

HERNE HILL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY ❧ ISSUE 158 ❧ Winter ❧ 2023



HERNE HILL'S BIG SMOKE

► See pages 4/5

WARTIME MEMORIES OF RUSKIN PARK

► See pages 12/13

HOLMES IN HERNE HILL

► See page 17



The Magazine of the Herne Hill Society



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Swings, springs, slides and climbs

The Ruskin Park playground has had a major refit. Children – and their parents – will be delighted to see this hugely popular asset in the park back in action, resurfaced and now equipped with a whole lot of new equipment.

While in the park it is also good to see the information board



recently installed near the Mendelssohn sundial in Ruskin Park. The sundial's careful restoration and removal to the Labyrinth Garden two years ago has made an important contribution to the history and heritage of the park, something reflected in the Excellence Award made by the Society to the Friends of Ruskin Park earlier this year.

Brockwell Hall – *work under way*

We have reported in recent issues of this magazine about the ambitious plans for Brockwell Hall. So it is very encouraging to see that work is now well under way. There will be many who miss their visit to the café and sitting in the sun on the terrace outside, but the transformative work on the



Hall promises something which will breathe new life into the place. In the course of the work in the stable yard area there was also the excitement of discovering a domed, subterranean ice-house, the pre-industrial answer to refrigeration, and a well. They had been covered up and forgotten. When the Hall re-opens it is planned to

feature such aspects of the history of the house as part of the refurbished interior.

Why is the time stuck at 12 o'clock on the clock-tower? Nine years ago, thanks to the generosity of many local people whose donations were then supplemented by Lambeth, the clock was repaired and the cast iron tower cleaned and repainted. But it seems



The clock-tower in 2014

that there are serious long-term problems which need more radical solutions, particularly to deal with the ongoing problem of rust. And the clock mechanism itself is, after 126 years, showing its age and is, not surprisingly, reluctant to continue to operate reliably out of doors in all weathers. Brockwell Park Community Partners, who are working with Lambeth on the Brockwell Hall restoration are now considering the replacement of the old mechanism with an electrical movement and a major restoration of the tower by the specialists responsible for restoring the "Little Ben" outside Victoria Station. And the old mechanism from 1897 would be preserved and exhibited in the refurbished Hall. There would be no change to the outer appearance of the clock-tower.

Transport Notes

Apology

In the Summer/Autumn Issue 157 of this Magazine, these Transport Notes showed some scepticism about two items on consultation. One item referred to the proposals put forward by the rail companies to close most rail station ticket offices in London (apart, strangely, from Herne Hill). In the event, the overwhelmingly negative response to the proposals caused Transport Focus and London TravelWatch to persuade the rail companies to abandon their plans – a triumph for consultation. But staff shortages continue to result in frequent unexpected closures to many smaller ticket offices.

Another item referred to the London Borough of Southwark consultation on the wider introduction of Controlled Parking Zones to cover the Dulwich area. In the event, the overwhelming opposition to the proposals for the Dulwich area has led to their abandonment in their original blanket form. But piecemeal new parking restrictions and charges are still planned.

Transport in the King's Speech

Despite much talk of rail system reform, and of reviewing the implementation of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, nothing definite made it into the Government's legislative plans for the next year.



Still no proposal for controlling the illegal use of private e-scooters on public roads and footpaths. The main proposed transport-related legislation is to regulate the three-wheeled pedicabs operating in the West End.

Lambeth low traffic initiatives

The Lambeth Healthy Route segregated cycleway along Rosendale Road has been extended to the South Circular, with the roundabout at the junction with Turney Road removed. Phase 3 continuing south across the South Circular is currently with TfL for detailed design.

The traffic restriction of Railton Road near Herne Hill should by now be remodelled, much to the relief of users of the 322 bus which has been diverted during the works.

Rail fare price rise for 2024

By now, the average price rise for rail fares in 2024 should be announced. While promised to be below 9%, at the time of writing it was widely expected to be 8%.

Buses through Herne Hill

After the strikes affecting the 3 and 68 bus services in November and December 2022, performance through 2023 for all services through Herne Hill has been reasonable. The bus mileage operated has been very close to the minimum standard, while the unreliability (average excess waiting time more than expected) has been generally better than the minimum standards set. But the 37 service buses still seem to be somewhat erratic... (Nothing someone says before the word 'but' really counts).

Bil Harrison

Herne Hill's Big Smoke



A major fire erupted in Herne Hill late on the night of 7 September, at a waste facility on Shakespeare Road. The fire brigade arrived at the scene shortly after midnight. Eventually over 100 firefighters were called in to master the fire, in the course of which the metal roof of the building caught fire and largely collapsed. In the end, 15 fire engines were needed. The brigade's hoses consumed so much water over the extended course of the incident that some houses on Shakespeare Road ran dry.

No fire without smoke

But that was only the start of the problem. Although the flames themselves, embedded in a muddled tangle of unidentified materials, were visibly extinguished within hours, the site smouldered on, continuing to generate dramatic clouds of dark smoke which drifted all across the neighbouring streets, sometimes depositing large flakes of burnt matter on roofs, gardens and roads. Worse, the fumes were acrid and irritating. The Fire Brigade (still on site and hosing down the mess), along with Lambeth Council, advised people to stay inside and keep windows and doors closed. Some residents, particularly close to the fire on Shakespeare Road, were understandably alarmed for their health; some moved out into different accommodation. The council offered some temporary respite spaces at the town hall. It was several days before the smoking wreck was fully dampened down.

More generally, and across a wider area as the smoke drifted over the railway tracks towards Milkwood Road, Fawnbrake Avenue and neighbouring streets, residents were asking themselves whether the smoke was not just unpleasant but possibly even toxic. No-one seemed to know for certain, although informally the Fire Brigade, in liaison with the Environment Agency and the UK Health Security Agency advised that the air quality risks to the public from this incident were "low" if public health advice (such as keeping windows and doors closed) was followed. UKSA advice was that due to the nature of the fire it could be expected that "normal products of combustion" would be present in the smoke which had the potential to cause short-lived respiratory irritation, but the consensus was that the fumes were not

identifiably dangerous, though perhaps troubling for people with pre-existing breathing difficulties. The fact that no-one – including the Environment Agency, which nominally supervises sites like this – seemed to have a list of the materials now smouldering on the site was obviously a problem for all concerned. That, and the fact that no-one knew how the fire had started. On top of which, there seemed to be a total lack of fire hazard and other safety precautions in place. An investigation was quickly opened but has not yet (at the time of writing) published any findings.

The ownership of the site appears to have changed hands more than once in recent years, and the management seem to have remained conspicuously silent during the whole episode. So their attitude to the fire and the future use of the site remains a mystery.

Could it happen again?

But then for many residents a wider question quickly emerged: after the inevitable inquest and site clearance, would it be rebuilt and re-authorised to again receive unidentified and possibly hazardous materials, exposing the neighbourhood to further risks?

We put it to Lambeth Council that in the light of what had happened, it would surely be irresponsible to license the restoration of the waste disposal site, particularly since the site had already been earmarked and approved (subject to certain conditions) for redevelopment as a residential housing site.

Rebuild or prohibit? It's not that easy

Lambeth's carefully worded response exposed a number of complex issues. Firstly, it seems, you can't simply prohibit a waste site and switch its use to residential without finding an alternative location "... the [Shakespeare Road] site is one of a number of designated waste sites within Lambeth. These waste sites are safeguarded for waste uses through Lambeth's Local Plan ... redevelopment of safeguarded waste sites for other uses will only be supported if compensatory waste capacity is provided elsewhere within the borough or if waste capacity is re-provided on-site. This is to ensure Lambeth can continue meeting its waste needs."

Lambeth then said that planning permission was granted on 21 December 2021 for demolition of the existing waste transfer station and redevelopment of the site to provide three blocks ranging from five to eleven storeys to provide 218 residential units (class C3)

with associated landscaping. However, they explained that the planning permission was granted subject to a planning obligation requiring the applicant to provide replacement waste capacity elsewhere in the borough, with a potential location being another safeguarded waste site at Windsor Grove in West Norwood. Meanwhile the



Shakespeare Road site remained a safeguarded waste site despite the fire.

The proposed move of the waste site to West Norwood has been strongly opposed, understandably, by that neighbourhood, but their objections were overruled on appeal to the Secretary of State. However, a number of conditions remain still to be met before works can begin on the Windsor Grove site and, Lambeth tell us, "At the time of writing, no application submissions have been received seeking discharge of these conditions."

So whilst planning consent for the move of the waste site to West Norwood now seems to be legally in place (thus freeing up the Shakespeare Road site for three blocks of flats), there remains an important condition in planning law which prevents the start of this desired development until a separate development has been completed on other land not controlled by the applicant. Planning experts call this a "Grampian" condition. Progress on this seems to depend on the site's owners pressing ahead to satisfy the requisite conditions for the move. They don't seem to be in any hurry on this. Are they playing a long and cunning game, or are they just baffled?

So it's all a bit in the air.

But there's hope

Lambeth then added that "Officers advise that there is no right to re-build the premises, and the erection of a replacement building at the site will require planning permission. An application for planning permission would be assessed against the planning policies of the Council's Development Plan and other material considerations ... Considerations would include matters relating to air quality, noise, transport and fire safety amongst other matters ... there would be consultation of adjoining and nearby residents and businesses in accordance with statutory requirements and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement."

Spreading the word

This incident has highlighted a separate issue. Some active residents were able to use social media to capture updates from the Fire Brigade and spokespeople for the council and from our MP – updates which they could then share with neighbours through social media. This proved to be vital. But it revealed a deficit in our local and perhaps national warning systems. True enough, the risks in this particular incident turned out to be low to moderate. But what if there had been a real danger to residents' health or lives? Through no-one's particular fault, guidance was distributed in a haphazard fashion and to a random audience. By no means everyone engages with Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter, and if the email system were to be used, would the authorities (Council, emergency services, Environment Agency etc) have everyone's email indexed by street or locality? We assume not.

We know that people living alongside those rivers and waterways liable to seasonal flooding are registered with the Environment Agency and have opted to receive text warnings, at the different levels of emergency, when the flooding risk rises and begins to threaten property or even life. But on a wider basis could such a system be developed by local government or some other agencies – and might it then be susceptible to misuse for political purposes? Big issues, for another day.

Pat Roberts

PLANNING & LICENSING

The Society’s planning group has commented on the following matters:

22 Hinton Road, Lambeth 23/00940/FUL

We have drawn the attention of Lambeth’s Enforcement team to the alteration of the ground floor glazed frontage of this former shop and replacement with a brick wall. The work does not comply with a permission that had been given for an alteration retaining a glazed frontage.

71 Herne Hill Road, Lambeth

We had reported to Lambeth’s Enforcement team the failure to build an extension in accordance with the permission (20/01670/FUL) that had been given. In October Lambeth informed us they were issuing an enforcement notice.

55 Hollingbourne Road, Southwark 23/AP/2210 and 23/AP/2632

We objected to a proposed rear extension dormer extension on grounds of its excessive scale, dominating the original building and its ungainly bulk failing to integrate with its surroundings. The amenity of its immediate neighbour at 57 Hollingbourne Road and of houses on Warmington Road and Holmdene Avenue was unacceptably affected in terms of privacy and outlook. Our concern was reflected in objections submitted from neighbouring houses. A revised application removed the balcony at the end of the dormer, but the fixed window in its place proposed a window that was significantly larger than in the original proposal and, if anything, increased the sense

of overlooking over neighbouring houses with a consequent loss of privacy for those houses and harm to the amenity they would reasonably expect to enjoy. The size and appearance of the window was also out of keeping with the character of windows used in the houses in this neighbourhood. A decision is pending.

44 Stradella Road, Southwark 23/AP/2324

We objected to an application to introduce a hard standing for car parking (where previously there was none) in a front garden within the Stradella Conservation Area (CA). We pointed to the emphasis in the CA Appraisal on the detrimental erosion of the leafy character of the area through front gardens being used for parking and its particular mention of the heritage value of pollarded limes in front gardens. In this case half of the limes in the front garden would be removed. We have also written to the Dulwich Estate objecting, the house being within the Scheme of Management. A decision is pending.

74 Red Post Hill, Southwark 23/AP/2801

We objected to an application which included a proposal to introduce a hard standing for car parking (where previously there was none) covering some three-quarters of a front garden within the Sunray/Casino Conservation Area. We again drew attention to the very specific guidance in the Conservation Area Appraisal which states: “Hard standing in front gardens is not appropriate to the character of the estate”. The application has now been withdrawn.

Laurence Marsh

Membership Renewal for 2024

We hope you are enjoying your Herne Hill Magazine. Without your subscriptions there would be no Magazine and none of the Society’s other activities would be possible. So we very much hope you will renew your subscription in January.

The annual membership rates remain unchanged again for 2024:
Standard household membership is £10.00
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- Renew online at www.hernehillsociety.org.uk
Click on the ‘JoinOnline Now!’ button on the home page.
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However you choose to pay, we are grateful for your continued loyalty and support.

If you have any queries please write to the Membership Secretary at membership@hernehillsociety.org.uk

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Shops & Business News

Christopher's Bakery

A change of ownership was recently announced at this successful, high-end bakery at 145 Half Moon Lane, which was opened some 10 years ago by, yes you guessed it, Christopher Garner and his wife Suanne. In an amicable transfer, the new owners are another couple, Tibi Negoita and Mihaela Ene. They are not strangers to the shop or the neighbourhood; from its earliest days, Christopher's has been stocking their cakes and baked delicacies, which from now on will be made on the premises along with the familiar artisan breads. Owners Christopher and Suanne are retiring to live a quieter life but will stay on hand with support and advice.

West 16th

After many months of restoration and building, this smart and surprisingly spacious new café opened in November at 137 Half Moon Lane on the corner of Holmdene Avenue. It will open every



day from 8am, and on Wednesday to Saturday it will stay open till 9pm to offer evening snacks and wine and also "Family Dinner" – a limited but changing menu of simple freshly prepared food (including vegetarian options) at affordable prices (with children's options). In addition to a varied programme of workshops and events, owner/chef Zita Steyn, who has a background in teaching cooking to children, plans to start cookery classes for children and adults after the Christmas holidays.

www.west16th.co.uk

Seasons of England

A familiar presence in Herne Hill for over 50 years, this family-owned greengrocers, run by Grant Fox and his family, sadly closed this autumn. Before the radical changes in what is now known as Station Square, they ran a traditional shop with fruit and vegetable stalls spilling out into Railton Road. The rebuilding of the units there by Network Rail meant a move to Milkwood Road the other side of the railway track, which initially worked for them; though like many shops they were then severely impacted by the Covid lockdown. A rent increase compelled a move to a smaller arch on Milkwood Road but even that proved unsustainable – along with changes in food shopping habits. Herne Hill now has no fresh fruit and vegetable shop.

... But some things, thankfully, stay the same. Too many to list them all this time but these are some of the important long-running fixtures in our retail scene:

Artemidorus

This tiny and memorable shop at 27b Half Moon Lane had originally opened as Half Moon Graphics around 35 years ago when Amanda Walbank bought it and opened the present business in 1991. Surviving Herne Hill's two notorious floods, she continues to sell carefully chosen gift items from predominantly British artists and makers, now with some mid-century items from both British and Scandinavian producers.



Brockwell Art Services

Still based at 232-234 Railton Road, Jim Davidson has been providing bespoke picture framing services for over 40 years: the business was established in 1979.

Brockwell Veterinary Surgery & Pet Shop

They've been here on Railton Road (now Station Square) for over 30 years.

Dickson Off Licence

The old sign painted on the brick arch demonstrates that 296



Milkwood Road has been an off-licence for very many years. Back in the day (the 1950s) it was C. Morley & Co., Wine, Spirit & Beer Merchants, 'established 1875'. And it has been run by the (related) Samuel and Dickson families for one

or two generations. It's two decades since the present manager, George Samuel Dickson, personally took over in 2003. But retirement beckons, and the lease is running down in a year or two.

The Flower Lady

Elaine Partleton, lodged in the corner of Station Square, has a strong and loyal following which supported her successfully in 2018 when Network Rail threatened to demolish her shop to make way for an electrical sub-station. It was back in 2007 when she started selling flowers from a traditional market barrow outside the Half Moon Pub. Her search for safe and permanent premises led her through many a challenge until in 2008 she was able to take over her present shop, previously a men's barbers but originally a Victorian coal merchant.

Herne Hill Builder Centre

What would we do without them? And they've been here 17 years. One of the most useful and best located shops in Herne Hill, where Jay Pindoria and his ever helpful staff can always find what you need.

Pat Roberts

A Key to the stable block?

Ruskin Park's stable block has stood boarded up and increasingly derelict for well over a decade. In 2014 a Lottery-funded appraisal looked at restoration and future use, but, as ever, lack of funding proved to be the problem. So Lambeth's decision in October to allocate a sum of £500,000 towards restoration of the building comes as very welcome news. It is described as an "initial payment" for refurbishment for lease as a café, bookshop and centre for environmental and community activities, this being the use strongly favoured in public consultation in the past. So one sincerely hopes that if more funding is required – as experience of such projects tells us will surely be the case – it will be found. Councillor Deepak Sardiwai tells us that he will be pressing Lambeth for a further allocation and encouraging Council officers to explore other funding possibilities.

The stable block is a very rare survivor from the days when Denmark Hill, from the late 18th century onwards, became lined with spacious houses, the homes of wealthy merchants and their families. It belonged to No.172 although closer to the neighbouring house at No.174 – the house where Felix Mendelssohn stayed in 1842 (see page 3 above). Identifying the precise house before street numbering was introduced and before the 1841 census is problematic, but one of the earliest, if not the first, residents of No. 172 could well have been the Key family, who made their fortune from wholesale stationery. Sir John Key became Lord Mayor of London in 1830.



The old stable block is locally listed by Lambeth and is an attractive building with distinct character, whose exterior retains its essential historic features. With a possible Key in its history, we hope that its future potential can now at last be unlocked!

Another addition –

Last year, issue #154 of the Magazine featured on its front cover a striking photograph by Colin MacInnes of work proceeding at "Higgs Yard", the Peabody housing development at the foot of Herne Hill Road. It is the biggest building project in Herne Hill's wider area since Meath House and the two tower blocks on Dulwich Road went up more than 50 years ago. In an article Colin examined the changing face of the area around Higgs Yard since the railways arrived in the 1860s and predicted more change to come, not least in the form of tall buildings.

One clear change has already arrived. The Higgs Yard development, including its 16-storey tower and eight-storey blocks on Herne Hill Road, is nearing completion, and the marketing of the one-, two- and three-bedroom flats has begun. The name Higgs Yard appears very prominently on the glossy marketing material. Peabody obviously want the name firmly lodged in people's minds. But, firstly, who was Higgs and what went on in his yard?

There were in fact two of them, Frederick Higgs and Henry Frederick Higgs, born in 1858 and 1865 respectively. Henry was the son of the very successful, Lambeth-born builder William Higgs (1824-1883) and Frederick was his cousin, the son of William's brother George. Both Henry and Frederick were apprenticed to William Higgs, but later chose to branch out on their own, forming in the 1880s the F & HF Higgs partnership with their building yard at "Station Works", Hinton Road. The Peabody development now covers all the yard, plus the site of a number of houses that used to stand on Herne Hill Road until demolished after the war. When William Higgs retired, rather than leave his business wholly in the hands of his oldest son, also William Higgs, he formed a partnership with the builder Joseph Hill. That became in time Higgs & Hill Ltd, one of the country's biggest building contractors in the last century, now part of major Dutch builders, Royal BAM Group.

F & HF Higgs seem to have concentrated on South London projects and were responsible for such 1890s buildings as the Tate Library at Brixton and Bermondsey Library (now a Buddhist meditation centre). Henry Higgs loved horses and had a passion for carriage driving, retiring from the business in his 50s, while Frederick was more studious, a keen antiquarian and continued to work until his death.

The housing association, formerly the Peabody Trust, today simply Peabody, grew out of the philanthropy of George Peabody (1795-1869), an anglophile American financier who from 1837 took up permanent residence in London. In his later years he gave away huge sums in the United States to good causes, especially in the educational field, to include schools, libraries and museums. In 1862 he gave the sum of £150,000 to provide housing for the "artisans and labouring poor of London", a sum increased to £500,000 by the time of his death (several hundred million in today's terms). The first Peabody block of flats opened in Spitalfields in 1864. It needed the reform of local government at the end of the 19th century to make possible social housing provided by public authorities, the first

to Herne Hill's backyard



The Higgs site cleared for development 2020

council estate being the Boundary Estate in Bethnal Green built by the London County Council and officially opened by the Prince of Wales in 1900 – now much admired for its design quality and layout and Grade II listed in 2007.

So might Higgs Yard be similarly regarded in 100 years from now? An important criterion for listing is scarcity, in two respects: the building is a scarce example because it has survived while so much else has perished, and it has inherent qualities that make it exceptional. Judged on that basis Higgs Yard is probably an unlikely candidate for future listing. Like mushrooms after rain residential blocks of this general type have been sprouting up all over London in recent years, as local planners seek to meet the need for more housing, especially housing that is affordable, and developers seek to profit therefrom.

Housing developments today show a steep rise in “densification”, i.e. fitting more dwelling units onto smaller sites. This can only be done by building upwards. Higgs Yard is such an example and one reason the Society, through its planning group, objected to the planning application. The predominant character of Loughborough Junction and the northern fringe of Herne Hill is one of two- or three-storey, occasionally four-storey, buildings, but nothing approaching the eight storeys on Herne Hill Road, let alone the 16 storeys for the tower. But now the precedent is established. At some point it may be joined by a nearby 13-storey tower to be built on the narrow site of the Hero of Switzerland pub on Loughborough Road, though nothing has happened since Lambeth allowed the scheme in 2019 – apart from the closure of the pub, now a very sorry sight. Also still undeveloped is the industrial site between Wanless Road and the railway. A proposal for two towers rising to 29 and 20 storeys came to nothing two years ago, but whatever does come will be certain to dwarf the Victorian terraces lying at its feet.

Financing such developments as Higgs Yard depends on a

substantial proportion of the flats being sold on the open market. At Higgs Yard, of the total of 134 flats 68 are for sale on the open market on 250-year leases, while 38 flats are available for sale as shared ownership, with 17 as affordable rent and 11 as social rent. Since shared ownership (where the buyer purchases a share of the flat and pays rent on the remaining proportion at a lower than market rate) counts as “affordable” this arrangement falls within Lambeth’s planning policies, devised to provide some protection from development being wholly driven by market forces. Housing associations such as Peabody have increasingly come to fill a role once the preserve of local authorities and in doing so their assets have grown in value – Peabody currently has an asset base of £8.3 billion and is responsible for 107,000 homes in London and the Home Counties. Housing in London is a hugely complex subject, but ultimately it is central government that controls outcomes. Financial constraints on local government have meant that housing associations have come to play this greater role. They are now sometimes criticised for being too commercially minded and losing sight of their social objective, but they would argue that without being commercially minded they cannot fulfil their social objectives. And it is worth noting here that Peabody’s current annual subsidy



Seen from Herne Hill Road today

for their social rents amounts to £621m.

Higgs Yard is described in the unique language of sales-talk as “nestled in the beating heart of SE24 ... a mere stone’s throw away from trendy Brixton and fashionable Herne Hill” and how it contributes to the “growing South London skyline where culture, transport and community meet”. One place where transport and community will definitely be meeting is Loughborough Junction station, where an upgrade is long overdue but none is envisaged (it has, for example, no step-free access). This was another concern raised in objections to the Higgs Yard scheme. So spare a thought for its new residents as they try to squeeze their way from overcrowded platforms onto overcrowded trains.

Laurence Marsh

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The Quadrangle ... a new owner

The highly distinctive building at the top of Herne Hill known as The Quadrangle is one we last featured in this magazine more than two years ago. Edmund Bird reported how the building had joined the ranks of listed buildings in Herne Hill. And three years earlier (issue #143) he had described the interesting origins of The Quadrangle, built in 1911 by the South London Provident Society for women who were civil servants, teachers, lecturers or similar, or those that had retired from these professions. It sought to answer a pressing need for safe and affordable accommodation for the growing number of educated single women in white collar jobs. A further wing was added after the First World War. It is a building with an important historic resonance, with links to women's suffrage and social and economic emancipation.

Ownership of the building passed from the original provident society some years ago and the restriction of the accommodation to female residents ended. However, the majority of residents today are women. Some have lived at The Quadrangle for more than 30 years. The nature of the building, its modest scale with studio flats linked by balustraded galleries, helps to create a strong sense of community. The extensive garden land at the back also provides an invaluable communal outdoor space, one that no modern development would consider viable.

In March of this year the Lexadon Property Group announced that they had acquired The Quadrangle.

Lexadon is a company owned by Jerrard (Jerry) Knight and his wife. Over the last 40 years the Knights have built up a substantial portfolio of properties, centred in Brixton but extending more widely into adjoining areas. This is Lexadon's first acquisition in Herne Hill. Lexadon has both commercial and residential lettings.

Concerns were first raised when Lexadon started work on making interior alterations to several flats prior to submitting the required planning applications. After intervention from Lambeth Council the works were stopped. Subsequently



planning permission was applied for three vacated flats but these applications have now been withdrawn. Another application, for restoration of the galleries and their balustrades was approved by Lambeth in August 2022, before Lexadon acquired the property. There is no doubt

that these repairs are long overdue, maintenance of the property having been neglected over a considerable period. Despite safety concerns being raised by the residents there are still no signs of repairs being undertaken or planned, sections of the wooden balustrade are rotten and unstable, and areas of concrete have started to fall from the underside of the balcony.

There are a number of residents who are long leaseholders, but the majority have periodic tenancies that offer very limited protection. Some tenants have recently been offered new contracts, but their rent has dramatically increased, forcing some who have lived in this tight knit community for many years to leave. The new rents demanded by Lexadon may well be in line with the market value of other flats in the area, but the rent has been increased prior to any repairs or renovation, and the

condition of some flats is poor. The leaseholders are waiting to hear how their service charges will be calculated and managed, and with so many structural repairs needed these costs will also steeply rise.

Listed buildings do present particular problems in terms of their maintenance and adaptation. Ideally, they need owners who show an understanding of the particular qualities of the building and how the building can be made

to work in the best way for its occupants, which is not necessarily the same thing as working in the best way for the building owner. A balance should be struck. In this case it is difficult not to look at another listed building, a stone's throw away from The Quadrangle, namely Dorchester Court. There one finds a sorry story of neglect over decades, of disregard for residents' safety and health and a contentious planning application that remains undecided after more than three years while the building continues to decay. Such a fate for The Quadrangle has to be avoided.



THE 2023 HERNE HILL SOCIETY EXCELLENCE AWARDS

HERITAGE/HISTORY CATEGORY

Winner

Friends of Ruskin Park

Highly Commended

- Herne Hill Velodrome
- Carnegie Library Hub

ENVIRONMENT CATEGORY

Winner

*Herne Hill Tree Watch
and
Friends of Sunray
Gardens*

Highly Commended

- Brockwell Park
Community Greenhouses
and Barn
- Post Box Happy
Crocheted Toppers

COMMUNITY CATEGORY

Winner

*Herne Hill Music
Festival*

Highly Commended

- Andy Gray for Off the
Cuff Junior Open Mic
- Champs Within
Boxing Club

We reported in the last issue of the Magazine about the Excellence Awards ceremony held at the Temple Bowling Club, a very special event in the history of the Society at a remarkable venue. At a time when so much in the world around us seems to be going awry, it is immensely encouraging that in a small corner of south-east London there are so many positives that can be highlighted – all made possible by the commitment of generous individuals who want to contribute to our community.

In the last issue we focused on awards in the History/Heritage category. Here we look at Environment and the overall Winner and the two Highly Commended awards.

Herne Hill Tree Watch and Friends of Sunray Gardens – Winner

The Winner was, strictly speaking, two organisations, but they are closely related. Herne Hill Tree Watch (HHTW) is a community group on the Southwark side of Herne Hill formed in 2019 to care for the street trees in their area, working in close conjunction with Southwark Council. Sunray Gardens is the four-acre park and lake at the bottom of Red Post Hill, once part of the grounds of Casino House, the country villa built by John Nash and demolished in 1906. The Friends of Sunray Gardens are a group of volunteers



Jeff Segal and Paul Millington

concerned to provide maintenance and improvements to supplement the basic level of care that Southwark Council is limited to providing.

Jeff Segal and Paul Millington set up HHTW and continue to organise it. Paul is also the driving force behind Friends of Sunray Gardens. The overall objective of the two groups is the same – that the natural world in the form of trees and other plants and the benefits they bring in our urban setting should be protected and supported. In addition both groups share an emphasis on the value of community engagement and point to how working out of doors and a sense of responsibility for the growing things in and around your particular street help create personal well-being in terms of physical and mental health.



Volunteers at work

HHTW is able to call on some 100 volunteers, organised by streets with street leaders. Under guidance from Paul and Jeff they organise watering and maintenance of their trees and do all they can to ensure that the trees flourish, are safe and healthy and that any gaps are filled. Any new trees are provided under Southwark's 'Cleaner, Greener, Safer' scheme and the result of close liaison with Southwark's tree officers. In the last year alone 23 new trees have been planted, including five Yoshino cherries, a black mulberry, a tulip tree and an Atlas cedar. Paul has also won approval for a small orchard of eight trees by the basketball

court in Sunray Gardens. An amazingly informative and well-illustrated website for HHTW regularly reports on developments and there is also a regular newsletter sent by email. At Sunray Gardens the Friends' achievements also include 12 boxes for birds and bats, bulb planting at entrances, a new beech hedge planted and newly landscaped beds, quite apart from the more humdrum task of regular weeding and watering in dry periods.



Worplesdon Sweet Gum

In announcing the Winner, Sheila Northover, one of the three judges for the Awards, described the streets covered by HHTW as a "joy throughout the year ... a city arboretum", and the Yoshino cherries in Winterbrook Road as not merely a local attraction in the spring but one drawing in admirers from all across London.

Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses – Highly Commended

A Highly Commended Award went to Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses (BPCG). In the past the greenhouses, within one of the historic walled gardens that used to serve Brockwell Hall, were



Steph Prior accepts the award for BPCG from Helen Hayes MP

used by Lambeth to raise the countless bedding plants required for formal displays. But tastes change and for many years the greenhouses lay empty and unused. Since their establishment in 2010 BPCG have grown from strength to strength. The site includes an orchard, a series of demonstration gardens, a walled herb garden and two large greenhouses. They run a garden volunteering scheme, school visits, family events, courses

and workshops. Their aim is for people to learn about conserving the environment and wildlife, to appreciate nature and to understand organic gardening and food growing – and all in a very friendly community spirit. In the last year they have had more than 48,000 visitors. 200 volunteers assist their three part-time staff in providing the many activities on offer. BPCG were especially delighted to



The BPCG Barn

see the opening this year of the architect-designed Brockwell Barn on their site, with facilities including a classroom space and kitchen that will improve the range and quality of what BPCG can provide for the community. Their excellent website gives up-to-date details of everything that is happening.

Steph Prior says BPCG were "thrilled to be Highly Commended at the Awards. It's brilliant to be recognised for the work we do". She tells us that the Society's Excellence Awards are a "great way to celebrate our community". And she particularly enjoyed the opportunity at the Awards ceremony to meet "so many wonderful people and hear about many brilliant local initiatives".

Post Box Toppers – Highly Commended

The other Highly Commended Award went to Post Box Toppers. Behind these clever creations that did so much to bring a smile to the face during the pandemic, and which continue to brighten up the streets of Herne Hill, lies an enigma. Their creator has, Banksy-like, no public identity. However, readers can be assured that the phantom crocheter is aware of the award – and very appreciative of it. Given this anonymity, we are limited in what we can say here. The best we can do is allow the crochet to speak for itself with examples here of the work of Post Box

with their skill and surely delight Herne Hill

Toppers that imagination, good humour all ages in the community.



WARTIME MEMORIES OF

These are the memories of David Davies who died last year. He had sent them to the Friends of Ruskin Park who have asked us to preserve them in more permanent form through this magazine. Our thanks also to June Mary Davies who would like to see her husband's memories not forgotten.

From 1938 until 1951 I lived at 111 Herne Hill Road; my bedroom at the back of the house overlooked Ruskin Park through an impressive line of tall poplar trees. I used to get into the park through a hole in the wooden fence at the bottom of our garden as a shortcut to see friends who lived in Ferndene Road. In 1939 our back garden was completely dug up to grow food, and a pole about 12 feet high stood next to the poplar trees holding a wire from the house which acted as an aerial for the radio – the evening news was very important for my parents to hear what was happening and occasionally Mr Churchill would speak; evenings then were very different from today with no TV and so walks in the park with my parents were regular treats.

During the war there was an RAF barrage balloon in the park, not far from the house. It took up quite a large area with its winch, gas cylinders and vehicles. The WAAF servicewomen who operated the balloon always seemed cheerful and welcomed me as a small boy, so naturally I often went to see them. They would raise the balloon when the loud air raid sounded, warning everyone to take shelter. I seem to remember that this area was mostly cultivated to grow food. When an air raid was on we went to shelter under the stairs in the house which was recommended as a safe place. Later in the war we had a Morrison shelter which took up most of the living room but at least it was safer and sometimes one or two neighbours would come to join us during bombing raids. While in a long queue outside a fish shop in Loughborough Junction one of those neighbours told us that her son had just been killed when his bomber was shot down.

One evening in 1940 six Belgian refugees, women and young children, arrived unexpectedly at our front door; they were the family of the head waiter from the Osborne Hotel in Ostende, where my parents used to stay. They had just arrived in a fishing boat from the advancing Germans – our address was the only one they had in England. The head waiter had been detained on landing and, because he was Italian, was sent to the Isle of Man to be interned for the rest of the war. The husband of one of the other women did not come and stayed to join the Resistance. He was



House railings are removed for the war effort

subsequently captured but did survive and became a friend after the war. My father arranged for them all to be evacuated to Wales. When we saw them later Albina, the daughter who was my age, spoke excellent English – with a broad Welsh accent.

Government pamphlets gave instructions how to protect property and people; one described how to make a room in the house gas proof, another how to make shutters to protect the windows. My father made shutters for our windows, but when a landmine exploded in Ruskin Park, near the gate just down the hill from the house, the shutters took the full blast taking out the whole window with their frames; in addition most of the roof was blown off. The damage was mended through the War Damage Commission. But I missed the explosion as I had been sent to stay with relatives in Aberystwyth during the height of the Blitz.

Early on in the war men had come to break off the wrought iron railings in front of all the houses along Herne Hill Road, which I remember watching with helpless sadness. We were told the iron collected was destined for armaments.

Initially we took gas masks everywhere with us and at St Saviour's Primary School we had regular air raid practices. School friends and I often used to go to Ruskin Park after school and I recall

playing in the park and watching V1s (doodlebugs) pass overhead and waiting for the bang. It was exciting for us as young children – we had no understanding of the devastation they caused. By 1944 the V2 rockets started and they gave no indication of their arrival. One landed on Woolworths in New Cross killing 168 people including 33 children.



Member of the WAAF with barrage balloon

RUSKIN PARK

When playing in the park we would often see formations of aircraft on their way to the continent and in June 1944 the sky seemed full of bombers and fighters which was a great thrill for us children. Apart from the landmine which landed in the park I know of no other bombs falling there, but we were always on the lookout for shrapnel from anti-aircraft shells that had fallen in the park and were proud if we had found the largest piece. The tail fin of an incendiary bomb was a great treasure when found on a bomb site. One night an anti-aircraft shell landed in Ferndene Road, cutting the electricity supply for the area. Of course there was no street lighting anywhere and ARP wardens were out to check that no light was emitted from houses – so we really were in the dark.

In those days the park was patrolled by Park Keepers who wore dark brown rough tweed suits and a matching hat with a badge. They supervised the activities in the park with authority and as children we held them in awe and did as we were told without question.

Occasionally, a special van with a back-projected screen would come to the park and show morale raising and instructional government information films which gathered small audiences. After the Blitz the Ruskin Park bowling green was well used and a local attraction. Many an evening my parents would take me to watch the games being played. And on warm summer days some of the patients in King's College Hospital would be brought out in their beds onto balconies overlooking the park. I think they were suffering from TB and fresh air was a help, treatment in those days being very limited.

Out and about

The Society is very fortunate in having a small core of loyal supporters – you know who you are! – who give of their time in ways both great and small, including turning out on occasions when there are special events that call for the Society's engagement. Thus in September the opening of the Lambeth Heritage Festival at the West

Norwood Library saw us joining other societies at a well-attended event, promoting our publications and meeting the public. We were back again in action at the beginning of December at a Christmas fair held at the Charter School, North Dulwich. And for the November Remembrance Sunday a small group, including Lambeth Councillors Jim Dickson and Deepak Sardial, assembled before the memorial at Herne Hill Station for the laying of a wreath of poppies on behalf of the Society.

Our photograph shows the Society's president, Colin Wight, in front of the memorial.



THE LAURELS ON HERNE HILL

One of the frustrations of tracing the Herne Hill that would have been familiar to earlier generations is the absence of any consistent visual record. In this magazine we show historic postcards with local views from time to time and more views can be found on twitter (follow @LaurenceMarsh2), but compared with what is available today on Google streetview they are a drop in the ocean. For example, one wonders what used to stand on the site occupied today by the Grade II listed mansion flats known as Dorchester Court, built in the mid-1930s – and continuing to crumble as Lambeth agonise over a highly controversial planning application made more than three years ago.

Maps show a large house, about 80 feet wide, and set back from the road by the same amount with a semi-circular carriage drive. But as



to how it looked we can only speculate. It was probably built about the same time – around 1810/20 – as its neighbour, the house that was the boyhood home of John Ruskin. While we cannot say what the house on the site of Dorchester Court looked like, recent information has come to light about one of its later occupants. We are most grateful to Christopher Fisher who got in touch with us recently to tell us that his

great-grandfather, Henry Fisher (1827-1902), lived his later years in the house and thanks to Christopher we can show a portrait photograph of the man. The house at this time was called "The Laurels" and was numbered 26 Herne Hill.

Henry Fisher had started out at a young age as a wholesale and retail confectioner and came to have shops in Newington and Islington. He prospered and saw the opportunities that arose as the old estates and farmland began to disappear beneath the bricks and mortar of the streets we see today. He built up a property portfolio. At the sale in 1890 of the Lett estate, an estate that comprised much of what is sometimes now referred to as the "North Dulwich Triangle", Fisher bought Cedar House and the extensive grounds that went with it. All the houses on Hollingbourne Road and about a quarter of those on Ruskin Walk were built on this land. In 1881 the Fisher family was living in a large house, Holly Lodge, at the junction of East Dulwich Grove and Lordship Lane. That house went when the shops on Lordship Lane arrived and the family moved to The Laurels on Herne Hill. The census for 1891 shows the family along with four domestic servants and a coachman in a separate lodge house.

Henry Fisher's son, who must have been familiar with Herne Hill as a young man, became a solicitor and was a founding member of the partnership that grew into the major law firm known today as Fieldfisher.

Laurence Marsh

THE HERNE HILL MUSIC FESTIVAL

Alan Taylor celebrates 12 years of a remarkable event

The first Festival, in 2011, was a modest affair of 15 events, some very low key, and with a combined audience of 456. We were not even established as an organisation, and the Herne Hill Forum kindly administered the funding we received from our three first sponsors. All the work was done by a few volunteers. However, there were enough good events to encourage us to continue.

Early in 2012 this small team met and agreed a set of rules for the Festival, and established a bank account. Planning began for the 2012 Festival, and total attendance at events crept up to 578, and then 650 in 2013. We had by then found a group of sponsors among local businesses whose funding covered all our publicity work.

In many ways the breakthrough year was 2014. The team of volunteers had by then become more established, and had also learned a good deal about how to organise successful events. We did struggle for a few years due to a lack of good venues after the closure of the Half Moon due to flood damage, but gradually learned which venues attracted audiences. The opening of Off The Cuff was a great help, and of course the Half Moon eventually became available again in its restored glory.

Total audiences have continued to rise steadily as word has spread, and reached 1,698 in 2022. This year five – and very nearly six – events sold out online.

We established three basic principles for the Festival at the start, and it seems to me that these are the foundations of its success. The first is that it is a multi-genre festival, aiming to offer classical music, jazz, folk and world music, and events directly involving the local community and local voluntary organisations. The second is that the target audience is primarily local. The third is to involve the local community directly. Following these principles through, we found that:

- A balanced programme of different genres attracts a growing and diverse local audience.

- A third of the audience has consistently come from SE24, and a third from surrounding postal districts. The remaining third comes mainly from more distant parts of south London.

It would be hard to promote the Festival more widely and attract a non-local audience.

- From the start we aimed to work with local schools, churches, and voluntary organisations, and win their support for the Festival.

Our recently developed mission statement reads “Herne Hill Music Festival aims to provide a variety of musical events which appeal to the community whilst promoting local artists. We are a not-for-profit organisation.”



Doolally Tap, performers in 2023

It certainly feels that the Festival is fulfilling that statement during its 10 days every October. The burst water main on Herne Hill in 2014 led to a decision to produce Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde*, featuring both professional performers and local schoolchildren. Since then other hugely enjoyable junior school musicals have been part of the Festival. Further child-focused events are also included every year.

A broad variety of our jazz and World music concerts are held in venues throughout SE24, including at the Brockwell Park Greenhouses, Off The Cuff, the Half Moon and the Prince Regent. Classical music also has its place, with the Southwark Sinfonietta traditionally closing proceedings every year. A Choral Evensong

is held alternately at St Paul's and St Faith's. Local community choirs are given an opportunity to perform at “Herne Hill Sings On”. Our fundraising events for local charities are well-attended. This list is long but not entirely comprehensive!

Twelve years on, it still surprises me how the Festival has grown and become an established part of the calendar of events taking place in our community. Regular financial donations from the Herne Hill Society are part of the picture and have helped make this possible.



Dave and Boo, performers in 2013

For myself, I am now stepping aside from involvement in it. Twelve years is quite enough, and I don't think people should go on and on. The work for the Festival has been demanding and I now have other priorities. I'm pleased to be able to say that the Festival has a strong team of effective volunteers, though they do need a couple of additional people to take on important tasks. Long may they, and the Festival, continue.

HOLMES IN HERNE HILL



I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for. Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them?

The immortal words of Sherlock Holmes in the first chapter of *The Sign of the Four*, as he explains to Dr Watson why he resorts to cocaine when there is nothing to engage his formidable mental powers. The novel (later published as *The Sign of Four*) was first published by *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890, the second Sherlock Holmes story by Arthur Conan Doyle. However, it was only when short stories started to appear in the *Strand Magazine* the following year that the phenomenal popularity of the great fictional detective took off.

But how many know that in *The Sign of Four* Holmes and his trusty biographer Dr Watson visited a house in Herne Hill? It is not of course as simple as Herne Hill being identified in the text. It required the skills and meticulous research of the pre-eminent Holmes scholar Bernard Davies in his *Holmes & Watson Country: Travels in Search of Solutions* (first published in 2008) to reveal the connection.

In the novel Holmes's boredom is relieved by the unexpected arrival of an attractive young woman, Miss Mary Morstan. The many complexities of the story – a treasure stolen in India and the falling out among those into whose hands it comes – need not detain us. Within no time Holmes, Watson and Miss Morstan (who becomes Mrs Watson) are in a four-wheeler that set off “at a furious pace through the foggy streets” heading south over the river to find the house of a certain Thadeus Sholto. Their journey takes them to Coldharbour Lane, which is named in the text, at which point Holmes remarks, “Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions.” There is then the following description:

“We had indeed reached a questionable and forbidding neighbourhood. Long lines of dull brick houses were only relieved by the coarse glare and tawdry brilliancy of public-houses at the corners. Then came rows of two-storied villas, each with a fronting of miniature garden, and then again interminable lines of new, staring brick buildings — the monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country. At last the cab drew up at the third house in a new terrace. None of the other houses were inhabited, and that at which we stopped was as dark as its neighbours, save for a single glimmer in the kitchen window.”

Bernard Davies is critical of Dr Watson's description of a “questionable and forbidding neighbourhood”, which he puts down to “unabashed use of hyperbole and romantic overstatement purely for effect”, and points out that although the purlieu of Coldharbour

Lane at this date were a trifle down at heel and blighted by the criss-cross of railways, it was still a moderately prosperous neighbourhood with many of its residents middle-class business people and professionals working in journalism and the theatre. Davies goes on to argue, in a detailed forensic examination of the development of the area in the 1880s, that Holmes and his companions must have proceeded to travel up Milkwood Road. The text describes their arriving, after rows of two-storied villas and lines of “new, staring brick buildings”, at the “third house in a new terrace” An important piece of evidence in pinpointing the house is that the other houses are not inhabited. The date for the story is taken as 1888, a date when the rural cordon sanitaire between the grand houses on Herne Hill and the poorer housing extending out from Coldharbour Lane was fast disappearing.

Davies carefully analyses the monthly returns of the Lambeth District Surveyor to the Metropolitan Board of Works, which show the progress of house-building, together with evidence from local directories and electoral registers. In this way he manages to narrow down his search to a group of four houses in Gubyon Avenue put up by the builder H.A. Brown. They were then numbered 1,3, 5

and 7. After no.1 Gubyon Avenue the road made a distinctive bend. That bend remains to this day. In 1888 there was no new housing between the start of the bend and the main road on Herne Hill, because the large early 19th-century mansions known as The Knoll and The Cedars were still standing, though they would be gone within a few years.

A particularly telling clue is the glimmer in the kitchen window of the house. Davies logically argues that the kitchen would not have been at the front of the house and that therefore the only house that fits is the house where the back extension is visible from the street. This was no.7 (today no. 13), which stands at the junction with Woodquest Avenue. Holmes and his companions do not linger long at the house in Gubyon Avenue and are soon on their way to find a house by the name of “Pondicherry” in Upper Norwood. But long enough, for me at least, to inspire this corner of Herne Hill with an aura evoking the fog and four-wheelers of late Victorian London.

Laurence Marsh



A PINT TO REMEMBER

An everyday scene from 60 years ago in a South London pub? Not exactly, because it's not every day that Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton pop in for a pint.

The two stars did just that on 17 February 1963 when they were photographed at the Fox on the Hill pub on Denmark Hill. At all events that's what the original photo caption says, adding the information that the two stars were in London filming *The VIPs* at Elstree Studios and that, when leaving the pub, Taylor, who had recently had a cartilage operation, limped slightly as she climbed into a Rolls

Royce. The date would also coincide with Burton being in London to re-shoot scenes at Pinewood Studios for *Cleopatra*, at the time the most costly production ever in the history of the cinema and one that almost bankrupted Twentieth Century



Fox. But why would Burton and Taylor come south to Denmark Hill of all places? There is an explanation. When in London the two stars were chauffeured by one Jack Richardson, who lived,

according to an account published by MailOnline in 2011, in a "humble, three-bedroom council house on the Peckham/Dulwich borders". Richardson invited the pair to Sunday lunch with his family at his home in October 1963 and they accepted. While lunch was cooked (presumably by Mrs Richardson who had to stay at home) he suggested they go to the Fox on the Hill for a pint and they "jumped at the chance". Except that the

photograph says February, not October 1963. Perhaps they made a second visit, perhaps Richardson got the date wrong. Does it matter? It's a good story.

(Thanks to Jeff Doorn for drawing our attention to this archive image)

New grooming salon in Dulwich Village

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BEHIND THE POSTMARK

This postcard was sold recently on ebay without identification apart from a Herne Hill postmark from 1907.

Herne Hill retains most of its later Victorian and Edwardian houses and it did not take too long to home in on Lowden Road, in particular no. 10 (visible on the front door under magnification). Although the house is barely 30 years old it appears already blackened by soot. Fortunately the card had been used and the writer signed herself Esther. The 1911 census revealed that Esther Smith, aged 40, born in Ticehurst Sussex, lived there with her husband Robert, described as a "nightman (cleaner)" and their daughters Hilda and Beatrice, aged 11 and 10. Clearly this is Esther and her children on the postcard. They shared the house with another household, commonly the case with poorer families.



RUBENS & WOMEN

Following its celebration of the 19th-century French woman artist, Berthe Morisot, Dulwich Picture Gallery invites us to look at women through the eyes of 17th-century Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens.

Rubens & Women opened on 27 September and runs until 28 January 2024. It challenges the commonly held view that the artist portrayed buxom ladies with little variation through his career. On display are family members, patrons and depictions of religious, mythical and historic figures.



Born in 1577 to parents in exile in Germany, Rubens lived in the family's native Antwerp from the age of ten. After art apprenticeships, he left for Italy in 1600, and worked for the Duke of Mantua for eight years.

A self-portrait at 28 begins the exhibition, shown alongside tender images of his first wife, Isabella Brant and eldest daughter, Clara Serena

(pictured), who died aged only 12. By contrast, his portraits of noblewomen – such as *Marchesa Maria Serra Pallavicino*, *Marchesa Veronica Spinola Doria* or *Portrait of a Lady* – revolutionised the genre. Faces of family and patrons show character, and the texture of clothing, including satin, lace, feathers and jewels are vibrantly depicted.

Room 2 features altarpieces and decorative displays for religious buildings. Commissioned to create images promoting the Counter-Reformation by inducing a strong emotional connection to aid worship, he portrayed real women rather than plaster saints. Here are chalk and red ink sketches, small oil paintings for private contemplation and prayer, plus scenes prepared for churches, some no longer in existence. Models include Isabella and his second wife, Helena Fourment.

In the Mausoleum, a Roman marble statue of Crouching Venus, which Rubens knew, provided a pose he used in several paintings to express different emotions, as pictures in subsequent rooms evidence.

Rubens felt paintings should not 'smell of stone'. He studied ancient sculptures and Michaelangelo statues, memorising postures, and also copied woodcuts of nudes in different poses. He devised new types of lifelike, vigorous female nudes and monumental figures. It is intriguing to see the artist's notebook.

A bronze relief plaque by Jacob Cobaert, *Diana and Callisto* inspired Rubens's drawing of three nymphs. There is a very large *Adam and Eve* and a *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* plus a *Psyche* using a male model, examples of depictions that are increasingly dynamic.

The final room celebrates goddesses of peace and piety. Rubens developed a dramatic mythological narrative in which

strong women determine their own destiny. Drawing on Ovid and Virgil and inspired by Titian, Rubens showed peace-making women bringing abundance, for example *Ceres and Two Nymphs with a Cornucopia*, a preliminary version of which is in the previous room



for comparison (pictured). We also have grand views of *Diana Returning from the Hunt* (pictured), with Frans Snyder providing the still life elements, *Juno – Birth of the Milky Way* and *Venus, Mars and Cupid*.

Rubens was alive during the devastating 80 Years War (1568 – 1648). He spoke several languages and travelled extensively, as diplomat as well as artist. He was knighted by both England and Spain. He died in 1640, having established himself as an inspired and inspirational artist. The works on display come from a wide range of sources; many have never before been seen in Britain.



In the Lupton Room and elsewhere in the Gallery, Sara Shamma (b.1975) responds to works by five artists in the main collection, including Rubens's *Venus, Mars and Cupid*. *Bold Spirits*, which runs until 25 February 2024, aims to channel the spirits of the women depicted by male painters, while also relating to her own life as a mother. It acts as a striking contrast and complement to *Rubens & Women*.

Jeffrey Doorn



'Clock Tower, Brockwell Park, Autumn' by Matthew Berry. – Limited edition 'Giclée' print available.

Other prints and original paintings by Matthew Berry and other artists, including Peter Forsyth, Mark McLaughlin, Ken McCalla, Su Au, Max Rush and John Bateson-Hill are also available.

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