

HERNE HILL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY 🏡ISSUE 162 🏡Spring 🏡2025



3

View of Bengeworth Road site from Higgs Yard tower

POWER INTRASTRUCTURE OLD & NEW

► *pages 12/13*

JIM DICKSON MP BIDS FAREWELL

► *page 6*

CELEBRATING LOCAL ARTISTS

► *page 17*

The Magazine of the Herne Hill Society



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Sauna comes to Ruskin Park

Finnish words that have become loanwords in the English language are few and far between. The borrowing really works in the other direction. For example, the Finnish for “tennis” is – tennis. In fact the only Finnish word that has an established place in English is “sauna”, as it has in all other European languages apart, perhaps surprisingly, from Swedish and Norwegian. Not that any of this is likely to be in the minds of those heading to Ruskin Park to try out a novel attraction – a Community Sauna Bath, situated near the pond and closest to the park entrance on Denmark Hill/Champion Park. It will fill the site, disused for several years, that was a service area for the park and was latterly a base for Trees for Cities.

At the time of writing installation is well under way and opening is scheduled for 17 April. There will be three saunas, one fully accessible, alongside plunge pools, hot showers, a treatment space, changing rooms and toilets. The company behind the project is a not-for-profit CIC (Community Interest

Company) and they describe their vision for “Camberwell Sauna” as a place where the “local community will be able to de-stress and rejuvenate whilst reconnecting to nature, the outdoors, themselves and others”. They offer low entry fees, concessionary rates and free sessions for those who can’t afford it. The sauna can be socially prescribed through NHS trusts and offers free sessions to NHS

workers. They opened their first sauna in Hackney in 2021 and have now successfully expanded to Stratford, Bermondsey and Peckham.

More details on entry prices, opening times and how to book can be found at www.community-sauna.co.uk/camberwell-sauna. Some might prefer to see the facility referred to as Ruskin Park Sauna or Denmark Hill Sauna – is the park entirely “Camberwell”? – but whatever the name it is good to see part of the park being brought back into useful service.



It will presumably also provide Lambeth with some income, from a use that should avoid the sort of controversies around Brockwell Park as a source of revenue.

A new future for the Stable Block?

Since 2009 the “Stable Block” in Ruskin Park – a rare survivor from the time when Denmark Hill and Herne Hill were lined with the mansions of wealthy merchants – has stood unused, boarded up and faced with an uncertain future. It was last in use as a building serving the needs of park maintenance, and even longer ago (in a later addition to the original building) providing public toilets. At the same time as we can greet the arrival of an open-air sauna in the park on the site of a disused service area, there is now welcome news of plans to restore the Stable Block and its outbuildings and find new uses for them as a café and community hub, with outdoor seating in the outer courtyard and, through the removal of the first floor and staircase, a double height space in the main block. The Lambeth planning application for the scheme can be found at 24/03904/RG3.

The Society has already responded to the application by providing a letter to the Friends of Ruskin Park and Lambeth Council, the building owner, strongly supporting the scheme and – apart from its clear potential attraction as a café – detailing some of the wider community benefits the scheme can offer. The letter has been particularly provided in order to lend support to a



proposed bid for Heritage Lottery funding. As always with such schemes funding is the crunch question. We have previously reported that Lambeth have committed to providing some funding, but a lot more will be needed. The scheme is still at an early stage. Lambeth gave it conditional planning permission in March. Now we must wait and see whether hopes to bring back the building into use will be fulfilled.



The Temple Bowling Club was, as last year, the venue for the Society’s well-attended AGM on 25 March. In the first half Rebecca Tee, the Society’s Chair, presided over the formalities with an account of the Society’s activities over the past year. She was followed by Lyndon Fothergill, the Treasurer, who presented his annual report on the Society’s accounts. The elections of officers and committee members of the Society for the coming year then took place, supervised by the Society’s President, Colin Wight. All outgoing officers and committee were standing again and all were re-elected unanimously (they are listed on page 2).

The second half, after a break and an opportunity to visit the well-stocked Bowling Club’s bar, moved on to a talk by Nikky Catto, local resident and Lambeth tour guide. The talk looked at Railton Road, the “heart and soul of Herne Hill” as Nikky described it, with fascinating insights into what was happening especially in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. It highlighted the stories of ordinary people for whom Railton Road provided a home, as it did for many talented black men and women who made important contributions in writing, the creative arts and community activism. The talk was beautifully illustrated. We are very grateful to Nikky for giving the AGM this extra dimension and doing so with such infectious enthusiasm. AGMs are important but can be, some might say, a bit on the dull side.

The occasion included one other special event. In May (see opposite page) the Society will be holding, for the second time, its Excellence Awards. However, it considers that patting itself on the back should not be part of these awards and therefore persons active within the Society, today or in the past, should not be included. But this excludes people who rightly deserve recognition for their work for the Society, so this year we have introduced an award, called the President’s Commendation. It was presented to

The Society’s AGM

Dr John Brunton by the Society’s President Colin Wight, with these words:



“John is a former Vice Chair of the Society. In that role he undertook responsibility for producing the Society’s magazine and organising its planning group. Moreover, he took a key role in helping to get a number of important books researched, written up and eventually published for the Society. These included the *Herne Hill Heritage Trail*, *Herne Hill Personalities* and the story of the Milkwood Estate. John also dealt with local history queries and represented the Society on the Lambeth Local History Forum. And he was always ready to help set up and man the Society’s stall at local fairs, and even built the ingenious stands on which we displayed – and continue to display – our goods. John also gave a huge amount of time, as the Society’s representative, to the complex issues surrounding the regeneration 15 years ago of the main Herne Hill road junction, a project which banished through traffic from what is now the village centre of Station Square.

He made a huge contribution to the Society over many years and recognition of that is long overdue. So it is a particular pleasure to award the President’s Commendation of 2025 to John Brunton – the very first recipient of this award, and one of many more recipients, we hope, in years to come.”



If you love the Society, please consider making us a financial donation as this boosts our work and really makes our day. We are all volunteers in the Herne Hill Society. Thank you.
www.hernehillsociety.org.uk/donate

Brenda Jones

At the time of going to press we learned that Brenda Jones, a former chair of the Herne Hill Society, had died peacefully in her sleep at the age of 96. Brenda moved to Totnes some years ago after many years in which she played an active role in the Society. There will be more about Brenda’s life in the next issue of the magazine.

Local Councillors’ Surgeries

Lambeth

1. Carnegie Library Hub at the Carnegie Library, 192 Herne Hill Road, SE24 0DG, 6 – 7 pm fourth Tuesday of each month
2. Lilford Area Residents Association, Lilford House, Lilford Road, SE5 9QD, 10 – 11 am, second Saturday of each month

Southwark

Herne Hill Methodist Church Hall, 155 Half Moon Lane, SE24 9JG, 6.30 pm, second Thursday of each month

“This year’s Award goes to ... “

Rebecca Tee previews a Special Event



Question: What do a local choir, a car repair workshop, a nail bar, a corner shop and a tree-planting scheme have in common?

Answer: They have all been nominated for a Herne Hill Society Excellence Award.

The nominations started arriving in September 2024 and

continued to flow in right up to the close of nominations on 31 January 2025. Towards the deadline, that flow became a torrent.

Quantity: Running the Awards for a second time produced twice the number of nominations compared to the first time two years ago. It seems the Awards are finding a firm place in the minds of local people. Our publicity helped, with our volunteers delivering hundreds of leaflets to encourage entries, with posters in local shops and even a video on social media. Do you follow us on Instagram?

www.instagram.com/hernehillsociety

Scope: What was also different this year was the sheer range of subjects in the nominations. Many more individuals were put forward for the great work they have been doing, with a wider spread of organisations featured, from shops and service providers, to big organisations, to small and hidden

local charities and iconic buildings. It is astonishing how much of value is going on in a small area of not much more than one postcode.

Location: The other notable difference this time around is the spreading of nominations to a wider geographic area. Encompassing more than just the heart of Herne Hill, nominations arrived from Loughborough Junction on our northern fringe, to Tulse Hill at our southern corner, to a slice of SE5 on the edge of Camberwell. We do not have a hard boundary, the Herne Hill area is fuzzy and flexible. If you identify with Herne Hill – we embrace your involvement.

Judging is taking place right now, which is no mean task with such wide-ranging and varied nominations.

The results will be announced on 7 May 2025 at a special Celebration Evening generously sponsored by Hamptons, North Dulwich, with Helen Hayes MP presenting the awards.

To book a free place, please register now at <https://herne-hill-excellence-awards-2025.eventbrite.co.uk>

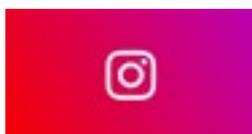
Frankly, every nomination is worthy of an Award. Herne Hill is a very special place.



Boosting interest with Instagram

The Society started its Instagram account in November 2024 with the goal to publicise the work of the Society and to build an audience who would want to hear about local news and understand more about our local history. Instagram is a fantastic way to connect with a millennial demographic who are much more likely to consume news and information from social media than from more traditional sources like newsletters. Instagram reportedly has almost 35 million users in the UK, more than half of whom are under 35.

At the time of writing (just 3 months after launching) we have just over 300 followers - not all of our followers will necessarily view every image or video that we post, but we do currently have excellent engagement statistics well above industry standards. One popular recent image of Herne Hill Station in 1968 was viewed 279 times by 200 different people, of which the vast majority were drawn from



our 300 followers. We are very happy to post anything of local interest, from old photos that we have in the archives, to present-day snapshots of the area.

During the nomination period for the Herne Hill Excellence Awards we made several videos of our Chair explaining the process and encouraging people to nominate, and not only did we upload these to Instagram, but we also chose to “boost” these posts. Essentially this means that we paid a small fee to Instagram to have the videos appearing in the feeds of anyone who lives in the Herne Hill area. The overall purpose was to encourage local people to visit our website where they would be presented with instructions on how to nominate for the Awards. Over 130 people visited our website from the boosted videos and we believe some of them made nominations as a result. We also know of at least one person who joined the Society as a member after seeing us on Instagram, and there are probably a few more – welcome to you all!

Jim Dickson MP bids farewell

As I move on from the massive privilege of representing people in Herne Hill and latterly Loughborough Junction on Lambeth Council, 35 years and nine elections on from my first encounter with the ballot box as a callow youth in May 1990, I just want to say a huge thank you to everyone who makes this a wonderful place. The



only favour I ask to allow me a little space for reflection on how our neighbourhood has changed and what lessons we can draw from that.

People may disagree with the diagnosis but since 1990 I've seen Herne Hill transmute from a mildly neglected – or perhaps let's agree on overlooked – “drive-through” on the way from Brixton to West and Upper Norwood or Dulwich, to a hugely distinctive destination in its own right. *The Telegraph's* recent verdict on our patch as the “poshest suburb” in the country may have committed the dual sin of wildly overstating its case and badly mischaracterising our neighbourhood but what's not in doubt is that there's been something singular happening over the past couple of decades to make our bit of South London an immensely special place to those of us who love it and have called it home.

Some of my big milestones in Herne Hill's three-decade journey from striving to thriving include joining the setting up of the indefatigable Herne Hill Forum back in 1999 which gave voice, energy and a sense of purpose to the neighbourhood; seeing our wonderful Brockwell Lido close in the 1990s to be gloriously reborn in the 2000s; working to get the Herne Hill “regeneration project” (aka creating the piazza that is Station Square) over the line with Lambeth and London Mayoral cash, and seeing our beautiful Sunday market open and flourish where heavy lorries and fast cars used to rule the roost. Seeing the future of our historic Carnegie Library secured by a great Community Trust with a gym and new café attached is another highlight, as has been the £1m plus invested by Lambeth in upgrading the gorgeous Ruskin Park thanks to great work from the amazing Friends group. Until the last decade Station Hall was a disused void sitting on top of Herne Hill station and it has now been transformed by (credit where it's due) Southeastern Rail and local people into an extremely valuable

(though sadly not yet fully accessible) community space. Special shout out too for my favourite gallery the brilliant 198 now a creative hub for young people as well as a place to view an amazing range of art, sitting as it does at the top end of a Railton Road which is now a green, tranquil, largely traffic free thoroughfare.

Let's not forget the green jewel that is Brockwell Park the space where my partner Nicola and I (and many other families) pretty much raised our kids, safely nurtured by our excellent local primary and secondary schools. With a restored Brockwell Hall due to re-open as a community hub, café and event space in 2025 (and park upgrades bolstered by extra cash from summer events) we can confidently say the best (including the continuation of our wonderful Lambeth Country Show) is yet to come for Lambeth's most cherished open space.

Let this be read as a paean to a certain type of entitlement, I think most would agree that Herne Hill remains an inclusive and tolerant community with a range of very diverse populations all rubbing along well together and creating space for people of all incomes, backgrounds and interests.

So what links all of this overwhelmingly positive change? – and yes I'm keenly aware of the continuing inequality, badly distributed health outcomes and need for more affordable homes that blights our country. I'd say it's Herne Hill's incredible social capital or, to be less pompous, the quality of people who live here and their willingness to get stuck in to creating a better neighbourhood. The commitment, passion and skills of residents, working either as dedicated and well-run community organisations - like the Herne Hill Society, Loughborough Junction Action Group or Brockwell Park Community Partners – or just taking the trouble as individual families or in self-organised groups, to make their corner of our neighbourhood a little healthier – all this has made it possible.

So Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction goodbye. I've loved working alongside you. It's been an amazing voyage and there's so much still to do. But above all good luck and thanks for letting me be part of your story!

Carnegie Library Hub sees a positive future

An article in our previous issue (#161, Winter 2024) reported the crisis in the relationship between the Carnegie Library Hub trustees and Lambeth Council, but hinted at the beginning of a solution. In the meantime, a petition attracted wide support.

This welcome result was confirmed in January when Lambeth indicated it was willing to negotiate. An agreement, soon confirmed



formally, recognised what was important to the Hub strategy, close to the original ambition. The Hub for their part accepted conditions which they felt were reasonable to provide accountability, as well as a lease term which was important to them.

In short, Lambeth have offered the Trustees a relatively short 21-month tenancy lease to enable them to demonstrate how they could start to execute the strategy they had presented.

The supporters' petition was formally presented to the Council in January, and Lambeth's helpful response is worth noting. It included the commitment that "The Council continues to commit to the future of Carnegie Library as both the library and a hub that can support a range of activities that support the well-being of the local community ... The Trust and the Council have committed to working in partnership to ensure the building is well used, maintained, and that the operation of the space is financially sustainable into the longer term ... The Council ... looks forward to developing the long-term approach to the building in partnership

and with input from the community."

Public pressure, including the support of our Member of Parliament, Helen Hayes MP, some of the ward councillors, and the widespread support for the Trust's petition, were clearly effective in producing this result. Welcoming this announcement, the Trustees noted that "our financial sustainability is a crucial point, underscored by recent announcements about Lambeth's library budget. The better we can financially support the building the community love, then the more impact this will have on the library [which] the community so cherish."

An early signal that the new relationship is working will come with the launch of the long-promised café in one of the big rooms of the library, operated by a well-established local coffee shop business. No café in Herne Hill can claim such a stylish setting, though the choice of colour for the recently redecorated walls has its critics. The "kick start" event took place on 29 March, with two Lambeth councillors attending. There is now an appeal for crowdfunding, and at present the café is expected to open for business end May/early June.

Library closures?

The reference above to Lambeth's library budget was timely and deliberate: in February the news emerged, initially from a leak, that the council was considering a 25% cut across all Lambeth library's budgets, provoking a series of petitions and demonstrations from library users and supporters. As widely reported, Lambeth's annual overall budget is under dire pressure and they plan to save £46.3m in 2025/26 through efficiency cuts, service reductions, and new income sources. But as Brixton Buzz has reported, despite these measures, a £49.8m funding gap remains over the next four years, requiring further spending reductions or new revenue streams.

With the budget approved by the full Council meeting on 5 March, this 25% reduction in funding for the library service will be achieved not as a cut or closures, but simply a decision not to recruit for the current 16 vacant roles within the library service. The opening sentence of the Council's response to the Hub's petition, as quoted above, seems to confirm that there are no plans at present to actually close the Carnegie or any other libraries. **Pat Roberts**

A rain garden for Lowden Road

Soak up Lambeth is a partnership initiative between Lambeth Council and Thames Water Utilities to help reduce the current and future impact of flooding, a danger that is likely to increase with climate change. When it rains water from roofs and the multiple paved surfaces found in urban areas enters the same sewer pipes as toilets, sinks and washing machines – unless rainwater is taken away by a separate system, which is not the case in Herne Hill. During heavy storms, rainwater overloads the sewers, causing flooding to those that live downstream. This can also stop drains from working, causing localised flooding



upstream. An interactive map at <https://apps.london.gov.uk/suds/#14/51.45162/-0.10211> issued by the GLA shows the varied Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) that have been introduced across London. One such is the recently completed "rain garden" in Lowden Road covering almost 70 square metres (pictured), recently planted with robust grasses and perennial plants (still in their infancy) and designed to slow the run-off into the sewers, thereby contributing to the reduction of flood risk. Other SuDS schemes in the wider south-east London area include the recent major works on Peckham Rye.

The Quadrangle

– another update

In the last issue of the Magazine we looked at The Quadrangle on Herne Hill. In October last year a balustrade along one of its distinctive first-floor walkways had collapsed. No-one was injured fortunately, but the collapse highlighted concerns about the condition of the building and its future, especially in the light of its acquisition by the Brixton-based Lexadon Property Group in 2023. Lexadon did start work on a number of empty flats, but this involved interior alterations for which listed building consent had not been given (the building was listed grade II in 2020). Just before we published the last issue we received an email from Jerry Knight, the Lexadon boss, offering to meet on site and explain their plans. We responded, saying we would appreciate a meeting, but heard no more. After a reminder we were told we would be contacted. After a



further reminder we were then told, without further explanation, no meeting would be possible. The current position is that a temporary structure, as pictured, has been erected along the walkways and there is a new application in respect of one of the flats (where permission had been refused) which appears to propose the restoration of original features that had been earlier removed in unauthorised alterations. Clearly, if the heritage value of The Quadrangle is to be safeguarded any new work must provide like-for-like replacement, both for the interiors of the flats and the highly distinctive exterior walkways.

As always, communication is a key element. But as the Society has itself learned from its own attempt to talk to Lexadon, communication between residents and the building owner is poor. Residents feel very much in the dark as to what will be happening and for those – the majority – who do not have a long leasehold interest their fear is that significantly increased rents will force them out. Their confidence has not been improved by an incident in March when a gas leak was discovered, from a pipe that was visibly corroded but appears not to have been checked for many years. **LM**

Dorchester Court

The group of eight Grade II listed mansion blocks at the top of Herne Hill have often been mentioned in this Magazine – something for which we make no apology, because their fate is important both as a home to the strong community that makes up its residents and as a building with significant heritage value for the whole of Herne Hill. Anyone who knows our area



will be only too well aware of the sorry appearance of the building, the maintenance of which has been neglected over decades by the property company that owns the freehold. Five years ago the owner, Manaquel Company Limited, applied for planning permission and listed building consent for a scheme that proposed restoration of the building alongside the building of 16 penthouse flats on the flat roofs of each block and eight new three-storey houses on the site of the disused garages that used to be available to residents, but which the owner several years ago sealed off and has allowed to fall into decay.

Last year Lambeth refused the applications. Now the owner has appealed to the Planning Inspectorate against that refusal. The Herne Hill Society, through its planning group, strongly objected to the proposed scheme and, consistently with that objection, have now submitted a statement to the planning inspector appointed to hear the appeal, which gives reasons why, in the Society's view, the appeal should be dismissed. There is much complexity, with documents running to many hundreds of pages, but the key principle at stake, as the Society sees it, is whether in the particular circumstances of Dorchester Court and having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework it is right for the building owner to seek justification for new development that will adversely harm a heritage asset and the community who inhabit it, when that owner could and should restore the building without such development.

The complexity of the issues has meant that the Dorchester Court residents have, very understandably, found it necessary to obtain legal and other expert advice to assist the presentation of their case as interested parties in the appeal. This is inevitably costly. They are having to dig deeply into their own pockets, and are also looking to crowdfunding to assist in their battle. Details can be found here <https://www.gofundme.com/f/save-dorchester-court>

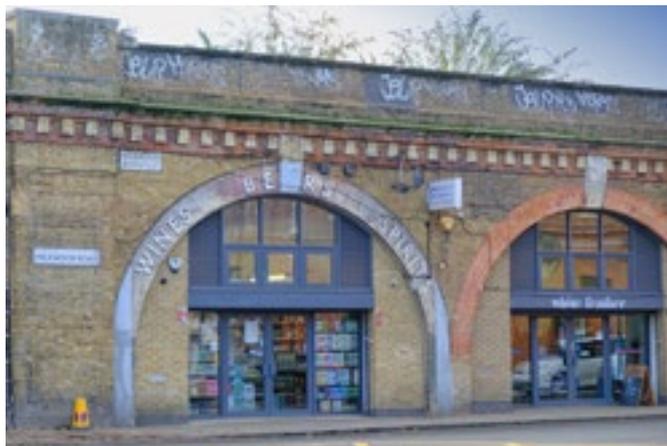
The appeal was due to involve two oral hearings in front of the planning inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. But at the time of going to press we learn that these hearings have been cancelled and the appeal is now due to heard by way of a planning enquiry. **LM**

Shops & Business News

Pat Roberts reports

Dickson Off Licence

The old sign painted on the brick arch suggests that 296 Milkwood Road has been an off-licence for very many years. Back in the day (the 1950s, for instance) it was C. Morley & Co., Wine, Spirit & Beer Merchants, 'established 1875'. It seems possible – though not yet proven – that this is the oldest surviving shop in Herne Hill that has dealt continuously with the same category of goods. Certainly it has been run by the (related) Samuel and Dickson families for one or two generations; and it's at least two decades since the present owner and manager, George Samuel Dickson, became involved. Now the lease is expiring and Mr Dickson is selling the business; but the new



owner will keep it as an off-licence, presumably with a change of name.

296 Milkwood Rd, London SE24 0EZ

Bird House Brewery

Until very recently, customers had to reach Arch 1127 by walking up into the Bath Factory Estate through the traditional gate near the post office on Norwood Road. But the Brewery now seems to have agreed with The Arch Company that their customers can stroll in from just under the bridge; and the outdoor drinking area has been expanded. The new arrangement promises to make Bird House even more popular with their young clientele, especially in good weather; though the management at The Half Moon may not enjoy this enhanced competition.

Meanwhile another local brewery and taproom, Bullfinch Brewery, also continues to prosper in a different set of railway arches close to Rosendale Road.



Bird House Brewery, Arch 1127, Bath Factory Estate, 41 Norwood Rd

<https://birdhousebrewing.com/>

Bullfinch Brewery, Arch 886-887, Rosendale Road

<https://www.thebullfinchbrewery.co.uk/>

The Arch Company

Regular readers will know that a good number of the retail premises in Herne Hill are ultimately owned by The Arch Company, a front name for the consortium that bought all 5000+ railway arches from Network Rail in 2018, paying £1.5 billion. (Network Rail of course continue to own the rails and all the other stuff that runs along the top.)

The original consortium was a joint venture between the US/global private equity group Blackstone, the world's largest alternative asset manager, with more than \$1 trillion assets under management, and TT Group, owned by the secretive Pears family and formerly known as Telereal Trillium. TT are one of the UK's largest privately held real estate investors, with a portfolio worth more than £9bn.

TT Group evidently found it tiresome to have to share ownership and responsibility over such a large and rather messy estate, so they have reportedly sold (or are about to sell) their share of the asset to Blackstone, who therefore now own the lot. A deal that symbolised, as the Financial Times remarked, the further advance of US private equity into the UK economy.

Regardless of ownership, we can expect the constant move to 'tidy up' the arches to continue.

<https://www.thearchco.com/>

The art of scrap

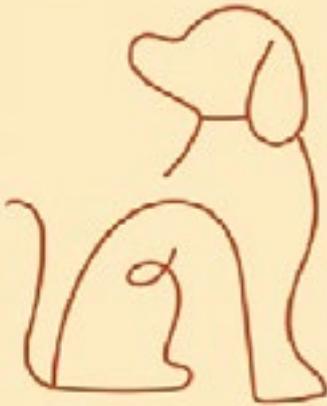


On 10 April an art event at Hardess Studios hit the national news – though some might take issue with the term "art". The Studios are among the varied enterprises on Hardess Street, some of which have been featured on these pages. The event in question was the smashing up of a Tesla motor car with sledgehammers and baseball bats (why? see picture). A spokesperson for the organisers explained that the car was already destined for the scrapyard, "it's a supervised, controlled art piece and there are proper safety measures in place. We urge people not to damage other Teslas or any other cars." The artfully destroyed vehicle is due to be auctioned, with all proceeds going to food bank charities.

New grooming salon in Dulwich Village

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Across the border – notes from our foreign correspondents

There is no formal agreement on where Herne Hill ends and Loughborough Junction begins. But you know that you are in the Junction when you feel bewildered by the numerous railway bridges that famously criss-cross the centre of the area. A few years ago the Bridges Project noted that from a single point near the junction of Coldharbour Lane, Loughborough Road and Hinton Road, six railway bridges are visible. Travelling in either direction on Coldharbour Lane or Loughborough Road you will pass below three railway bridges in quick succession. There was indeed a railway junction here at one stage: the tracks still join and divide (one heading to Denmark Hill and beyond) but now the station only caters for the Thameslink trains.

Sandwiched between Camberwell, Herne Hill and Brixton, the area has historically felt neglected, its identity ill-defined – but this has stimulated a series of projects to celebrate the area's diversity, confidence, unique character and promise, harnessing the efforts and ambitions of many creative and optimistic residents. Recently, though not universally welcomed by local residents, the construction of the 16-floor Higgs Yard apartments, and the now-agreed 320 units 'co-living' residential development (plus industrial workshop and studio facilities) on the other side of the railway will further change and possibly improve the ambience of the area, whilst undoubtedly putting even greater pressure on the inadequate facilities of Loughborough Junction Station. The small businesses and other tenants of the arch properties on Hardess Yard will also be troubled by the demolition and subsequent construction works as we have mentioned in the past.

A major point of unity for many of these projects is the Loughborough Junction Action Group (LJAG), a social action charity whose unofficial headquarters is the Platform Café on the edge of Loughborough Road as it leads north between the housing estates. LJAG was formed in 2008 in response to the murder of an innocent resident on Southwell Road. In the years since then, the charity has attracted voluntary donations and public funding but its driving force has been the energy and commitment of local volunteers.

One of their prominent and most successful projects has been **Loughborough Farm** – not exactly a farm but in fact a small and well-run market garden area where local residents can come together



to enjoy planting, reconnecting with the land, strengthening their community ties and growing useful foods and plants, some of which they sell at the gate.

Formerly a Victorian public toilet block, the **Platform Café**, created in 2015 by volunteers with support from Lambeth funds, is more than a welcoming place for good coffee and vegan food: it is a vital base and hub for connection and inclusion for many local grassroots



organisations and community leaders, including some focused on training local young people in confidence, practical experience in the hospitality sector and pathways into work. It also serves as a friendly and inexpensive venue for other activities such as second-hand book sales and exhibitions by local artists. Last year the Café was a finalist in the Outstanding Business Award category of the Lambeth Civic Awards.

Pat Roberts

<https://www.theplatformcafe.org/> <https://loughboroughjunction.org/>

And **Kara Tritton** reports on another find across our borders:

As a big lover of old books and secondhand book shops I was recently very excited to discover, by accident, a little gem of a place round the corner from the Ritzy Cinema in Brixton.

Bookmongers of Brixton is a treasure trove of secondhand and remaindered books at fabulous prices. Having recently featured in *TimeOut's* 45 brilliant bookshops in London you will soon see why it was second on the list. Founded in 1992 by American Patrick Kelly

the shop is bursting at the seams with every book you can imagine. Why had I not found this before? On entering it's as though you are going back in

time to a traditional community-based bookshop. I was immediately welcomed by Robert and Wendy Coyne. They soon introduced me to the resident rescued stray Popeye the cat who definitely rules the roost. This fabulous artwork by Wendy Coyne (pictured) features Patrick's much loved dogs. It is an acrylic painting on canvas and is titled "Dogs of Bookmongers; Window on to a Bookshop". A copy of it originally hung on the outside wall as a 'trompe l'oeil'.

The feeling is so relaxed and there is even a spot to sink into an enveloping sofa, browse the books and immerse yourself in the atmosphere. What an oasis in the hustle and bustle of Brixton's daily life. I will definitely be returning!

Bookmongers can be found at 439 Coldharbour Lane Monday to Saturday 10.30 - 6.30 and on Sundays 11.00 - 5.00



BENGEWORTH ROAD: POWER INFRASTRUCTURE OLD AND NEW

Colin MacInnes tells the story

Earlier this year – firstly in January and then again in February – a section of Coldharbour Lane between Loughborough Junction and Camberwell was closed to traffic. During each of these closures a very large blue object was to be found sitting on an oversized lorry trailer blocking the roadway. These pieces of equipment were in fact two “supergrid transformer blocks” for installation at the National Grid’s Bengeworth Road substation nearby.



Transformer unit in Coldharbour Lane

The substation site is visible from Ruskin Park, on the opposite side of the railway lines that run alongside the paddling pool area. Many regular users of the park will have noticed the large new buildings, now nearly complete, that have been appearing here over the past couple of years.

Major works are ongoing on this site as part of the London Power Tunnels project which involves building an entirely new tunnel across South London, carrying high voltage power cables. This will replace existing, ageing power lines which currently follow a different underground route across the city. The new tunnels pass under Loughborough Junction, and Bengeworth Road is one of the access points as well as being the location of an upgraded substation that is part of the project.

The site has a history that long predates the current works. In 1896 the South London Electric Supply Corporation was formed, to supply electricity to the whole of Lambeth. Their coal-fired generating station was built on land marked as a “cricket ground” on 1890s maps – and accessed via Bengeworth Road, the residential street from which it took its name. It started supplying electricity in



1930s aerial view showing the original power station

1899. Initially this power would mainly have been for the purposes of domestic lighting, and for newly installed electric street lights as they started to gradually displace gas lamps. In nearby Brixton, Electric Avenue was one of the first streets to have electric lighting, but this was completed in 1888 so the Bengeworth Road power station cannot take the credit for powering this pioneering installation – it had its own generator.



1916 OS map detail

The power station did, however, have a role in the early electrification of South London’s tramways. Around 1900, London County Council Tramways were looking into how they would power their network once they started replacing horse-drawn trams with electric ones. In the longer term, they intended to build their own power station in Greenwich, but various delays in the progress of

this lead to a decision to use a temporary supply provided by the South London Electric Supply Corporation at Bengeworth Road. This operated between 1903 and 1906 and thus the site provided the power for the first of South London's electric trams.

Because the Bengeworth Road site is next to the South London Line, which in the early 1900s was one of the first railway lines in the UK to be electrified with overhead wires, it is tempting to speculate that the power station supplied this too – except that it did not. It provided a DC supply and the railway initially used an AC system which was supplied by a power station in Deptford. Loughborough Junction does have a large substation building supplying the railway, but this is in a different location, off Wickwood Street, and dates from the 1920s and a later phase of electrification.

The power station was supplied by a small network of railway sidings, visible on the 1916 OS map. The circles within this layout of



1930s sports team (on coal wagon turntable)

sidings represent turntables, on which individual coal wagons would have been turned, to let them switch between tracks in a relatively compact area. It's on one of these wooden turntables that the 1930s sports team is photographed.

The Bengeworth Road Power station generated power until 1928,



Bengeworth Road in 1968 before demolition

after which it was decommissioned and became the location of an electrical substation only. During the 1920s the South London Electric Supply Corporation had entered into an agreement with several other power generating companies that meant that their networks became interconnected, and took advantage of a large new power station in Barking.

The power station building (minus its chimney) seems to have survived until the late 50s or early 60s. An aerial photo from 1966 shows it replaced with a more modern building, which remained until around 2013 at which point it was demolished, presumably to make way for the current development.

Bengeworth Road itself, once a residential street, now exists only nominally, and within land owned by UK Power Networks. It originally formed a triangle with two others, Conderton Road and Bredon Road. The houses along all three streets were entirely demolished to make way for the depot area that now exists on this land.

As of 2025, there are two buildings newly visible on the Bengeworth site. Seen from Ruskin Park, these sit beyond the two blue transformer blocks that were temporarily parked in Coldharbour Lane a few months ago but are now partially installed on site – in view close to the fence along the railway line. The slightly smaller building on the left, clad in dark grey, is the Tunnel Head House and this sits directly above the vertical shaft that provides access to the new tunnels below. The larger building, clad mostly in yellow brick, is the Gas Insulated Switchgear Hall. According to National Grid's press releases, the switchgear equipment located



*400kV Gas Insulated Switchgear Hall
seen from Ruskin Park*

within means that this is the UK's first gas-insulated substation to be free of sulphur hexafluoride (SF6), a potent greenhouse gas.

Due to their status as essential infrastructure, these large buildings did not need to go through the normal planning permission process. Park users can form their own opinions on how successful the decorative brickwork patterns on the large switchgear hall are, in mitigating its bulk. But a century ago, an arguably even more dominant building sat here – a coal-fired power station nearing the end of its thirty-year life generating electricity for the borough of Lambeth's first ever power network.

For more details on the Bengeworth site and Loughborough Junction history in general, see the website at colin-m.com/LJ4D

Transport Notes

More Victoria trains!

The number of trains between Victoria and Orpington via Herne Hill in the off-peak was increased in the December 2024 timetable revision to four trains per hour, to deliver an all-day turn up and go 'Metro' service on weekdays – let's hope they can find the drivers. The extra services at Victoria Station follow on from the investment to expand and improve the ticket barriers as part of a major congestion relief scheme delivered in partnership with Network Rail. To help passengers move through the station better at busy times the number of gate lines has increased from 88 to 121, including five more of the accessible wider gates plus new overhead display indicators that show if the gates are entry or exit. New customer information screens have also been added.

ULEZ

The Greater London Authority has published a report on the first year impact of the extension in August 2023 of the Ultra Low Emission Zone to all of Greater London. This shows air quality continuing to improve in all areas as the number of non-compliant vehicles continues to decline/be sold outside the area. The data also shows a continuing backlog of unpaid fines ...

Airports

London City Airport has had its appeal against the rejection of its application to increase the hours of operation and number of flights (mentioned in the Spring 2024 #159) largely rejected, although a few more early morning flights have been allowed. Importantly, the Airport's request to relax the current closure of its airport from Saturday lunchtime to Sunday lunchtime has been again refused at appeal. Expansion at Heathrow will take many years to get approved, especially after the recent power supply breakdown. Gatwick, however, is poised to expand (exploiting an existing second runway) but will need to organise better rail access as a condition for permission. (Gatwick trains from Herne Hill?)

Dockless bikes

Lime bike usage in Southwark has apparently doubled in the last year – as has the anti-social and illegal blocking of footpaths by dumped bikes. While 'action' and 'negotiation' are being talked about, this mainly concerns the central busy sites, such as London Bridge, and the creation of on-road parking areas. The widespread obstruction of residential footpaths contrary to the terms of use continues to be ignored by Lime.



Blackwall and Silvertown Tunnels

As the new tolled Silvertown Thames tunnel opens, charges have been imposed since 7 April on the Blackwall Tunnels as well. Charges are applied 6am to 10pm, and the basic charge is £4 one way for a car, with higher charges for larger vehicles, and can be paid up to three days after using a tunnel. There are advantages to signing up with TfL for 'Autopay', with lower charges off peak. Blue Badge holders can apply for exemption from the toll. 'Low income' drivers in 12 'local' Boroughs (which include Southwark, but not Lambeth!) can apply for a 50% discount on charges. All rather complicated – see the TfL website for details. (As an occasional user of the free Rotherhithe Tunnel, I expect queues to grow ...)

Bil Harrison

REMEMBERING

This year, on 8 May, we reach 80 years since the end of the Second World War in Europe. In January European heads of state and political leaders had gathered at Auschwitz to mark the 80th anniversary since its liberation by Soviet forces on 27 January 1945, perhaps the last time there will be such a commemoration as the number of survivors grows ever smaller. With that in mind this article looks at a collection of personal papers held in Lambeth Archives that provide a moving insight into that time and its countless individual tragedies. It is a collection that lay forgotten for more than 30 years and might have been lost for ever, had not the owners of a house in Herne Hill, who found it in their attic in 1975, had the good sense to deposit with it with Lambeth Archives.

The papers and photographs are those of Herta Löbenstein. Herta was born on 15 July 1921. Her home was the town of Hanau in Hesse, 25 km to the east of Frankfurt. Herta's family was Jewish and given that they lived in the very centre of the town it seems likely that a shop or business provided for the family's needs. Herta's parents were Karl and Johanna and she had a sister, Ruth, who was three years younger. As the position of Jews in Germany became increasingly troubled, more and more sought to find ways of leaving the country. This could be extremely difficult, particularly if there were limited financial resources and no contacts abroad who could facilitate emigration. Foreign



Herta's primary school class in Hanau c1930

countries were generally not inclined to welcome Jewish refugees, or only prepared to do so subject to significant controls. One way to be allowed to enter Britain was to show there was a job waiting for the refugee on arrival. This is how Herta came to England, only a few weeks if not days before war broke out on 3 September 1939.

There are some notes made in 2005 by a researcher from the Wiener Library that have been added to the original documents in Lambeth Archives. The notes say that Herta came to stay with a relative, Cilly Ullmann, at Croxted Road, Herne Hill, where she worked as a domestic servant before later moving to a house in Half Moon Lane. My research suggests this is wrong. The Ullmann family, who were themselves German Jews, did live at 238 Croxted Road and Zibora (known as Cilly) Ullmann, who is referred to as a "Tante" (aunt) was instrumental in finding Herta the employment that enabled her to come to England (they may have been relatives, but a "Tante" might also apply to a family friend). But Herta did not work for the

HERTA LÖBENSTEIN

Ullmanns. In 1939 a Register was taken of the civilian population of England and Wales as at 29 September. This reveals that Herta, just 18 years old, was living at 72 Half Moon Lane at this date with Henry Cumming, a wine and spirit merchant, his wife Lilian and their two unmarried daughters. Herta is described as a “domestic”, as she is in the document showing her exemption from internment. Whereas there are many letters received by Herta in the collection, there are only two letters written by her from this period (presumably because they were never sent). One describes her daily activities. She gets up at 6 am. Makes tea in bed for the ‘boss’ (Mrs Cumming). There is then half an hour to get the large dining room ready for breakfast. The boss comes to make breakfast, during which Herta cleans the hall and steps. A big breakfast is served 8.30 –9 am, with eggs done differently each day. The morning is spent cleaning the house. After lunch there is cleaning of ornaments, but also some time to sit in the garden until tea and cakes are served at 5 pm. She has an early bed. Herta stresses the kindness of her employers.

Correspondence received by Herta includes letters from her parents and from relatives in Rotterdam. Postal communication between England and Germany ceased on the outbreak of war, but until Holland was invaded in May 1940, letters between England and neutral countries such as Holland could be sent. The tone of the letters to Herta is generally chatty and reassuring, striking more for what is not said than said, with only the occasional reference to continued attempts to find a way to emigrate. When Herta left Germany, the Jewish population of Hanau, which had numbered about 500 in 1933, were already being increasingly persecuted. The synagogue and community centre had been destroyed during the pogrom of Kristallnacht in November 1938. Many Jewish men had been detained

nothing and on 7 September 1940 the London blitz began with many bombs falling on South London. Herne Hill was not spared. Five days later a bomb fell on Half Moon Lane. Herta was at home at no. 72 and



Herta, on the right, with her sister Ruth

21/11/39
FEMALE EVERY ALIEN EXEMPTION FROM INTERNMENT REFUSE
LÖBENSTEIN
Herta Löbenstein
Date and place of birth 15-7-21 in Hanau
Nationality German
Police Reg. Card No. 757246
Address 72 Half Moon Lane SE 14
Domestic
Same
Exempted
21/11/39

Exemption from internment, November 1939

and incarcerated in Buchenwald concentration camp. The situation deteriorated after the start of the war and Jews in Hanau were forced to leave their homes and live only in a designated area.

In one of Herta’s surviving letters she excitedly refers to the possibility of her sister Ruth obtaining a job as a nanny for the family of one of her employers’ sons. There are also a few letters from her boyfriend Heinz Boley, who in 1938 had managed to emigrate to the United States and was working in New York in the leather goods trade. Herta had hopes of joining him there. Sadly all these plans came to

was fatally injured and died the following day at Dulwich Hospital. Her employers, the Cumming family, all survived, presumably because they were not at home. Bomb damage maps show the house (at the junction with Village Way) to have been damaged beyond repair as was the Methodist Church on the opposite side of the road.

Herta did not live to learn the fate of her family. Whether news of Herta’s death reached her family cannot be said. Her parents and her sister were among the last remaining Jews in Hanau to be deported to Theresienstadt in September 1942. From there they were transported in January 1943 to Auschwitz, where they were murdered. Herta’s relations in Rotterdam also perished in Auschwitz. Herta’s hometown in Hanau was largely destroyed by British bombs in March 1945. Nothing remains of the family home in the Hammerstrasse.

The collection in Lambeth Archives contains a number of family photographs. A few are dated, but, frustratingly, no names are given to the people shown, their identities and lives denied to us. So it is hard to be certain which might show Herta. However, by eliminating other photographs, I am confident that the picture of the two girls in fancy dress shows Herta Löbenstein and her little sister Ruth.

Laurence Marsh

PROTECTING THE PARK

“Lambeth Council describes Brockwell Park as the jewel in its crown but nevertheless turns a blind eye to the despoliation that results from the major events and to the certainty that continued deterioration will result in a landscape which cannot be repaired without major financial investment.

We urge you to give Brockwell Park the time to recover.”

This is the message from Brockwell Park Community Partners (BPCP) to Lambeth as the park faces another summer of events. BPCP is the registered charity that for many years has worked hard to represent the users of the park and act as the main link with the Council, its councillors and officers.

This summer will see a series of major events held between 23 May and 8 June. The last of these is the Lambeth Country Show on 7/8 June, which has free entry. The rest are ticketed commercial music events. Although Lambeth, at the time of writing, say that a “final” decision on whether this summer’s planned events can go ahead has not been taken, tickets for the commercial events are already on sale. The numbers allowed entry for any event will be up to 30,000. As in past years the time part of the park is fenced off and then sealed off behind 3m high barriers is not restricted to the dates of the events themselves, because there is at least a week at either end for the setting up of what is needed and then its dismantling. A total of 30% of the park’s footprint becomes shut off, or 45% in terms of amenity grassland.

Lambeth justify this use of the park on the basis that – to quote Cllr Anyanwu, Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities – “these events generate significant cultural opportunities and entertainment for younger people across the borough as well as boosting business in the area, the majority of which are small businesses who experience increases in footfall during the events programme. This boosts our local economy and provides jobs and income for residents ... The additional income also makes a substantial contribution to the council’s finances, helping to bridge the gap caused by previous central government austerity measures. The income generated allows us to restore and improve our award-winning open spaces and fund biodiversity initiatives across our parks and borough ... Events are integral to showcasing Lambeth’s unique cultural identity including allowing us to celebrate being the home of the Windrush generation and home to one of the biggest LGBTQ+ communities in the country.”

Lambeth has also promised improved organisation and resources, following the many concerns expressed about the experience of events held in 2024, in areas such as park recovery and maintenance, road closures/parking and their enforcement, and the provision of security and measures against anti-social behaviour.



Brockwell Park event map area

Brockwell Park Community Partners are not persuaded. Neither are Friends of Brockwell Park, who have submitted a strong critique to Lambeth in which they stress the park’s value as “one of the very last remaining public places available free for our urban community to come together in shared enjoyment. Any potential loss of this amenity or damage to the park must be properly assessed with full professional measurement of the impacts. The documents available for this and previous years applications demonstrate that these assessments have not been made ... it is essential that a fallow year takes place to allow the proper technical assessments to be made”. For the full submission see www.friendsofbrockwellpark.org/summer-events-in-the-park-update/

Feelings against the use of Brockwell Park for events have, without any question, intensified over the last year. Anyone who attended one of the public consultation sessions at 198 Railton Road on 17 February will have been left with no doubt about the passions raised by the issue, passions which tended to boil over to the extent that a coherent exchange of views became difficult. But whether this should be seen as more people objecting or roughly the same number objecting but doing so more passionately is hard to say.

The Herne Hill Society has not taken a position opposing summer events in the park. There are other groups with a long track record of informed concern for the welfare of the park. This Society has members who support the stance of such groups in relation to summer events, but there will also be members who see their social benefits and are therefore more sympathetic to them and to Lambeth’s reasons for allowing them. That said, on the current evidence, the proposal to allow the park proper time to recover does appear eminently sensible and the best way to protect the park from a gradual build-up of damage which could be very difficult in practice to reverse. And if the park, the jewel in Herne Hill’s crown, is to be protected for the enjoyment of future generations that surely is what matters.

Laurence Marsh

The views expressed in this article are those of its author.



CELEBRATING LOCAL ARTISTS

In our second chapter in this series, we are featuring two painters in Herne Hill whose work not only figures in the excellent annual Artists' Open House programme but also enjoys international reach – in these instances, in North America.

Pat Roberts reports

Courtenay Kusitor

Courtenay's confident paintings now sit firmly in the abstract tradition — but to the thoughtful viewer, they impact beyond the rhythms and colours. A severe accident over ten years ago, which temporarily rendered her unconscious but inwardly aware, led her to a post-traumatic drive for exploration of the deeper and less rational mind. Today's canvases offer positive and perhaps



unique experiences that resonate with a number of British and international collectors. She shows in the annual Dulwich Open House exhibitions, and is represented by Azart Gallery, New York. Her work has also been featured in Saatchi Art's Undiscovered

Artists to Know and notably, she has received acknowledgment



from Pulitzer Prize-winning art critic Jerry Saltz who has liked and commented on her work.

Like many artists contributing to the wealth of creative life in London, Courtenay, though now based in Fawnbrake Avenue, brings insights from elsewhere. She arrived from Ghana with her parents and siblings when she was a child: those strong colours proudly proclaimed

in Ghana's traditional Kente fabric still sing from her current canvases.

<https://courtenaykusitorart.com/> and [@courtenay_kusitor_artist](https://www.instagram.com/courtenay_kusitor_artist)

Elizabeth Curtis

Artistically active since her childhood and early years in Chicago, Liz Curtis, her husband and their young family moved to London some four years ago and feel magically at home here in welcoming Herne Hill, with access to the inspiring artistic resources and stimuli of this great world city (which some of us natives often under-appreciate, don't we?). Her original and energetic impressionistic mixed media creations continue to evolve: sometimes low-key and shape-focused, channelled from line drawings to become a light, mystical but commanding presence on a large canvas; others land there as a rich jungle of vibrant strong colours which at first sight whisper "abstract" but



then reveal themselves as a positive and vigorous exploration of the natural world.

Liz's studio is based in Elfindale Road. Her works are regularly featured in the annual Dulwich Open House Festival, and her art is now held in collections across the US, Canada, the UK, and Europe. She is also commissioned to create large paintings for several highly prestigious locations across the USA.

<https://www.lizcurtisart.com/> and [@lizcurtis_art](https://www.instagram.com/lizcurtis_art)



PS: A painting by one of the artists featured in our last issue, Marie Lenclos, appears on the front cover of the 2025 Dulwich Festival Artists' Open House catalogue. The Festival runs between 9 – 18 May.

THESE FOOLISH THINGS

Colin Wight explains

Jim Dickson (now MP for Dartford) having stood down as a Lambeth Councillor after 35 years, a by-election will be held in the Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction ward on 1 May. According to Jason Cobb of *BrixtonBuzz.com*, a surprise challenger has entered the fray: Chad Freedom-Winters III, a candidate personally endorsed by President Trump and Elon Musk, is running on a platform to liberate Lambeth from “woke socialism and bicycle tyranny”. The story continued with references to oil-drilling and fracking in Brockwell Park, and the erection of a taller wall to keep out non-paying park users (wry smiles all round). The “Make Loughborough Junction Great Again” spoof was, needless to say, posted on 1 April. Whilst I doubt that anyone would have been naive enough to be taken in, you never know. Anything is possible these days.

BBC’s Panorama infamously reported on 1 April 1957 that European farmers were enjoying a record spaghetti harvest. It showed footage of women picking strands off a tree and laying them in the sun to dry. Were viewers more credulous back then, or just unacquainted with foreign grub? And would the Panorama team today be allowed to waste so much time and licence-payers’ money on such a wizard wheeze?

I could have said I watched the programme at the time, but I was only two and I cannot tell a lie. However, I do remember *The*

Guardian’s San Serriffe spoof of 1 April 1977. In my final year at university I was the ideal audience for this liberal elite prank. Had those boozy journalists nothing better to do than create a hoax about a non-existent island nation running to seven pages?

Britain isn’t the only country to practise April foolery. In France – from where I write, honestly – the object of a prank is a “poisson d’avril”. It’s not clear why. Perhaps all this larking about is something to do with the vernal equinox. Who knows? Or cares? Being made a fool of once a year is tolerable, and the humiliation is soon forgotten.

Ten years ago anyone saying that we were living in the ‘post-truth’ age would have been met with blank faces. I read a brilliant, but depressing book some years ago by journalist Peter Pomerantsev called *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: Adventures in Modern Russia*. The author explains how Putin and his coterie systematically manipulated the public so that truth became, at best, a matter of opinion. Putin and other totalitarian dictators led the way. Others, under the thin veneer of a democratic mandate, have followed. ‘Fake news’ simply means ‘not the story I need you to believe’. Orwell was right. The public, or much of it (hopefully not me or you, gentle reader) has become chronically gullible. By the way, did you know that the motto of the French Navy is “A l’eau, c’est l’heure”?

Taken in, if only for a few seconds? I thought not...

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HERNE HILL'S BOVRIL

LIEBIG'S EXTRACT OF MEAT AND THE OXO CUBE

The connection of Kingswood House in Dulwich with Bovril – built as it appears today by Bovril's inventor John Lawson Johnston – is well-known, but not so well-known is the connection of the area of Herne Hill with OXO and its forerunner, the arguably less than glamorously named Liebig's Extract of Meat, later named LEMCO.

The story begins in 1847 when noted German scientist Baron Justus von Liebig, one of the founders of organic chemistry, developed a concentrated beef extract with the aim of providing a cheap and nutritious meat substitute for the poor. His method was to trim the fat from the meat, break the meat into small particles, boil it with water to form a liquid, and then stir it over low heat until it was reduced to a paste of 80% solids – and then bottle and sell the result.

Von Liebig did not patent his process - his clearly stated intention was that his work should benefit as large a number of people as possible. In 1862 he was approached by a young German railway engineer who had been working in South America, George Christian Giebert, who was convinced that the process could be industrialised if the manufacturing plant was in a much cheaper location. He wrote to Liebig and suggested opening a plant in Uruguay as he had seen local ranchers killing cows solely for their hides, leaving the meat to rot unused – this was before the canning or freezing of meat became practical.

With Liebig's agreement a test plant was built at a small Uruguayan town called Villa Independencia, later to be known as Fray Bentos (of corned beef fame) and, by the end of 1864, £12,000 of the product had been exported and sold. To expand the business more capital was required and Giebert went to the London stock market to raise it – and this is where the Herne Hill connection first appears. The share offer was advertised on 4 December 1865 and one of the promoters was Charles John Gunther (born Carl Johan Gunther) of the merchants, Corneille David & Co. It aimed to raise £500,000.

Gunther, originally from Prussia, moved to the substantial Hill Lodge on Champion Hill in 1872, living there until his death in 1898. One of the other early backers, Emanuel Butcher, a leather merchant, also had Herne Hill connections as his father lived in the house on Denmark Hill which was later to become Henry Bessemer's home.

Corneille David & Co remained the London and European agents of LEMCO and Gunther's son, Charles Eugene, born in London in 1863, was sent to work for LEMCO to learn the ropes. One must

assume that it was his talent rather than nepotism behind his rapid rise in the company's hierarchy – in just five years, at the age of 25, he was a director. By 1895, aged 32, he was chairman and had bought an additional 80,000 acres of land in Argentina and put up a new factory, before expanding into Paraguay and later Rhodesia.

In the 1890s he lived near to his father at 5 The Terrace, Champion Hill, one of six very large terrace houses that once stood just west of the junction of Champion Hill and Dog Kennel Hill. By the late 1890s he was living at 59 Prince's Gate and in 1903 he bought the Tongwood Estate in Hawkwood in Kent (now St Ronan's School).

He purchased the property from Isabel, Flora, and Emma Goldsmid, three unmarried daughters of Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid who had previously owned Dulwich Hill House in the 1830s, the house next door to Hill Lodge where he had lived as a teenager.

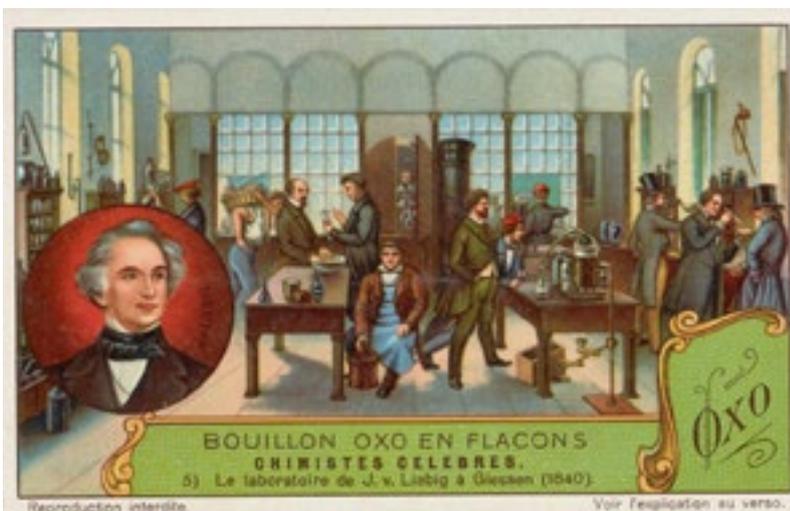
It was the invention of OXO that made Charles Eugen Gunther's fortune. It came about in an attempt to create a cheaper version of LEMCO's standard product. Called OXO – presumably after the ox – it was initially a liquid but it was still too expensive for the mass market. The driver

behind Gunther's plan was to emulate Liebig's original aim of a high-quality product available to everyone that he could sell for a penny. He hired an eminent chemist, Sir Henry Enfield Roscoe, to develop the product but it was not easily achieved; fluid OXO in a gelatine capsule proved too expensive to manufacture and OXO in a tablet form was impractical. Finally in 1910 they solved the problem with the small bouillon cube that we know today. It was just in time for it to become a stock item for WWI troops – 100 million cubes were consumed and the hand-wrapped foil packaging helped keep them in good condition.

The business benefitted hugely but, despite Charles Eugene being English-born, his German name was seen as a commercial risk, and he stepped down as director and Lord Hawke, chairman of the MCC, one of the great cricketers of his day, was appointed in his place – arguably adding British aristocratic associations, physical prowess, and athletic achievement to cement OXO's reputation as a symbol of all that was best in British life – notwithstanding its German antecedents.

Intriguingly OXO was acquired by the Vestey Group in 1924. Here there is another local link, because Bessemer House on Denmark Hill was the home of William Vestey, 1st Baron Vestey, for some years up to World War I, when he moved out to make it available for the care of wounded soldiers. Lord Vestey then moved to Kingswood House, which brings us back to Bovril!

Ian McInnes



Liebig laboratory in Giessen c1840

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