

# HERNE HILL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY ♣ ISSUE 149 ♣ Summer/Autumn ♣ 2020 ♣ £3.00



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## IS THERE A NEW NORMAL YET?

► *See page 12-13*

## DENMARK HILL STATION EXPANSION

► *See page 5*

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## THE FUTURE OF DORCHESTER COURT

► *Turn to page 11*



# The Magazine of the Herne Hill Society



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## CONTENTS

Brockwell's famous tree	3
Weeding the street	3
Red kite over Herne Hill	3
Investing in Ruskin Park's future	4
Railway bridge repairs	4
Denmark Hill Station expansion	5
Herne Hill Tree Watch	6
Lord Lester of Herne Hill	6
Call for new members	7
A rare win for Crystal Palace	7
Lark alights at Station Square	9
Ruskin Park's mighty oak	9
Lambeth Heritage Festival 2020	9
Planning & Licensing	10
Re:Cycling	10
The future of Dorchester Court	11
High Street research project	11
Local businesses: is there a "new normal" yet?	12-13
The Society's planning group	14
Rumer's memories	15
Herne Hill's silent star	16
Teaching in lockdown	17
A Brockwell summer	17
Notes from la France profonde	18
100 years ago	18

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Particular thanks to Marieke Wrigley for providing the image for our front cover and two further images at p. 17. Marieke is a photographer specialising in animal and nature photography and can be contacted at [mariekewrigley39@gmail.com](mailto:mariekewrigley39@gmail.com) and at her website [presentmomentspetphotography.com](http://presentmomentspetphotography.com)

# Brockwell's famous tree

You know your trees, of course, so you will recognise this as a Hornbeam, elegantly flourishing in Brockwell Park. But did you know that it is a famous one?

That's because it was featured in *The Guardian's* "tree of the



*The old tree, now gone*

week" feature in August. It was entered for this honour by Tim Mosley, a gentleman who lives in Oval but visits the tree frequently and has been photographing it for nine years. Obsession? He admits it. As Tim told *The Guardian*, it looks like the perfect tree to him – aptly, "like a tree looks in children's books".

He even had an image

of it tattooed on his arm. Then, when he went on a yoga training course in Kerala (as you do), the instructor recognised it from the tattoo, as he had previously taught yoga at Brockwell Lido and used to meditate under that very tree.

The park used to host another much-photographed Hornbeam, a stone's throw from Brockwell Hall at the top of the hill. Sadly, though, it had to be cut down in July 2019 when it became weak and dangerous: "unstable crown" was the specialists' fatal verdict. Our survivor stands near the children's playground on the western side of the park.



*The Hornbeam today*

## Weeding the street

One positive effect of the lockdown has been to enhance neighbourly contact – suitably distanced of course. Take WhatsApp street groups for example. They are not new but they have grown and found a new relevance during the Covid crisis. A recent example of how such communication can assist a valuable environmental objective is the move by Lambeth to phase out the spraying of glyphosate (most commonly marketed as "Roundup") to control the growth of weeds on our streets. The alternative proposed is to call on public-spirited residents to group together and do the weeding themselves with no recourse to chemicals. Cynics will say it's simply a way of getting local people to do the work the Council should be doing. Well yes, but councils are struggling and don't have the resources to hand weed the pavements. To our knowledge residents in Fawnbrake Avenue have already formed a group and, building on their success in contributing funds for street tree planting, have been busy keeping their tree-lined street weed-free. Our thanks to Christina Rogers for the illustration.



The Red Kite is a large bird of prey, which is described as graceful and elegant in flight.

It is a handsome russet and brown bird with a very distinctive forked tail. It was once a common scavenger in our cities, but was persecuted to near extinction by the beginning of the 20th century. A small population hung on in remote Mid-Wales, but what had become a very rare bird was successfully reintroduced in 1989 in several places in England and Scotland. The nearest site to London was near Stokenchurch on the M40 in Buckinghamshire, which many of you may be familiar with when driving along the motorway. In the 30 years since then they have successfully bred and enlarged their range and can be found in many places as well as Wales, including Yorkshire, the East

## Red Kite over Herne Hill

Midlands and the Chilterns, and there are regular sightings even in London and the suburbs.

On 5 June I heard through a local birding



friend that a Red Kite had been seen over Dulwich Road. He had been looking for a Peregrine Falcon and was most surprised.

By chance the next day I looked out of my upstairs window near the top of Herne Hill, and saw an unmistakable Red Kite being mobbed by another smaller bird, probably a Carrion Crow. Wow! Before I had a chance to pick up my binoculars for a closer look they had disappeared over a roof top in the direction of Ruskin Park. I am confident of my sighting as I am very familiar with the birds in Oxfordshire where I am a regular visitor, and have also seen them at a feeding station in Mid-Wales. I checked the records on the RSPB website site, and found there was a Red Kite seen over Herne Hill in 2014. Now I am always on the look out.

**Sheila Northover**

# Investing in Ruskin Park's future

The pandemic has given residents of Herne Hill reason to spend more time in our local green spaces, and to reflect on the important role they play in our lives in the city.

Ruskin Park was opened in 1907 following a campaign by local people and named after the writer, artist, critic and campaigner, John Ruskin, who lived much of his life in Herne Hill.

The park today is managed by Lambeth Council, and borders directly on Southwark borough. It is much loved by the community, but the Friends of

Ruskin Park have long argued that it needs more investment. We now have a strategic masterplan ([www.friendsofruskinpark.org.uk/masterplan](http://www.friendsofruskinpark.org.uk/masterplan)) that aims to offer a clear and coherent vision for the future, produced by local architects Campbell Cadey and in partnership with Lambeth Council parks officers. We're really grateful to the park users who contributed their thoughts and ideas along the way.

## What does the masterplan say?

Ruskin Park has its own character and many existing assets. The plan aims to protect these, and show that the park's natural beauty and its facilities can be enhanced. It's not a detailed plan for implementation, but provides a series of guidelines structured around three principles. Each includes both gradual improvements and bigger projects.

- Enhance and maintain – Although there has been progress recently, park maintenance must be improved. This will be easier with clear planting schemes and regular pruning. There should also be a simple materials palette, including for paths where considerable repairs are needed.
- Legible, accessible and safe – The park should be welcoming and inclusive. The masterplan includes a clear and consistent approach to signage, and longer term improvements to key entrances. Once in the park, there should be more seating and fewer internal gates and fences.



- Engaging and joyful – We need a range of features and facilities to help people get the most from the park. This could include refurbished sports facilities, a bigger and better playground and a new café and green space in place of the current depot. We must also protect existing features, such as the bandstand, and restore neglected assets such as the former stable block.

## Can we make improvements happen?

We know that council budgets are under more pressure than ever, but there is a strong argument that parks should be a bigger priority. According to research from charity Fields in Trust, the UK's parks and green spaces deliver £34 billion in health and well-being benefits each year.

Other parks – including Brockwell Park – have found a strategic masterplan can build consensus from the community and attract resources. We'll work with the council, community and appropriate partners to set priorities and find opportunities for improvements to be funded and implemented. Some will need more consultation, for example by involving parents in the design of an upgraded and expanded playground. Larger projects will be subject to planning permission including public consultation.

We are already making progress, where we can, with projects such as the outdoor gym and improvements to the wildlife garden. Smaller enhancements can also bring joy, such as logs and stepping stones for informal play, a heritage trail to help people explore the park, art pieces and wild flower areas to further increase biodiversity.

We hope local people will get behind the plan and will continue to contribute their thoughts and comments. It is not set in stone. We need your support for our efforts to drive joined-up park improvements over the coming months and years.

**Chris Norris**, Chair, Friends of Ruskin Park

## Railway Bridge Repairs

Network Rail has started the long-overdue maintenance and repair work to the bridge at the main Herne Hill junction. The underside of the south side is being cleaned, repaired, and re-painted in September and early October, working on top of a wide pedestrian route, and maintaining the two lanes of vehicle traffic that have been operating during the social distancing measures for pedestrians. The middle section of the bridge underside is being dealt with during night-time working (22:00 to 05:00) for five weeks from 12 October using mobile platforms, again maintaining one lane of vehicle traffic in each direction. Finally, the north side will be dealt with in late November and December, again working on top of a wide pedestrian route, and maintaining two lane working for vehicle

traffic. There will also be some weekend traffic restrictions.

There also will be weekend rail service line closures 28/30 November, and 28 February 2021 to 1 March 2021, to work on the top of the bridge.



# Denmark Hill Station expansion

**A** long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, people used to go to work on the train, as many readers will have heard. It was called “commuting” – how quaint! And because they often travelled at the same times each day, their trains got unpleasantly crowded. So, inevitably, did some of the stations.

Aspiring City Thameslink passengers at Herne Hill will certainly have felt this pain.

But it was often much worse at Denmark Hill Station. No, it's not in Herne Hill but for many local commuters and other rail travellers wanting to touch down somewhere other than Victoria or the City, Denmark Hill offered wider (and maybe trendier) options, including the London Overground heading towards Clapham Junction and all points beyond, and if aspiring to a different direction, gliding north-east to Canada Water, Whitechapel, Shoreditch, Hoxton en route to Highbury & Islington. True, if you lived more towards the Brixton or Tulse Hill side of Herne Hill, it would be something of a trek, but for those of us close to the Camberwell frontier, a brisk walk alongside or through Ruskin Park would get us there pleasantly, as would the 68 bus.

More important in some ways, Denmark Hill is not only a jumping off point for residents but also a destination for visitors from other points in London, South-East England and even further afield. Every day, King's College and the Maudsley Hospitals draw in thousands of staff members, out-patients and visitors. The simultaneous arrival of several train loads of alighting passengers is the main cause of the congestion.

## **Dangerous overcrowding**

The station was redesigned and upgraded to ensure accessibility in a programme that concluded in 2013. But contrary to the expectations of many station users and Camberwell residents, the redesign left it with only one entrance/exit.

Meanwhile the number of passengers using Denmark Hill went up from 3.7 million in 2011–12 to 5.63 million in 2014–15. Much of this increase was down to the introduction of London Overground Services in December 2013.

This surge in traffic that meant the station was operating in unsafe conditions –

because its only exit, accessed up quite long staircases, could present a lethal bottleneck if the station ever had to be rapidly evacuated – and even on normal days the move from platform to street was getting uncomfortably slow and crowded. Since then, traffic numbers have grown further – at least before the pandemic. Last year (2018-19) the figures suggest that entries and exits totalled some 6.9 million.

Herne Hill station, by comparison, had 2.9 million entries/exits and we know how unpleasant conditions could be at rush hour. As a benchmark, Clapham Junction was running at 29.5 million – but of course it is vastly bigger station, indeed one of the busiest in Europe.



Pressure grew from local groups for the obvious remedy at Denmark Hill – opening a second entrance/exit on Windsor Walk, the quiet street that runs down past the Phoenix pub then, with a sharp right turn, along the north of the platforms and parallel to the station. Various groups including the Herne Hill Society and the Dulwich Society lent their support to the Camberwell Society who from 2016 onwards initiated and have led a persistent and well-informed campaign, building a positive working relationship with Network Rail and Southwark's planning team over several years.

It now seems to have been a success. A planning application has been made to Southwark Council for the construction of a new entrance to Denmark Hill Station on Windsor Walk. Listed Building Consent has been granted, and the rest of the

process seems on track for overall approval.

So if (may we say “when”?) Herne Hillians feels like going to work again on the train, Denmark Hill might once more be an attractive option. Covid-19 permitting, the new entrance is planned to be open by April 2021. It will have four gates plus two wide gates and will connect with the existing modern footbridge. The current one-way system will be dispensed with. Platforms 2, 3 and 4 will have extra canopies at the east to encourage people to use that end of the platforms.

With the active encouragement of the Camberwell Society, the entrance hall will also benefit from Camberwell-themed designs and lettering, and a new plinth for

installations and other exhibits on a rolling basis.

## **New pedestrian access**

Separately, Southwark Council has been awarded £1.5m by the GLA's Good Growth Fund. One slice of this funding will be used to create better pedestrian connections between Denmark Hill station and the hospitals and town centre. Our friends at the Camberwell Society think that the walk route to the hospitals and Camberwell will go through the Maudsley campus. There is going to be a new ward block on Windsor Walk called Douglas Bennet House, opposite where the new station entrance will be. The plan is for this to have a walk-through route to the Maudsley garden and thence to the main road.

*Camberwell Society* <http://www.camberwellsociety.org.uk/>

**Pat Roberts**

## Herne Hill Tree Watch



One of the joys of living in Herne Hill is our tree-lined streets. But look closer and you'll see stumps where trees have been felled, empty pits where mature trees once stood and fragile specimens struggling to survive. Now concerned residents have taken matters into their own hands by joining Herne Hill Tree Watch, a community organisation working with Southwark Council to look after the street trees in our neighbourhood.

First, we help them flourish by watering saplings regularly for their first two or three years so they can withstand hot and dry weather. It was the sight of young trees dying from a simple lack of water that spurred Jeff Segal and Paul Millington, both long-term

Herne Hill residents, to form the group late last year.

On top of that, we keep our older trees safe and healthy by cutting out suckers and other growths around the base, removing unwanted cages, lopping off dead or hanging branches within easy reach, looking out for poor health and reporting issues to the council through regular surveys.

The London plane pictured here before and after pruning, one of many on Ardbeg Road, shows the difference some simple maintenance can make.

We're also determined to expand the tree canopy, which is crucial for combating global warming. We identify bare stretches where new trees are needed and have been working with council officers on their schedule for the coming November–March planting season, when they're aiming to replace many of those trees lost in the last 10 years. At the same time we're planning ahead for winter 2021/22, when the £12,000 we were awarded in Cleaner Greener Safer funding this year will be used for planting up new areas.

What gives Herne Hill Tree Watch its real strength, though, is community involvement. In return for basic training and a monthly newsletter, our 75 or so volunteers patrol their street in dry spells with watering cans, bring their secateurs and pruning saws out on working parties and help us decide what type of new trees to plant and where. We even have a network of outside taps which residents share with their neighbours.

It's valuable work and fun too, so if you're interested in signing up please let us know at [hhtreewatch@gmail.com](mailto:hhtreewatch@gmail.com). And if anyone in Dulwich Village or the Lambeth side of Herne Hill wants to set up a similar group we'd be happy to advise.

**Jeff Segal**

## Lord Lester of Herne Hill

Anthony Lester, the eminent human rights lawyer, who died on 8 August aged 84, was for many decades a resident of Half Moon Lane and a life member of the Herne Hill Society. Such was his affection for our area that he chose the title Lord Lester of Herne Hill when he entered the House of Lords in 1993, having overcome any concern that his name might be confused with the hereditary Earls of Leicester. Lester was born and grew up in London, was educated at the City of London School, Trinity College Cambridge and Harvard Law School. He

played a key role in the creation of modern human rights and equality legislation, especially the Sex Discrimination Act 1976, the Race Relations Act 1976, as well as the legislation that introduced civil partnerships in 2004 and the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK domestic law. Such reforms would not have been possible without active involvement in the politics of the day, which saw Lester, like his close ally Roy Jenkins, as a member of the Labour Party, then the SDP and finally the Liberal Democrats, while

at the same time pursuing a very busy practice as a barrister in the field of public and administrative law, often challenging the lawfulness of Government decisions in landmark cases. In his final book, *Five Ideas to Fight For* (2016) Lester explained how his life's work had been shaped by his belief in human rights, equality, free speech, privacy and the rule of law.

The Society was delighted to have Lord Lester launch its publication of *Herne Hill Personalities* in 2006 at the Carnegie Library. In complimenting the Society



on its book he welcomed the attention given to John Ruskin, for 50 years a local resident. Should there be one day a new edition of that book Lord Lester of Herne Hill will without doubt also take an important place, as a tireless champion of the best values in a liberal democracy.

**Laurence Marsh**

# Call for new members



**M**y name is Rosalind Glover. I am the Society's new Membership Secretary.

The current membership tally stands at around 300. We are very proud of the organisation and are keen to see it flourish. Over the coming months we will be running a recruitment drive to increase membership. Members provide meaning for our work as they give us legitimacy for our interventions on planning items and credibility for our statements on topics that affect our area. They enliven the Society with the issues they present and the views they hold, support our campaigns and give

us accountability. From our membership comes the next generation of activists and Committee members. Do you know other friends and neighbours in the Herne Hill area who could be persuaded to take out a membership? If asked, people are often very happy to join to receive the magazine for only £10 p.a. per household. Every new member represents strength for the Society and support for our work and will be warmly welcomed.

We also want to increase the group of people who volunteer with us. Are you looking for a worthy local cause with which to become involved? Are you passionate about Herne Hill and what it has to offer and keen to devote some of your free time to working with us? Do you want to get to know your local area and the people in it? You would be very welcome to join us in this voluntary work and you don't need to be on the Committee to help. We are always interested in hearing from anyone who would like to get actively involved by:

- offering IT skills to help us with our website development and social media presence
- adding to our recruitment campaign



to publicise the Society

- researching articles and writing for our magazine
- helping scrutinise planning and licensing applications in Lambeth and Southwark
- monitoring transport and environmental issues that affect our area
- promoting our local history and helping to produce and manage our publications.

Do get in touch if you would like to offer support in any of these areas. And if you have any questions about your membership please e-mail me at: [membership@hernehillsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@hernehillsociety.org.uk).

**Rosalind Glover**

## A WIN FOR CRYSTAL PALACE!

**I**n the time-honoured tradition of the silly season, some Twitter-wag known as @CupOfParks dreamed up the pointless but oddly successful idea of organising a "World Cup of South London Parks". A list of 32 local parks, large and small, was compiled and split into two groups of 16. In your correspondent's humble opinion there were some dubious inclusions and exclusions: if Hillside Gardens, why not Sunray Gardens? To say nothing of Belair (which sounds like it should be owned by David Beckham OBE). Cannizaro (Serie C) lent a spurious Continental flavour to a domestic competition. But let's get too worked up about it. It's only a game at the end of the day.

The winner of park A vs park B would meet the winner of C vs D and so on until, Wimbledon-like, the victorious park from each half of the draw faced each other in an almighty winner-takes-all clash. But, you might well ask, "how were the results to be determined?" Ah yes,... Twitter users simply voted for their preference match by match. (If Wimbledon

were decided on that basis, we'd see Federer, Djokovic, Nadal and Murray in the semis every year! Come to think of it...)

For the record, Brockwell Park defeated Wandsworth Common, Hilly Fields and Battersea before being edged out by Crystal Palace Park in the semis; Ruskin went out in an earlier round to Peckham



Rye. So Herne Hill's parks were left licking their wounds and dreaming of what might have been.

The Dinosaurs, widely derided as well past their prime, proceeded to thrash giant-killing minnows Tooting Common in the final on Friday 7 August. All credit to Joseph Paxton, "the Alf Ramsey of garden design", as Javier Pes put it in a tweet.

Significantly - or maybe not - the winners were the only park to share a name with a Premier League football team (who managed just one win and

a draw from nine games after last season restarted in June).

A mad idea, certainly, but if it encouraged people to think that Hilly Fields or Palace Road Nature Garden might be worth a visit, maybe not a bad one.

**Colin Wight**

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# The Herne Hill Society Membership Renewal for 2021

**Renew your Membership – no increase in 2021**

**W**e hope you are enjoying your full-colour Herne Hill Magazine. To continue the good work we rely on your support, so we very much hope you will renew your subscription in January.

And the annual membership rates remain unchanged for 2021:

**Standard household membership is £10**

**Concessionary membership is £8**

- You can save a stamp and the bother of having to write a cheque by renewing online at [www.hernehillsociety.org.uk](http://www.hernehillsociety.org.uk)  
Click on the *How to join* button on the home page.
- Or send a cheque to the Society at the address on page 2 of this magazine.
- If you are one of our many members who currently pay by Standing Order and wish to continue to do so, please check that you are paying the correct amount.

However you choose to pay, we are grateful for your loyalty and continued support.

If you have any queries please write to the Membership Secretary at

*membership@hernehillsociety.org.uk*

The Society values being able to communicate with members by email. If you are not receiving our mailings that keep you updated between Magazines, it means we don't have a current email address for you. Please email the Membership Secretary with your address.

*Thank you for your supporting the Society!*

## Herne Hill *matters*

- Our Community
- Our Environment
- Our Heritage
- Our Future





## Lark alights at Station Square

Just as the coronavirus lockdown was beginning, one of the long-empty shop premises on Market Square acquired a new identity and new tenants; the first unit to do so in fact, and so far the only one.

In spring this year, Priya and Dominic Aurora-Crowe finally signed the lease, took possession, had the facade painted in their customary livery, and started bringing in stock for the launch of Lark. Then everything was put on hold. As we know, it was a deeply worrying time for all businesses but particularly for smaller retailers just launching a new venture. They could have pulled out but they went ahead, and here they are now, full of intriguing things, and new customers.

Lark is a family-owned shop that sells a huge and attractive variety of products for lifestyle and home, including casual clothes, stationery, homeware, jewellery, accessories, toys, beauty products and gifts of all sorts.

Priya and Dom started Lark 18 years ago and now have five stores in addition to this new one in Herne Hill: in Balham, Earlsfield, Tooting, Streatham, and Wimbledon. So they have had some

practice in opening new stores. We asked them why they came to Herne Hill. Oh, they said, people who had seen us in other places begged us to come here!

They have no regrets so far. As we know,



Herne Hill shops and restaurants are not patronised just by us natives – the centre of our community now draws in visitors

from other parts of London especially in the evenings and at weekends, which have proved particularly busy for Lark. It helps that the Herne Hill premises are much the largest of all their stores. (Longer-term residents will remember that before the long-running renovation of this terrace of shops, this particular site housed the greengrocers Seasons of England who now of course inhabit arches the other side of the railway lines.) The location of such a shop, near a busy station (is that still relevant for Working from Home people?) and bus routes, is also a powerful mark in its favour.

They nearly didn't come, though. The lease negotiations proved unusually prolonged, complicated and testing, to the point where at times it might have seemed easier just to walk away. But we are glad that they persisted.

What does the future hold? Christmas! A busy time for all similar shops but Lark make a special feature of their Christmas shop decorations, some of them locally handmade, so that is something to look forward to.

[www.larklondon.com](http://www.larklondon.com)

**Pat Roberts**

## Ruskin Park's mighty oak



Local artist Karen Keogh specialises in three-plate etchings and monotypes, taking a wide variety of land- and cityscapes for her inspiration. Our thanks to Pat Roberts who has made available the etching shown here, the great Turkey Oak in Ruskin Park thought to be some 250 years old. Pat commissioned the etching in memory of his wife Alison who was particularly fond of this magnificent tree. We featured the Half Moon Studio, where Karen works with fellow printmakers, in the last issue of the Magazine. For more information on Karen's work go to [www.karen-keogh.co.uk/](http://www.karen-keogh.co.uk/)

## Lambeth Heritage Festival 2020

Hats off to Lambeth Archives who were not going to be put off by the minor inconvenience of a pandemic. The Heritage Festival went ahead in September and offered an extraordinarily rich and varied programme – all online via Zoom. Events were spread over five weeks with something to join on almost every day of the month, and sometimes two on one day. The Society were among the many groups and individuals to contribute to the Festival: Ian McInnes and Laurence Marsh, assisted in their research by Sharon O'Connor, presented a walk along the Lambeth side of Denmark Hill, with a wealth of information about the houses that once stood there and with stories of their occupants. So why does Southwark offer nothing comparable?

## PLANNING & LICENSING

### Dorchester Court , Lambeth 20/01200/FUL and 20/01201/LB

When the last issue of this Magazine came out (online) at the heart of the lockdown the planning application for Dorchester Court had just been made public. The Society has now strongly objected to the application as a blatant misapplication of the planning principles in the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly as they apply to listed buildings, and to the application going against many of Lambeth’s own planning policies. The Society’s submission is lengthy and detailed and can be found in full on our website. Rather than attempt to summarise that submission, in this issue we publish the reaction of the Dorchester Court Residents’ Association who have also expressed their strong opposition. We were told that there was going to be an online hearing of the application by Lambeth Planning Committee in mid-September, but the hearing has been postponed and we wait to be told a new date. The Society will seek to make an oral representation at the hearing.

### Electricity Sub-station, Station Square, Lambeth19/03371/FUL

This matter was decided by Lambeth’s Planning Committee in June. The Society had opposed the application and provided a pre-recorded submission objecting to it at the (virtual) hearing, on the grounds that better sites could be found and that the permanent loss of a newly refurbished retail unit should be avoided. Although two councillors voted against, including Herne Hill ward’s Rebecca Thackray, the majority approved the application.

### 1 Chaucer Road, Lambeth 20/00480/FUL

At the end of May Lambeth approved an application for a new house, built on the site of garages. The site is in the Poets’ Corner conservation area. The Society had supported the proposal that uses a contemporary architectural idiom as a well-designed solution on a small site. The application was unanimously approved.

**Laurence Marsh**

## RE:CYCLING

The Highway Code states in Rule 64: “You MUST NOT cycle on the pavement” (their capitals). It is illegal under the Highways Act of 1835, you are liable to an on-the-spot fine and open yourself to a civil injury claim which it is unlikely that your insurance will cover. Eh?

The rules about using kids’ scooters on the pavement are not clear – probably they are legal if they travel at less than 4mph, and give way to pedestrians. The rules about electric scooters are clear – it is completely illegal to use them on either public pavements or the road.

In recent months the amount of cycling has increased, and the distinction between road and pavement become blurred with the requirements of social distancing, and the widespread introduction of “shared space” – mixing pedestrians with all form of transport. Nervous cyclists on the road have been confronted by fast-moving traffic, and nervous pedestrians have been confronted by cyclists on the pavement forcing them into the road. Gone are the days of cycling proficiency tests for young teenagers; in has come toddlers with dangerously ill-fitting

helmets and often little road sense.

About the only source of road space improvement money available to local authorities at the moment are for “COVID-19 Post-Lockdown Highway Schemes” – traffic-calming measures, and changes to encourage walking and cycling – for example Southwark’s scheme in Dulwich Village, and Lambeth’s scheme



on Shakespeare Road. So, lots of potential conflicts and accident potential – from elderly pedestrians knocked over to wobbly cyclists knocked down.

Experiments with rental schemes for electric scooters have been planned in

several areas in the Tees Valley – to work out how they could be introduced safely, checking out the insurance, licensing, age and safety implications. The limited trials are not going well – lots of vandalism, and hardly a representative cross-section of users. In the meantime sales in London are soaring, almost all being used entirely illegally and unlicensed on roads and pavements.

Current behaviour and practice are out of step with the law, and the likelihood of accidents only too obvious. The law should be changed to reflect current realities, and then should be enforced – including local speed limits and the use of powered vehicles on the pavements. Not much chance of either...

One solution would be to increase the extent of traffic-calming (road humps, chicanes or road markings) on residential roads. Both Lambeth and Southwark seem to be enthusiastic about this. However, this still leaves a dangerous mix of slow, fast and illegal traffic on the main roads.

**Bil Harrison**

# THE FUTURE OF DORCHESTER COURT

**D**orchester Court is a private estate that stands on top of Herne Hill. Designed by architects Kemp and Tasker and built by the Morrell brothers in 1935 it is much loved by its residents for its well thought out design that encourages community interaction, with its central garden, recreational roof spaces and many aesthetic qualities. Grade 2 listed in 2004, it has sadly been on the 'heritage at risk' register since the same year.

Bought in 1959 by the Feldman family it has been mismanaged and neglected to such an extent that at one point Lambeth Council had seven dangerous structure notices issued on it. It is a great pity that the first thing visitors to the estate notice is not the sleek lines of the buildings or the beautiful garden but the wooden props holding up balconies and windows and the general run down appearance.

In 2003, after two decades of asking for necessary maintenance works to be carried out, the Dorchester Court Residents' Association (DCRA) went to the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal to agree a scope of renovation works to save the buildings from further decline. Phase 1 of the agreed works (the electrics, heating and lifts) started in 2005 and was supposed to take 12 months to complete. It ended up taking nine years. Phase 2 (the balconies and windows) is yet to start.

Instead of simply fulfilling their repair obligations Manaquel Ltd, the Feldmans' holding company, have now submitted a planning application to build eight townhouses on the garage site and 16 flats on top of the eight blocks of flats, purportedly to fund the renovation works. However, upon examination of the application, details about the renovations are ominously scant and commitments

to ensure them are non-existent. On top of this Manaquel want to evacuate the blocks to make way for building works, an unnecessary action which will result in the



eviction of around 70% of the community.

Submitted at the beginning of lockdown, the planning application was a call to action for the community. A call to which it responded with the vigour, tenacity and coherence of a group well used to defending its rights against its landlord. Mobilised by the DCRA and the



Dorchester Court Tenants' Union a website was built telling the history of Dorchester Court ([www.dorchestercourtmatters.org](http://www.dorchestercourtmatters.org)), residents, both within the estate and the local neighbourhood, were canvassed for support in objecting to the application, and the story went out in both local and national press (all available on the website).

To date over 1000 objections have been submitted to Lambeth. These were

supported by detailed and compelling objections from the Herne Hill Society and the DCRA itself. MP Helen Hayes and Councillors Jim Dickson and Pauline

George have also objected with their knowledge of Manaquel's appalling treatment of the community and buildings.

The Dorchester Court community didn't stop there though. In July each year they usually hold their summer party. A hugely popular, day long event with food and drink and entertainment for all. Due to the Covid restrictions this was the first time in 10 years that it couldn't go ahead, so instead they put their efforts into

turning the estate into an art exhibition in the first weekend of July. It was a fantastic success! The lobbies and communal landings were filled with all kinds of art created by the many creative residents, both professional and amateur, including an artist in action in the central garden. The event was well attended and MP Helen Hayes even came by for a couple of hours, later tweeting "The super talented residents of Dorchester Court have produced an art exhibition. It's brilliant!" – demonstrating what a unique and valuable community there is at Dorchester Court.

The application is still with the Lambeth case officers and a date for a Planning Application Committee hearing is expected soon. If it's approved it will be a sad day for a diverse community that has pulled together and supported each other through a long struggle. If turned down, the work can begin on getting Dorchester Court renovated in a way that is sympathetic to both the community and heritage of this amazing estate.

**Ben Archard**

*Treasurer of the Dorchester Court Residents Association*

## HIGH STREET RESEARCH PROJECT

**O**ur attention was caught by an interesting research project publicised locally by the Dulwich & District U3A. The project is under the auspices of the U3A's National Research Committee and intended to cover the British High Street across the country. It wants to look at changing patterns in the High Street, in particular as accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It will need volunteers to record details from their local areas. The aim is to publish a report in 2022.

More details can be found here [u3asites.org.uk/Dulwich](http://u3asites.org.uk/Dulwich) and on the website at [u3alondonregion.wufoo.com](http://u3alondonregion.wufoo.com) where there is an online enrolment form for volunteers, or contact Carole Chapman at [carole.chapman@u3a.org.uk](mailto:carole.chapman@u3a.org.uk).

# LOCAL BUSINESSES – IS THERE A “NEW

In this world where coronavirus has made almost everything different and questionable, we wanted to see how some of our local shops and businesses had found ways to cope and what the future, still scarily unclear, might hold for them.

It's of vital concern for every community and neighbourhood. Our shops, restaurants, pubs and other businesses don't just sell us what we



*-12° ice cream shop*

need and provide important local employment for the owners and staff. Their lively variety determines the character of our neighbourhood and gives it a unique, vibrant but still fragile identity.

So the accelerating habit of shopping online, whether for food, household goods or takeaway meals, was an existential danger for all so-called “high street” businesses even before coronavirus hit us. But in March when the health scare became frighteningly real and all-encompassing, the nature of the threat entered another dimension. And, in one or two cases perhaps, became an opportunity too.

Restaurants and pubs were hit hard by the shutdown and did not begin to re-open until July, having faced acute problems over staff retention and a collapse in income while responsibility for rents and business rates continued unrelieved. Some of the bigger chains will be shedding costs by closing outlets. Will that include our Pizza Express?

**Park's Edge Restaurant's** owners had many a sleepless night but started a delivery service which kept existing and new customers aware of their high quality, interesting food; they then re-opened properly in early July, with mask-wearing staff and tables separated by Perspex screens. General Manager Claudia McKenzie says that they have been delighted by the support that their old customer base has given them, and by the willingness of new customers to book tables and

post enthusiastic recommendations online. **Llewelyn's**, the successful restaurant in Station Square, re-opened a little later. They have cleverly solved the problem of table spacing by colonising the outdoor space under the trees in front of the restaurant, Mediterranean-style, allowing them to accommodate many more diners – but only, of course, when the weather is fine (so “outside table booking at your own risk”). All our pubs closed; **The Florence** was even boarded up, a disturbing spectacle. It has been a relief in recent weeks to see customers happily drinking and chatting in the re-opened pubs, especially on the outside areas. Likewise in the coffee shops.

**Dough Bakehouse**, like the other arch-based food shops on Milkwood Road, was quick to introduce controlled entry and spaced queuing, alongside enhanced hygiene for food preparation and serving staff. In those first mad weeks, the long queues stretching up Milkwood Road were proof that demand for their bread would keep them in business.

On the other hand they lost out on all those customers who in the past popped in throughout the day for drinks, cakes and sandwiches either at the table or for takeaways. Indeed, as Carina and Rachelle Lepore explained to us recently, much of that business hasn't returned even though the rules have relaxed to allow seated customers to be served. The customers in the industrial estates further down Milkwood Road, who came in for their daily sandwiches; the mums and kids attending the dance school; the many regulars who came for breakfast croissants or sausage rolls: mostly they haven't returned yet.

It was a similar situation at **Seasons of England**, another well-established family business. Customers queued patiently and were rapidly schooled into the new discipline. Demand soared in those early months as the home delivery grocery systems more or less collapsed



*Llewelyn's outdoor terrace*

and the supermarkets struggled with stock shortages. But dealing in fresh and perishable products, Grant Fox and his family team had to

# NORMAL" YET?

wrestle with another problem: the wholesale markets shrank almost overnight. Many Covent Garden wholesalers stopped trading and the others were open only for a few hours in the middle of the night. Somehow we all managed to survive.

Like other food shops, off-licences were permitted to open even at the height of the lockdown. Liam Plowman at **Wild & Lees**, which specialises in interesting wines and craft beers and ciders, confesses they had a busy, indeed exhausting time. A couple of team members were unable to attend, so Liam and his other colleagues were fully stretched putting together the mixed cases they devised for home delivery as well as serving the regular stream of people queuing to get in to the little shop under the bridge. "It was like Christmas, but in a rather disturbing



*Liam Plowman, Wild & Lees*

way," he says. At the time of writing, things are more normal but the business is disadvantaged by the large-scale refurbishment works on the railway bridge looming over their window, and the resulting heavy traffic and removal of a useful pedestrian crossing at the nearby traffic lights. It might all be over by December, we think – just in time for the real Christmas.

Several retailers other shops offered home deliveries by bicycle and car, as did Minus 12°, our ice cream maker in the station, which is now back in correctly distanced full swing again.

## Is it normal yet?

Crazy times, but here was another resourceful family business that learned quickly how to cope with the new problems of queue management, supply chain, in-store hygiene and worried customers. At least, they can reassure themselves that they will know what to do if ever the infamous second wave and a new shutdown hit us (which we all hope won't happen of course). Meanwhile, are things back to "normal"? Too early to say, Grant admits. School holidays, followed in September



*Grant Fox, Seasons of England*

by the traditional holiday exodus of the child-free, means that no-one can really tell if the old ways are going to return until October.

Maybe the story here is that small businesses could often rely on loyal customers as well as on her own creativity. Hasan Ahmed, owner of **Herne Hill Dry Cleaners** up on the hill, found that when he reopened, his customers had saved up their dry-cleaning jobs rather than take them elsewhere. He puts this down to having a personal relationship with many loyal customers. For the present, turnover has recovered, but if people aren't going to return to their offices, will they need to have their business suits and shirts cleaned and laundered in the same way as before? And if people's jobs disappear once the initial furlough scheme ends and redundancies kick in, will dry-cleaning be one of the costs that drops out of the household budget?

## What does the future hold?

No-one knows, though opinions abound.

Some of this spring's and summer's fears will haunt the hospitality industry after the end of the government's successful Eat Out to Help Out scheme – though some establishments, including The Florence, introduced their own £10 discount scheme running through September.

The long-term impact of the pandemic is only beginning to work through all sectors. Redundancies on a painful scale are inevitable as the initial furlough scheme is due to end in October; some household incomes and consumer spending power will diminish or evaporate completely; nervousness about infection will increase as autumn slides into winter. Our resourceful local businesses will strain every nerve to survive. But the bills for rents and business rates will still need to be paid.

One phenomenon might help, though. If people remain reluctant to venture into the centre of London on public transport or are stuck in a "working from home" routine, they might still be happy to patronise trustworthy and familiar local businesses within safe walking distance of home.

Let us hope so, for the sake of our community and our businesses.

**Pat Roberts**

# THE SOCIETY'S PLANNING GROUP

**A**s a member of the Society's committee and responsible for co-ordinating its role in planning matters, I am sometimes asked why the Society concerns itself with planning and, more particularly, how we go about forming judgements on planning issues.

The answer to the first question is straightforward. The Society's constitution sets out as a primary objective the promotion in the Herne Hill area of "high standards of planning and architecture" and securing the "preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest". Such an objective is one that we share with numerous local amenity groups up and down the country.

As to the second question, the Society acts through a planning group. This is currently made up of seven individuals from a variety of backgrounds: thus three practising architects, one retired Head of Planning of a London borough, one former planner now a heritage advisor and architectural historian, one former local councillor and one retired lawyer. Herne Hill being split between Lambeth and Southwark, applications in the Herne Hill ward of the former and the Dulwich Village ward of the latter are monitored. By London standards this is a relatively small area, but it still produces a steady flow of applications. Monitoring in practice means filtering out the non-controversial before anything is referred to the wider planning group. Communication within the group is by email. The great majority of applications are not controversial, typical examples being rear ground-floor extensions and loft extensions with rear dormers. These now follow in almost every case a predictable pattern. In any event, many if not most such extensions today are carried out as "permitted development" (PD), not requiring full planning permission, which in practice means that we could not object even if we wanted to. Over recent years there has been increased relaxation of planning restrictions allowing wider development as PD. People seeking to use PD rights will almost always seek a Certificate of Lawful Development, which serves to protect them just in case it later turns out that full permission was in fact required. We have very occasionally challenged applications that in our view do not fall within PD parameters.

Herne Hill is an area with limited scope for major development schemes, unless you were to pull down a significant number of existing houses. This has not happened since the late 1960s, when small Victorian, mainly terrace houses were demolished and the multi-storey blocks on Dulwich Road took their place. That said, there are signs, so far on the fringes of our area, of growing pressure for high-density housing development, with the limited space available leading inevitably to heights far in excess of what constitutes the normal local building character. This is a subject discussed in the last issue of this Magazine, in particular in the context of the application, currently pending, for two towers at the northern end of Milkwood Road rising to no fewer than 29 and 20 storeys.

So how do we judge applications, whether for a tower block or a single-storey "granny annexe"? We look, first and foremost, at Lambeth and Southwark's own planning policies, as set out in their



Local Plans and supplemented by further published planning guidance. Sometimes it is necessary also to look behind local policies to the broader strategic policies of the London Plan and the overarching structure of the National Planning Policy Framework. There is a daunting amount of material to consider in these policies, which,

fortunately, becomes less daunting with familiarity. We will, for example, pay particular attention to policies on conservation areas and the preservation of heritage assets. Herne Hill not only enjoys Brockwell Park, all of which is a conservation area, it also has conservation areas covering Stradella/Winterbrook/Burbage Roads and shops on Half Moon Lane, the Casino/Sunray Estate around Red Post Hill, the Poets' Corner streets and the buildings on the Lambeth side at the foot of Herne Hill. The Society, I should add, strongly supports the creation of a new conservation area around Station Square. Then there are buildings with listed status conferred by Historic England, such as St Paul's Church, the Carnegie Library and Dorchester Court. And there are buildings with local listed status, such as the Quadrangle on Herne Hill and the disused dairy on Rosendale Road, the subject of a current development proposal and one that we support.

We would like to think that our two local authorities listen to what we say. It is of course satisfying to learn that an application to which we have objected has been refused. But would it have been refused in any case? This is something that is true of participation in all debate on affairs of public interest. But if you have something to say and can say it with relevance and cogency, then surely it is better to say it than stay silent. Moreover, when it comes to larger developments with more money at stake, there is a veritable industry in the provision of experts on whom developers can call to argue – sometimes with remarkable ingenuity – why the scheme satisfies every conceivable planning criterion! In such circumstances it is surely right that planning officers can also be exposed to another point of view – and one with no financial interest in the outcome.

No other local organisation concerns itself with planning decisions affecting our area. The Herne Hill Forum has a new and much improved website where topical planning matters are clearly featured. However, as the Forum acknowledges, the information is provided from this Society, since there is no group within the Forum focused on planning.

Planning is something that never stands still. In recent years there have been major changes designed in particular to encourage the building of more housing. This includes the controversial ability to add extra storeys on blocks of flats and to convert office accommodation to residential, in both cases without the need for planning permission. Now the Government wants to push through a completely new "simplified" planning system, which could hugely weaken the local democratic element, a crucial part of our planning system over the last 70 years. And what does a post-coronavirus world have in store for us? Will there be permanent changes in work patterns and how will this affect our built environment? Come what may, the need for the Society to express a voice in planning matters will not go away.

**Laurence Marsh**

# RUMER'S MEMORIES

As well as being a singer with a strong and wide-ranging list of recordings, a big following in the USA as well as the UK, a new album just out and a sweetly clear and lyrical voice, Rumer owns a vivid memory for people and happenings in Herne Hill. Read on, be fascinated and, perhaps, reminded.

First, though, understand that Rumer is her stage name by which she has been known as a singer since the start of her career. She is, in real life, Sarah Joyce and spent formative years of her life in Herne Hill, where she moved in 1998 after dropping out of art college in Devon. Older readers may remember her.

Not long after settling here, she found a job in Boland's Wine Bar on Half Moon Lane. Some residents will recall Boland's as a free and easy bar on the site (later, under different ownership, another wine bar, Number 22, until the flood) where Aitch, the hairdressers, now operates. (In those days, Pedders was still a Lloyds Bank branch.)

It was the start of an enduring fondness for the grittier but colourful and warm blooded aspects of Herne Hill which may have faded to the margins as gentility has encroached. Sarah also worked in Pullens, the restaurant near the station now trading very differently, after a thoroughgoing renovation and relaunch, as Llewelyn's, and also in The Fringe hair salon, which is still there, though under different management.

It was a time, she remembers, when you could see the chefs in their aprons going backwards and forwards from Pullens to Café Provençal with buckets of potatoes, because they used to share the potato-peeler machine. She has fond memories of Alan Gaunt, the proprietor of Pullens: a father figure to a lot of lost young souls, "including me", Sarah admits.

The Half Moon, pre-flood, was where she and her band La Honda sometimes played and where according to some legends she was "discovered" as a singer, at the same time keeping an affectionate eye on the friendly and sometimes needy characters that for her made Herne Hill a special place in those days.

Post-flood, amidst the twists and turns of the commercial negotiations and public campaigns to reopen the Half Moon, Sarah surprised herself by giving a crucial extra spin to what has become the dominant narrative of those times. The *Save the Half Moon* campaign had been exchanging tweets with Fullers on Twitter, as they battled to reinstate the iconic and much-loved music venue, to no avail. Let Sarah take up the story: "I chimed in here and there in support. I



remembered that on Jill, the bar manager's personal Facebook page, some months back she had posted a photo of the barred list from the pub, and it was really funny. I went immediately to her Facebook page and started searching back through her photos to find it. I found it, saved it, then I posted it on Twitter and tagged Fullers, wishing them luck with the pub. Then I watched in absolute amazement in real time as this list went viral. It was ping-ponging across the internet at lightning speed and being retweeted thousands and thousands of times a minute. The next morning it was in the *Metro*, *GQ*, the *Evening Standard* and it even made it on *Have I Got News for You*.

Jill has always been very caustically funny, and I was overjoyed that her 'barred list' had made it out there and brought laughter to so many! The week when the barred list – including Staring Pervert, Flat Cap Coke Fiend and, best of all, Tall Chavvy Fighting Idiot of Old - went viral was the happiest week of my life. Everyone thought it was hilarious, even though many of us knew that some of the stories behind the characters weren't actually funny at all. In fact many of them were very tragic and sad."

Several albums later, Sarah has now come back to south London after a sojourn working in the USA where in the last year or so she met the venerable Texan singer-songwriter Hugh Prestwood, the inspiration for her latest album *Nashville Tears*. She is happy



*Rumer at the Half Moon 2011*

to be back now among her old haunts, although much of course has changed. The scruffiness of Norwood Road's pavements surprises her, with shops unable, it seems, to master a dependable refuse collection. She is intrigued about the possible development of Brockwell Hall, provided it can be a community-friendly and inclusive enterprise. She is sad, as we are all, that there

are still so many empty units in Station Square. And she wishes Herne Hill had a relaxed wine bar again.

*Nashville Tears, the Songs of Hugh Prestwood – Rumer*  
[www.rumer.co.uk](http://www.rumer.co.uk)

**Pat Roberts**

# HERNE HILL'S SILENT STAR

Amongst the portrait vignettes that decorate the mural in the Station Underpass is one of Lillian Rich. Since I was responsible for asking the mural's artist, Victor Szepessy, to include her, an explanation is called for. Who was Lillian Rich and what is her link to Herne Hill? Wikipedia, that first port of call in any enquiry, tells us she was born in Herne Hill on 1 January 1900 and that she was an actress who appeared in 66 Hollywood films between 1919 and 1940. Her reputed birth in Herne Hill is widely echoed in other internet sources.

Except that more careful research shows she was not born in Herne Hill. She was indeed born on the very first day of the twentieth century, but at 20 Offley Road, Kennington. Neither was she born Lillian Rich. She was Lillian (the second 'l' was acquired later) Magenis, daughter of John Constantine Magenis and Theresa Magenis, formerly McGrail. Offley Road runs from the northern end of the Brixton Road and exits opposite the churchyard of St Mark's. The street remains in all essentials unchanged since Lillian, to use the subsequent spelling, was born there. Her father is described as a "comedian" on the birth certificate. The following year, in the census, he is a "professional vocalist" and the family of six (sharing the house with another family of four) appear under the surname Rich. By 1911 they have moved to 21 Hamilton Terrace, Shakespeare Road, the terrace (at the Coldharbour Lane end of the road) then separately numbered from the rest of the street. By now Lillian has two more siblings, a family of ten in a small terrace house.

Six years later on 23 August 1917, Lillian, aged 17, still resident at Shakespeare Road, is married at St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road. She uses the Magenis name, but her age is given as 21. The bridegroom is Lionel Edward Nicholson, known as "Leo", a Canadian in the Royal Naval Air Service. Father and daughter are both described as "music hall artistes". One can speculate that her father was against his daughter's



*Lillian Rich in The Golden Bed, 1925*

marriage, which, given her true age, would have needed his consent. Perhaps he saw Lillian, who by now had started to appear on the London stage, as valuable for her contribution to the family's income. I have



found no record of John Rich finding any fame as a music hall performer.

Lillian's father-in-law, a wealthy Winnipeg businessman, seems to have been smitten

by his son's bride and he gave the couple \$1000 for Lillian to try her luck in Hollywood, where the movie industry was growing apace and fast replacing the world of music hall. They arrived in 1919 and Lillian quickly found success. Hollywood churned out huge numbers of films in this period and, even allowing for the different tastes of 100 years ago and a style of acting with no human voice to enhance it, there are few that impress as memorable works of art. But few films had any such aspirations. Lillian, however, had a beauty and a presence that gave her films a distinct quality, whether as a femme fatale in Cecil B. de Mille's *The Golden Bed* or playing the comic stooge to Stan Laurel's clowning in *On the Front Page*. One can understand why her talent was regularly in demand for a few glittering years.

Lillian seems to have remained in contact with her family. There is a record of her crossing the Atlantic in 1928 not only with her husband (though it seems the marriage did not last much longer) but also with her sister Cecilia, whose home address is still Shakespeare Road, while Lillian and her husband give the Savoy Hotel as theirs. She made some low-budget talking pictures in England at Beaconsfield and Nettlefold Studios at this time, but her career was already on the wane. The next twenty years saw a decline from leading to supporting roles, to small uncredited parts. She seems to have been one of many actors who found it hard to make the transition from silent to talking pictures.

Members of Lillian's family remained in and around Herne Hill. Several were living at 37 Holmdene Avenue at the time of the war and later at 51 Pickwick Road in Dulwich. Lillian remained in California, becoming a US citizen in 1939 and dying at the age of 54. Not among the 2,690 star names on the sidewalks of Hollywood Boulevard, but Lillian Rich is rightly remembered on the mural close to the home of her youth.

**Laurence Marsh**



# TEACHING IN LOCKDOWN

It is now the beginning of a new school year, with students finally stepping back into classrooms. Many teachers nationally will be breathing a sigh of relief that the experience of lockdown teaching has (hopefully) come to an end.

At Charter North Dulwich the lockdown all happened very quickly. More and more teachers and students began to come down with the symptoms of the virus, and classrooms seemed half-empty. It quickly became clear that Charter, with other local schools, was going to have to close. Teams hurriedly drew up plans to support students, but in reality we were at the beginning of an enormous learning curve.

Getting to grips with online teaching had to happen extremely quickly. At Charter we set all our lessons through our virtual learning network, but this was a tool designed for setting homework and not teaching all our students remotely. The first few weeks became an exploration of Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and Loom video recording, as we hurriedly tried to work out what would be most effective. It did create some lovely moments - teaching my A-level students in a Teams virtual classroom worked surprisingly well. At other times I did feel like my days were spent churning out PowerPoints that could be followed at home. Providing online feedback was also often tedious.

The main thing that was lacking was that face-to-face interaction with the students, which is why we all went into teaching in the first place. Going into school to support the children of key workers did provide this to some extent, but in reality this was largely monitoring students while they completed their online work. I really began to miss my classroom! The students felt this even more intensely than us, particularly at the start of lockdown when there were restrictions on meeting friends. Our phone-calls home to tutees often revealed that students were struggling badly with the isolation and demands of home learning. Others, though, flourished; including one of my students who made hundreds of pounds through her own tie-dye T-shirt business in a matter of weeks!

We're incredibly proud of the way our students dealt in the circumstances, particularly those who are suffering the exam results fiasco. Though school won't be the same for the immediate future, with "bubbled" year groups kept isolated from each other as well as possible on the site, it is at least a step towards the resumption of normal service. I'll just be happy to be back in the classroom and not staring at a screen. Let's hope it lasts. Fingers crossed.

**Dan Townsend**

*Subject Leader for History  
The Charter School*

## A BROCKWELL SUMMER



Sophie: *Good girl, Bella.*

Bella: *You must be barking!*

*Sophie Zarod-Hall and her cockapoo.*



# NOTES FROM LA FRANCE PROFONDE

“And have there been any cases of Covid in La Bréchoire?” I asked. “Yes, one lady, ‘Madame X’, sadly passed away in a care home in Rouillac. Mind you, she was 102.”

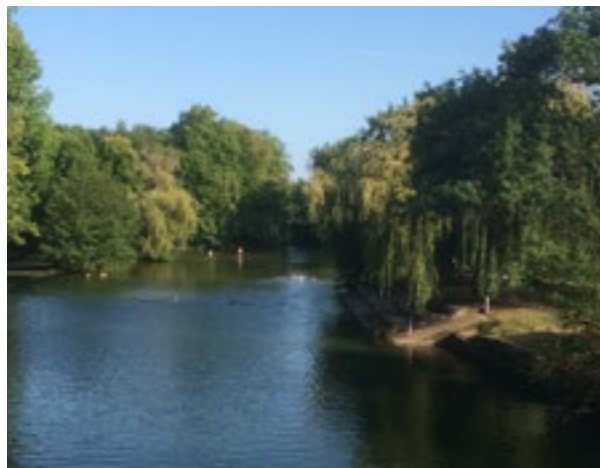
As I write (mid-August) France has recorded well over 200,000 cases of Covid-19, with 2,500 or more new cases every 24 hours: the highest daily rise since lockdown was lifted in May. Nevertheless, deaths have remained at a low level. The reason for this second wave seems to be that young people on holiday are catching it from one another, but are only rarely exhibiting serious symptoms. So if you want to stay safe, avoid young people like the plague, as the cliché has it.

It would be accurate to state that rural Charente has not experienced a deadly wave of infections. In the departmental capital of Angoulême one might have reason to take precautions, but even there the situation has been nothing like as bad as in large cities such as Paris, Marseille or Bordeaux, where the wearing of face coverings, even in the open air, is now de rigueur.

As I have no desire to contract Covid, this is a pretty safe place to be, staying in my own holiday home in a hamlet of no more than 40 inhabitants. Social distancing is easy here in Charente, where you can go all week without meeting another soul.

Although infection rates locally have been very low, that’s not to say that there hasn’t been disruption. The initial lockdown in France was more severe than in the UK. Just a short drive to buy food (there are no shops within walking distance of the village) required people to fill in a form in case they were stopped by the police. One couple whom I know well were unable to see their daughter, who works over 100 km away in Bordeaux, for four months.

I get the impression that matters have been pretty well handled so far. Mask wearing, compulsory in shops and restaurants, has been universally respected. Even the local farm shop has instigated a one-way system, with hand-washing on entry. Queuing outside the pâtisserie rather than inside is hardly a major issue. In certain respects, from my point of view, it’s business as usual. As in England, the weather has been extremely hot and dry, so nearly everyone has chosen to eat and drink outside.



Nevertheless, some activities have been curtailed. August in France means family holidays, and everything is scheduled to take place when people can get out and about in groups. For example, there is a series of evening markets. At Saint-Cybardeaux, a few kilometres from where I am staying, once a year local producers of meat, cheeses, wines, bread and vegetables set up stalls around the village square. Normally there is a big barbecue on the go, chickens roasting on spits and a well patronised buvette. People

buy what takes their fancy from these producers, then sit at shared trestle tables to enjoy a long, socially-undistanced supper. It is a good way to make friends and support local farmers, and is one of the highlights of the summer. Whilst the market did go ahead this year, it was poorly attended and there were no tables. I stayed for 15 minutes, bought a few items to show willing, then went home. It was not the same. July’s Blues Passion festival at Cognac was cancelled. Nor were there any concerts at the local abbey church.

Rouillac swimming pool has been closed, a real loss in this heat, but there are other places to cool off. About 15 minutes away is Les Gours, a natural *plan d'eau* fed by springs, with a sandy beach. But when it gets busy - which it certainly is now - the water can be a little murky, and I prefer to drive a bit further to Jarnac (proud home of Courvoisier) and jump in the river. With temperatures in the 30s most days, it’s a pleasant way to spend an hour or two.

What does the future hold? As of yesterday Britons returning from France will have to go into quarantine. This is a nuisance but hardly a tragedy as far as I am concerned. But my wife’s cousin, on the point of coming out to a villa in Provence with his young family, will have to think again. It’s another blow to French tourism. Many shops and restaurants here are struggling to stay in business. Without us Brits I am sure many would have closed years ago. Our lives are so entwined that there can be very few people - in any country - who have not been, or will not soon be affected by this pandemic. With the situation changing from day to day, this piece may look very out-of-date by the time you read it.

**Colin Wight**



## 100 YEARS AGO

Clearly Herne Hill Station, but can one date the photograph precisely? Cars and clothing help, but in this case we also have - on the left - the Cinema Grand. Almost certainly the films of local girl Lillian Rich (see p. 16) would have been shown here, but the film advertised in this photograph predates her films by a few years - *Ti Ling Lang*, a silent drama starring Sessue Hayakawa and Doris Pawn. Hayakawa became the first great star of Asian descent in Western cinema. One of his final roles was in *Bridge over the River Kwai* in 1957. *Ti Ling Lang* dates to 1920, making our photograph exactly 100 years old.



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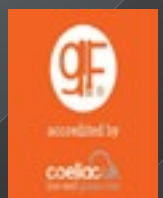
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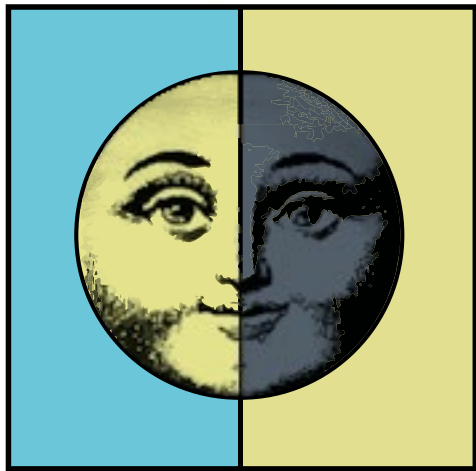
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