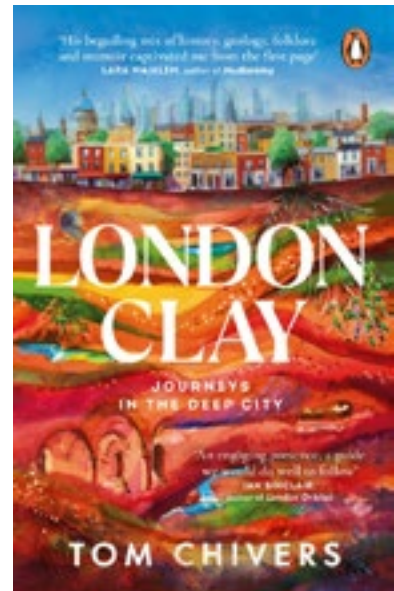
Even as Chivers guides us around further-flung subterranean sites – at Finsbury Circus, Hampstead Ponds and Westminster – in pursuit of lost rivers and stories, he references Herne Hill time and again, making *London Clay* all the richer for it.

Elsewhere, Chivers talks politics, Brexit and redevelopment, recalling ghosts of London's past including an 'entire' village devoured by silkworms, a lost river island in Westminster and a mysterious metal cube at Elephant and Castle...

With overheard dialogue, glances of graffiti, chance encounters with London characters and insightful reflections, it's a love letter to London – with all roads leading back to Herne Hill.

David Williams

Tom Chivers, London Clay: Journeys In the Deep City, Penguin Books, ISBN: 9781529176711



PEAR BLOSSOM IN HERNE HILL AND DULWICH

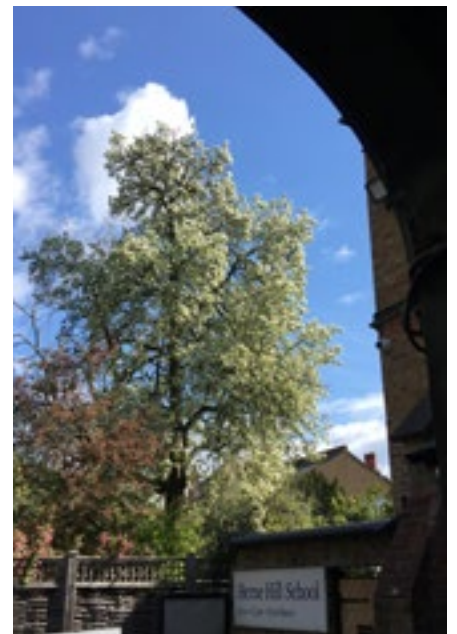
After 40 years of marvelling at the wonderful spring sight of old pear trees in full blossom I wanted to record and share this pleasure. A dozen kind readers pointed out trees in their garden or street.

Were the trees the remnants of old fruit farms or orchards? Brian Green, Dulwich's local historian, explains that in medieval times and probably down to the early 18th century many of the fields, especially the hilly ones, were used for sheep grazing. In the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th this was replaced by grazing dairy cattle for fresh milk sold to local dairies – until built on in the early 20th century. However, the large 19th-century houses in Dulwich and on Herne Hill all had spacious gardens that often included an orchard. Hence in the gardens of current houses just north of St Paul's Church one can find not only a magnificent pear tree, but several old varieties of damsons, plums, and greengages.

Other surviving pear trees are often found along the boundaries of gardens and old 'dustbin paths'. Sadly, they are at considerable risk as new householders may prefer an empty space to an ancient tree. While conservation orders are easy to impose, property developers and new owners may ignore these, and cut the tree back to the trunk to be quietly removed later.

A final point from Brian Green: the field east of Red Post Hill – now the Sunray estate – was known as Perifield in medieval times. So the pears there, as well in the orchards, had a good foothold in the local drinks market!

Judy Foster



ELFINDALE, HERNE HILL

A HIDDEN HISTORY REVEALED BY MIKE TUFFREY

Buried beneath modern day Elfindale and Frankfurt roads lies a hidden history – a very Victorian tale of love and tragedy, of servants and masters and of immigration and migration, as London grew to be the economic powerhouse of the 19th century.

For about a hundred years Elfindale Lodge stood in the line of grand houses along the east side of Herne Hill, built for prosperous business people from the City seeking a rural bolt-hole. With its extensive garden land, Elfindale extended across the area today covered by 61 to 69 Herne Hill and back across the gardens of 1 to 29 Elfindale Road and the houses of 2 to 38 Frankfurt Road. On Tuesday 11 December 1883, my grandfather, Herbert Dudley Tuffrey (1882-1961), was born there, or rather above the adjacent stables where his father was resident coachman. My quest to discover the story of the house and its occupants begins when Henry William Segelcke (1813-1901) arrived in Herne Hill around 1850 and soon took on the lease of Elfindale Lodge. To date



William Tuffrey 1845-1919 c1912

no pictures of the house or of Henry Segelcke and his descendants have been found. At the age of 21 had Henry departed his home in Cuxhaven on the north German coast, close to the great port of Hamburg, and headed to London. The eldest son of Claus, a merchant, and Catherina, the family were well established in the town – a cousin was later mayor for many years. Henry – or Hinrich as he would have been known at home – left behind a brother and three sisters. In 1841 we find him lodging in Islington in the house of James Ker, of the Scottish banking family, listed as a merchant. Little is known of his early business activity but he prospered and was able to follow others in the German émigré community to Herne Hill. In 1851 he is listed as a merchant, from Germany, living alone, near Nelson Cottage (opposite St Paul's church).

Perhaps work left little time for a love life, for in 1861 we find him, still unmarried, now aged 47, living in the large mansion, Elfindale Lodge, with only two servants for company: Mary Brindle, a widow aged 67 from York, his cook; and Willmot Greenhoff, aged 23, his house servant, up in London for work from her home town of Bideford, Devon, where her widowed mother was a pauper and her sisters scraped a living as dressmakers.

For Henry all was going well. Just the year before he had successfully applied for naturalisation as a British subject, sponsored by a cluster of fellow merchants, bankers and City figures. However, all that was soon threatened by scandal.

In February 1864 Willmot gave birth to a daughter, Mathilde Segelcke Greenoff, swiftly followed by Emily Bessy Segelcke Greenoff and then by Catherine Willmott Segelcke Greenoff (who both quickly died in infancy). Although Henry and Willmot did not marry, he seems to have tacitly acknowledged his responsibilities, not least in the children's naming – and using the German spelling of Mathilde, likely after his youngest sister. Henry set her up in her own house in Burton Road, Brixton, and presumably lived something of a double life (where the services of a discreet coachman would have been essential) going between there, the City and Herne Hill.

But tragedy struck. In October 1869 Willmott died of liver disease, aged just 32, her death recorded in Bideford where she and her daughter presumably went to be cared for by her mother and siblings. The Registrar had to correct his original entry a month later, however –



Segelcke memorial at Holy Trinity Sloane Square



Elfindale road c1915, where Elfindale Lodge once stood

deleted from the description of rank or profession was “wife of Henry Selkirk (sic), wine merchant” and replaced with “daughter of William Greenoff, a gardener, deceased”. Was that the story she had told them about affairs in London or their attempt at keeping up appearances locally? Or perhaps a disapproving registrar putting her firmly, if posthumously, back in her place?

We do not know who now cared for Henry’s sole surviving daughter, five-year-old Mathilde, or where she was educated, but she seems to have thrived. Thanks to newspapers reporting the distinguished arrivals at grand hotels, we do know that father and daughter had seaside holidays together each year through the 1870s – mainly in Hastings and Ramsgate. Young Mathilde was also good at flower-arranging – Miss Segelcke of Elfindale Lodge, Herne Hill, took second prize for her button-hole bouquets at the Crystal Palace’s Rose Show in 1877, the *Norwood News* reported.

A decade later, aged 23, Mathilde made a good match, marrying Alexander Dundas Ogilvy Wedderburn, a barrister from an old Scottish family, educated at Haileybury and Balliol. A disciple of John Ruskin at Oxford, Alexander became co-editor of the 39-volume *Complete Works* and was later his literary executor. After moving to the Lake District in 1872 Ruskin frequently returned to London, staying at 28 Herne Hill, the house he had given to his niece, which stood opposite Elfindale Lodge. We can speculate that is how he and Mathilde met and became interested in the Arts and Crafts movement. The movement owed much to Ruskin, and the Wedderburns’ involvement is evident today in Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square. Dubbed the “cathedral of the arts and crafts movement” by the Poet Laureate Sir John Betjeman when threatened with demolition following wartime bomb damage, a memorial is still in place behind the Lady Chapel altar marking the couple’s last resting place, both a testament to their relationship and a very public acknowledgement of Mathilde’s paternity.

Two children followed the marriage: Margaret a year later in 1888 and Alexander junior in 1892, both christened at Holy Trinity church. Tragedy soon returned, however. In November 1898 Mathilde died during childbirth, aged 34, leaving the two children, just six and ten years old. Husband, and indeed father Henry, now aged 84, would have been devastated. (A note made in death duty registers in 1912 reveals something about attitudes at the time: the identity of their grandfather was kept secret from the children. Whether that was lingering shame at the circumstances of their mother’s birth, anti-German sentiment or some other sensitivity is not evident.)

All the while Henry continued to prosper in business. His most prominent role was as director of the London Joint Stock Bank. Founded after banking was deregulated in the 1830s, it grew rapidly from international business – notably following Bismarck’s North German Confederation in the 1870s – soon after Henry had joined the board. (The bank eventually amalgamated in 1918 with Midland, today part of HSBC, forming what was then the world’s largest bank.)

Henry remained a director until his death aged 87 in April 1901. His estate was valued at over £13m in today’s money, largely left in trust to his two grandchildren. In a complicated will, along

with legacies to family members in Cuxhaven and charitable donations including for the poor of Holy Trinity Sloane Square and St Paul’s Herne Hill, he also left instructions concerning his servants. His coachman – my great grandfather William – and long-time gardener James Lambert received a year’s wages.

William (1845-1919) was born in Clapham, his parents originally agricultural day labourers in Stanmore before migrating into London.



*Herbert Dudley Tuffrey
1883-1961 c1940*

He worked for Henry Segelcke over nearly three decades from 1873 – and had his own share of tragedy. His wife, Ellen Merryfield, died young too, leaving him three sons, then aged 7, 13 and 17. Still, we can imagine young Herbert Dudley having the run of the house and grounds by his father’s obliging employer.

And what of Elfindale Lodge? Heralding the

arrival of today’s streets, an advert appeared in the *South London Press* of March 1903 offering for sale 250,000 bricks, 10,000 slates, 20,000 feet of hot-water piping and much more as the site was cleared. Ruskin would have been appalled. And yet so it was that 100 years of grand living came crashing to an end.

As for my family, Herbert Dudley was just finishing a two-year apprenticeship as an electrical engineer and about to start on a career that lasted through two world wars – funded by that bequest from Henry Segelcke, the immigrant from Germany made good.

Mike Tuffrey is a member of the Clapham Society local history group.

A SHOP SIGN'S STORY

This view of Herne Hill Station dates from 1968. Firstly, it reminds us of an era when we allowed motor cars to rule our towns and cities, something we are today reconsidering. Then there is the plastering of the station facade – the building had to wait until 1999 to be listed – with advertisements (Danish Bacon and Beanz Meanz Heinz can be deciphered). But what is



Herne Hill station 1968

particularly intriguing about the picture, and not visible in other views, is the detail of a large jar mounted above the door of No. 291 Railton Road (today the hairdressers Myla and Davis). Why is it there?

Although the station and railway arrived in 1862 it took some time before other buildings arrived on the railway side of what became Railton Road. But from 1880 an Oil and Colourman is established at what became No. 291, though initially known as 4 Commercial Place. It was the business of Samuel Willett, who lived above the shop with his wife and four children under 10 years of age. By the end of the decade Commercial Place had become part of Railton Road (after a very brief incarnation as Bransby Road) and the business had passed to Charles Spiers (born in Gravesend in 1850), who ran the business for the next 30 years.

An 1896 directory shows that Charles Spiers had three "Oil and Italian Warehouses", the others being at 17 New Park Road Brixton, and at Warriner Gardens, Battersea. The jar mounted outside such shops was a common sight, though very few survive today. The concept of the "Italian

Warehouse" and its link to many forms of oil, some for use in cooking and others not, goes back a long way in the history of London trade. There is an 18th century advertisement designed by no less an artist than William Hogarth for Mrs Holt's Italian Warehouse in the Strand. Hogarth's picture



Hogarth, Italian warehouse advert c1725

shows a jar of the very same type used as a sign for Mr Spiers' shop about to be loaded on board ship for passage to England. Every sort of Italian product was for sale at Mrs Holt's shop, from "Velvets, Damasks,

Fans, Leghorne hats" to "Lute & Violin Strings, Venice Treacle, Anchovies and Parmesan Cheeses".

Oil and Italian Warehouses remained common in London through the 19th century, combining what we would now call a delicatessen with the sale of non-foodstuffs, in particular oils for lamps, soap-making, paints and medicinal use. They would tend to specialise more in

one direction than the other. For example, at Brown's Oil and Italian Warehouse at 118 Wardour Street in Soho in the 1830s many imported delicacies were available, at least for better-off Londoners. The shop sold an impressive selection, including

finest Florence and Lucca oils, "Chapzigar" [Schapziger] cheese, Bengal curry powder and other curious-sounding products no longer to be found on our shelves, such as "King of Oude sauce", "Cavice" and "Coratch".

It seems Charles Spiers' shop at 291 Railton Road came to concentrate on the non-edible, because the census shows him in 1901 and 1911 as a "colour merchant" and "gilt colour man". Probably only a very small part of such trade would have been sales to artists. The major business would have been household paints, varnishes and cleaning materials.

Sadly, the distinctive memento of its trading past above the shop door has been erased

since the photograph taken in 1968. The conservation area proposed for Station Square and its surrounds will arrive too late to preserve it.

Laurence Marsh



KATE WHITEFORD'S WORK

Responding to our article in the last issue about Kate Whiteford and her unique house and studio in North Dulwich, several readers have asked whether we could add a little more information about her work.

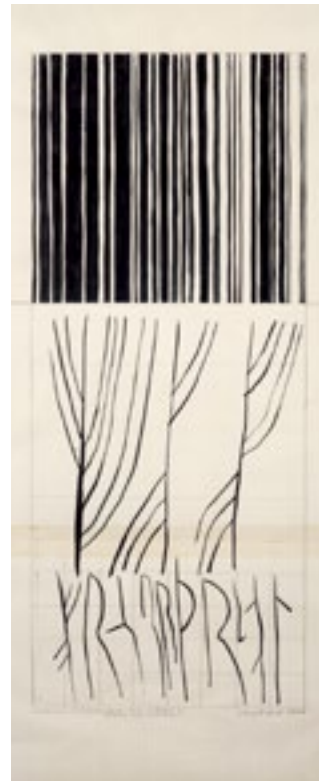
Deep breath: there could be a lot to say. But we have selected just one project which reveals a thread running through much of her work. She often uses archaeology, topography and aerial photography to unearth and celebrate ancient or hidden objects which can articulate new meanings for the contemporary world.

Approached in the mid-1970s by the National Museum of Scotland, she was commissioned to design an enormous tapestry for the Museum's new main hall. She devised it to reflect the various layers of this great Museum's collection in a design that

linked the chronological changes encountered in the displays on each floor. Unpredictably, as a central symbol of huge energy, Kate chose the Corryvreckan whirlpool just off the Isle of Jura. Layered over a symbol of this famous natural phenomenon, she introduced runic inscriptions from a celebrated archaeological site on Orkney, along with tree-like runes which run the height of the tapestry linking every period. The top quarter of the design, evoking 20th-century technology, showed barcode-like vertical bands. The

tapestry was then woven by the Edinburgh Tapestry Workshop and was formally unveiled in December 1998.

Pat Roberts



© Kate Whiteford; Image © National Museums Scotland

Corryvreckan Tapestry

HERNE HILL'S STREET TREES

Jeff Segal tells the story



Frankfurt Road c1920

Herne Hill is a lovely, leafy place, with more street trees than in most inner London districts. There are roughly 1,500 altogether, spread rather unevenly over 100 streets, with about two-thirds of them on the Southwark side of SE24. Their story begins in the 1860s, when two things happened that would reshape the area dramatically. First, the railways arrived, with Herne Hill station opening in 1862 and North Dulwich six years later. Fast trains into the city were the catalyst for developers to start breaking up the grand properties of the merchant classes along Denmark Hill and Herne Hill and laying out streets of suburban housing.

Until then the villas of the wealthy were “so graciously concealed by the fine trees of their grounds”, as John Ruskin put it, that the mile-long carriage ride from Camberwell might have seemed like a woodland drive. Old boundary trees or meadow trees would have heightened Ruskin’s sense of “leafy seclusion”, like the ancient elm at 50 Half Moon Lane or the aspens on Simpson’s Alley (now Ruskin Walk).

At the same time, a few miles north, construction began on Joseph Bazalgette’s revolutionary sewer system for London, designed to clean up the stinking, insanitary River Thames. A key element was the Thames Embankment, built on marshland on the north shore. The section between Westminster and Blackfriars bridges housed

the main sewer from west London, gas and water pipes and the District Railway tube tracks beneath a major new road

Most of London up to this point was a tangle of winding, narrow streets, but this remarkable avenue along the Thames gave the Metropolitan Board of Works the space and the opportunity to emulate the much admired tree-lined boulevards of Paris and other grand European capitals. In 1869, before the carriageway, railway and sewer were even finished, hundreds of London plane trees were planted at 20 ft intervals along the new 20 ft wide riverside footway.

This was the first time that street trees of any species had been planted at a large scale in the capital. The London plane (*Platanus x hispanica*) had been known in Britain for almost 300 years and was selected for its tolerance of pollution from coal fires and the factory chimneys along the river. In *Street Trees in Britain: a History*, Mark Johnston writes that the lines of planes soon extended along Northumberland Avenue, then crossed the Thames to



Fawnbrake Avenue c1910

St George’s Road, Blackfriars Road and Tooley Street.

They reached Herne Hill by the turn of the century. By then the new residential streets of Poets’ Corner, the Milkwood Estate and the roads around Kestrel Avenue were well established, but the streets between Herne Hill and the railway viaduct from North



Herne Hill c1895

Dulwich were incomplete. It was in this area, at the parade of shops built in 1899-1900 opposite the Half Moon pub, that the columns of planes began. They stretched along Half Moon Lane into Beckwith Road, Ardbeg Road, Elmwood Road and Nairne Grove, and then up to the top of Sunray Avenue. Poplar Walk has another 16 London planes, the only ones found on the Lambeth side. Apart from a few losses all those old trees – over 170 of them – are still cooling and shading our pavements.

Trees soon began to appear on the new side streets too. Before the council adopted a road, housing developers and residents had to pay for any planting, and not everyone wanted to take on the expense. Still, contemporary photos and postcards show dense, regular planting on five middle-class streets by around 1905: Danecroft Road, Elfindale Road, Fawnbrake Avenue, Frankfurt Road and Hollingbourne Road, each with one identical tree for every two houses.



Shakespeare Road c1900

It's difficult to make out the species from grainy pictures, but the tightly packed trees on Frankfurt, for example, were likely to have been London planes. Once they grew it would have become apparent that they were too big for the location and they wouldn't have lasted long. Even on Half Moon Lane the five planes between what's now Oliver Burn and Bon Velo had been removed by 1912. Some big limes in the neighbourhood might be survivors from this era, though.

On other more affluent roads like Croxted Road, Guernsey Grove, Stradella Road and Winterbrook Road, rather than planting trees the builders often put pleached limes in the front gardens. Pleaching is where selected branches and twigs of young limes are stretched out horizontally to intertwine with the next tree along,

eventually creating a clipped hedge on top of a row of clear trunks. There are traces of them all over Herne Hill and some are still maintained, among them a fine double-decker hedge at 26 Half Moon Lane.

In the Edwardian years there were also some pleached limes in Poets' Corner – Chaucer Road, Milton Road, Shakespeare Road and Spenser Road – but the deep front gardens were big enough to plant tall trees and thick hedges and period photos show them looking abundant.

Limes and London planes were clearly the species of choice at this time, but as H.J. Dyos noted in *Victorian Suburb*, his history of house-building in Camberwell, social class determined what type of tree, if any, your street would get: "Planes and horse chestnuts for the wide avenues and lofty mansions of the well-to-do; limes,



Sunray Avenue c1900

laburnums and acacias for the middle incomes; unadorned macadam for the wage-earners."

"Unadorned macadam" is evident in early pictures of working-class streets in Lambeth. On the Milkwood Estate – Lowden Road, Milkwood Road, Poplar Walk Road (later Poplar Road) and Jessop Road (now gone) – there isn't a single tree to be seen. Railton Road had some hedges and small shrubs or trees in the shallow front yards by the mid-1920s, but Mayall Road remained largely bare.

By contrast the Sunray Estate – municipal housing dating from 1921-22 – had trees at its very heart. Designed along garden-city principles, the cottage-style dwellings with generous front and back gardens and privet hedges were picturesquely sited among wide grass verges, quiet green squares, cul-de-sacs and veteran oaks from Casino House. Other old trees lived on in Sunray Gardens, the small park opening at the same time as the estate.

The second part of this story will appear in the next issue.



Wanless Road c1975

A HUMAN HISTORY OF THE GREAT NORTH WOOD

Pat Roberts on *The Wood that Built London*

by C. J. Schüler

Well before they were tasked with a duty in the struggle against global warming, the forests and other wild places of our pre-modern world enchanted and alarmed our ancestors. What beasts, what untamed individuals and ungodly spirits lurked in their gloomy recesses? What freedoms and mischief could be found there, hidden from the restrictions of families, armies, bishops and kings? With the blossoming of the romantic movements all across Europe, followed by the slow creep of urbanisation, forests also became icons of natural beauty and refreshment, places of retreat from a stressful world. As they still are.

But from the very earliest times a forest was also a resource – a “tree farm” as Schüler explains. Conflicts arose, most sharply in those woods closest to human settlements. The woods harboured wildlife to be hunted for food or sport; grazing grounds for domesticated animals; timber to be harvested for construction, manufacturing, shipbuilding and fuel; and eventually, land – that most finite and immediately valuable of earth’s resources – to be a base for towns, roads, trains and of course houses.

So from the earliest times, ownership, access and exploitation were vital issues. Choices had to be made. Like Tudor monarchs before him, James I, for example, was worried about the supply of oak for

the shipbuilding upon which the country’s security of course depended; in 1615 he therefore issued a proclamation forbidding the use of wood as a fuel for glass-making, thus tipping this small but developing industry towards the early adoption of Black Country coal. Meanwhile however

What we regard as natural is actually the result of millennia of interaction between human beings and their environment, and our wildest-seeming landscapes have been sculpted by centuries of husbandry. This book is therefore not only a natural history but a human one”



Sydenham Hill Wood March 2022

the production of timber for other uses continued.

For such reasons, Schüler’s book explains, few of our British forests today come to us as primeval wilderness. As the book emphasises, the antiquity of the North Wood

“... should not mislead us into thinking that any of its surviving parts are wild, pristine woodland; they have not been that for at least a thousand years, and probably for much longer. Since our Neolithic forebears first crafted flint hand axes and began to clear the wild wood for agriculture, few corners of the British Isles have remained an untouched wilderness.

This had been evolving for centuries. The careful recording, as in the Domesday Book, of the landscape’s resources often calculated the economic value of the land by how many pigs could be fed by each acre. Schüler’s unrolls an astute examination of the ongoing power struggles between church, monarchs, coppice and estate owners versus farmers, smallholders and commoners and early manufacturers such as charcoal burners.

So ever since pre-Neolithic times as his previous quotation explains, early human settlements in southern Britain had seen changes to the original wildwood. But while forest exploitation for fuel and

In the late 19th century, towards the end of his long life, John Ruskin wistfully recalled the vistas of his youth, as seen from Herne Hill: “... the Norwood hills, partly rough with furze, partly wooded with birch and oak, partly in pure green bramble copse, and rather steep pasture, rose with the promise of all the rustic loveliness of Surrey and Kent in them”. So again, not literally “forests” as we sometimes expect.

building materials and clearances for livestock and crops had reduced much of the woodland, much of the Norwood Ridge as we now call it was mostly too steep to be easily farmed, so at first retained some partial tree cover as recalled by Ruskin. That apart, coppicing tended to prevail.

The ancient practice of sustainably harvesting wood produced through coppicing was valued by many landlords. Coppicing was England's longest established form of woodland management, and the dominant form of silviculture in Britain until well into the 19th century. So it is not surprising that, here in the North Wood too, it was often the dominant form of economic exploitation and thus survival. As Schüler explains, a tree would be cut close to ground level to encourage many shoots to grow from the stump producing quantities of round, even, strong and flexible poles which could be harvested at appropriate intervals after which the cycle starts again. This would not have satisfied the King's hunger for mighty oaks for his Navy, but much of the North Wood's historical area evolved, as recorded in many old maps and surveys, into numerous privately or corporately owned coppices renewably producing timber as a heating fuel and for other requirements.

It didn't last. Despite the persistence of systematic and sustainable coppicing, the slow erosion of the wooded areas was seemingly unstoppable. The growing availability of coal as a heating fuel made coppice-sourced wood less attractive to landlords who were increasingly tempted to convert the land first to pasture or crops, then finally to building purposes as London and neighbouring communities developed and spread outwards. Canals and railways accelerated the trend. 1852–54 saw the clearance of trees on the crest of Sydenham Hill Ridge to accommodate the Crystal Palace, removed from South Kensington to be reconstructed and enlarged (to John Ruskin's much-quoted distress). Then in the 1860s, the governors of the College of God's Gift in Dulwich decided to raise cash for new college buildings by selling carefully controlled plots of land along Sydenham Hill under long lease: several large villas were accordingly built here

with substantial (but steep) gardens which subsequently, with the disappearance of the villas, were reintegrated into Sydenham Hill Wood. A Cedar of Lebanon planted in one of the gardens still survives in the Wood along with a few other ornamental plantings, relics of its short-lived domesticated past.

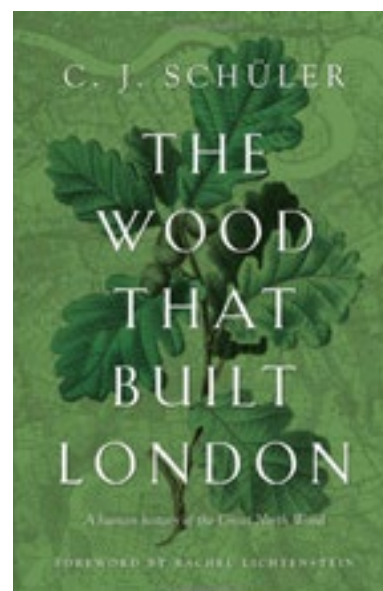
Schüler's definitive and detailed history of the North Wood leads us, with confidence and authority, through many of these issues. A Herne Hill resident and a well-established author and geographer, he follows the development of the Norwood Ridge from the era of the last Ice Age right up to the present day, where much has been lost but some precious elements have been preserved and are now, to be hoped, safeguarded by laws and by people deeply motivated to preserve and watch over endangered but surviving elements of our forested past.

In the last few decades pressure groups and some enlightened individuals and organisations including the London Wildlife Trust have vociferously and, for the most part, successfully resisted further encroachments. Important patches of the old North Wood accordingly flourish and are cherished, their vital underlying ecosystems still largely intact.

As many readers will know, the best-known forest survivors in our immediate area are Dulwich Wood and Sydenham Hill Wood, though other smaller remnants lie to the south around Thornton Heath and in the north towards Forest Hill, Honor Oak and Brockley. The author has personally been vigorous in helping to defend these patches of near-urban woodland, and the numerous and diverse species of plants, birds, insects and fungi that shelter beneath and within the trees.

The book has excellent illustrations including some maps meticulously redrawn by the author.

Did it "build London"? In part, surely. And is the North Wood actually "Great"? It seems that this slightly misleading descriptor is a romantic modern invention. The maps and legal documents of centuries ago have it as the North Wood, so that should be good enough for us too. It gets its name, in fact, by being situated to the north of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Manor



of Croydon, to which much of it at one stage belonged – and definitely well north of those more distant forests of the Sussex Weald.

*C. J. Schüler, The Wood That Built London, Sandstone Press 2021
ISBN: 9781913207496*

AN APPEAL

Lockdown saw an unprecedented increase in the number of visitors to Sydenham Hill Wood/Dulwich Wood. Much of the natural woodland ground cover has disappeared and ever-widening paths have taken its place, heavily compacted in dry weather and quagmires in wet. The London Wildlife Trust, responsible for looking after this unique South London asset, launched an appeal in April for funds to repair the damage and give the native vegetation and the wildlife that relies on it a chance to recover. The Dulwich Society are generously matching funding what can be raised up to a sum of £10,000. See <https://donate.thebiggive.org.uk/campaign/a056900002D1HU6AAN>

REFLECTIONS ON MOVING HOUSE

I had lived in one of the popular three-bed semis on Brantwood Road for close on 50 years – until last November.

I won't go into my personal story here; suffice to say that with age the house had become too big for me and the hillside garden too hilly to manage easily.

After various false starts, including thinking about adapting the house for my future needs, I approached the local estate agents and found that they were very interested in selling my house for me.

Once I made the decision to downsize, my requirements were specific. I wanted to stay in Herne Hill near my friends and be within the area I knew well, with all its attractions and convenient access to central London.

I did a lot of on-line house hunting for two-bed flats with gardens, and found a few, but only one or two I wanted to look at in person. I learned a lot from looking at floor plans and knowing the area well helped.

I did look at a large penthouse flat with two balconies and spectacular views of central London, but it was on the third floor, albeit with a lift, and I realised this was not ideal.

Then I came across the flat I eventually bought, which is purpose-built, rather than the downstairs of a house conversion. The garden is a very decent size and the living room light and spacious. I feel very lucky to have found it, and am now spending money on getting it done up to my taste.

My house in Brantwood Road sold quickly and relatively easily. I had an open day, with 10 potential buyers throughout the day,

supervised by the estate agent. From this came five offers, and then it narrowed down to the eventual purchaser, who was upsizing from down the hill.

Was it a wrench leaving my house? Well yes and no, but because I was excited about the new place I had found, the positives outweighed the negatives. My adult sons were more emotionally affected than I was, and they have their own homes and families!



What I miss are the view from upstairs over central London, which I always loved, and the garden, with many plants and trees I had grown over the years. However, I can walk into the park to see the view, and I took cuttings of favourite plants and will create a new garden behind my flat.

I had to get rid of some furniture; a few pieces went to a charity shop, but they are very choosy about condition, so I had to pay for some to be taken away. Some

things I gave away to family members and charity shops, and I had a big garage sale, which was great fun and very successful. A few possessions have been put into storage while the new flat is refurbished, and I look forward to seeing them all again before too much longer.

Would I recommend downsizing? Yes I would, because it forces you to make decisions about accumulated possessions. It is not easy but there is plenty of advice out there about how to do it. My new neighbours are friendly, and I stay in touch with my former neighbours as much as I can. My advice is don't leave it too late!

Sheila Northover

FURNISHING THE PARK

With the increased democratisation of society that came with political reform in the 19th century, the provision and treatment of public spaces assumed much greater importance. One, often overlooked, example was the planting of street trees – a subject examined at p.18 of this magazine. Another would be the “furnishing” of public parks. In this card postmarked 1912 one sees not only the typical municipal iron railings of the time but also a curious circular bench, and in the background the building known as “The Temple” in Brockwell Park. Such benches used a very popular style in later Victorian and Edwardian England, a style known as “rustic”. And those furnishing Brockwell Park did not have far to look for a supplier. “Herne Hill Rustic Works”, the business of G.W. Riley, specialised in these products, occupying the land next to Brockwell Park between Norwood Road and the railway embankment. The business got going in the 1890s and



was said to be the largest manufacturer of rustic structures in the country. But taste moved on and the business did not survive the First World War. The land came to be developed in the 1920s with the parade of shops that still stand there today. For more on Mr Riley's business and the “Bath Factory” that followed it (and never manufactured baths) see articles in issues 133 and 143 of this magazine.

Laurence Marsh



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