

# HERNE HILL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY ♣ ISSUE 159 ♣ Spring ♣ 2024



© Marianne Wie

## NEWS FROM DORCHESTER COURT

► *See pages 6/7*

## LAMBETH ARCHIVES FIND NEW HOME

► *See page 3*

## CHANGING SHOPFRONTS

► *See pages 14/15*



# The Magazine of the Herne Hill Society



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Lambeth Archives page 3. Pat Roberts pages 5, 7, 16. Victoria Tee pages 12/13. Colin MacInnes pages 14/15. Kara Tritton pages 18/19.

# A new home in central Brixton for Lambeth's precious Archives

Lambeth is privileged to have an extensive and professionally managed archive of documents relating to local history – possibly the best such archive of any London borough.

The collection was started by William Minet in 1890, when he built and gifted a library on Knatchbull Road. It served both as a lending library and, very deliberately, the start of a collection of documents and records relating to local history, many of which he personally purchased for the library and which are now priceless. For many years Mr Minet and later his daughter chaired a joint library committee which had oversight of libraries and records of the boroughs of Lambeth and Camberwell. William Minet died in 1933 but his interest in the library and the archives was maintained by his daughter.

The original library was severely damaged in the Blitz in December 1940. Over 18,000 library books were destroyed in the fire but the archives housed in the basement strong rooms survived. A new library to replace the fire-damaged original building was opened in 1959, with the local history collection



*The Search room*

and archive still housed in the original basement strong rooms. It became the official repository for Lambeth Council's own historic records; and records previously held in other local libraries were also transferred there in the 1960s. But as the historical materials accumulated, space was running out: the lengthy search for a new home began.

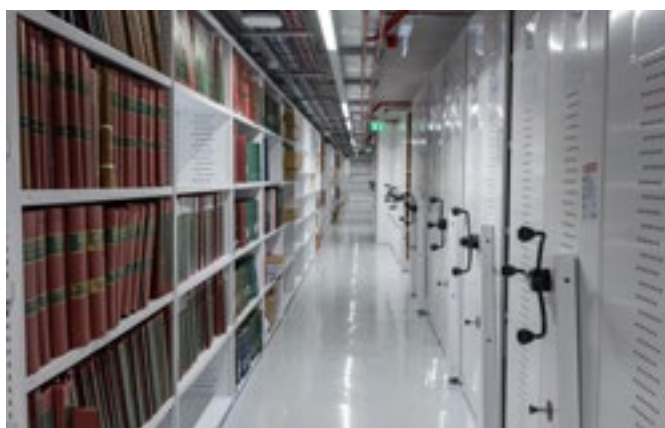
An opportunity arose when the former Olive Morris House site on Brixton Hill fell due for redevelopment. Thanks to the foresight of the Council in the 2020s, the basement and some of the ground floor of this new development were safeguarded as a suitable location for the archives. The design was entrusted to architects Howarth Tomkins and the building was completed and handed over in mid-2023. Then the extraordinarily complicated task of safely moving the archives from the Minet Library to the centre of Brixton began, and was completed in January this year. In these hard times for local councils it is to Lambeth's great credit that this ambitious project has been achieved.



It was on 29 February 2024 that the new library at 16 Brixton Hill was officially opened. Olive Morris, the celebrated black activist of the mid-80s, is commemorated in the meeting and exhibition room on the ground floor; the original founder of the archive, William Minet, is commemorated in the Minet Search Room.

In his speech at the very well-attended opening event, Archive Manager Jon Newman warmly thanked the extraordinary contribution of the archives team and many volunteers who helped with the "stupendous and hopefully unrepeatable piece of work" in moving the archive. He went on to observe that:

"Any archive is forever on a cusp. On the one hand, weighed down by the tradition of previous, inherited collections and the responsibility for caring and preserving them; on the other, constantly adding to the archive, trying to grow the collections, to improve their quality, their significance, their comprehensiveness, their representativeness; trying to improve your credibility as an organisation in order to encourage deposit; trying to anticipate



*Extensive underground storage*

what future researchers will value or need access to. We are never static, never complete, never full."

As was said in other speeches at the opening event, the history of the community is important for telling us not only where we have come from and who we were, but where we are going and what sort of community we ought to be in the future.

**Pat Roberts**

# Replacing a landmark

A year ago (spring issue #156) we described the “loss of a landmark”, the tree that used to stand just within Brockwell Park, but then came to stand on its own outside the park following the regeneration of Herne Hill junction completed in 2010. The tree had had enough and last year



Lambeth removed it, but announced their intention to replace it in 2024. The Herne Hill Forum said they would organise a popular vote on the replacement tree. The Forum duly set up an online poll in March and this Society assisted with publicity. It was important that only trees that could be regarded as suited to the particular location were considered, so the choice was limited to four candidates, carefully chosen for their suitability by Lambeth tree officer Philip Louis and members of the Lambeth tree team. The poll generated plenty of interest and 818 votes were recorded. The winner was *Koelreuteria paniculata*, commonly known as Pride of India or Golden rain tree (322 votes); in second place *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, or Dawn redwood (257 votes); in third place *Quercus ‘Mauri’*, an oak cultivar (122 votes); in fourth place *Sophora japonica*, or Japanese pagoda tree (117 votes).

The Pride of India is native to China and Korea and was introduced to Europe in 1747. It is prized for its early spring and autumn colour, flowers and unusual seed pods, as well as attraction for pollinating insects.



*A mature Pride of India  
at Osterley Park Station*

A semi-mature Pride of India was planted on 24 March and it is hoped it will grow to full maturity in its new home, providing a new landmark at this prominent location for many years to come.



## Crowdfund your council *Southwark's Green Finance Initiative*

Most English local authorities are planning severe cuts to services, asset sales and maximum permissible council tax rises in order to remain financially solvent. Some have already had to issue “Section 114” notices, in effect bankruptcy, though the particular legal status of local authorities prevents bankruptcy as it applies to individuals or companies. In the South East this has been the fate of Slough, Thurrock and Croydon. The London Borough of Southwark is not in that position but it has decided to adopt an innovative funding solution for ways to help tackle the climate emergency.

Southwark’s crowdfunding scheme aims to raise £6m up to 2030 — the first £1m for the current financial year — with a fixed return of 4.6% p.a. over a five-year term. It allows investments of as little as £5. It is not restricted to Southwark residents. Southwark says it is, to date, the UK’s biggest community investment scheme by a local authority for green projects. Full details of the scheme can be found at [www.southwark.gov.uk/environment/climate-emergency/get-involved/southwark-green-investment#How](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/environment/climate-emergency/get-involved/southwark-green-investment#How)

Southwark is not the first council to adopt such a scheme. Nine other English local authorities have done so, including Hammersmith & Fulham, Lewisham and Camden. Southwark’s scheme, like others, is managed by Abundance Investment, a financial platform focused on ethical and sustainable community investment projects and authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

In comments to *The Guardian* Emily Hickson, deputy cabinet member for green finance, said: “Southwark is not different to any other council in the country: we’re all struggling with the lack of central government grants and keeping up with inflation. We are in the black and that’s because we are being innovative.” She also explained that the Southwark scheme would involve a cheaper interest rate for the local authority than borrowing through the government’s public works loan board. It would also have the benefit of engaging residents directly with the council’s climate emergency plans.

There is no lack of projects that could benefit from the scheme. They include new LED street lighting, more cycle hangars and electric vehicle charging points, green updates for schools and leisure centres and projects protecting and enhancing wildlife and the natural environment.

# Shops & Business News

*As usual the news is mixed*

## Finally, an estate agents come to Herne Hill!

At the Station Square end of Railton Road, another set of the empty retail units has now been rented from The Arch Company. The premises at 323, 325 and 327 Railton Road, i.e. the last three shops in the row, have been leased by John D Wood, a well-established estate agents with many branches. Further, and perhaps surprisingly, they have taken the largest of all the vacant premises, in effect three adjacent units combined into a spacious single unit on the corner of Railton Road curving round to the bridge. Many residents, we know, had romantically hoped for the advent of a progressive Indian restaurant or something similar. But these are not ideal times to sink capital into such ventures. And



after all, Herne Hill only has five estate agents, so surely there's always room for another one or two? Anyway, sarcasm aside, let's bid welcome to John D Wood and congratulate them for taking these long-vacant premises. As we go to press (April 2024) the interiors are still being fitted out. [www.johndwood.co.uk](http://www.johndwood.co.uk)

Sadly, **319-321 Railton Road**, the neighbouring retail units sporting a bright blue frontage since the refurbishment five years ago, still remain vacant.

## The Sicilian

Gail's arrival must be having a impact on all our smaller local coffee shops and delis, so it is surely a good sign when a small business adapts and adjusts to accommodate changing customer



expectations and competitors' moves. This Italian deli and coffee shop on Station Square first opened back in February 2022. It closed for a short time at the New Year to carry out an internal refit which has now delivered a much expanded comfortable seating area inside the shop, accommodating up to 30 people.

They will also offer a wider fresh food offering served by friendly and efficient staff, plus late night openings at the weekends with cocktails and classic Sicilian dishes and wines. The plan also includes a happy hour and good-value children's after-school meals.

## 'What do we, as a nation, care about books?'

asked Herne Hill resident John Ruskin (who had of course published quite a few). The genuinely sad reaction of many Herne Hill residents last year to the departure of the much-loved and indeed nationally celebrated children's bookshop, **Tales on Moon Lane**, provided something of a reply to Mr Ruskin's rhetorical question.

So they will now be delighted (as would he presumably) to have learnt of the proposed launch of a fresh new independent children's bookshop in the same premises at 25 Half Moon Lane. To be called **Paper Cat Children's Books**, it is the brainchild of well-established author and illustrator of children's books Frann Preston-Gannon and Anja Stobbart, both of them local residents and parents, both with deep knowledge of the publishing industry and children's books in particular.

Earlier this year they announced the start of a crowdfunding campaign, and hope to open before the summer. They know from their own experience, and from the lives of their children, the huge importance of giving children agency: being able to browse for books in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere – and more generally to have the freedom and encouragement to read and fall in love with books: experiences that online vendors cannot offer and that only dedicated bookshops can create. Frann and Anja have established strong links with local schools, with distribution companies and with authors interested in holding book launch events. They also have the germ of an idea for subscription boxes, selecting a new book each month for subscribers. The plan is for the new shop to open later this spring/early summer.

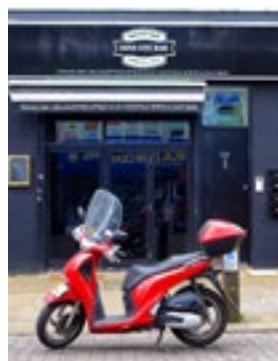
## Speaking of fresh ...

Our report in the last issue deplored the lack of a fresh greengrocers in Herne Hill, following the closure of Seasons of England, the second-generation family business. But this provoked a justified correction from a very long-standing resident. He (yes, you, Robert Holden) hastened to point out that we still have a fine fresh fruit and vegetable shop in SE24, namely **Andrews Food Store** at 268 Rosendale Road, on the left near the corner of Hawarden Grove. The business was started some 40 years ago by Andreas Haralambous. He sadly died at a venerable age in April 2023, and the business has been taken over by his daughter Katrina and his son-in-law Sozos. Their stock of fresh fruit and vegetables awaits anyone who can

cope with the extra five minutes walk from the centre of Herne Hill. They are also, usefully, a general food and convenience store.

## ... and renaissance

On the site of the former Cinema Grand at no. 222 on Station Square, a new and quite discreet private members bar opened in late March. Fittingly, it will be called **Cinema Grand**.



**Pat Roberts**

# PLANNING & LICENSING

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

**74 Red Post Hill, Southwark 24/AP/0071**

We had objected to an earlier application, which included a proposal to create a hard standing for parking in the front garden, because of the harm that would be done to the Sunray/Casino Estate Conservation Area. The application was withdrawn but a new application was made with a slightly modified scheme. We objected again because the front garden was still shown with a substantial area of hard standing that only made sense as an area for parking. Southwark has refused permission.

**Shurgard Self-Storage, Milkwood Road, Lambeth 23/04108/VOC**

We objected to an application to extend the licensed opening hours from the current closing time of 9pm to 10pm, on the grounds of the vicinity of the premises to houses on Milkwood Road and disturbance to residents, and the absence of evidence to suggest that the circumstances that made the 9pm closing time appropriate had changed. A decision is pending.

**11 Herne Hill Road, SE24 0AU**

We wrote to Lambeth to report what we considered to be a breach of planning rules, namely the removal of a Victorian shop front, and its replacement with a poorly designed and executed ground floor façade, all without planning permission. Lambeth have indicated they are considering enforcement action to require the owner to reinstate the original.

**Wellfit Street/Hinton Road/Hardess Street SE24 0HN, Lambeth 24/00073/FUL**

We objected to an application for a high-rise development on

this light industrial site adjacent to the railway to accommodate 320 co-living units and associated low-rise light industrial floorspace. We submitted that the height of the principal building was excessive and went against Lambeth’s current planning policies. We disputed the applicant’s disregard of the site’s PTAL rating of 3, a rating that made the site inappropriate for the proposed scheme. The development, in its height and scale, would adversely impact the predominantly three-storey housing around it and access to daylight for some properties. We were also concerned at the impact of such a large structure on views from Ruskin Park and said that in this respect the harm already inflicted by the Higgs Yard development should not be made worse. We welcomed the opening up of a public thoroughfare through the site and stressed that this should be kept open and not become a gated development. We were concerned at the poor infrastructure around the site, especially in terms of pedestrian access, and stressed the need for improvements as conditions if permission were given. We also underlined the current inadequacies in facilities provided by Loughborough Junction Station, to be rendered more acute as Higgs Yard becomes occupied.

**30 Shakespeare Road SE24 0LB, 24/00468/LDCP**

This application, presented as permitted development, proposed to remove a dwarf wall and hedge in front of a house in the Poet’s Corner Conservation Area and create a hard standing for car parking in the front garden. We argued that this was not permitted development and a full planning application should be made, in particular given Lambeth’s clear planning policies with regard the creation of hard standings in front gardens. Lambeth has not responded to our comments. It appears no decision has been made.

**Laurence Marsh**

## May is the month, Dorchester Court is where the art is

**O**n the weekend of 11-12 May the artistic talent of our neighbours in the Dorchester Court community is being showcased as part of the Dulwich Festival artists’ open house programme. This open house event will run each day from 10:30 to 17:00.

Twelve artists from this remarkable community will be exhibiting drawings, prints, paintings, photographs, cyanotypes, crafts, American rag rugs, vintage clothes and their own limited edition artist designed artisan chocolate. The works will be displayed throughout Dorchester Court, showing on the landings and in some apartments. Visitors will be able to purchase selected works from the artists as well as the chocolate!

In addition they plan to have a guided heritage architectural tour, exploring this unique location of listed “moderne” buildings, to be led by Ian McInnes.

Designed and built in the 1930s, this special site includes Dorchester Court (Grade II listed, but handled with shocking indifference by its landlords, resulting in disrepair and in some

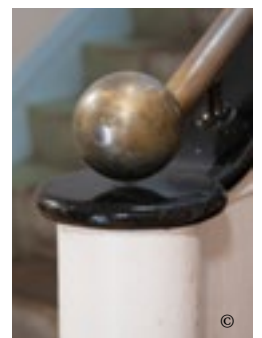
cases partial collapse), Dorchester Drive and the recently listed Quadrangle.

The tours are planned for Saturday 11 May at 10.30 and Sunday 12 at 4pm, meeting by the fountain in the gardens. There will be a scavenger hunt with a historic twist to entertain younger visitors whilst the grown-ups go on the tour.

Marquees in the central gardens will be selling refreshments and vintage clothes and there will be a selection of Dorchester Court musicians performing acoustic sets in the gardens throughout the weekend.

There will also be a repair club on 18 May, facilitated by residents with tools lent by Queen’s Crescent Fixing Factory from Camden.

As May draws near, the Dorchester Court and Friends website will be getting updates with more information about art, history and activities.



[www.dorchestercourt.org](http://www.dorchestercourt.org)

## A sorry saga

So what is happening at Dorchester Court? On the one hand there is a thriving community, who look forward to welcoming visitors to their exciting May event (see opposite). On the other hand, there is a group of Grade II listed buildings on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register due to decades of neglect by its

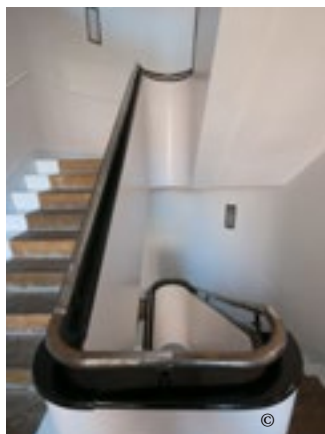


owner and landlord, a neglect whose dire effects have to be suffered by residents.

Built in 1935-6 Dorchester Court offered, in the words of an advertisement at that time, "Modern flats of distinction and comfort that are a definite step forward in the art of luxury living". Their sleek contemporary design sought to get away from the

standard suburban semi of the interwar years with the implicit promise of a far more glamorous lifestyle. Despite the current deplorable state of the building those design qualities are still there (as Marianne Wie's photographs on this page show), though they make the restoration of the buildings all the more urgent if they are to continue to survive. Today less than one fifth of the flats are on long leaseholds, while some 80% are let on tenancies that are subject to the constant uncertainty of rent increases under threat of section 21 termination. On 23 October last year Helen Hayes MP spoke in the House of Commons and used Dorchester Court as a graphic example of the lack of protection for tenants. It is their rents that continue to augment the fortune of the family of the late Heinrich Feldman, a multi-millionaire property magnate.

There are two aspects to the current impasse in the residents' battle to improve their living conditions: a public health concern centred



on safe supply of water and heating and dangerous structures, especially balconies; and a planning application made four years ago to build penthouses on top of each of the eight blocks and town houses on the site of the derelict garages, a development that the owner/landlord holds out as the only means to facilitate the urgent remedial work to Dorchester Court. Lambeth Council, with powers under public health and planning legislation, are

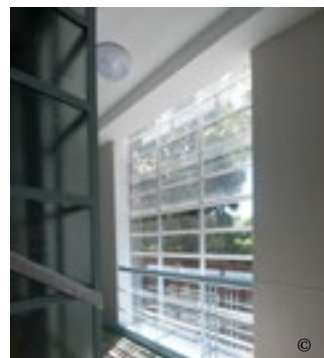
key to both aspects. But residents feel they are being held to ransom by the owner/landlord who is being wrongly allowed by Lambeth to leave easily addressable hazards unremedied while afforded leverage in



their negotiations with Lambeth in the planning process.

When the planning application was made in 2020 (also comprising an application for Listed Building Consent) the Society's planning group submitted a detailed objection (the full text can be read on the Society's website). In essence, we said that, on a proper application of national and local planning policy principles, the application could not be justified and should be refused. The owner/landlord could not use their own failure to keep the building in repair as justifying an application to carry out development that would damage a designated heritage asset. Moreover, when the application was closely scrutinised, while it spoke eloquently of the restoration of Dorchester Court to "its former glory" it did so in terms of aspiration only.

One can see that Lambeth in its desire to see the buildings restored might wish to take a "pragmatic" view. Thus, if the only way to secure the restoration would be by allowing the addition of a penthouse floor, despite obvious damage to the architectural integrity and design character of the original, the development should be allowed.



Consistent with its objection to the planning application, the Society would say such "pragmatism" is not justified and goes against established planning policy in this particular case. If, however, it can be justified then there must be a legally enforceable means of preventing the owner/landlord reaping any reward from the new development before the full restoration of Dorchester Court is complete. As to how and when this sorry saga will be resolved we can only say – watch this space.

**Laurence Marsh**

# Transport Notes

## City Airport Noise

Herne Hill is under the flight paths to and from the south-east for both Heathrow and London City airports, and the noise starts in the early morning with the arrival of overnight flights. All London City Airport flights operate at lower heights than Heathrow flight paths (if you are woken at 6:30am by aircraft noise, you can check out the culprit on websites such as [www.flightradar24.com](http://www.flightradar24.com)). While Covid and video-calling have slowed the growth of air travel, both airports have expansion plans.

London City Airport has applied to the London Borough of Newham, and been refused, to increase the number of passengers it is allowed to carry; to increase the number of flights in the early morning; and most controversially, to extend the airport operation into Saturday afternoon. (At present the airport does not operate flights from Saturday lunchtime until Sunday lunchtime.) The airport appealed against the refusal, and a public inquiry was held in December 2023 through January 2024. Objectors questioned the airport’s claims concerning patronage growth, local employment benefits and, importantly for Herne Hill, lower noise from new generation aircraft. The inquiry inspector’s report is expected in a few months.

## London Overground rebranding

The London Overground suburban rail services are made up of a clever but complex revitalisation of disused parts of the rail system, developed at the end of the last century, and opened by Ken Livingstone in 2007. Since then, the system has been extended and strengthened, including the re-opening of the Wapping–Rotherhithe Thames Tunnel in 2010, and other additions for the 2012 Olympics. Today the network has been expanded to cover 113 stations across six routes. Originally branded with an orange/white/orange stripe on the TfL maps, this had become somewhat confusing and the six distinct routes are now planned to be given different names and colours, as with the tube lines:

- Lioness (formaly Watford Junction to Euston) – yellow
- Mildmay (formerly Richmond and Clapham Junction to Stratford) – blue
- Windrush (formerly Highbury & Islington to New Cross, Clapham Junction, Crystal Palace and West Croydon) – red
- Weaver (formerly Liverpool Street to Enfield Town, Cheshunt and Chingford) – maroon
- Suffragette (formerly Gospel Oak to Barking Riverside) – green
- Liberty (formerly Romford to Upminster) – grey



So, from Autumn 2024, it is planned that the useful line through Denmark Hill and Peckham Rye will be branded the Windrush Line, and will be coloured red/white/red on the maps and station branding.

## TfL Off-peak Fares on Fridays trial

For a three-month trial period (8 March until 31 May 2024 inclusive, coincidentally spanning the London Mayoral election) pay-as-you-go

single fares purchased using contactless or Oyster payment are now off-peak all day every Friday on Tube, DLR, London Overground, Elizabeth Line, and some National Rail services across London and the southeast. This will mean a significant saving for travellers in the Friday rush hour (but season ticket holders are not included). This also means that 60+ Oyster cards and Freedom Passes can be used early Friday mornings.

## Rail fare price rise for 2024 – correction!

Contrary to the “expected rise of 8%” suggested in the last Transport Notes, the national fares rise for this year has been limited to about 5%, whilst the TfL fares rise has been ... 0%.

**Bil Harrison**

## Slow down and keep us safe



Parents and children at the Judith Kerr Primary School in Half Moon Lane are calling for better road and environmental safety. On Boxing Day 2023 a car came off the road at speed and crashed through the school fence, ending up in a play area that at other times could have been filled with children. This was the catalyst for a public meeting in March, at which petitions to Southwark signed by parents and by children were presented and banners designed by the children were unveiled along the school fence. Helen Hayes MP and Councillor Margy Newens were at the meeting. As reported in the *South London Press*, Helen Hayes acknowledged there was more work to be done, adding “we will keep on working until all of the work that is needed across our area to make it as safe as possible for children to travel to school is done.”

Road safety, in particular widespread ignoring of the 20mph limit, is not the only concern of the school community. The school has also been monitoring air pollution on its site since 2021 and recorded morning and afternoon peaks in air pollution which regularly exceed WHO recommended limits, with nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) – mainly from vehicles, especially diesel engines – exceeding WHO guidelines by more than three times.

This is a problem by no means confined to the Judith Kerr Primary School. More than 1.2 million children in London, 700,00 of them at primary school, attend schools where the safe limits for NO<sub>2</sub> and particulate matter are regularly exceeded. Research indicates that the ULEZ expansion and other air quality control measures from the Mayor of London are set to deliver improvements, but balancing the downsides of vehicle use in London against the benefits is bound to remain controversial. Part of the picture is the use of cars for transporting children – in 2022 40% of children in England aged between 5 to 10 travelled to and from school by car.



# Local lists – Southwark gets there in the end

Listing decisions are like some London buses, a dearth for ages and then along come a bunch of them! In December 2023, Southwark Council finally adopted a new Local List of historic buildings that the Council and residents of the borough consider important and worthy of designation. The list was originally drawn up a decade ago and conservation groups across the borough have been urging its adoption for years so its final approval on 5 December is most welcome. Buildings and other structures on the Local List are not afforded the same protection as national listing (i.e. Grade I, II\* or II listed buildings) but the local planning authority now has to consider this designation in any planning decisions about the site and there is a general presumption against their demolition. Any harm caused to a locally listed building by a proposed development has to be justified and outweighed by the benefits created as a result of the works. If a locally listed building is already in a conservation area it has protection against demolition – for those outside conservation areas the borough can consider designating Article 4(1) Orders to remove the right to demolish without their prior consent. The newly locally listed buildings can be found on Southwark’s excellent interactive mapping site – click on the Local List layer in the key on the right hand side <https://geomap.southwark.gov.uk/connect/analyst/mobile/#/main>

Southwark’s Local List has a large (over 1,200) and very diverse range of heritage assets; borough-wise this includes such landmarks as Tate Modern (the former Bankside Power Station), the towers



*Onaway, Half Moon Lane*

of the late 1950s Brandon Estate in Walworth, the 1920s Oxo Tower on the South Bank, the market halls and art deco frontage building at Borough Market and the Globe Theatre. Closer to home in and around Herne Hill we have a number of treasures newly locally listed. These include the former David Greig grocers at 16 Half Moon Lane (now the Peachey Goat vegan restaurant) which retains its fine c1900s ceramic tiled shop front, the Grafton Hall

ballroom on Village Way (built in 1910 to host musical evenings, whist drives, lectures and charity receptions and from 1957 used as a dance academy, attracting leading ballroom dancers including Len



*Swiss Cottage, Norwood Road*

Goodman and Anton de Beke), ‘Onaway’ the elegant c1890s house on the corner of Ardbeg Road and Half Moon Lane (No.173, now in flats), the Arts & Crafts style St Faith’s Church Hall (1907) on Red Post

Hill, the two bridges over the railway either side of North Dulwich station with their fine heraldic shields, the Herne Hill Velodrome, the ‘Chateau’ (administration building) of the former Dulwich Hospital of 1887 and the late Victorian Dulwich Hamlet schools.

Coincidentally, Lambeth has approved a list of additions to its Local List first adopted in 2010. These additions include several historic buildings and other assets in Herne Hill: the charming half-timbered Swiss Cottage at 155 Norwood Road which faces Brockwell Park built in c1890, St Saviour’s Primary School on Herne Hill Road (1868), the model village houses by the walled garden in Brockwell Park created in the 1940s, the former St Jude’s Church on Dulwich Road designed by E.C. Robins and completed in 1868 (now offices for Mark Allen Group), a Victorian stench pipe (ventilating the sewers below) opposite the Lido on Dulwich Road, the Mendelssohn Sundial which forms the centrepiece of the garden which was formerly the bowling green in Ruskin Park (recently relocated from the corner of the park by the derelict stable block) and No. 167 Railton Road, the Brixton Advice Centre building where the writer and racial justice campaigner Darcus Howe once worked.

**Edmund Bird**

## And heritage is good for well-being!

Worth adding here that in a report published in March 2024 Historic England uses new research to show that the overall well-being value for people’s day-to-day encounters with heritage is estimated to be worth £29 billion every year in England. Funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport through its Culture and Heritage Capital Programme, “Heritage Capital and Wellbeing: Examining the Relationship Between Heritage Density and Life Satisfaction” demonstrates that, as with the positive impact of green spaces on well-being, the very presence of nearby historic places benefits residents’ quality of life, whether or not they participate in heritage activities. The report can be found on the Historic England website: [historicengland.org.uk/](https://historicengland.org.uk/)

**LM**

## Forum elects new Chair



Mary Burguieres

The Herne Hill Forum had been without a Chair for a while, but at their AGM on 19 March Mary Burguieres was elected to the role. She is joined by George Hornby and Giles Gibson, who continue as Vice-chairs, James Leabeater as Treasurer and 11 other committee members. Mary Burguieres has lived in Herne Hill for more than 20 years. She is interested in helping to foster an inclusive community through the Forum's activities and engagement, particularly ones in which children and young people are able to thrive. She is also a committee member of the Friends of the Charter School.

## The Society's AGM

The Society held its Annual General Meeting on 26 March. AGMs in recent years had been held on Zoom. This year we went back to an in-person gathering, held at the Temple Bowling Club. The meeting was well attended.

The business side of the proceedings was presented by Rebecca Tee, the Society's Chair, and the election of officers was



supervised by Colin Wight, the Society's President. Rosamund Jones stood down from the Committee, but the Society's officers were otherwise re-elected unchanged. With business out of the way there was an opportunity for members to socialise and patronise the Temple Bowling Club's bar, following which Sarah-Jane Miller gave a most illuminating talk about George Edmund Street, the outstanding Victorian architect, remembered for his many Gothic revival churches, not least St Paul's Herne Hill.

## Bernard Nurse 1947–2024

Bernard Nurse grew up in Carshalton and pursued throughout his life a passionate interest in the history of London, one that found eloquent expression in his work as a writer, librarian, antiquary and bibliophile. It was an inspiring teacher at Wimbledon College who encouraged his interest in history, the subject that Bernard went on to study at Trinity College Oxford, graduating in 1968. His love of books led to a qualification in Librarianship at the University of London and a job in the Guildhall Library in the City, a task that involved drafting speeches for the Lord Mayor. From there he moved on to become the Local Studies Librarian for Tower Hamlets and later Southwark.

Bernard met his wife Judith (née Rollason) in 1976, on a walking holiday in Scotland. He loved walking, in the British Isles and further afield. He and Judith married in 1979 and first settled in the village of Newport, near Saffron Waldron. Bernard lost no time in researching the history of the village and contributing four chapters of the book that was subsequently published.

The Library of the Society of Antiquaries of London, housed in their historic home at Burlington House, is the largest antiquarian library in the country, amassed by the Society since its foundation at the start of the 18th century. In 1986 Bernard became the Antiquaries' librarian and remained in that post until retirement in 2008. During his tenure, while responsible for the administration of the library, he continued to research the topography and buildings of London, with many studies published in learned journals. In 1995 he was elected a Fellow of the Society (FSA). He also contributed to the history of the Society's library, *Visions of Antiquity: the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1707-2007*,

was co-author of the *Catalogue of Paintings in the Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London* and worked extensively on the catalogue for the Society's tercentenary exhibition. He also found time to write 21 entries for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Bernard and Judith chose Herne Hill as their home after Bernard became the Antiquaries' librarian. Their house on Ruskin Walk lay on the four-centuries-old Dulwich Estate and Bernard made his knowledge and research skills available to the Dulwich Society, whose journal and website saw many articles contributed by him. He chaired their Local History Group for almost 20 years. But he also became a member of the Herne Hill Society and supported local history research promoted by the Society, contributing to the revised edition of the *Herne Hill Heritage Trail* (2013), *The Pubs of Dulwich and Herne Hill* (2016) and in one article in the Society's magazine was able to point to the earliest



known documented record of the name "Herne Hill", in two fire insurance policies issued in 1792. Bernard was also one of the loyal group of volunteers who undertook to deliver the Society's magazine in their area.

Retirement allowed Bernard to devote time to research in the Bodleian Library in



Oxford. He loved staying in his old college, a stone's throw from the library. His research in the Bodleian's Gough collection produced two superb books: *London: Prints & Drawings before 1800* (2017) and *Town: Prints & Drawings before 1800* (2020). There was also time for walking and gardening and other interests, including volunteering at the Oxfam bookshop on Half Moon Lane, where he was able to make use of and share with other volunteers his formidable knowledge of the antiquarian book trade and his expert eye could spot books that had special value and, in one case, an old postcard used as a bookmark written by Siegfried Sassoon, later sold for a good sum for the charity.

Rightly described as the "epitome of the scholar-librarian" Bernard was by nature quiet and retiring, but for those who were fortunate to know him well he was an immensely kind and thoughtful companion. At Bernard's funeral service held at St Pauls' on Herne Hill, Judith referred to the long periods of illness in his later years endured without complaint, but also to the unwavering support she had received from him during the 45 years they were married. "I don't know how he found the time to write." That he did is something we can remember with grateful admiration.

**Laurence Marsh**

## Village wade



Our first picture (with thanks to Colin Wight for providing) shows the railway bridge at Village Way in January of this year. For once it was not a burst water main but torrential rain that caused the flood. Our second picture looks back to the bridge in 2013, with its original cast iron Victorian columns, built in the 1860s to take the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway. Despite representations from the Society Network Rail could not be persuaded to retain and restore them when replacing the bridge superstructure the following year.



# 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

- Off the Cuff Junior  
Open Mic
- Champs Within  
Boxing Club

**I**n the last two issues of the Magazine we covered awards in the categories of History & Heritage and Environment. That leaves Community, a category that attracted the highest number of entries. In introducing the awards in this category Patrick Roberts, on behalf of the judges, spoke of how every one of the entrants illustrated a positive contribution to the well-being, local identity, improvement and coherence of our community. And he referred to how the range and variety of the initiatives described in these entries gave the judges great reassurance about the sustainability, compassion, mental resilience and positivity of Herne Hill's many interconnected communities. Picking a winner and two runners-up was not made easier by some entries in this category representing activities which also featured in the other two categories – though not in any sense duplicating them. In many cases an activity which was positive for the Community could also be making a valid contribution in terms of Environment History & Heritage – and vice versa.

### Herne Hill Music Festival – Winner

Festivals in the fields of art and literature may be not unusual today, but a festival dedicated to music and located in one small corner of London definitely is. None of our considerably larger neighbours can make this claim. The Herne Hill Music Festival was launched in 2011, the brainchild of Alan Taylor, who in the last issue of this Magazine described the Festival's journey over the last 12 years and highlighted some of its many remarkable achievements. In deciding on the

winner's award the judges focused on the volunteer-led nature of the organisation (a base of 10 committed volunteers meeting throughout the year) and the broad range of the events on offer (jazz, classical, folk, family and world music). They were especially impressed by the steady growth of the Festival that had put Herne Hill onto a wider map while reinforcing its local identity when set beside much larger communities such as those of Dulwich, Camberwell and Brixton.

The judges pointed to how the Festival has drawn in many individuals



*Alan Taylor accepting the award  
from Helen Hayes MP*

and groups from every part of Herne Hill and beyond – as audiences, but also as performers (amateur and professional), supporters, organisers and sponsors. It has encouraged musicianship and performance skills among young people and other non-professional players and singers. It has raised money for a variety of charities and, as one of the nominators of the Festival for an award, put it: “most of all, it's inclusive and fun!” This year Alan Taylor will be stepping down as the Festival driving force, but the judges had no doubt that its track record and the commitment of its organisers would continue to give Herne Hill something of immense community value for years to come. On the festival winning the top award Alan said: “We were completely taken aback to be finalists. We were



*Cambria Choir — regular performers at the festival*

astonished and thrilled to know how much our community values were recognised and appreciated.”

The 2024 Festival will run from 11 to 20 October 2024.

### *Champs Within – Highly Commended*

Champs Within is a project for children and young people based at the long-established Miguel’s Boxing Gym in the railway arches of Hardess Street. Teaching the self-discipline and skills of boxing, and working often with youngsters from deprived and crime ridden areas, the classes teach self-discipline and other positive coping skills, enabling young trainees to acquire the habits and attitudes that will help them escape the violence and crime around them.



*.... and Sammy McKay for Champs Within*

As well as teaching self-discipline and other positive life skills Champs Within go a step further with those who show a real passion and flair for boxing and will provide training for them to become professional boxers and also coaches for Champs Within. Beginners’ sessions are free, and the majority of young trainees come from Herne Hill and the Loughborough



Junction area. For them, Champs Within offers a safe environment where they can take part in mental health group discussions, get work experience over the summer and be steered in directions that will create better life chances. About the Award Champs Within’s Sammy McKay said: “It shows you never know who is watching what you are doing. We were shocked to hear that we were finalists. It meant recognition and represented a valuing of our work.”

### *Junior Open Mic – Highly Commended*



*...and Andy Gray for Open Mic*

As its name suggests Junior Open Mic (JOM) is a regular event aimed at providing young people with the opportunity to take the stage and perform. The age of performers ranges from as young as four or five to late teens. Held in the railway arches premises of Off the Cuff next to the station and with the whole-hearted support and involvement of JOM’s founder Andy

Gray, for more than five years JOM has helped hundreds of young people, many local to Herne Hill, but others from further afield, gain experience and confidence performing in front of an audience. Many have started just with a backing track but have moved on to learn an instrument, form a band and write their own songs. And there are even some who have begun to forge a career in the music industry. But the emphasis at JOM is not on singling out talent, but praising all performers for their courage and making them feel special. With venue, music equipment and sound systems all provided free of charge and volunteer parents as sound engineers, stagehands and comperes, JOM has created the UK’s largest Open Mike programme. After the Award was made Andy Gray said: “the evening of the Awards



presentation was great fun and I met plenty of people I had not met before including local councillors who were interested in Junior Open Mic. Being Highly Commended by the Society authenticates our work and as such it will help to impress people, including funders.”

# FROM SHOPFRONT TO

*In a pre-supermarket age there was no lack of small local shops. Today almost all have closed. Architectural designer Colin MacInnes takes a critical look at some local examples of conversion to residential use.*

The Victorian streets of south London were built to accommodate much more commercial use at street level than there is demand for today. Even outside of the obvious “town centres” there were short parades of shops and other businesses, often focused around a junction of otherwise residential streets.

This means that many of these shops get converted to residential use, and this raises a bit of a design problem: how to take a frontage that was all about transparency and display of wares, and turn it into something providing a degree of privacy and seclusion? Here we make an attempt at categorising some of the strategies commonly seen in the Herne Hill area.

First, though: how to spot buildings which once were shops? An easy giveaway for Victorian shopfronts is the “console bracket”. These decorative elements nearly always bookended the fascia, which would display the name of the business and ran above the display windows. In many cases nearly all other original elements have disappeared but these brackets remain, in various states of disrepair. A few are illustrated in image 1.

## 1. The shopfront restored and inhabited

While there are very few examples of shopfronts that have survived in their original form, some retain enough that their original purpose is easily recognisable, even if visibly



2



3

adapted for residential use. Images 2 (Kemerton Rd) and 3 (Shakespeare Rd) show examples where the fascia signage has been restored. In both of these cases, the glazing and framing, although partially rebuilt, follows the basic arrangement and extent of the original. Inevitably there has to be some compromise to provide privacy: either internal curtains or



1

frosted glazing. This is easier to deal with when the frontage is set back from the pavement edge.

## 2. Retained in spirit

In some cases, less of the original remains but what has been built in its place retains the “idea” of shopfront. Images 4 (Hinton Rd) and 5 (Shakespeare Rd) show some examples. Here a further step towards privacy (and perhaps security) is taken, with the lower portion of what would have been glazing in solid panels – but with the pattern of framing still recalling a fully glazed frontage.

## 3. De-shopfronted

Another strategy is not to retain any pretence of a shopfront, and instead rebuild the ground floor as if it were always in residential use, matching the upper storeys of the building in style. Images 6 (Hinton Rd) and 7 (Milkwood Rd) show some variations on this.



4

Even where this approach is taken, some evidence of the previous use nearly always remains.

# FRONT ROOM



## 4. The defensive void

Quite often, shopfronts were built out from the frontage of the main house, occupying the zone that elsewhere on the street is taken up with small front gardens. There are



many examples of conversions where this zone has been reclaimed as outside space – the wall of the ground floor is pulled back and this allows a small area that can be fenced off. This is one way of dealing with the problem of having living space right against what might be a busy pavement

and reflects a common urban design principle of “defensible space”. When the shopfront fascia remains above, that space is overshadowed and there is quite a wide variation in how successful this approach is. Image 8 (Dulwich Rd) shows an



example that could also fall within category 3, while image 9 (Hinton Rd) might fall into category 5 below.

## 5. Who cares what it looks like anyway?

One strategy is simply to fill in the shopfront with no regard for appearance or

contribution to the street scene. Appearance is a subjective matter of course, but images 10 (Hinton Rd) and 11 (Herne Hill Road) are offered as examples which have been carried out recently. The Hinton Rd example was built contrary

to planning permission – and has actually since been altered after an intervention by Lambeth’s planning enforcement team. The Herne Hill Road example involved the destruction of many surviving Victorian features and had no planning permission at all.

We wait to see whether any action will be taken by Lambeth.

The Herne Hill Society’s planning group attempts to keep an eye on these kinds of alterations but many building owners seem untroubled by potential sanctions. Perhaps some of the

better examples shown on this page demonstrate that it is possible to create usable residential accommodation without losing all memory of the previous lives of our streets, and the attractive architectural features associated with them.



# OUR VERY OWN (SECRET) WHIRLED CINEMA

**I**t's not like the Ritz, because this is really local. You approach this small secret cinema by picking your way through the fashionably unimproved micro-streetscape of Hardess Street in Loughborough Junction, down at the bottom of Herne Hill Road. For this first-time visitor (others may have different reactions) we are in classic grungy railway arch territory. Maybe like Hoxton in the 1990s but without the synthetic self-aware bohemian pretensions. At first we tread carefully past untidy-looking but highly professional car bodywork repair arches.

Then the street briskly narrows to a path heading towards the brightly lit Miguel's Boxing Gym & Fitness Gym, host to the Champs Within programme which achieved recognition in the Society's Community Excellence Awards last year (see more at page 13).

But before you hit the gym and grab your boxing gloves, you notice a steel door with keypads and a discreet bell push announcing the cinema – and



indeed there is a reassuring illuminated neon sign over the door. You have arrived. Now you achieve entrance by swiping your designated contactless membership card on the keypad. You tug the heavy door and climb the short stairs towards a calmer and more international dimension, the Whirled Cinema (get it?).

## What we can watch

Since Whirled Cinema opened its door (yes, it's heavy) in 2010 as an independent members' cinema, it has set out to screen a diverse programme of the best of current world/Whirled and art house cinema. People don't come here expecting to see the film industry's very latest releases, the sort of screenings which attract people to commercial cinemas (then having to endure lengthy commercials and trailers before the actual film is shown). So again, not like the Ritz.

Instead, and thanks to a carefully curated programme which changes each week, Whirled members see films that have provoked and earned the attention and interest of discerning cinema followers. A new film is shown each week, generally at 5 pm on Sunday afternoon and at 8 pm on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. In addition, documentary films are shown on the first Thursday of every month. The club normally shows at least 60 films a year. For members, there's no need to book, we just turn up to any screening. And no trailers or commercials to waste our time.

Another attraction of this club (which has a good website and is

inexpensive to join) is an intimate and comfortable environment with excellent sound systems and a friendly bar at the back. You have to be a member to use Whirled Cinema, but the membership system is straightforward:

individual memberships start at £9.99 a month and you can bring a guest for free to all these screenings. There is even a £12 Weekly Membership which covers two films but no guest entitlement.

At present Mike Atterby, the owner-manager, tells us that more members can be accommodated, so this is a good time to sign up and commit to seeing more interesting films, in a relaxed and intelligent environment. Very Herne Hill! (although it is also very Loughborough Junction!).

## Private hire

In addition to the films, the premises are often rearranged for parties and other private hire events – either private filmings, or other social events for all ages. For such events, skilled staff easily remove the benches to set up a party night, club or dancefloor environment. The bar can be open for such occasions, as can the professional sound system. Private hires are generally available on Thursday – Sunday evenings and some afternoons too at the



*The Hardess Street approach*



*The exterior belies the interior!*

weekend.

Whirled Cinema is more fun than slumped at home watching Netflix or Prime. If you join, this is a secret which is so intriguing and so unique that you may be unwilling to share it – but you should join, and you should share it.

[www.whirledcinema.com/](http://www.whirledcinema.com/) 259-260 Hardess Street, SE24 0HZ

**Pat Roberts**



# SOULSCAPES

Curated by Lisa Anderson, Managing Director of Black Cultural Archives, *Soulsapes* at Dulwich Picture Gallery presents alternative views of landscape art by African Diaspora artists. Over 30 works approach the subject through a wide variety of media, including painting, photography, film, textiles and collage. Ms Anderson hopes “this exhibition will challenge perceptions of our relationship with nature”.

Each section is themed, with the walls colour-coded. We begin with ‘Belonging’ (green), highlighting emotional affinity through shared histories. Monica de Miranda’s inkjet print triptych *Sunrise*



*Che Lovelace*

imagines his ancestral Jamaica’s tropical foliage.

Room 2, ‘Memory’ (pink) features Harold Offer’s 20-minute video of black figures placed in a romantic English landscape as music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor plays. Similarly, Jasmine Francis uses photographic images and archive views juxtaposing black people in ‘picturesque’ scenes. Njideka Akunyili Crosby’s *Casava Garden* combines painting and collage with pictures of Nigerian pop stars, cuttings from fashion magazines and family photos as the many layers making up cultural identity. Alberta Whittle presents three acrylic and raffia roundels as dreamscapes referencing Caribbean Gothic and the legacy of the slave trade.

Ebony G Patterson uses mixed media collage to explore layers of time in the undergrowth, while Michael Armitage paints onto bark cloth, its ridges making hills recalling mystical tales of Tanzanian witches. Renowned filmmaker Isaac Julien’s *Onyx Cave* a still from his installation *Iceland*, places a black woman standing alone in a cold, snowy land.

In the Mausoleum, Phoebe Boswell’s site-specific installation, *I Dream of a Home I Cannot Know*, is a 21-minute video compiled over six years documenting daily life in Zanzibar.

Room 3, ‘Joy’ (yellow) evokes the euphoria felt with close connection to landscape. Kimathi Mafafo’s *Unforseen Journey of Self-Discovery* is a hand and machine embroidered fabric depicting a woman emerging from a white muslin veil into a colourful, natural

space; it speaks of serenity, introspection and peace. Mafafo, a South African artist, had a solo show in a Bermondsey art gallery earlier this year.

*On Episode Seven* is one of a series of ‘Idyl’ paintings by Kimathi Donkor, created to “celebrate tender and contemplative moments shared by families and friends as they enjoy serene meadows, lakes, mountains, forests, rivers and beaches together”.

It shows four people at ease and play, relaxing in a public park on a balmy day.



*Kimathi Mafafo*

Two vibrant paintings by Che Lovelace depict flora, fauna and Caribbean ritual, while Alain Josephine evokes Martinique’s lush landscape.

The final room, ‘Transformation’ (sky-blue) considers how we understand or navigate change and how people found refuge in nature during the Covid lockdowns. Four large paintings, one a commissioned diptych, fill the room. Ravelle Pillay’s *There is Water at the Bottom of the Ocean* is a moody reference to painful colonial history. By contrast, Michaela Yearwood-Dan uses bold, swirling brushstrokes in floral displays with ceramic petals. In Christina Kimeze’s *Wader (Lido Beach)* a pregnant woman in a lush, natural setting symbolises new possibilities. Her *Interior I* has a figure



*Isaac Julien*

emerging from and becoming part of her surroundings, warm colours suggesting closeness and intensity.

**Jeffrey Doorn**

*Soulsapes*, a powerful, thought-provoking exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery opened 14 February and runs until 2 June. Exhibition entry £15.90, including admission to the permanent collection. Concessions available.

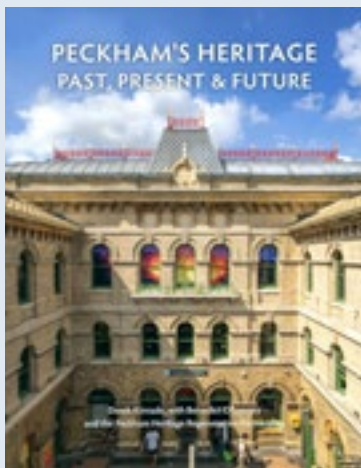
# PECKHAM'S HERITAGE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The fascinating stories of Peckham's people, communities and landmarks have been recorded in a new book by local historian Derek Kinrade and architect Benedict O'Looney, underpinned by the work of former Peckham Society editor John Beasley and beautifully designed by Laura Mingozzi-Marsh.

The talented team has put together a superb selection of historic illustrations, many not widely seen before, together with contemporary images showing how Peckham looks today. The book is divided into roughly three parts, beginning with a brief history of Peckham before moving to detailed profiles of important buildings both lost and surviving, such as the Jones & Higgins department store, Peckham Rye Station and the charming Choumert Square. The final part of the book comprises oral histories such as that of community activist Eileen Conn MBE, who has lived in Peckham for over 50 years.

There are studies of social, industrial and architectural history and sometimes of all three, such as the analysis of the Bussey Building: a rifle range, turned

London's largest sporting goods factory, turned cultural hub. The Bussey Building's remarkable red-brick proportions can most easily be seen from a train going through Peckham Rye with its rooftop



cinema affording views right across London. There is a well-illustrated history of the Bussey family and their sporting goods business. In the late 19th century every London cricketer had a Bussey bat (including WG Grace). This innovative piece of industrial heritage has survived, reborn today as workshops, music

venue, bar and cinema. But there are also accounts of lost heritage like Gordon's Brewery of Chadwick Rd, whose horses, destined for the Western Front, can be seen in a famous photograph.

Garden history is illuminated by a profile of Peter Collinson, the 18th-century botanist and a man who, as the authors note, deserves better recognition for his role in the evolution of British gardening.

Like that of Herne Hill, the history of Peckham is still there to be revealed. Sometimes it's just been covered up, as in Khan's Bargain store where Akbar Khan has discovered and restored the old glass vaulted roof over what remains of Holdron's, once a prestigious department store with modernist façade from 1935.

The book does exactly what it says on the tin and gives an insight into Peckham's past, present and future heritage. It is a valuable resource for historians or for anyone interested in how Peckham has changed and how it will continue to change. The authors are to be congratulated on an important addition to our knowledge of South London history.

**Sharon O'Connor**

*Peckham's Heritage: Past, Present and Future by Derek Kinrade and Benedict O'Looney and the Peckham Heritage Regeneration Partnership, published by Peckham Heritage (2023), £15 ISBN 978-1-3999-4029-0*



## THE UNEXPECTED

On the 26 January this year, my friend and I were walking our dogs, as we often do, in Brockwell Park. It was a beautiful crisp day with not a cloud in the sky. We ambled down towards the pond for our regular visit to see the bird life and the swans who are always to be found on the upper pond. On this occasion, however, we noticed only one swan. Further investigation led us to the middle pond where another two swans could be seen from the small bridge. We were remarking how unusual this was to a passer-by with his bike, who was looking concerned and messaging on his phone. The message he was sending was to the Swan Sanctuary. In discussion, we realised that the two swans that were in the middle pond were actually the Brockwell Park pair. The one on the upper pond was a visitor. Further round on the other side of the middle pond was yet another visitor, but this time on the bank. It is, I understand, not a good idea to introduce other swans from a different area and indeed the Brockwell Park resident cob (male) and pen (female) were looking distinctly agitated.

It seemed a very short time before Ann, a volunteer from the Swan

# FLOWERING EMBANKMENTS

In 1897 *Queen, The Lady's Magazine* provided an intriguing article on the joys of spotting plants along railway lines: "you practically get out of town at Herne Hill, and immediately you will notice Nature's gardens on the embankments and cuttings." In springtime coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*), daisies (*Bellis perennis*) and buttercups (*Ranunculus bulbosus* and *R. repens*) could be seen, and "some of the banks with a south aspect are covered with other early meadow flora". Later on beside the track between Herne Hill and Sydenham oxeye daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*, pictured), kingcups (also known as marsh marigold, *Caltha palustris*), meadow (*Ranunculus acris*) and bulbous buttercups, and seedling apples and pears could be enjoyed. While in the autumn, after "the ruthless mowers have cut down the straggling swathes", feverfew, wild carrot and yarrow could be seen.

How does this differ from the flora which we see beside the line today? It seems that in the late 19th century, when sparks escaping from steam trains might easily ignite railside vegetation,



embankments were regularly mown, so that they resembled meadows. Such mowing has largely ceased and today shrubs extend towards the rails.

Another factor which can restrict the development of herbaceous flora is the vigorous growth of ivy (*Hedera helix*), a member of the essentially tropical family Araliaceae, which possibly as a result of

climate change has been thriving in recent years.

A tree which is doing well is evergreen oak (*Quercus ilex*), of which seedlings pop up all along the line.

More conspicuous in the summer is buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) or butterfly bush, which is following railways throughout Britain. This



well-known ornamental shrub was introduced from China in 1896, and first recorded in the wild, in Merionethshire, in 1922, before becoming established on bombsites during the Second World War. Another introduced ornamental is Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*), first grown in British gardens in the 1820s, and first recorded in the wild in the 1880s. Today it is a feared invasive weed, which Network Rail tries to exterminate, spending millions of pounds doing so, although it is said that at one time it was planted on railway embankments as a stabiliser.

Herbaceous plants which are thriving include green alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*), at one time thought to be native to southwest England, but now considered to be an ancient introduction, and rosebay willowherb (*Chamaerion angustifolium*, pictured), which until the mid-19th century was very restricted in its distribution, but since then has become much more widespread spreading along railway lines.

**Roy Vickery**

*For more than four decades Roy Vickery worked as a botanist at the Natural History Museum. He also has a long association with the South London Botanical Institute, retiring as its President in 2022. He has published more than 130 books and articles on plant folklore.*

## GUESTS

Sanctuary, arrived and told us that she was going to attempt to catch the visitor cob on the bank. She climbed the railings to reach the



resting swan and with the speed and gentleness of someone with 30 years of rescues to her name managed to secure him in what could only be described as a very large, swan-sized handbag. However, trying to get back over the railings with a large swan weighing 13 or 14 kilograms was not going to be easy. I held both of our dogs while my friend went over to assist the rescue. What a privilege. We enquired about his mate, still swimming on the upper pond. It was decided that if she reached the bank she could be rescued

too, if not we would have to wait and see what the next step would be. It had been possible to read the ring numbers on the uninjured

pair and it was found they had flown from Tooting and had left their cygnets behind so it was fairly urgent that they all be reunited. The cob seemed very calm and relaxed, as he was placed into the back of the car to be transported back to Tooting where his cygnets were waiting.

Some time later that day I returned to the park without my dog, who at all points previously had been kept on a very short lead and at a good distance from any rescue so as not to alarm the birds. The pen from Tooting was still on the upper pond and had appeared to continue to banish the Brockwell Park pair to the middle pond. She was still calling for her mate and displaying her beautiful wings. I captured this moment.

Two days later the Tooting pen eventually took flight and returned to her home where she was reunited with her partner and cygnets.

We are so fortunate to be able to enjoy the wildlife we have in Brockwell Park. How wonderful and fascinating it was to witness the care taken by the Swan Sanctuary to keep our two special majestic birds and our January visitors healthy and safe.

**Kara Tritton**



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