

HERNE HILL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY ❧ ISSUE 160 ❧ Summer / Autumn ❧ 2024



The Ice Cream King

ITALIANS IN HERNE HILL ▶ *See page 19*

LOCAL SCHOOL FACES
CLOSURE ▶ *See page 3*

THE GREAT BICKNELL ART
COLLECTION ▶ *See pages 14/15*



The Magazine of the Herne Hill Society



THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY

President	Colin Wight	president@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Chair	Rebecca Tee	chair@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Vice Chair	Laurence Marsh	vicechair@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Secretary	Susie Perring	secretary@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Treasurer	Lyndon Fothergill	treasurer@hernehillsociety.org.uk

Committee

Henry Ferguson
Rosalind Glover
Martyn Hall
Lin Proctor

Magazine	Laurence Marsh (editor)
	Sophia Marsh (design & layout)

COMMENTS & ENQUIRIES

To advertise in the Magazine	advertising@hernehillsociety.org.uk
To contribute to or comment on the Magazine	editor@hernehillsociety.org.uk
To comment on planning or licensing issues	environmental@hernehillsociety.org.uk
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Membership enquiries	membership@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Local history enquiries	localhistory@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Herne Hill notice boards	noticeboard@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Website	webeditor@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Community safety	publicsafety@hernehillsociety.org.uk
Other issues	enquiries@hernehillsociety.org.uk

Postal and online addresses

The Herne Hill Society, PO Box 27845, London SE24 9XA
hernehillsociety.org.uk
X (Twitter)@hernehillsoc
facebook.com/hernehillsociety

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Local school faces closure

In the summer term a shock exploded on the teachers of St Saviour's Church of England Primary School on Herne Hill Road and on the parents of the 185 children: Lambeth announced that they were considering amalgamating it with another Church of England school, St John's Angell Town, by September 2026.

This would result in all children and staff from St Saviour's moving to St John's Angell Town, and the current school site, which has existed for 155 years, being closed. An informal consultation process was opened; worried parents at the school and the partner churches promptly started to organise a campaign to prevent the closure. (It seems incidentally that Church of England schools, even when at risk of closure, cannot be merged with non-church schools – which to some people might seem a logical alternative.)

The Council's rationale behind the merger proposal is that there are too few pupils attending schools in the local area. For a variety of reasons, including variable birthrates, some schools across this and neighbouring boroughs are close to slipping below the level at which even a single form entry school can be economically viable. This development is not uniform across the country, but at local authority level Lambeth will see the country's biggest drop in primary school pupils between now and 2028, according to research from the Education Policy Institute.

Consequently, some secondary schools in Lambeth have already been closed, the pupils and staff incorporated into other schools to keep the numbers up. Now many London boroughs are working similarly to reduce the number of primary school places, as the significant dip in the primary school age cohort moves through the system.

In fact compared to other schools in the local area St Saviour's has relatively high pupil numbers (88% of capacity as at May 2024). It is in a better financial position than many other schools. Two other C of E Lambeth schools in line for an amalgamation



could, it is argued, more conveniently both be accommodated within St John's Angell Town.

And the Diocese of Southwark says that whilst it doesn't have the power to stop the merger, it agrees that St Saviour's is viable as a stand-alone school with the current pupil numbers on roll.

On top of all that, St Saviour's is a much-loved local school and in a convenient location for its catchment area. For parents and children, the walk beyond Loughborough Junction to Angell Town would be longer and more time-consuming – perhaps too long even for older

children to walk unaccompanied, and in some cases requiring parents to resort to twice-a-day driving instead of healthier and more sustainable walking. And reports suggest that, if faced with closure, a large number of parents would anyway choose not to send their children to St John's, and therefore it would continue to be undersubscribed.

But other factors may be at play here. Not all parents want to send their children to a school with religious affiliations and church membership/attendance has been declining, even though



there was a small post-pandemic bounce-back in 2022. Separately, our part of Lambeth has a number of viable non-church schools which are attractive to many families, even those living just a few steps away from St Saviour's, including the popular Bessemer Grange, Jessop, and Judith Kerr schools.

That apart, the new government's application of VAT to private schools could result in some children being switched into local state or church schools: but no-one is prepared to quantify this at present.

The period of informal consultation on the fate of St Saviour's has been extended to late August. If, as is hoped, this ends with a decision by Lambeth not to proceed with amalgamation and closure, children, staff and parents will breathe a great sigh of relief. If not, the consultation moves into a more formal phase. We will continue to monitor the campaign.

Pat Roberts

A piece of local Railwayana

Postcards with historic views of Herne Hill provide valuable information – indeed the original postcards can acquire, depending on rarity, a value as collectibles (and they can come in useful when there is a space to be filled in this Magazine).

Here we illustrate an example of perhaps a more niche field of collecting, that of Railwayana. The green “target” sign appeared recently on ebay with a starting price for bidding of £249 (and found one bidder at that price). The distinctive green was the colour adopted by Southern Railways, following the merging in 1923 of multiple railway companies into the “big four”, Great Western (GWR), London Midland & Scottish (LMS), London & North Eastern (LNER) and Southern (SR).

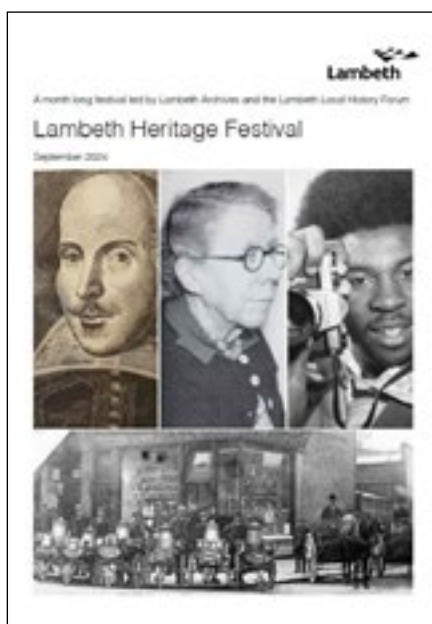
The use of a roundel with a rectangular banner for the station name is a design derived from its use on the London Underground in the early years of the last century. Through the vision of Frank

Pick and the talented calligrapher Edward Johnston, that was refined by the early 1920s into the iconic London Underground sign in use to this day. Since 2003, when London Underground became part of Transport for London, the sign has become the unifying symbol for TfL.



With nationalisation of the railways in 1948 target signs tended to be replaced by “totem” signs. These use two rectangles with rounded corners. The sign painted some years ago on the wall beneath the railway bridge at the main Herne Hill junction reproduces the totem design.

The privatisation of the railways in 1993 does not seem to have produced any design classics of interest to collectors, so both target and totem signs are sought after today. Prices vary enormously, with the value of some signs even running to several thousand pounds. This in turn has generated the production of very accurate imitations. The best indication of an original is the presence of wear and damage.



A rich collection of talks, walks and events is again on offer during September. Full details can be found here www.lambethlocalhistoryforum.org.uk/lambeth-heritage-festival-2024. A printed brochure is available at Lambeth libraries.

This year sees the return to Lambeth Archives of their Second, Third and Fourth Folios of Shakespeare’s plays. Donated to the Archives in the 1920s and on loan to the British Library for safekeeping since the 1950s, the Archives’ new home on Brixton Hill can now provide the environment these rare treasures require. Remarkably, it was only very recently that a researcher unearthed

Lambeth Heritage Festival 2024

the loan of the Folios. It had been wholly forgotten, but there was no doubt about Lambeth’s continued ownership. A number of events to celebrate their return, including an exhibition, form part of the Festival.

There are also talks about South London’s lost rivers and women artists at Doulton’s Pottery, along with online workshops on family history, an urban sketching tour of Brixton and tours of Brixton Market, St Leonard’s crypt, a walk exploring Streatham’s Art-Deco heritage, history walks in Norwood, Lambeth and Streatham Cemeteries, Clapham Common, Kennington Park, Brixton Windmill and Henry Tate’s gardens as well as a tour of Brixton through the eyes of the Windrush generation. And much more!

Of particular interest local to Herne Hill are three heritage walks led by the indefatigable local historian **Robert Holden**:

- **Saturday 14 September** 2.30pm: starts at Herne Hill Station and includes Station Square, Poet’s Corner and Brockwell Lido.
- **Saturday 21 September** 2.30pm: starts at the entrance to Herne Hill Velodrome, looks at the Velodrome and its history and takes in some less well-known landmarks in the area.
- **Saturday 28 September** 2.30pm: starts at All Saints’ Church, entrance in Lovelace Road, looks at the Grade I listed All Saints and then proceeds along Rosendale Road, ending at the Bullfinch Brewery.

Booking is available for all of Robert’s walks by email at noticeboard@hernehillsociety.org.uk

The Herne Hill Society's Excellence Awards

Rebecca Tee announces the next round



It is two years since we held the inaugural Herne Hill Society Excellence Awards ceremony at a special celebration event in April 2023. It was an exciting evening and a great success, where nine finalists were presented with their certificates and awards from Helen Hayes MP. All those awarded were making a positive difference to Herne Hill.



Now we are excited to launch the next round of Awards. So the search is on for any person, group, business or organisation worthy of winning. Who or what do you think deserves to be celebrated in this way? No subject is too small, (crocheted postbox toppers were a finalist last time) so let us know your favourites. Last time we had a wide range of entries from grand buildings (e.g. Carnegie Library Hub and Herne Hill Velodrome) as

well as local projects for young people.

Entries are very welcome across any of the Society's three main areas of work: **Environment**, **Heritage** and **Community**. It is really quick and easy to enter and people can nominate themselves or someone else can do it on their behalf. Our first set of winners

really appreciated being recognised by receiving an Award, showing their contribution to our local area was valued.

There is plenty of time to consider who you would like to put forward and why. The closing date for entries is **31 January 2025**, and after the judging has taken place, the Awards will be presented in May 2025.

These were the winners of awards in 2023:

- **Environment:** Winner: Herne Hill Tree Watch and Friends of Sunray Gardens. Highly Commended: Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses and Barn; Post Box Happy Crocheted Toppers
- **Heritage:** Winner: Friends of Ruskin Park. Highly Commended: Herne Hill Velodrome; Carnegie Library Hub
- **Community:** Winner: Herne Hill Music Festival. Highly Commended: Off the Cuff Junior Open Mic; Champs Within Boxing Club

All the details are on our website at:

www.hernehillsociety.org.uk/about-the-society/excellence-awards/

Our new Secretary

Following the election of the Society's committee at the AGM in April, we were delighted that **Susie Perring** stepped forward to fill the role of Secretary, a post that has remained vacant for some considerable time. Susie has strong local connections, being born and growing up in what was the Gatekeeper's Cottage on the Kingswood House estate. Her father



was Lord Vestey's chauffeur. The cottage today is part of Dulwich Prep. She trained at the London College of Printing to become a graphic designer, moving to Herne Hill in 1979 where she opened an antique shop on Half Moon Lane in an old lock-up garage on the site of what is now Artemidorus. By 1986,

after attending printmaking classes at Morley, she had become a professional artist and printmaker. She joined forces with fellow printmakers Sonia Rollo and Martin Ridgewell, working in various studios, lastly in a railway arch on the Bath Factory Estate before rent increases by the Arch Company made it impractical to continue. Susie is a resident of Dorchester Court and Chair of the Dorchester Court Residents' Association.

An award winner

When reviewed in this Magazine two years ago *Dulwich: Mid-Century Oasis* earned high praise from Edmund Bird. The book traces the history of the extensive housing development undertaken by the Dulwich Estate between the 1950s and 70s, which has done so much to give the area its distinctive character. It has now won an award from the Architectural Publishers' Association and, having sold out, is being reprinted by the RIBA.



Local Councillors' Surgeries

Lambeth

1. Carnegie Community Hub at the Carnegie Library, 192 Herne Hill Road, SE24 0DG, 6 – 7 pm 4th 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

Brockwell Park takes another beating

– Pat Roberts takes a look

This year a period of unusually heavy rain coincided with the semi-closure of Brockwell Park for the annual series of summer music festivals and the Lambeth Country Show. The influx of very large trucks with machinery and structures to build (and then carry away) the sound stages and other installations for the festivals – on a scale which seemed heavier and more grandiose than before – followed inevitably by the feet of thousands of festival visitors, smashed much of the grass into wet mud. So heavy was the rain and so drastic the earlier damage that at least one of the festivals, Mighty Hoopla, was in danger of being



cancelled. It went ahead, but only when the organisers had covered much of the muddy turf with boards and wood chips, making post-festival recovery even more challenging. Even so, the free festival for families and children, Bounce, had to be cancelled this year because of the weather.

And just as the buildup to the festivals was beginning, an argument blew up about the removal of some trees because, it was suggested, they stood in the way of the festival installations. Lambeth said no: it was their age and general condition which destined them for removal and replacement anyway. But suspicions remained, and some other trees were either heavily trimmed or carelessly damaged by machinery introduced by contractors and sub-contractors, possibly endangering birds during the nesting season. Then some 130,000 revellers plodded in.

Although many local residents complain bitterly about the possibly permanent damage and the unmistakable noise pollution created by these annual events (apparently Lambeth, under regular pressure from the music acts, raised the permitted noise levels some years ago and are unrepentant), the community as a whole seems divided or indifferent. Even on social media, which is of course never a reliable barometer, voices raised in protest are not as numerous as one might expect. And it's evident that some people, as well as the Council, believe that this is an appropriate use of the park. Some local businesses undoubtedly see a boost in

sales from the contractors and festival visitors.

But those who oppose Lambeth's handling of the problem are visibly more angry than ever.

Lambeth of course argues that the fees paid by the festival organisers not only subsidise the holding of the Lambeth Country Show but also contribute significantly to the repair and long-term maintenance of the park and other Lambeth duties. But whilst there are many local developments where our councils go through the motions of a "public consultation" exercise, the alienation of our park for commercial purposes is not one of those issues.

'Fenced-off wasteland'

One of the conscientious voluntary bodies directly concerned with monitoring the welfare of the park, Friends of Brockwell Park, regularly but so far vainly deplore these festivals. This year because of the excessive harm caused by footfall, machinery and heavy rainfall, they have also been arguing that – like Glastonbury – the park should be able to enjoy regular sabbaticals, meaning festivals are suspended for a year to allow more sustainable recovery to take place. There is no sign that Lambeth will heed this request.

More than ever this year, the Friends have not held back in their distress and anger: "The heart of the park is a fenced-off wasteland that has patently no prospect of meaningful restoration this summer, although we are generously invited back onto the bare ground immediately after it has been resown, an offer with a political rather than an ecological origin ... Perhaps by next summer there may be the beginnings of the patient's real recovery, just in time for a further 200,000 stamping feet to be unleashed onto it? ... Huge bare patch gouges are in addition to be found all over the park. Once again this year, users are left with a disfigured, limited remnant of the park that plays such an important part in the maintenance of their mental and physical wellbeing".



"It's just not working"

The Friends' response continues: "In an attempt to find a compromise solution that took account of the Council's fundraising needs, the Friends [had] agreed not to oppose the 'sealed envelope' of walled events in May, with the aim of leaving park users free to enjoy their park undisturbed for the rest of the summer. This arrangement has been shown not to work." They add that allowing for commercial festivals and Lambeth's need to generate income cannot be "satisfactorily addressed by a policy

that results in huge damage to a resource that is also critical to the daily health and welfare of the community. Until such time as a proposal is brought forward from the Council that guarantees the community full and undisturbed use of an undamaged park for the unchallenged majority of the summer, the Friends return to their opposition to any walled commercial event in Brockwell Park.”

Another body, Brockwell Park Community Partners, is the stakeholder forum for Brockwell Park and the main link with Lambeth Council and its Parks Department, Lambeth Landscapes. They too have a thankless task and still find it hard to excuse Lambeth for dishonouring its undertaking last year by allowing an extra major event during the 2023 school holidays – Pokémon Go – that did particularly severe, and possibly long-term damage to the park.

Regardless, here are your diary dates for next year

Despite such reservations, Brockwell Live, the semi-detached body tasked with commercialising the park for the benefit of the Council, is already promoting next year’s concerts including a new event, on 23 May 2025: “Project 6 . . . a new marker for bass-heavy sounds in the UK . . . bringing the hottest talent in hip-hop and electronic music to Brockwell Park.” Order your earplugs now.

The next day 24 May sees Wide Awake back again; the ultra-loud Cross the Tracks and City Splash are scheduled for 25 and 26 May. And then 31 May and 1 June bring Mighty Hoopla, “the UK’s biggest pop festival. With more than 400 artists and performers spread across 2 days and 8 stages embracing the best of queer culture, Mighty Hoopla is the ultimate pop extravaganza!”

Can’t wait. You’ve been warned.

It’s not all bad news from Brockwell Park

Trudie Goodwin makes this point (see this page) and to that we can add a visit to the north-west corner of the park (with access from Brixton Water Lane). A very different picture to be seen here – a large undulating wildflower meadow. Its creation is the result of Lambeth’s successful bid last year for almost £37,000 funding from the Mayor of London to boost the park’s role as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. The particular aim, apart from the pleasure for human visitors, is to increase biodiversity by the provision of plants that will encourage butterflies and other pollinators, as well as seed-eating birds. The meadow is part of the larger Rewilding Brockwell project, including a new thorny hedge to protect the BMX track and new wood pasture, damp woodland, scrub and hedge around the park’s lakes.



Trudie Goodwin on some favourite trees

I’ve walked Brockwell Park since we first moved here in 1988. First with children and dog, but as children moved on and dog went to that great park in the sky, I’ve continued to walk most days.

I must know every inch of our beautiful park and have seen it change so much since we landed here. It was already a magnet for people from all over, for rallies, festivals and of course, the Country Show. It was pretty run down and had a reputation for being dangerous to walk in, although we never felt that.

What it has always had, since it was laid out as a park and opened in 1892, are some magnificent trees, the most famous of which is the Brockwell Oak, one of the Great Trees of London. Between 500 and 700 years old, 7 metres in circumference, it stands



undaunted on the slope down from the Hall. Mere 200-year-old youngsters nearby probably formed part of an ancient field boundary. When things get a bit much or I’m feeling my age, just looking at them can put things in perspective.

Generations and different species of oak are scattered over the park and young ones are being put in, along with a great variety of other species, every year. This year 90 new trees will be planted, essential to protect the park for future generations. It’s awful to see ‘condemned’ notices on trees, but they will have been assessed by an expert as being dead, diseased, or a danger to the public. Sadly they will need to be felled and their trunks left as a habitat for wildlife, or if stable enough, trimmed back and left as ‘high monuments.’ Remarkably some of these can regenerate and after several years one near the Water Lane entrance is sprouting again from the very top. The 200-year-old Mulberry tree in the walled garden had to be felled after a storm in 2022, but its ancient stump is now bursting with vigorous new growth.

Try visiting, as dusk approaches, the Lombardy Poplar that towers beside the children’s water play area. This tree is where hundreds of parakeets flying in from miles around raucously gather before heading off to roost at Nunhead Cemetery. Find the Caucasian Wingnut Tree, the Swamp Cypress, the Indian Bean trees and the Blue Atlas Cedar. Consider buying a tree. When each of our children reached 21 we did this and love how sturdy and tall not just the children, but the trees are, all these years later.

Transport Notes

Public and Private Public Transport

The King’s Speech includes measures to bring rail operating companies into public ownership, and help local authorities organise bus services. None of this will affect Herne Hill in the near future. Herne Hill rail services to Victoria and Orpington, and the station itself, are run by Southeastern, owned by the public company SE Trains Limited since 2021, and so is already in government ownership. The Thameslink train services form part of the largest private rail franchises in Britain operated by the private company Govia Thameslink, but they recently had their franchise extended until 2028, and the proposed legislation will not involve ownership changes until then.

Bus services in London are already under the control of the Greater London local authority. London Buses are operated as a series of franchises run by TfL, with the 68 service currently operated by ‘Transport UK’ a public company, and due for re-tendering of the franchise in 2024/25. The 37 bus route is operated by the private operator GoAhead London, and the 468 by the private operator Arriva, both under the TfL franchise specification.

Fair Rail Fares

The King’s Speech also contains vague government aspirations to simplify rail fares. . . I’m afraid the complexity of fare pricing is beyond my ability to explain in a short article, but there are several websites (see my previous failure to explain in Issue #156 Spring 2023). More recently, individual operators have brought out Apps and cards to allow commuters to manage their weekly fare limit, but apparently not within the London area.

Rosendale School Street

Although I can’t find any details on the Lambeth Council website at the time of writing, the Herne Hill Forum has reported that the campaign to introduce ‘School Street’ restrictions around Rosendale Primary School are planned to be implemented for the autumn term:

Rosendale Rd will have a School Street from 3rd September at drop off and pick up times. This timed entry of motor vehicles aims to help reduce road danger on the road, improve air quality and increase active travel to school. The School Street will operate on Turney Road between the junctions of Rosendale Road and Croxted Road, Rosendale Road between the junctions of Hawarden Grove and Lovelace Road and Dalkeith Road, introducing a temporary prohibition of vehicles between 8:15–9:15am and 2.45–3.45pm, Monday to Friday during term time.

School Street restrictions are in marked contrast to the Southwark Council restrictions around Dulwich Village, which operate Monday to Friday throughout the year 8am to 9am and 3pm to 4:30 pm. This will provide a further potential layer of confusion for drivers in the area.

The rental e-scooter comes to the end of the pavement?

A year ago, Paris terminated the contracts for rental e-scooters, although personal e-scooters are still legal. Now Melbourne in Australia has also banned the rental e-scooters, citing anti-social use. In the UK, the use of personal e-scooters on public roads and footpaths is illegal and uninsurable – but never challenged. In certain London boroughs (including Lambeth and Southwark) rental e-scooters are being trialled, with a review date in May 2026, with riders meant to be over 18 with a provisional driver’s licence, and of



Paris bans e-scooters

course subject to normal traffic regulations.

Celebrating World Car-Free Day – 22 September

Southwark Council have announced that they will be marking this by encouraging residents to have a Play Street or Street Party in the period Friday to Sunday, 20–22 September. On the car-free weekend, roads can be closed between 10am and 6pm for a street party, and Play Streets can be held for three hours at times to suit each street, between 10am and 6pm. Details on how to apply can be found at *Car Free Day 2024 - Southwark Council*. But will it be e-scooter free as well?

Bil Harrison

Starstruck in Station Square

Issue #157 of the Magazine got wind of this a year ago with a shot of A-list stars Andrew Garfield and Florence Pugh outside Herne Hill Books. The film *We Live in Time*, described as a “deeply moving romance”, is now made and, judging by the trailer, it looks as if locations in Herne Hill will feature prominently. But we will have to wait until release in the UK in January 2025, unless you can make it to the Toronto International Film Festival in September.



Shops news

Bunhead Bakery, 145 Dulwich Road SE24

This unique new Palestinian bakery and coffee shop near the centre of Herne Hill received a big welcome when it opened earlier this summer, often with queues out of the door in the morning. (It is quite a small shop: most of the space is dedicated to the baking, which is performed in the traditional way early every morning.) Though born in south London, Sara, the owner and founder, is faithful to the traditions and skills of her Palestinian mother. She, her business partner Georgia and their enthusiastic coworkers produce a rolling menu of seasonal buns, breads and bakes, using Wild farmed flour. A regular star is their Palestinian version of Knafeh, the sweet-savoury shredded pastry delicacy which many middle eastern traditions cherish. www.bunheadbakery.com/

NB: Bunhead are closed Mondays – Wednesdays. On other days, they often sell out by the afternoon

High-value coffee and cake, Gail's, Station Square SE24

Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, City rumours suggest that the multinational owners of Bread Holdings, which



includes the ever-expanding Gail's Bakery chain, may be looking to hire advisers for a sale that would value it at well over the £200m price tag at which it changed hands only three years ago. At the time, Gail's had just over 70 bakeries trading across the country. But that figure now stands at more than 100 shops: some reports suggest the business has annual sales of over £130 million. Bread Holdings is owned principally by US investors Bain Capital Credit which manages assets worth \$47 billion, and private equity firm EBITDA Investments. Gail's is also part-owned (15%?) by Luke

Johnson, the former Channel 4 chairman, through his company Risk Capital Partners. It's nice to know where your sourdough and coffee money ends up.

Rents threaten vital small shops, again

The Denmark Hill, Sunray Gardens and Bessemer council estates form a quiet and pleasant mini-suburb between Herne Hill and Camberwell, but it is served by few shops. Now the principal cluster of small businesses, along Crossthwaite Avenue, say their



survival has been threatened by steep rent increases. The shops provide essential services, on which basis they were allowed and encouraged to stay open during Covid. Now one of them – a launderette – has been served a 140% increased rent demand by Southwark Council, and the neighbouring shops expect similar demands.

The business owners and local people say that these are not typical high street shops and do not have the volume of trade to pass on such huge increases to the local customers. They argue that rent hikes on this scale cannot be afforded and, if imposed, the shops will have to close, including a post office (well known for its especially friendly and helpful service), a pharmacy and a small supermarket, as well as the launderette. A local resident has started a petition to persuade Southwark Council to rethink their proposed rent increases:

www.change.org/p/stop-southwark-council-extortionate-rent-increase-on-5-essential-small-shops.

We await further news.

Pat Roberts

Ken's Fish Bar

This August Ken's Fish Bar on Half Moon Lane celebrated 40 years serving excellent fish and chips. The business was set up by "Ken", or Kemal Mustafa, but very sadly Ken died in July shortly before the anniversary. There was a gathering outside the shop where many friends and regulars were able to pay their respects before the funeral cortege moved on. Fortunately, Ken's Fish Bar lives on, in the hands of the next generation.



Across the border – notes from our foreign correspondent

South London has a new Château at last

Older residents may remember the Dulwich Community Hospital on East Dulwich Grove when it was still partially active within the NHS. It had opened in 1887, Queen's Victoria's Golden Jubilee. But well before the end of the 20th century its unsuitability as a modern healthcare centre had been clear to all, and in 2016 Southwark



got permission to build a modern health centre and school on the site, and to demolish various peripheral buildings. On the eastern edge of the site the Tessa Jowell Health Centre was completed in April 2020. The rest of the site was made available for the construction of the new Charter School East Dulwich. Building works began in 2017 and students moved from a temporary school site in Peckham to

the new campus in 2019. The school is now fully operational and approaching completion.

The challenge has been what to do with the striking and extravagantly styled central block, designed by reputable Victorian

local architects Henry Jarvis & Son, boasting its distinctive tower-topping ogee domed 'onions'. Some commentators have described this style as 'neo-Flemish'. Happily, it will survive, repurposed during the final stages of the Charter School development project to house school offices, Special Educational Needs (SEN) classrooms and a 20-place specialist Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit.

In the course of this metamorphosis, this surviving central component of the 1887 building is now being re-baptised, at least by the architects, as the 'Château'. So while it doesn't aspire to compete with Versailles or Chambord, it can almost certainly claim to be the only neo-Flemish Château in south London. Classy, yes?

Brixton site allocations development plans

Like all councils, Lambeth maintains a Site Allocations Development Plan which provides a permanent feast or worry for local planners, developers and residents. Our neighbours in Brixton constantly monitor this, as many proposals are on their very doorstep. One prominent development prospect relates to the privately owned Halfords and Currys retail park on Effra Road, where the sizeable car parks and low-rise retail premises offer juicy prospects for redevelopment. Similarly, the big Tesco supermarket site on Acre Lane (also privately owned) is under close examination: it too has a large car park which could theoretically be relocated below or above a rebuilt Tesco superstore, thus liberating ample space for high-rise housing. Under the new government councils face mounting pressure to exploit sites for additional housing.

Pat Roberts

An Urban Forest – trees in Lambeth

Last year Lambeth published their detailed Urban Forest Strategy 2023-2030. This followed the decision of the Council to declare – the first London council to do so – a climate emergency and a target to become net-zero compatible and climate resilient by 2030. The Strategy explains how the council is responsible for 40,000 trees in the borough's parks, streets and public spaces and how these are essential to a healthy environment and cohesive communities: "They cool hot places, condition the air we breathe, and even contribute to psychological balance and longevity. They are vital in the fight to reduce climate change impacts, and are highly valuable for wildlife and biodiversity."

Tree canopy cover makes up 17% of the land area of the borough. This is lower than the 21% average for London as a whole and lower than the Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee's recommendation of 20%. The distribution in Lambeth is also uneven. The canopy cover for the local authority wards of Waterloo & South Bank, Brixton Acre Lane and Vauxhall is only about 11%, while West Dulwich enjoys 24%. Herne Hill & Loughborough Junction is in the middle at 17%.

In the five years up to 2020 the deficit between trees planted (on average 361 per year) and old trees felled left an annual deficit of 141. However, since then there has been a significant increase in the number of trees planted and we have been told by Lambeth that they plan to plant 1400 in 2024/25.

Linked to the Urban Forest Strategy are environmental policies



that Lambeth have incorporated in their Kerbside Strategy, also published last year. This includes a requirement that there is a "minimum footway width of 2 metres" as a "Kerbside Basic". Some readers may recall that some years ago residents of Fawnbrake Avenue got together and in an initiative match-funded by Lambeth and supported by this Society were able to finance the planting of 40 street trees. As a result compared with many other Lambeth

streets this street is something of an oasis. Earlier this year we asked Lambeth about filling some gaps in the street trees enjoyed by Fawnbrake Avenue. We were told that the 2-metre requirement in practice meant – since the planting site itself required 0.6 metres – there would need to be a distance of 2.6 metres between the kerbside (excluding any kerbstone) and any boundary wall/fence of a roadside property. We expressed concern that this would rule out a huge number of sites for planting in residential streets. We are relieved to hear, after further recent enquiries, that the team responsible for street tree planting has reassessed the matter, and that the width of the planting site itself can be

omitted. This should facilitate planting in very many places.

The comments here apply only to Lambeth. On the Southwark side the amazing work of local volunteers in Herne Hill Tree Watch – winners of the Society's 2023 Excellence Award in the Environmental category – is something we would love to see mirrored on the Lambeth side of our area. Currently the Society's committee simply lacks people with the time needed to give this important environmental issue the attention it deserves. **LM**

The General Election 2024

There was concern two years ago that boundary changes would see the end of the Dulwich & West Norwood constituency and Herne Hill would find itself split between three revised constituencies. Strong representations were made to the Boundary Commission opposing the idea, including from this Society, and the Commission changed its mind – with only minor changes that saw the Champion Hill Southwark ward brought within Dulwich & West Norwood and the Goose Green & Dulwich Southwark ward joining the constituency of Lewisham West & East Dulwich.

Given the pre-election polls the result in Dulwich & West Norwood will have come as no surprise. Helen Hayes, first elected in 2015, was re-elected as a Labour Member of Parliament with a majority of 18,789 (60.3% share of the vote) over her nearest opponent, the Green candidate (18.9%). After that came the Conservatives (8.5%), Liberal Democrats (7.7%) and Reform (4.0%). The turnout was 61%, down 9.1% since the 2019 election.

These results were broadly very similar to those in neighbouring constituencies. Thus the Greens also came second to Labour in

Streatham & Croydon North, in Lewisham West & East Dulwich and in Peckham. In Clapham & Brixton Hill the Greens came third but close to the Lib Dems in second place. In Dulwich & West Norwood and neighbouring constituencies the Greens' share of the vote averaged 17.7%, two and a half times the national average. Reform had a share of the vote in these same constituencies that averaged 4.2%, substantially less than the national average of 14.3%.

Also of local interest will be the election of Lambeth Councillor Jim Dickson, a local councillor for Herne Hill (latterly Herne Hill & Loughborough Junction) for more than 30 years. He has been elected as Labour Member of Parliament for Dartford. Seen as a bellwether seat, Dartford has for the last 60 years consistently elected the candidate whose party has gone on to form the government. Jim Dickson's majority was 1,192 over his Conservative opponent, and previous holder of the seat, with Greens and Lib Dems consigned to fourth and fifth place. In third place was Reform with a 21.4% share of the vote, substantially higher than the national average.

Our congratulations to Helen Hayes and Jim Dickson on their success.

The 2024 Herne Hill Music Festival – 11 to 20 October

The festival is a not-for-profit organisation. We aim to provide a variety of musical events for the whole community and promote local artists, community groups and venues. Some events are free or aimed at raising funds for local charities. Full details and booking at www.hernehillfestival.org/home

Friday 11 October Sarah L King opens the Festival with an evening of soulful jazz standards mixed with originals from her new album, *Fire Horse*.

Saturday 12 October coffee morning at Herne Hill United Church with music from two contrasting groups, Indig-O, a folk/early music group, and the Dogoda Wind Quintet. Donations to the Norwood and Brixton Food Bank



Sarah L King

St Faith's: Note-Orious from East Dulwich, Clapham Community Choir, Nunhead Community Choir and West Norwood Community Choir.

Saturday 12 October The South London Jazz Orchestra, a community big band playing arrangements from the jazz greats - Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Glenn Miller et al. Conducted by Hugo Jennings.

Saturday 12 October Creature & Machine(aka Lilly Neubauer), an evening of electro pop, acoustic and spoken word performances on the theme of 'Quiet Power'.

Sunday 13 October The Big Swing Band from Camberwell at the Ruskin Park bandstand with classic swing and modern big band charts, hopefully accompanied by sunshine!

Sunday 13 October Peter Black with an international tour of solo guitar music, from flamenco to blues, classical to calypso.

Sunday 13 October Solis Choir sing choral evensong at St Faith's church, a calm but uplifting event to end the first weekend of the Festival.

Monday 14 October Jazz Jam at Off the Cuff. Listen to the House band Head's Up play a short set, then join in! Or come and listen for free.

Tuesday 15 October Whiskey Moon Face with 'alternative' folk, combining elements of Klezmer, New Orleans jazz and Middle Eastern folk in their original songs.

Wednesday 16 October Kalmaar, a young duo playing every imaginable style except classical.

Thursday 17 October Grinch Mountain Bluegrass Band, a trad bluegrass band with banjo, fiddle, mandolin, guitar and double bass, paying tribute to the American Southern string bands of the 1940s and 50s.

Friday 18 October Dancing at the Ceilidh to toe tapping tunes with the South East London Folk Orchestra.

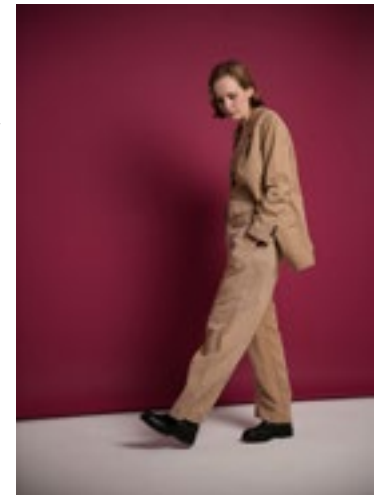
Saturday 19 October a morning of songs, drumming and interactive story telling with Whippersnappers at Brockwell Lido.

Saturday 19 October *Peter and the Wolves* specially adapted from Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* to include a whole pack of wolves from the Judith Kerr Primary School and accompanied by members of the Dulwich Symphony Orchestra.

Sunday 20 October Hank Dogs with folk, folk rock, alternative country, Americana, blues, Celtic influences, creating a haunting sound.

Sunday 20 October Junior Open Mic at Off the Cuff, bring the whole family!

Sunday 20 October The Southwark Sinfonietta close the Festival with a programme of classical music.



Creature and Machine

Kay Longley

Baroque Pop in the Workshop

The Half Moon has a "fabled history" as a live music venue – which is not to say that live music is never heard any more. Back in May a familiar figure, no less than the Society's President, Colin Wight, was performing in the Workshop with his group One for the Wall, who describe themselves as "Baroque Pop from the City of Dreaming Spires" (the band formed in Oxford in the late 1970s). As to the Half Moon's fabled history, there is a Wikipedia article on the subject, though it comes with this warning: "This section may contain an excessive amount of intricate detail that may interest only a particular audience."



A local tour – Colin Wight gets nose

For the perennially nose, Artists' Open House is an annual treat. Over the years I have poked my nose into both grand and (relatively) humble dwellings across SE24, and as far off as Pond Mead, SE21. I have even, very occasionally, bought a watercolour or a pot.

Many would claim to know the 'moderne' gem that is Kemp and Tasker's Grade II-listed Dorchester Court, but how many have looked into its apartments? Well, I hadn't done so until Sunday 12 May, an event promoted as part of the Dulwich Festival and a welcome opportunity to explore beyond the communal gardens and staircases. It amazes me how many talented people there are in our corner of the capital (or is it only me who can't draw for toffee?)

Amongst the many Dorchester Court residents opening up their homes was printmaker Susie Perring, recently co-opted as the Society's Secretary (see page 5). Susie is the owner of an apartment possessing many original 1930s features, including a black WC! Whilst the interiors of the apartments I saw were well maintained, this is sadly not true of the lamentable exterior of the building (more on this in "A sorry saga", in the Magazine #159).

As 4pm approached I joined the large and still-growing group awaiting the arrival of Ian McInnes of the Twentieth Century Society (and formerly Chair of the Dulwich Society) to lead a walk past, and in one case through, some examples of Herne Hill's architectural heritage of the last 100 years.

Leaving Dorchester Court and turning right along the main



road, Ian's crocodile entered The Quadrangle, designed by Edward Ellis and opened for single 'professional' women in 1911. It was extended after the war with the construction of a rear wing. This Tudorbethan condominium was Grade II-listed in 2020, largely due to the efforts of Society member Edmund Bird (see "The Quadrangle: social history in the making" in Magazine #143). Our group included two current residents. There are understandable fears about what might happen following a recent change of ownership.

Peering over the back wall, we had a cheeky view of Dorchester House (5 Dorchester Drive) before making our way past the

1936 modernist house at 32 Herne Hill to Dorchester Drive, where Ian drew attention to the herringbone brick wall (all that remains) of Tudor Stacks, now the site of an architecturally undistinguished example of sheltered housing. Our Pied Piper then led us to No. 10, recently saved from the threat of demolition by the urgent action of the

Twentieth Century Society and the Herne Hill Society, who were fortunately able to enlist the aid of Lambeth Council. It is now looking very smart after extensive recent restoration, although Ian had reservations about the planters on the roof. Changes have been made to the rear of the building as part of the restoration, but its public face and stylish art deco design details remain unaltered.

As so often, our group included people who confessed that they had walked past these buildings time and time again without noticing that there was something rather special about them.

Dorchester Court – an update

In the last issue of the Magazine we spoke of the sorry state of Dorchester Court, though, on a more positive note, we were also able to point to the artistic talents of residents on show in a forthcoming event. Since then there has been an important development – the refusal by Lambeth of the application to develop the site, by the addition of a penthouse storey on each of the eight mansion blocks and to build eight 'townhouses' where the derelict garages now stand. A major concern had been the absence of a legally binding commitment that the urgent restoration of the existing buildings would be an integral part of any new development. Lambeth seem now to accept that there

has to be such a commitment, by having a Section 106 agreement that will prevent the occupation of any new development until the original buildings are fully restored. That is an important step. However, the refusal of the application stems, primarily, from Lambeth's conclusion that the penthouse flats will cause the loss of more than 1900m² of communal amenity space currently provided by the open rooftops on top of each block. The proposal does not make up for this loss anywhere else on the site.

Since residents have long opposed the application – as has this Society – Lambeth's refusal will come as a relief. But meanwhile of course the building fabric continues to decay.

THE GREAT BICKNELL ART COLLECTION

The acquisition of fine art was essentially, until the Victorian era, a pursuit of the aristocracy. But the growth of a merchant class, whose wealth was built on commerce and manufacturing, also saw the rise of a new class of collectors. It was not enough to own a grand house, the house needed to be filled with art of appropriate quality. Herne Hill provides a particularly interesting example of such a collection, one that was dispersed after the death of the man who created it, but which gives valuable insights into changes in taste from that of 150 years ago – and also dramatic fluctuations in the value of art.

Elhanan Bicknell (1788-1861) made a great deal of money from the whaling industry, in particular the extraction of spermaceti, the liquid waxes that make up much of the bulk of the huge heads of sperm whales. Until other products obtainable at lesser cost took its place this form of wax was especially favoured for domestic lighting, being largely odourless and burning more cleanly than tallow or beeswax candles. Herne Hill was Bicknell's home for more than 40 years. The house – on a site opposite to where Dorchester Court stands today – enjoyed extensive grounds that stretched all the way



Landseer, Doubtful Crumbs

down to Half Moon Lane. The Bicknell household was large: there were 13 children (Bicknell married four times with three of his wives dying prematurely) and numerous servants, so over time the relatively modest Regency house was greatly enlarged, and with space for art.

Like most other self-made men who formed art collections in this period Bicknell's interest was not in old masters, whether of the Italian Renaissance or the "Golden Age" of Dutch painting. Indeed on returning from a visit to Italy he professed he had seen nothing he "would give a damn for". He wanted modern pictures painted by



Turner, Giudecca

British artists. One reason for this could be the desire for authenticity, hence certainty of value, something that could not be guaranteed when collecting pictures by long-dead artists with all the uncertainties of attribution and "connoisseurship". Bicknell liked to buy his pictures from artists directly, without the intervention of dealers, sometimes commissioning particular works. He was a sociable man and artists were regular guests at *conversazioni* held at Herne Hill. He clearly enjoyed the pleasure of owning and having art around him but also brought to it the shrewd judgement of the man of business.

Today the Bicknell collection is remembered for its including a significant number by J.M.W. Turner, several bought directly from the artist, who was himself a regular visitor to Herne Hill. There were 10 Turner oils and 18 watercolours at the 1863 sale after Bicknell's death. The sale attracted wide attention, firstly with viewing at the Herne Hill house that at times caused a mile-long queue of carriages, followed by a four-day sale at Christie Manson & Woods. Turner by this date was hugely admired and his pictures fetched what were for the times very high prices, but what is also intriguing is that work by other artists was equally if not more sought after. A superb Turner of Venice, *Giudecca, la Donna Salute and San Giorgio*, bought by Bicknell for 250 guineas, was sold for 1650 guineas. Another Turner, the seascape *Antwerp: Van Goyen Looking out for a Subject*, fetched 2500 guineas, the highest for any Turner in the 1863 sale. However, both these were eclipsed by a landscape with cattle by Augustus Calcott, with cows painted by Edwin Landseer. It fetched 3000 guineas. And a large landscape by the prolific Clarkson Stanfield, for which Bicknell had paid 700 guineas, was sold for 2650 guineas. (To put this in perspective, the skilled worker – bricklayer, mason, carpenter – would in mid-Victorian England expect to earn about £100 per annum, working 10 hours per day, 6 days per week, and the unskilled labourer about half that amount.)

The 1863 sale fetched what was said to be a record total for the time, a total of £75,000, though this was eclipsed in the following decade by the sale of the art collection of Joseph Gillott, a man who made a huge

fortune from the manufacture of the humble steel pen-nib. Bicknell would have been pleased to see his art collection going for prices considerably more than he had paid, but it has to be said that 150 years later the majority of his acquisitions – with the exception of his Turners – have seen a poor return on the original investment. Thus a comparable landscape by Augustus Calcott might fetch today little more than in 1863. Cows painted by Landseer on the same canvas would add some value. But with the exception of his *Monarch of the Glen* – an iconic image through its use to advertise Scotch whisky and bought for £4m in 2017 by the National Galleries of Scotland – the Victorian veneration of Landseer, skilled painter of animals though he undoubtedly was, has not survived. Among Bicknell's pictures was one of Landseer's very popular, whimsical animal subjects *Doubtful Crumbs*, showing two dogs of very contrasting size waiting for crumbs to fall from the table. It might fetch tens of thousands today. In 1863 it was sold for 2300 guineas, more than any of the Turner oils (apart from the Antwerp seascape). The picture was bought by the 4th Marquess of Hertford, along with four superb Turner watercolours – and they all sit to this day in the Wallace Collection.

Bicknell's *Antwerp* seascape has not been on the market since it was bought by Henry Clay Frick in the early 1900s and is now one of the gems in the Frick Collection in New York. However, Bicknell's Turner of the *Giudecca* came on the market in 2006 and sold in New York for \$35.8m (£20.5m), a record for Turner at the time, although surpassed



Turner, *Antwerp*

since then. The picture is said now to be in the art collection of a Las Vegas casino owner. Another Bicknell Turner, *Ehrenbreitstein and the Tomb of Marceau, from Byron's Childe Harold*, was sold in 2017 for £18.5m. Great rarity is a factor, for now there are only a handful of Turner oils in private hands. Contributing to this is simply the stupendous wealth of the very richest individuals today, outdoing the wealth of Elhanan Bicknell in real terms many times over.

Many other British artists were represented in the Bicknell collection, highly regarded at the time but not familiar today, names such as Webster, Collins and Leslie. Or William Edward Frost, who specialised in anodyne female subjects, usually nude (Bicknell had four of his pictures), including *Euphrosyne*. This was a replica – It was common for artists to paint replicas of their own pictures – of the painting given by Prince Albert to Queen Victoria on her birthday in 1848, now hanging in Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.



Bicknell Sale, 1863

Pictures by Frost today sell at best for a few thousand. By contrast, the paintings of David Roberts – there were at least ten in the 1863 sale – retain greater value today, especially scenes in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, though nothing to compare with Turner.

One picture, a painting by William Dyce of 1844, *King Joash Shooting the Arrow of Deliverance*, stands out as an untypical choice, since it has a biblical subject and also shows the clear influence of the German school of Nazarene painters. The German influence in Dyce's work was criticised by art critics at the time. The picture sold for 220 guineas in 1863. Dyce also painted in a manner close to that of the emerging pre-Raphaelites – such a picture by Dyce sold for more than half a million in 2008. But the pre-Raphaelites clearly held no attraction for Bicknell.



Dyce, King Joash

Today *Joash* is part of the collection of the Kunsthalle Hamburg, whose catalogue detailing the picture's provenance states, surprisingly, that very little is known of the early history of the painting. I will be writing to the Kunsthalle to invite them to include Elhanan Bicknell and Herne Hill in their records.

Laurence Marsh

ANOTHER LAMBETH BUILDING “AT RISK”

Things have gone rather quiet on the planning front in the last months – with the exception of the decision on Dorchester Court (see p.13). So it presents the opportunity to stray a little outside the Herne Hill area to look at a



fine Grade II listed building with links to the First World War. It shares with Dorchester Court the distinction of Grade II listing within Lambeth and, more regrettably, being on the Historic England “At Risk” register. This year it was also added to the Victorian Society’s Top Ten List of Endangered Buildings.

Those who know Myatt’s Fields, the delightful park created in 1889 on 14 acres gifted by the Minet family, will be familiar with the late Victorian former school on Cormont Road, whose turrets, towers, gables and spires rise splendidly above the trees on the northern perimeter of the park. As the Historic England description rightly puts it: “a building of romance and fantasy” – but sadly today draped in green netting.

Built at cost of £18,600 as a London Board School to the design of the architect Thomas J. Bailey, the school was opened on 10 February 1898 by the Hon. Edward Lyulph Stanley (later 4th Baron Stanley), a Liberal politician with a strong interest in public education. London Board Schools sprang up across London following the Education Acts of 1870 and 1880, under which education for children aged from 5 to 10 became compulsory for the first time. The new schools typically rose far above the massed terraced housing around them and became powerful physical symbols of the importance of education among the social improvements of the later 19th century.

In 1914 the school was requisitioned, along with its immediate neighbour St Gabriel’s College, today successfully converted into flats, to become the First London General Hospital, caring for wounded soldiers. As the number of casualties grew temporary wards were built in the park of Myatt’s Fields itself. Vera Brittain, the writer and campaigner, served in the hospital as a volunteer nursing

assistant (VAD). In Testament of Youth she recalled the arduous life of VADs and feeling the vibrations caused by the massive artillery bombardment that preceded the fateful Somme offensive launched on 1 July 1916. It was also here

that she learned of the death of her fiancé killed at the front.

Unlike Dorchester Court, which is privately owned, the Cormont Road school is owned by Lambeth. So we asked the Council why the building is being allowed to deteriorate. Our query was answered by Tristan Dewhurst, Development Manager in the Neighbourhood Regeneration team, who told us that the school was due for renovation under the Building Schools for the Future Programme – “but that programme was cancelled by the government in 2010 leaving its condition to worsen following

the vacation of the main school building in 2012. The building was then handed to the council three years ago in a very poor condition and in need of very extensive restoration work. The council initially looked at fixing the roof and then temporary fixes, but even just this is expected to cost in the region of £1.5 million given the size and complexity of the roof structure. Considering the cost of this work and pressures on our budgets we are now looking at the feasibility of securing funding for the much-needed renovation.”

One can understand the dilemmas caused by shrinking budgets. At the same time, as Lambeth will be aware, the longer the building is neglected the greater the cost of its restoration. According to Griff Rhys Jones, president of the Victorian Society: “This is one of those dilemmas that just seems confusing. How come this building can’t be reused? Recycled? Why can’t it be

sold? This is a central borough. Loads of distinguished old places have been successfully repurposed for homes or commercial use. To allow this noble structure to simply decay by neglect is surely wasteful bad policy.”

Laurence Marsh



Vera Brittain at the then hospital

A WHIRLED AT RISK

In our last issue, readers will have seen the objection lodged by the Society's planning group to the proposed 14-storey construction of 320 co-living units (and associated low-rise light industrial facilities) to be built at Hardess Street in Loughborough Junction near the northern ends of Milkwood Road and Herne Hill Road. This project would be built across the railway line from the already very dominant Higgs Yard development, now nearly complete and looking for tenants. The developers are choosing to call this new scheme the 'Hardess Yard' project.

Similar objections were also tabled by local residents and by the Loughborough Junction Action Group and Loughborough Junction Neighbourhood Forum, who continue to monitor the planning application as it proceeds.

The new 'co-living' flats would replace all the current, seemingly haphazard structures on the small and admittedly complex and messy Hardess Street/Hinton Road site, squeezing into a roughly triangular plot on Hardess Street alongside the railway arches.

In the same issue we also wrote about Whirled Cinema, one of the small businesses in the same arches. But alongside this cinema there are other businesses flourishing there under the tracks, including the well-established Miguel's Boxing Gym, several busy garages and bodywork repair businesses, our local blacksmith Frances Plowden (whom we interviewed in 2021) and some studios housing skilled professionals and artists. All contributing to the social structure and economy of the local community; all housing active and successful small businesses. Messily, perhaps, but legitimate, necessary and sustainable.

A vibrant mixed business community

There is Whirled Studio, for example. It shelters behind an anonymous, graffiti-covered entrance door boasting no evidence of what goes on within. But this Arch alone houses around 30 small individual units, used by an artist painter, a fashion designer, a stained-glass artist, several animation and graphic design specialists and a small recording studio.

If these arches no longer proved a stable base for their and neighbouring businesses, the shortage of accessible studio space in London would mean that their activities would probably need to be wound up.

Will the Hardess Yard development drive away these activities? Perhaps not at first. The new building itself, built on the land already acquired by the developers, would not literally trespass on the activity of the arches. But it would dominate their premises, not least in depriving them of light and in curtailing easy access. Whirled Studio tenants, for example, require natural light for their work, currently provided by a large first floor window. A tall modern building a couple of metres away would surely cut off much light.

Some reports suggest that Lambeth had tentatively suggested it

could improve these Arch sites. "Working with the freeholder of the arches [i.e. the Arch Company] and leaseholders, the council will explore the potential to create dual aspect units in the railway arches, including those facing the Higgs development, where possible". But is this consistent with the local strategic plan? And anyway, would it not involve asking the Arch Company to turf out current tenants so as to 'improve' this area?

There may be another serious threat: the afore-mentioned Arch Company itself. Regardless of the council's fair words, the fate of all the businesses working from these arches is ultimately in the hands of the Arch Company, which in 2019 bought all the former Network Rail arches up and down the country. We have seen elsewhere that the Arch Company can be a single-minded and unsentimental

landlord, willing to 'improve' its properties by inflating rents in order to 'persuade' current tenants to leave, and then happy to leave premises vacant until a new tenant with the right budget comes along (witness the glacial pace at which Arch Company-owned properties on Station Square have become tenanted). Now there's the prospect of an influx of young professionals renting modern properties in the Higgs Yard and Hardess Yard projects. Might such a landlord see a perfect opportunity to clean out and modernise these useful but untidy arch properties in order to attract, for instance,



Railway arches on Hardess Street

bars, coffee shops and other shiny new businesses keen to service the needs of these new incomers – and all at a higher rent than the current tenants? Communities up and down the country, including some in SE24, have found that the Arch Company, owned and controlled by a joint venture of two of the biggest privately owned commercial property owners in the world, is entirely immune to pressure from tenants, local communities and elected councils.

A decision is awaited

And now, with the new government and new planning rules, Lambeth will be under greater temptation to sign off all available residential development applications. Lambeth, like many other councils, is under strong pressure to build more housing; the new government have made no secret that this is one of their highest priorities. That said, the Hardess Yard 'co-living' application is not one for conventional housing, be it for private sale, shared ownership, or affordable or social rental. The absence of 'permanent' homes is a particular criticism of the project.

It's generally thought that the Hardess Yard planning application will be formally considered by Lambeth after the summer break. It would be good if Lambeth's planning deciders could point a little of their attention towards the site issues mentioned here.

Pat Roberts

A MEMOIR WRITTEN WITH KINDNESS AND UNFLINCHING HONESTY

REVIEW BY ROSAMUND JONES

I've volunteered in a second-hand bookshop for a while now, and in that time one thing has become very clear. There is one category of book that is frequently donated but rarely sold. The autobiography. The reason I think is that they tend to be written by the 'great and the good' either as legacy projects with every chapter showcasing an achievement, or as attempts to set the record straight. This often means, of course, they want the record adjusted to suit themselves.

Memoir, however, is an entirely different beast. Even when penned by those in the public eye they focus on their untold – frequently fascinating, sometimes revelatory – life stories. *Ruskin Park*, by former BBC News technology correspondent Rory Cellan-Jones, falls squarely into that category. That I should have enjoyed this book so much came as no surprise as I liked Rory immensely when we had worked together briefly on *The Money Programme* in the early 1990s. He struck me then as open-hearted, quick-witted and inquisitive and those same qualities shine through on every page.

In this book he takes on the role of investigator. He has two puzzles to solve: the circumstances surrounding his own birth and whether Sylvia, the mother he remembers as mildly eccentric and isolated, had always been like that. An extensive paper trail of legal documents, sales receipts and letters help him in those endeavours. He found this treasure trove, after his mother's death, in the one-bedroom flat where he'd spent his childhood. Astonishingly, Sylvia had not only kept the letters she'd received, over many decades, but also copies of ones she'd sent. Who knows, perhaps she suspected that leaving a full account of her life would be warmly appreciated one day.

Sylvia became a council tenant in Ruskin Park House on Champion Hill (next to

where Denmark Hill forks at the Fox on the Hill) in the mid 1950s. She moved in, before Rory was born, with her other son, Stephen, and was delighted to secure the flat. In one letter she writes, "...we wake in the morning to sunshine and birds singing and trees outside the window, and



really feel quite poetic about it, it's such a contrast to our former dark and dreary place...it's quite small, labour saving and easy to run, big windows and a balcony and plenty of cupboards, and built-in fires etc – and gardens, which are well kept, and a laundry downstairs which is bliss."

If his mother found much to love about her new place, Rory saw it through a different lens, as "... somewhere to escape from, somewhere to be embarrassed about when the parents of friends with houses and gardens asked where I lived." On revisiting the flat he remarks on how hugely changed this corner of London has become. Wryly he notes that Ruskin Park House flats are now marketed for sale as modernist gems. Things, of course, have changed in other ways too. Holding down

a job while carrying the domestic burden alone remains a hard road for anyone to travel today. How much harder it must have been in the socially conservative decades after the war. Yet, that is what Sylvia somehow achieved. After divorcing (with much wrangling and difficulty) Stephen's father she, unintentionally, became a single – and this time unmarried – mother to Rory. It was 1957.

This memoir is essentially the story of his mother's two love affairs. The most enduring one was with the BBC, the organisation Sylvia first joined during the war years and then continued to work for until she retired. While there, she was fleetingly appreciated and then consistently overlooked and, no surprise here, underpaid. Despite all that, she remained steadfast in her commitment to both her career and the BBC itself, an organisation which Rory credits with giving his mother, who left school at the age of 14, both a purpose and an education.

The second love affair was the one between Sylvia and her much younger colleague, James Cellan-Jones. Rory writes about this liaison with kindness and unflinching honesty. He uncovers a tender, but ill-fated, relationship between a besotted but childlike young man and a woman who had hoped for more than she received.

This memoir is a well-drawn slice of social history but also a reminder, if one were needed, that our parents are more complicated, flawed and fearless than children, even adult ones, usually imagine.

In May this year Ruskin Park and its author featured in one of the wide-ranging literary events presented by the Friends of Carnegie Library (in co-operation with Lambeth Library Services)

Ruskin Park: Sylvia, Me and the BBC by Rory Cellan-Jones, published by September Publishing
ISBN 978-1-3999-4029-0, now in paperback

ITALIANS IN HERNE HILL

THE 'ICE CREAM KING'

While researching properties in Dorchester Drive in online newspaper records for the Herne Hill Art Deco Walk in May (see page 13), I came across an article in the *South London Observer* of 30 December 1954 headed "Ice Cream King Dies". Further research, and a chance meeting with some relatives who live locally, uncovered a story of a family of successful Italian entrepreneurs who had emigrated to Britain in the late 19th century and built up a substantial ice cream business, Marcantonio's. In a promotional pamphlet published in the ice cream trade association's magazine *The Ice Cream Industry*, to mark the 1951 Festival of Britain, the firm was said to be possibly the largest ice cream factory in Lambeth and the Home Counties outside of national brands like Wall's.

Raffaele Marcantonio was born in Italy in 1881 and arrived in this country aged four with his father, Antonio. The latter started the business with a cart in Hammersmith but by the early 1900s they had set up a shop and factory at 107 & 109 Lambeth Walk. In the 1930s, as well as the main shop there were others in the Granville Arcade in Brixton, Camberwell Green, Catford, Edmonton, Norwood, Tooting, Wembley and Wood Green. In addition, the firm also supplied ice cream to many chain stores and independent retailers but, unusually, were apparently never involved in the cinema trade. A fleet of insulated delivery vans was used for regular distribution from the factory which moved from Lambeth Walk to West Norwood in 1949.

The firm used full cream milk powder rather than the more usual skimmed milk powder to provide a richer ice cream with a better texture. As early as 1910 the firm had seen the benefits of using wafer biscuits in their products – an apocryphal story has Raffaele buying an early wafer making machine with a bag of 500 gold sovereigns. Raffaele was also a founder member of the Ice Cream Association, set up in 1918 when the government tried to prohibit ice cream manufacture.

By the 1940s Marcantonio's were best known for two products, the first of which was the 'Rainbow bar'. This was a 'Neapolitan

brick' with a mix of strawberry, vanilla, and pistachio ice cream – the factory had a machine designed by their own engineers which enabled the mix to be extruded in one go from three separate freezers. The second was figured ice lollies where the firm was a pioneer – these included the 'Icy Fruit', made with

clear fruit juice, and they also produced the 'Teddy Bear' and 'Big Bear' animal shapes and the 'Creamy Bar', a mixture of ice cream and fruit juice in flavours ranging from banana to spearmint. The lollies were a great success at the Festival of Britain.

Raffaele and his family moved from living in the flat above their shop in Lambeth Walk to the newly built house in Herne Hill at 12 Dorchester Drive late in 1936. In 1944 they persuaded their daughter Margaret Cianfarani, and her husband, Victor, a grocer with premises in Draycott Avenue, Chelsea, to move into the 'Sunspan' house next door at No. 10 (see #152/153 of the Magazine). The two families remained as neighbours until Raffaele's death in November 1954 – his wife died less than a week later, reportedly overcome with grief. An interesting aside

noted in Raffaele's obituary in *Ice Cream & Frozen Confectionery* in January 1955 was that his wife was the daughter of Orazio Cervi known in the late Victorian period as "the king of London's artist models". Sir William Hamo Thornycroft used Cervi as his model for *The Sower* (in the grounds of Kew Gardens) and *The Mower* (Walker Art Gallery Liverpool,

reduced version in Tate Britain), one of the best examples of high Victorian sculpture.

In March 1954, a few months before Raffaele Marcantonio's death, the business was sold to a larger national ice cream maker Neilson's, owned by Canadian entrepreneur Garfield Weston, also the owner of Allied Bakeries. Post-war he had bought up several British food businesses including the Aerated Bread Company (and the ABC Tea Rooms) and the Fine Fare supermarket chain. After

1960 the firm was called Associated British Foods and is perhaps best known today as the parent company of Primark.

Ian McInnes



Raffaele Marcantonio serving ice cream at the Festival of Britain, 1951

ROYAL HERNE HILL – A FOOTNOTE

In issue #155 of the Magazine we carried an article about Herne Hill's links with royalty, or the striking absence thereof. But there was an omission that we can now rectify. On the afternoon of 27 November 1911 Herne Hill was graced with the presence of HRH Princess Victoria Louise Sophia Augusta Amelia Helena of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg, though she was known by the name Helena Victoria (and 'Thora' within the family) and after 1917 ceased to use her German title altogether. She was a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria (one of 42 grandchildren), never married and her public life was spent working with various charitable organisations. The visit to Herne Hill was prompted by a fund-raising drive by St Paul's church for renovations to the church and to support its work in the parish. The Princess came to open a three-day bazaar at St Paul's 'Mission Church'



in Lowden Road. The South London Press reported that the Princess was "well received" with children lined up outside Jessop Road School singing the National Anthem. Over the porch of the church a white and gold arch was erected and inside there was a "charming array of stalls decorated in a floral theme".

The history of the Mission Church is told – with the exception of the Princess's visit – in the Society's 2009 publication, *Milkwood Estate: The Story of a Lambeth Community*, now out of print but available as an e-book on the Society's website. The church was completed in 1881 to serve

the population of the newly built Milkwood Estate. It became disused 100 years later. After various community uses the building was sold and, after extensive repair and refurbishment, serves today as a Seventh-day Adventist Church drawing a large congregation from many parts of London. **LM**

MUSIC IN MILKWOOD ROAD

A short walk from the Mission Church in Lowden Road is Milkwood Road. Today, with the exception of a row of shops (some now converted into residential use) at the northern end of the road before its junction with Hinton Road, all the houses – more than 100 of them – that were built on the side that backs onto the railway have gone. Demolished after the war, their place has been taken by a number of industrial estates and, more recently, by the Shurgard storage building and the Peabody housing development known as Kerin House. Our postcard shows the soot-blackened house that used to stand at No. 56 and can be dated to about 1910. The two signboards show that at this date the 'Loughboro' Music Studio' offered tuition under its principals, the Misses Ridler.

There was mandoline and banjo at the cost of one shilling per week or 10 shillings and sixpence per term, as well as the slightly more economical piano and American organ (similar to a harmonium) at ninepence per week or eight shillings



and sixpence per term.

The Misses Ridler were Annie and Lily, the two unmarried daughters of Frederick and Elizabeth Ridler. In 1901 the family lived a little further down the road at No.8, above the butcher's shop run by their father. Two further daughters, Rose and Mabel, made up the family. The 1911 census shows Annie and Lily aged 42 and 34 respectively, now residing at No. 56, with their sisters no longer in residence. They are still there 10 years later, both shown as teachers of music on their own account. Also in the house is their widowed father, aged 76, described as a 'retired meat salesman' – more polite than butcher? In 1939 Annie and Lily had left London and were living near Barnstaple in Devon, where their mother came from, but

they returned to London and spent their later years in Penge. We have no image of the Misses Ridler, though one can be fairly confident that it is their father who stands at the entrance to the Loughboro' Music Studio with a proprietorial air. **LM**

YOSHIDA- A FAMILY OF ARTISTS

Dulwich Picture Gallery exhibitions often highlight artists not well known in this country but who deserve our attention. *Yoshida: Three Generations of Japanese Printmaking* introduces a family of artists celebrated in Japan but unknown here. It is truly a revelation.

Yoshida Hiroshi (1876-1950) born Ueno Hiroshi, was adopted by his art teacher, Yoshida Kasaburo, and went on to become one of Japan's greatest artists. His signature in Dulwich Picture Gallery's visitor book in 1900 is on display, alongside his diary and a large hanging photograph. He travelled the world, producing American landscapes, views of Venice, Athens, the Matterhorn (he was a keen mountaineer) as well as traditional Japanese motifs, e.g. *Kumoi Cherry Trees*, Osaka Castle, a bridge, reflections in puddles or river, bamboo and wisteria. The Gallery's front entrance is



Yoshida Hiroshi, *Kumoi Cherry Trees*, 1926

festooned with wisteria to draw us in.

A woodblock depicting the Sphinx with people and camels by day reappears in different hues by night. From the same keyblock of the Taj Mahal, he used 14 blocks and 55 impressions to achieve effects of morning through night with gradations of colour. Similarly, we see Fujiyama in the first light of the sun and in subtle shades of mist. A display case shows the order of printing of *A Junk* in five mini-proofs.

As we move through the exhibition, we find hanging-scroll photos of each artist. Room 2 features Hiroshi's wife Fujio (1887-1987) and son Toshi (1911-1995). The daughter of an art teacher, Fujio was a watercolourist, painter and printmaker. Six of her bright flower prints are on display.

Toshi was initially influenced by his father's work but then developed his own style combining abstract and representational elements. On show are *Women in Baghdad*, a stone garden, San Francisco seen beyond a tree. *Camouflage* hides tigers in Africa behind tall grass echoing their stripes. In *Santa Fe*, New Mexico, tourists queue to visit the Spanish Revival pueblo-style Palace of the Governors with indigenous people selling handicrafts.

The Mausoleum displays printmaking tools including brushes, blocks and chisels plus a video showing the process.

The next room features Hiroshi's second son Hodaka (1926-1995) and his wife Chizuko (1924-2017). Hodaka challenged

tradition, becoming a pioneer of early modernist, abstract art, playing with motifs as in *Profile of an Ancient Warrior*. His output includes lithographs, collages, photo-engraving and screenprints.



Yoshida Hodaka, *Profile of a Warrior*, 1958

Chizuko was part of an avant-garde community of writers and artists. Her landscapes and nature studies, innovative use of zinc plates, embossing and ink woodblocks connected Abstract Expressionism with traditional Japanese printmaking. *A View of the Western Suburbs of the Metropolis*, *Rainy Season* and *Jazz* are striking modern takes on familiar themes.

The final room is a stunning site-specific work over the walls by Hodaka's and Chizuko's daughter Ayomi, born 1958. Finding her grandfather's signature in the Gallery's guest book and inspired by the Yoshino cherry blossoms she saw in Dulwich and Herne Hill, she created a walk-in scene with 8000 hand-printed blossoms under the natural light of the newly reopened skylight.



Yoshida Ayomi with *Cherry Blossom* installation, 2024

It evokes the passage of time, changing weather, nature and the environment, carrying on the tradition in a playful way. The work is unique and never to be repeated.

This first UK introduction to the Hiroshi dynasty opened 19 June and runs until 3 November. It is vibrant, colourful and uplifting.

Jeffrey Doorn

CECIL SHARP

– A LOCAL LINK REVEALED

In issue #158 of this Magazine we told the story behind a photograph of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton shown enjoying a pint at the Fox on the Hill pub. The pub had been built after World War II to replace the Fox under the Hill damaged in the war and which used to stand on the corner of Denmark Hill and Champion Park.

As with so many places in and around Herne Hill, if you dig a bit deeper you find an older stratum. Thus the Fox on the Hill took the place of three large houses that faced onto The Triangle, the wedge of land today used by the pub as its popular beer garden. One of these houses provides a link to a famous name and to a centenary, a link hitherto overlooked in the Herne Hill Society's publications. For it was in one of these houses that Cecil Sharp, who died 100 years ago, was born in 1859.

Cecil Sharp was an immensely influential figure in the movement that arose at the very end of the 19th century to collect, record, preserve and later to perform, English folk music and dance. His research in the field and publication of the music he found played a key role in the forming of a national musical style particularly associated with Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, George Butterworth and others. In time this led to the important folk tradition revival of the 1960s.

The aerial view from 1922 shows the group of houses facing the Triangle. After the Sharp family moved out their house became known as Trieste House, the name given by its owner, Frederick Kern, a merchant born in that city. Herne Hill, Denmark Hill and Champion Hill at the time of Cecil Sharp's birth formed an enclave of prosperous merchants and their often large families. Cecil is shown in the 1861 census aged one with his parents James and Jane Sharp, and three sisters, all children aged under four, with six servants to look after the



family. Five more siblings followed. Cecil's father was a slate merchant, a lucrative occupation at a time when London was rapidly expanding and slates were the standard roofing material. But although Cecil was the oldest son it was never the wish of his parents, with interests in music and the arts, to have him follow his father into the business. He spent his earliest years on Denmark Hill, but by the age of 11 he was a boarder at Uppingham School. Here he showed particular promise in mathematics and music. In contrast to the typical public school ethos at the time music was very much encouraged. He went on to study mathematics at

Cambridge, but music became his lifelong passion.

Sharp did not 'discover' English folk songs until he was well into his 40s. And it is wrong to think he was the first to discover this rich cultural tradition. But Sharp was a very effective self-



Denmark Hill Triangle, 1922

publicist and happy to ride roughshod over others who he felt stood in his way. And he is also sometimes criticised for bowdlerising material with overt or implied sexual references. At the same time his ambition and dedication to his task did mean that he collected and recorded, both in this country and in America, a formidable amount of material that could otherwise have been lost. Sharp's research during the First World War in America, mostly in the Appalachians, where he worked in difficult conditions often battling

chronic ill-health, proved to be especially valuable.

London retains a permanent memorial to Sharp in a fine building at the northern edge of Regent's Park. It is the home of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, and named Cecil Sharp House when it opened in 1930.

Laurence Marsh

YESTERDAY'S NEWS

WHERE RUSKIN LIVED

Injunction against a Dairy at Herne Hill

Judge Parry at Lambeth County Court on Saturday, on the application of Mrs. Elizabeth Roots, of Elfindale-road, Herne Hill, granted an injunction to restrain R. Higgs & Sons, dairymen, from making a noise which amounted to a nuisance.

For the applicant it was submitted that Herne Hill was an exclusively residential district. Judge Parry: It is close to where John Ruskin used to live. He was enthusiastic about its beauties.

Counsel said the noise commenced at 6.30 in the morning with the arrival of the full churns, followed by the removal of the empty churns. Then came the departure of 16 milk carts till nine o'clock, and after that a steam cleaning apparatus till 3.30 p.m.

The plaintiff said she suffered from heart trouble, and owing to the noise was unable to recover from an illness. An accountant said that it was impossible for a man working with his brain to live in the houses adjoining the dairy.

Judge Parry said there was no doubt whatever that the noise was a nuisance. He granted the injunction asked for, but suspended its operation for a month.

Daily News, 17 November 1919

A few nights since, Mr. Blanchard, of Norwood, was robbed of what money he had about him, by three footpads, on Herne-hill, Lambeth, one of whom he knocked down, but being over-powered by the other two, they (thinking he had some knowledge of them) drew a knife, and proposed cutting his throat. Their intentions, however, were frustrated, by a man on horseback coming up at the time, when the villains made a precipitate retreat.

Mirror of the Times, 26 December 1801

Ten shillings fine was imposed at Lambeth Police-court on a man who was charged with causing an obstruction in Norwood-road, Herne Hill, by parading the street dressed in old English costume, mounted on a white horse, and sounding a horn in order to advertise a cinema.

St. Austell Star, 1 January 1914

HIS MEMORIES

"I wish to be buried with my autograph album," wrote Mr. Hermann Bongers, of Herne Hill, London, in his will. He left £905.

Birmingham Daily Gazette, 4 June 1949

NAMES FOR ABANDONED BABES

Lambeth guardians, at their weekly meeting, yesterday were informed that an infant, apparently a few weeks old, was brought to the workhouse at an early hour in the morning a few days since, having been found by the police in the forecourt of a house in Kennington. The master of the workhouse asked the Board to give the child a name. The Chairman thought they might very well leave that task to the lady guardians.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Hartley) stated that formerly the foundlings had been named after the roads in which they were found. For instance, a boy baby picked up at Herne Hill was christened and registered as John Herne Hill; another infant, now a fine youth, abandoned in the hall of the relief station, was given the name of Lambeth Hall; while a baby girl, found in Westminster Bridge Road near the Canterbury, was registered in the name of Nellie Westminster. Mr. John Mills said this method of naming the foundlings had been strongly objected to by the present Board. The Chairman—It is an objectionable system.

Mrs. Despard agreed to have a name ready by the next meeting. "I will interview the poor little thing," she said.

It was mentioned that the infant was in deplorable condition when brought to the home, but had with a few days' treatment become a "strikingly bright child."

Eastern Evening News, 24 December 1896

- A MISCELLANY

"THE LADY OF THE LAKE"

NEW L.C.C. WOMAN OFFICIAL AT BROCKWELL PARK

For schoolboys enjoying holidays at Brockwell Park lake the terrors of the after-effects of duckings have been removed by the actions of a sympathetic committee of the London County Council, which, having taken into consideration the question of how to deal with the large number of children who are constantly falling into the lake, decided that the best things to be done for them was to dry their wet clothes.

How could this be most expeditiously carried out was the next point raised, and the problem was solved by the appointment of an entirely new official to carry out the work – a woman with a mangle! Of a heavy and very serviceable pattern, this machine is now to be seen in use at all hours between sunrise and sunset. Duckings are frequent all day long. Dryings are carried out with neatness and dispatch by the "lady of the lake" as the youngsters have named her, who busily plys her novel and beneficent calling in the shelter-house

London Evening Standard, 12 August 1913



TWO YOUTHS LAND PLANE IN PARK

Two youths who flew a Cessna 150 from Biggin Hill airfield, Kent, and landed it in a small London park last night, are being sought by police. The youths, aged about 19 and wearing blue clothes, were seen running from the aircraft when it landed in Brockwell Park, south of Brixton.

The proprietor of the King Air Flying Club at Biggin Hill, Mr. Gordon King, said the aircraft was worth between £8000 and £10,000.

Liverpool Echo, 3 September 1973

September 24th—At Brockwell Park, Herne Hill, close to station. Eight Cart and Nag Horses and Ponies, Eight Jersey and Shorthorn Cows, Two Bulls, 118 Pigs, 200 head Poultry, the useful Implements and Machinery, and about 100 Loads prime Meadow hay, by direction of Mr. William Haydon, the estate having been sold.

Croydon and East Surrey Reporter, 23 August 1890

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

For the local historian the national census is an indispensable tool. The first systematic counting of this country's population began in 1801, but this was essentially a head count without personal information. That was introduced in 1841. Since then, the holding of a census every 10 years has made it possible (subject to being able to decipher some very dodgy handwriting) to trace not only how many people lived in your area and their place of birth, ages and occupations, but also their names. The most recent census for England and Wales was held in 2021. The Office for National Statistics, responsible for the administration of the census, now think that we may no longer need this means of collecting data about the population, because that data is available from other sources. Thus the 2021 census may have been the last.

There has been widespread concern, particularly among social scientists, at this news. And for the local historians and genealogists of the future – the original census returns are only made public 100 years after the census was taken, thus preventing the identification of individuals – the sort of personal information they seek will be far less easy to find, or will not be found.

However, if we lose the census one type of data will presumably not be lost, for so long as births are registered the names of children will be recorded. Names were something I became very aware of when researching the

early history of Herne Hill's Station Square. What were the favourite names chosen for children of families that lived in the surrounding area?

Easily the most popular boys' name, based on data from the 1881 census for Hurst Street, Rymer Street, Herne Place and Railton Road, was William. And it retained top place 40 years later in the 1921 census covering the same area. Curiously, the name William seems to have fallen wholly out of favour in royal circles after the death of William IV in 1837 – with one notable exception, Victoria's grandson Kaiser Wilhelm. But this shunning of the name obviously did not deter Herne Hill families, who at the same time strongly favoured names such as George, Henry, Alfred and Arthur associated with royalty. As to girls' names, around Station Square in 1881 you would have heard more Elizas or Elizabeths than any other name. That too is a name you will not find in royal circles at the time, nor the next most popular names, Edith and Annie. For boys' names the differences between 1881 and 1921 are slight though Alfred leaves the top six, its place taken by Sidney, an immensely popular name in the early 20th century. For girls the differences between those dates are more pronounced.

Dorothy takes the place of Elizabeth. Edith, Annie, Mary and Alice are supplanted by Lilian/Lily, Violet, Florence and Ivy.

What is rather remarkable is that Victoria is a name entirely absent in the evidence studied. Quite a few Alberts but no Victorias. Was having the same name as the monarch perhaps regarded as having ideas above your station?

The classification of the social reformer Charles Booth at the end of the 19th century has the families nearest to the station in a "mixed" category, "some comfortable, others poor". And the census shows most breadwinners in jobs such as gardeners, cab drivers, dressmakers, laundresses and carpenters, with most houses in shared occupation. Was the choice of children's names in Herne Hill influenced by social status? Milton Road, by comparison, was ranked by Booth as "fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings". The census shows families with breadwinners in mainly white collar occupations, in many cases employing a servant and with houses in single occupation. For boys' names, using the 1881 census data, there is no real difference between Milton Road and their poorer neighbours around the station. William, Henry, Arthur, Charles, John and

George are the most popular names in both areas, although Milton Road also favours Ernest among its top names. Forty years later the picture is much the same, though Sidney is less popular in Milton Road. For girls the two areas also show similar preferences in 1881, although Milton Road was not so keen on Elizabeth and had a liking for Ada. Forty years later the three top names in Milton Road were Mabel, Doris and Rose, none of which were among the most popular names around the station. Drawing any broader conclusions from these results would need a more exhaustive survey and more research into the influences on the choice of names at particular periods of history.

The contrast with the choice of names today is striking. Data on names from the 2021 census is now available, though linking names to individuals and their addresses will not be available for another 100 years. However, it is possible to give results for local government areas. Thus in Lambeth, in order of popularity, the top names were: Oscar, Theodore/Theo, Leo, Benjamin, Oliver, Adam; and in Southwark: Leo, George, Arthur, Noah, Theo/Theodore, Liam. For girls, in Lambeth the order was: Sophia/Sofia/Sophie, Chloe/Sienna, Isabella/Lily, Alice/Amelia and Margot/Evelyn. In Southwark: Sophia/Sofia/Sophie, Maya, Amelia, Mia/Emma/Hannah, Ava/Chloe and Emilia.

What's in a name? More than one might think.

Laurence Marsh

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