

HERNE HILL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HERNE HILL SOCIETY ❧ ISSUE 161 ❧ Winter ❧ 2024



CELEBRATING LOCAL ARTISTS ▶ *See page 17*

OUR STRAW BALE
NEIGHBOUR ▶ *See pages 14/15*

RESTORATION OF
BROCKWELL HALL ▶ *See pages 18/19*



The Magazine of the Herne Hill Society



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Carnegie Library and the Community Trust

Is it peace in our time?

Possibly. But the talks continue. We had all hoped that those troubled years had been put behind us – years when the Carnegie Library was under threat and then actually closed, when local people gathered outside the padlocked gates in protest, and when even the national media proclaimed another victim in the slow death of public libraries.

Then finally it reopened, and – in compliance with the Council's own Culture 2020 Strategy – Lambeth additionally agreed the importance of a Community Hub, driven by trustees working to build local social value from the unused areas of this large building – too large for a 21st-century suburban library – with a partnership programme of community events.

There were early problems. But then, following what seemed like an understanding with Lambeth, the Carnegie Community Trust CIO, who trade as the Carnegie Library Hub, had looked forward to negotiating and signing a long-term lease that would allow them to grow their community business and enhance the viability of this cherished building on a financially sensible model. The Council appeared to be pushing in the same direction when authorising some overdue capital works. Meanwhile the Carnegie Library Hub started to develop working relationships with currently 30 active weekly partners and hundreds of occasional hirers who valued the opportunity to use the splendid spare rooms in this unique, welcoming and usefully sited Edwardian library.

However, in late 2022 Lambeth started to review the agreed position, and then in 2023 finally tabled a revised but (in the Trustees' eyes) deliberately hostile offer which undermined the Carnegie Library Hub's long-term viability, chipping away at the potential for regular income, innovation and growth, and requiring all profit to be returned to Lambeth instead of being partly retained to support innovation, growth and heritage maintenance (including the option to operate a community café). Thereafter, fruitful negotiations dried up.

The autumn shock

Accordingly, despite their many achievements and ambitious plans, the trustees of the Hub felt compelled to announce in September 2024 that in the absence of a stable and workable tenancy agreement as originally promised, they would cease all Hub activities at the end of 2024. This would leave Lambeth Council responsible for utilising and managing the

spaces for which, it had become clear, they had no strategy of their own.

The Trustees' startling announcement prompted a wave of protest to Lambeth among users of the Carnegie Library Hub and many other local residents. A petition to the Council was signed by over 450 people and presented to ward councillors; it will be formally presented to the Council in January. Meanwhile councillors' in-trays filled up with letters and emails of protest. Our widely respected Member of Parliament was also drawn into the controversy, confirming that she had "urged the Council to work with the Community Trust to resolve the current issues and re-establish a productive working partnership to everyone's benefit".



Getting real

By late November, senior councillors, followed by the relevant officers, had evidently realised that nothing was to be gained by such a collapse in an important and useful relationship. A meaningful and promising dialogue was reopened, and continues as this magazine goes to press in early December.

So it seems that Lambeth's key decision-makers are now showing a willingness to properly understand, engage with and negotiate about the Carnegie Library Hub's charitable objectives. Plans and ambitions for a partnership for long-term community use of the building can perhaps now be discussed and agreed. The

strong working relationship between the Hub and the highly respected library team may be further strengthened. The complementary activities and events programme run by the separate Friends of the Carnegie Library can in any case continue.

More trustees needed

And if these negotiations are finally fruitful, the Hub will be needing even more ambitious and experienced support. They are hoping to attract more trustees to support their plans going forward, particularly competent and energetic trustees local to our part of London.

Not quite there

So while the Community Hub's current agreement with Lambeth still expires in early January, the talks and drafting have recommenced. And as the deadline draws near, there may at last be hope that a detailed and satisfactory medium-term lease can be signed in time to secure the Hub's continuing and viable presence. Whatever the outcome, a formal announcement can be expected in January.

Pat Roberts



A lot to contend for

Old topographical postcards are a valuable source of information for local historians and can also bring to life scenes from the past in a very direct way that the printed word cannot. So there was keen interest in November when auctioneers Toovey's in West Sussex were offering a huge collection of postcards, mostly of South London and with one lot containing 154 views of Herne Hill. Some pre-sale research showed that most of the views were of Brockwell Park, scenes that have not changed very significantly since the decades before and after the First World War, when most of such postcards were produced. It is the street scenes that hold the greatest interest. Of these many were known to me and I have copies (either original or digitally), but some were unknown. So I joined the auction online – with a limit to



how far I would go, aware that one can get carried away! The bidding did not take long to exceed my limit and the hammer price for the Herne Hill lot was £650 (the pre-sale estimate had been £200-300). With buyer's premium, VAT and a fee for bidding online the actual final cost would be around £900. It is of course frustrating not to have these images available as a resource for research into Herne Hill's history. I can but hope that the successful bidder, whose identity remains unknown, will make the collection available in some way to local historians.

One of the rarer views in the lot was the one we show of the railway bridge and approach to what is now Station Square. Our ancestors were not shy when it came to advertising tobacco!

Laurence Marsh

Please renew your membership for 2025!

We hope you continue to enjoy your Herne Hill Magazine. Everything the Society does, including production of the Magazine, depends on the support of members, so we very much hope you will renew your subscription in January.

The annual membership rates for 2025 remain unchanged:

- Standard household membership is only £10.00 per year (concessions £8)
- The simplest way to renew is by going to the Society's website at www.hernehillsociety.org.uk. Click on the green 'Join online Now' button on the home page.
- Or (if you don't mind the cost of a stamp) send a cheque to the Society at the address on page 2 of the Magazine.
- If you pay by Standing Order and wish to continue to do so, please check that you are paying the correct amount.

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

The Society values being able to communicate with members by email. If you are not receiving mailings that keep you updated between Magazines, it may mean that we don't have a current email address for you so please let the Membership Secretary have your address. Or it means that our emails are going into your spam box.



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

Local Councillors' Surgeries

Lambeth

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

Southwark

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

The 2025 Excellence Awards

Open for nominations!

Send in your entries now!

In 2023 we ran our first Herne Hill Society Excellence Awards. It was a great success, creating a lot of excitement. People loved that we were celebrating all the unsung good things that happen all around us, giving credit to the people whose tremendous work so often goes unnoticed.

Which people or groups do you think are enhancing this area and creating the community that makes Herne Hill a great place to live?



The award judges: Pat Roberts, Sheila Northover and Colin Wight

our winners and runners up for the Excellence Awards.

Community does not happen by accident. Perhaps you are involved with something or somebody who you think is worthy of an Award? We need you to help us to find



The Awards will feature the people, organisations or businesses contributing to the Society's three priorities of

- **Community**
- **History & Heritage**
- **Environment**

Our finalists last year all felt that the Awards were a terrific way of giving public recognition to their work.

The Excellence Awards are now open and our judges are keenly awaiting the arrival of your nominations. You can nominate yourself or get another person to do it for you. It is quick and easy to enter. If you entered last time, enter again!

In 2023 we unveiled the Awards finalists to a packed celebration audience, in a very special event. Place your nomination now to get your choice in with a chance of picking a winner this time round.

See the Herne Hill Society website for full details of how to enter in each of the three Award categories.

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

Please send your entries to chair@hernehillsociety.org.uk We are really looking forward to receiving them.

CLOSING DATE: 31 JANUARY 2025

Remembrance Sunday



Following an annual tradition that was established when the World War I memorial on the wall of the entrance hall of Herne Hill Station was unveiled in 2019 the Society laid a wreath of poppies at the memorial on Remembrance Sunday. Sheila Northover, former Chair of the Society, laid the wreath this year, pictured here with Councillor Deepak Sardiwal.

Saving St Saviour's – the challenge of falling child numbers

St Saviour's School has been saved! After extensive consultations, and in response to a vigorous and widely supported campaign led by parents of children attending St Saviour's School on Herne Hill Road (see article in our previous issue), Lambeth's proposal to merge the school with another nearby Church of England school has been withdrawn. Lambeth will now consider alternative solutions.

There was strong opposition by current parents at St Saviour's facing a move to St John's Angell Town; indeed, no parents selected the option to move their children there. Lambeth were also persuaded by the very strong representations lodged by the Diocesan Board of Education, our local MP, the staff at the school, St Saviour's Church community, and a large number of other local residents mobilised by the campaign. Unfortunately, Lambeth's decision to rescind the merger came quite late during the summer holidays, by which time some parents, unsettled by the uncertainty over the school's future, had already enrolled their children at other schools.

But the projected demographic decline in London pupils expected to start in reception years remains an important factor for many schools and local authorities. Interviewed on the BBC in September, Louis Hodge, the associate director of the Education Policy Institute, said: "In the whole of London, we're expecting primary school pupil numbers to fall by another 52,000 by 2028. And we're also now expecting that trend to occur in other parts of the country but at a slower rate.

The national picture is pupil numbers at primary have been falling, more so in London than the rest of England, but pupil numbers at secondary have been rising in almost all local

authorities in England.

That's going to take a peak and turn a corner in the next five years or so. In London, in certain areas, we're expecting to see falls



in secondary as those falling numbers at primary school work their way through the system."

Conscious of the need to compete for pupils, St Saviour's have now unveiled a series of attractive recruitment posters in the station tunnel.

Pressure on teachers as well as pupil numbers

Some London boroughs see this as a result of families relocating in the face of rising costs and housing developments. In September, Sir Dan Moynihan, chief

executive of Harris Federation, spoke to Radio 4 at the Harris Academy secondary school in Peckham, where they are already worried about pupil numbers.

"The impact of depopulation for us is that we've had to merge two very successful primary schools into one. The other impact is teachers can't afford to live in the capital. We now recruit teachers from Jamaica, simply because we cannot find teachers who are willing to work and live in central London."

And in early November it was reported (in *Southwark News*) that Lambeth Council's Cabinet had approved a decision to shut two schools permanently with effect from September 2026 – Fenstanton Primary School, and Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School in Tulse Hill – though the Council would allow the schools to negotiate a merger instead if they could bring forward "viable proposals". Meanwhile plans to merge St John the Divine Church of England Primary School in Camberwell with Christchurch Primary SW9 in Brixton were signed off.

Pat Roberts

In Herne Hill Hurricanes Hardly Happen



But according to the BBC's weather service on 10 October they do, and we have a screenshot to prove it. Highly alarming windspeeds were also predicted, as local resident Jay Rayner was quick to note. The same reports appeared for numerous places across the UK and the wider world. Fortunately no-one was injured by the computer glitch.



A “six bob” at the Velodrome

What is the collective noun for a group of penny farthings? The short answer is that there doesn't seem to be one. But the cumulative value of the line-up for a race at the Herne Hill Velodrome on 12 October of no less than 58 of these remarkable machines would suggest 6s ½d – for those old enough to remember pre-decimal days. So let's forget the ha'penny and call it a “six bob”. Not all those attending raced and the number



at the Velodrome was actually considerably larger. Many records were broken and the editor-in-chief of Guinness World Records was there to adjudicate. For a start the 58 competitors racing in a velodrome was a world record.

After a number of record-breaking events had been held at the Herne Hill Velodrome the cycles and their owners moved on to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park velodrome for further celebrations and another record – 140 riders on their penny farthings lined up in one “stack”, which requires holding on to one another for more than three minutes. The weekend of penny farthing festivities was organised by the Penny Farthing Club and its founder Neil

Laughton, the adventurer and entrepreneur, also captain of the England penny farthing polo team – not yet an Olympic event so far as we are aware. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine Neil Laughton got on his penny farthing to cycle across part of the country to raise money for Ukrainian charities.

Our front cover picture shows Melissa Eisdell (leading), supported by Julie Woodward and Evi Dumon, who established a new record for the greatest distance on a penny farthing in one hour (female, paced). Our thanks to the official photographer Sally Bliss for permission to use her photographs of the event.

Footnote: *The Velodrome has a long history of holding events that have featured penny farthings. The old black and white image shows*



a One Mile “Ordinary” scratch race at Herne Hill at the National Cyclists’ Union Annual Meeting in September 1928. At the very end of the 19th century, as cycling became safer with the development of a bicycle with two wheels of equal size and, in time, gears and brakes, the penny farthing was called an “ordinary” to distinguish it from the new “safety” bicycle.

LM

Transport Notes

The Government's Autumn Budget

The budget had very little good news for London and Herne Hill – which has already been doing relatively well. Transport for London may well get more reliable routine funding, but most transport initiatives were concerned with devolution and the need for supporting bus services outside London. TFL's capital renewals programme in 2025-26 was given £485m, which includes funding for some new rolling stock on the Piccadilly and Elizabeth Lines.

But where was your car from ORIGINALLY?

The current car number plate system was introduced in September 2001, with the numbers in the middle starting at 51, changing to 02 in March 2002. That is, the numbers change in March each year to the last two digits of the current year, then 50 is added to the number in September. This will work until February 2051... The last three letters are random (presumably with some censorship) but the first two letters are interesting (well, at least to me!).

The first letter of the car registration number indicates the region in Great Britain where the car was first registered. Ones near London include, well, 'L' for London; 'E' for Essex; 'K' for north of London; and 'G' for south of London. Many others are the initial letter – 'B'

Birmingham; 'M' Manchester; 'C' Wales/Cymru; and 'S' Scotland. Watch out for 'X' – personal export. The second letter indicates the DVLA office which issued the registration – three in London – Wimbledon, Stanmore, and Sidcup. There are plenty of websites which list the letters used by each office. Letters never used are I, Q, and Z, because they could be confused with numbers (although O is used – not sure why – perhaps Oxford complained).

The Bakerloo Line Extension – not yet

A campaign to extend it south-east from the Elephant and Castle is gaining support, although no funding as yet. The Bakerloo is operated with the oldest rolling stock of all the Tube lines, trains dating from 1972. A comprehensive new Northern Line station, being built as part of the Elephant and Castle redevelopment, should be complete by 2027 and allows for the possible linking of the new Northern Line station to the separate existing terminus of the Bakerloo Line. Outline plans for the full proposal for a south-east extension as far as Lewisham are a long way from getting funding, but the first phase (with two stations on the Old Kent Road at Tesco by Albany Road and a second by Lidl by Asylum Road) is being actively promoted by Southwark Council.

Bil Harrison

The Quadrangle – an update

A year ago we wrote on these pages about The Quadrangle, the distinctive “Tudorbethan” building at the top of Herne Hill built in 1911 for single professional women. After being initially locally listed by Lambeth it achieved national listing as a grade II listed building in 2020. This listing means that any alterations have to satisfy planning criteria that are much stricter than those for non-listed buildings.

In our earlier article we expressed concern about the Quadrangle’s future fate, following its acquisition in March 2023 by the Brixton-based Lexadon Property Group, given the need for major repair work



following years of neglect. And tenants on short-term tenancies (the majority of residents) were concerned about dramatic rent increases, while the few long leasehold owners were worried about how new service charges would affect them. Residents of The Quadrangle have formed a strong community which they now perceive as under threat. Indeed a number have left because of the proposed rent increases.

The condition of the building caused further concern when, two months ago, a balustrade along one of the walkways that serve flats on the first floor completely collapsed. Fortunately no-one was injured. A

temporary repair has since been effected, but residents remain far from reassured about the safety of the walkways, since they remain manifestly in poor condition. We wrote to the owners Lexadon in October following the collapse. We referred to the grant of planning permission and listed building consent for repairs in August 2022, but no such repairs being carried out before the collapse, whereas work on alterations to a number of vacant flats did proceed without the necessary permissions, resulting in enforcement cases being opened by Lambeth. We said we would be reporting on events in our Magazine and invited them to comment. We have to date received no reply from Lexadon.

We have also written to Lambeth who have confirmed that applications for retrospective consent for alterations carried out to eight flats have been refused and in one case an appeal dismissed and listed building consent refused.

At the time of going to press we received an invitation from Jerry Knight, the Lexadon boss, to meet on site. This follows publicity given by *BrixtonBuzz* to our article a year ago. He says there are two sides to every story. We have accepted the invitation. **LM**

Shops &

A M Motors back in business

The popular car servicing garage on Rymer Street a few steps away from Herne Hill station has now reopened, after a period of closure to allow the construction of two first-floor flats in adjoining premises. The business has operated for over 40 years. It was started by Peter Smith and in recent years has been run by his son, also Peter Smith.

21 Rymer Street, SE24 0NQ 020 7733 3596



The Paper Cat Children’s Bookshop

In our spring issue we were able to announce the name of the new bookshop to be opened in the same premises as the former much-loved *Tales on Moon Lane*. It has now opened fully and is well stocked. From late November it has been opening every day.

25 Half Moon Lane, SE24 9JU; 020 4568 1309

info@papercatbookshop.co.uk; www.papercatbookshop.co.uk

Feeling industrial?

The three arches butting up against the railway bridge in the centre of Herne Hill have been comprehensively renovated by The Arch Company, and are now being advertised as a single industrial unit. The rent for the three arches would be just over £9,000 per month plus business rates. The premises were previously occupied by a vehicle accident repair business.



Arches 1124 – 1126 Norwood Road, SE24 9AA; www.thearchco.com

Archie’s signs up

It’s almost unbelievable, but it was way back in 2016 that the row of traditional shops built onto and under the railway arches on Railton Road, now known as Station Square, finally closed in preparation for radical conversion – originally by Network Rail then taken over by the Arch Company – into the modern retail premises we see today. Indeed, Network Rail had started consultations with the existing

Business News



Railton Road January 2017

tenants back in November 2014. By 2019 the units were finished, painted and available to let. Little by little, tenants have arrived. But the double-fronted unit sandwiched between Lark and the recently arrived John D. Wood & Co estate agents has been very slow to let. Now this last remaining unit has been leased. Recent months have seen a flurry of activity to fit out this extensive two-floor unit.

Herne Hill will be Archie's second restaurant. The first is a brunch and coffee spot in Archway/Highgate. Unlike that North London joint, Archie's in Herne Hill will have an all-day dining and drinks focus. Closed on Mondays, open for breakfast and lunch all other days, open for dinner Wednesday to Saturday, they will also have a takeaway hatch for coffees and grab-and-go food items. They



promise a central and south American influence in their food and drink offer but also seem to be offering a variety of grilled steaks, in varying sizes. Archie's opened on 29 November.

@archies_hernehill

Gail's on the up

As trailed in our last issue (#160/Summer/Autumn), Gail's – "the upmarket bakery chain embroiled in a gentrification row", as one newspaper put it – has now appointed advisers to kickstart a £500m sale process. An auction for the business is underway after Gail's shareholders, including Luke Johnson's Risk Capital Partners and Bain Capital, drafted in bankers at Goldman Sachs. They are seeking either a full sale of the business or a partial exit, fetching a price tag of as much as £500m, as first reported by Sky News. This would represent a significant windfall for shareholders after the business was valued at £200m when Bain bought its stake in 2021. The jump in value comes after a major expansion drive by Gail's, which now has 130 bakeries across the UK – up from 74 in late 2021.

The Arch Wholefood

On the other side of the tracks, and after the departure of the long-standing greengrocers, Seasons of England, one of the arches near the Herne Hill end of Milkwood Road had stood empty for several months. It has now been refreshed and occupied by The Arch Wholefood, selling a wide variety of quality groceries including chilled and frozen foods and an attractive display of fresh vegetables and fruit. The independent business is owned and managed by a



friendly and enterprising Bangladeshi family and friends. They have a similar shop in Kew.

Arch Wholefood, 290 Milkwood Road

Brixton Brewery quits

Brixton Brewery, which started in a single railway arch on Brixton Station Road and later moved to their current larger premises in Dylan Road on one of the industrial estates on Milkwood Road, will transfer most of their production to Enfield in North London, they recently announced. At Enfield they will have potential for further expansion at a highly efficient single state-of-the-art brewing complex which is already home to Beavertown Brewery owned by global brewing giant Heineken.

In a statement published on the brewery's website, managing director and co-founder Jez Galaun said that to facilitate rapidly growing demand for Brixton Brewery beers, "we have taken the difficult decision to begin to move production away from our dedicated main brewery on Dylan Road. There is no space to expand where we are, and with the expiry of our lease coming up, we need to plan the future of our growing business."

Galaun and three friends started the business in 2013. In February 2021 it was acquired by the global brewer Heineken – another example of a craft beer start-up falling (eagerly, it must be added) into the clutches of massive multinational brewers, with their deep pockets and established and profitable routes to market.

The original small-batch brewery will continue to produce limited edition beers on Brixton Station Road.

<https://brixtonbrewery.com/>

... but meanwhile, the Bird House Brewery is flourishing

Bird House is a new-ish neighbourhood brewery, taproom and cocktail bar under the arches in Herne Hill, with similar venues in Shepherd's Bush and Peckham. Opening here in March 2024, they took over in the arch where Canopy Beers once was, and seem to have found a winning formula, serving food, wine, soft drinks and a variety of beers in addition to their own. A licensing application to expand into a second arch also suggests the formula is succeeding.

Arch 1127, Bath Factory Estate, 41 Norwood Road, SE24 9AJ
<https://birdhousebrewing.com/>; @birdhousetaproom

Pat Roberts

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ICE CREAM FACTORY
12 DEGREES
ICE CREAM FACTORY
12 DEGREES
ICE CREAM FACTORY

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Across the border – notes from our foreign correspondent

Morganico - you've heard of him? Let's remind you: he is a British/Australian street mural and wood sculpture artist (that's an oversimplification) who among other works created the ever-popular carved fallen oak branch in Ruskin



Park by the big turkey oak tree. Dedicated to John Ruskin, with its intricate carvings of squirrels, acorns and oak leaves, it provides an irresistible climbing and crawling environment for young children. One of his earlier prominent tree carving achievements was the totem pole on Peckham Rye, created from a fallen plane tree in 2013/14, and this year Morganico secured crowdfunding to renovate this. It's full of symbolism, with many a homage to London's numerous faiths and community identities.

The angel wings are a reference to the visions experienced by William Blake. In 1765, at the age of eight, William Blake saw his first vision while walking on Peckham Rye. "A tree filled with

angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." Doesn't seem to happen these days – must be the pollution.

It's hard times for angels in Brixton, too. Here, as reported in *Southwark News*, local residents

groups are distressed at the surge in drug dealing and general antisocial behaviour that has now, some say, surpassed the crack dealing crisis of 20 years ago. Drug dealing in crack rocks is now carried out in plain sight; the devastating impact on the drug users themselves, and on local residents, in terms of petty theft, vandalism, aggressive begging and the widespread evidence of discarded drug paraphernalia is worse than ever. There are no easy answers. Stronger collaboration between council services and the police is obviously essential, but police resources across London are increasingly strained. Just arresting drug addicts isn't the answer, of course.

Pat Roberts



PLANNING & LICENSING

The Society's planning group has commented on the following:

3 Fawnbrake Avenue, 24/02728/FUL

We objected to an application for a roof terrace at first-floor level on grounds of loss of amenity to neighbours and lack of local precedent for such a development. Lambeth has given permission.

35-39 Chaucer Road, Lambeth 24/02881/FUL

We objected to an application for a mansard roof extension over a terrace of three houses. We stressed the houses' conservation area status and Lambeth's own policies with regard to the preservation of historic roof types (in this case "butterfly" roofs behind a front parapet). A decision is pending.

92 Red Post Hill, Southwark 24/AP/3094

We commented (without objecting) on an application to replace white-painted, timber-framed windows at the side of the house, within the Sunray /Casino Estate conservation area, with new grey aluminium windows. We pointed out specific guidance by Southwark on this issue applicable to the conservation area.

Hardess Yard

A year ago the Higgs Yard development, which includes a 16-floor tower, opened its doors (one-bedroom apartments

"from £460,000"). Now, on the Herne Hill side of the railway that forms the base of the triangular rail intersection at Loughborough Junction, another major development is proposed, but this time on a much more constricted site, to be known as Hardess Yard.

In November Lambeth gave it the go-ahead. As a "co-living project" it differs from the usual residential development, offering in effect bed-sits, but with a bathroom and "basic" kitchen facilities, with other amenities shared with co-residents. There will be 320 units, plus light industrial workshop/studio facilities. The Society had submitted objections to the scheme, especially on grounds of height (up to 14 storeys) and bulk, its out of scale character given its position directly next to the two- or three-storey housing typical of the area, and the absence of proposed improvements in the surrounding infrastructure. A further concern is the effect on existing enterprises in the adjacent railway arches, businesses we have highlighted in this magazine.

We also responded in detail to a consultation on a new "Householder Development" Supplementary Planning Document proposed by Southwark, welcoming some aspects but suggesting a number of improvements. **LM**



Organ reborn at Saint Paul's Church

The classic pipe organ at St Paul's church on Herne Hill had gradually been showing its age and wearing out. After all, pipe organs must be the most complicated musical instrument known to God and man. Many natural materials, including woods, metals and leather, are involved all with their separate lifespans: deterioration is inevitable, while technology including electrification becomes ever more sophisticated.

St Paul's Church was originally consecrated in December 1844 but the interior was destroyed by fire in 1858, the original organ with it. Rebuilt and designed by G. E. Street, the celebrated Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architect of the High Victorian period, it was applauded by John Ruskin ("one of the loveliest in the country"). It opened later in 1858 equipped with a new organ, reportedly by the famous organ builder George Holdich.

According to a rare copy of the *St Paul's Church History* written in 1944 and kindly lent to us by the church, the present organ, a three-manual instrument which escaped damage in World War II, was built and installed in 1914 by Messrs. Norman & Beard, at a cost of £1,037/5s/7d, funded by donations from the congregation. It is of historic interest because during its subsequent life none of its original mechanical features had been adapted to include electrical features. Over that long period, the condition of the organ had deteriorated to such an extent that, despite frequent 'patching-up' repairs, it had by now become so unreliable



that it was getting close to becoming unusable: further running repairs were not feasible, whilst the cost of a full restoration of the original mechanical features was way beyond the financial means of the parish. So the scope and specification of the restoration project, whilst including a significant amount of repair work, has involved varying degrees of electrification.

A dedicated project team secured the financial support of the parish's congregations and other local residents and support from those performing at, and attending, the 20-plus fund-raising Pipe-Up musical events. In addition, grants were received from The Garfield Weston Foundation, The Benefact Trust and the Herne Hill Society. The PCC committed to a £70,000 project budget in November 2022, and the work was undertaken by Organ Design in the period October 2023 to September 2024. The final cost of the

project was just over £63,000.

The project has resulted in the organ's most significant faults being repaired and greatly reducing the likelihood that any further major repair work will be required for several decades.

The cost of the renovation project might seem high, but the needs of a traditional local parish church are still modest compared with the organ requirements of some of our great ecclesiastical monuments. By comparison, the recent rebuilding of the Grand Organ at York Minster, one of the greatest churches in Europe, took three years and cost £2 million. Though it is Liverpool Cathedral which claims the largest church organ in the UK.

Pat Roberts

Footnote

Longstanding readers of this Magazine may recall that in issue #121, all of 12 years ago, we had another story about an earlier organ at St Paul's. It concerned an unhappy lady organist who, in 1854 had travelled many miles to Herne Hill – before the days when this could be done by train – in response to an advertisement seeking candidates for the position of organist, only to be told when she presented herself that females were "inadmissible". She wrote a letter in protest to the *Daily News*: "... we are more than unkindly treated – we are badly used. We are condemned unheard. Notwithstanding an expensive

education, years of time spent in acquiring a thorough knowledge of theory and practice, and in spite of the spirit of the age, which has done much to promote female occupation and enterprise, still church authorities are the last to afford us even the common privilege of competitors, or, as in some instances, the commonest courtesy."

Perhaps it afforded this eloquent proponent of women's rights some satisfaction and even a sense of divine intervention when four years later St Paul's church burnt down, including the organ within.

LM

Flying the nest?

Nature lovers of Brockwell Park wait with bated breath each year to see how many eggs our two resident swans will finally have in their beautifully constructed nest in the reeds of the upper pond. We return regularly anticipating a first glimpse of hatching and the emergence of the adorable fluffy cygnets. Both this year and last, eight eggs transformed into eight beautiful swans. What great parents the cob and pen (the adult male and female) of Brockwell Park appear to be. Fast forward a few months and the family of 10 become two and mum and dad are once again alone.

So what happens to the cygnets each year? Why do they suddenly disappear and where do they go? At this year's Friends of Brockwell Park AGM the guest speaker was Ann Aitken-Davies from The Swan Sanctuary. She answered all those questions and more.

Ann and a team of rescuers catch and relocate the cygnets to the nearest flock, which is Barnes. Swans are only moved in exceptional circumstances so permission is sought via Natural England before the birds are moved. The events that led up to this request occurred a few weeks earlier. Because there were so many cygnets on such a small pond the parents turned on two of them in late August. Ann had never come across swans chasing off their young so early in the year. The cygnets couldn't fly out and remained hidden in the reeds for a couple of days. They were getting weak as they had no food source but they were unable to be caught without a boat. Every time they tried to come out for food the parents chased them back into the reeds. Once a kayaker was free the cygnets were safely removed and it was agreed that the others would need a helping hand. The rescuers returned three weeks later.

It's always best to move them early morning as it gives them

enough daylight to get used to their new home before nightfall. They have to get used to a tidal Thames and the river traffic but the flock is in a very safe area. Fishing is not permitted and the birds are relatively safe from dogs. They are now all happily swimming on the Thames in and around Barnes and are often spotted by the admiring residents in that area. This year the cob and pen produced two Polish cygnets. These are the leucistic (paler, almost white)

cygnets you may have noticed. According to Ann, this gene is one that both the mother and father must carry as neither are Polish swans themselves.

Ann, who has been rescuing swans since the 1990s, knows our breeding pair well and this year had to oversee the return of two of the Tooting swans back to their home after a Brockwell Park invasion, which had sent our two off in a huff to the Middle Pond for a couple of days. Then, later on in the summer, one of the cygnets appeared to be in distress and not breathing properly. After examination a face mask was found blocking the airways and was pulled from the mouth of the poorly baby who, thankfully, went on to make a full recovery.

We are indebted to Ann and her team for their care, keeping our beautiful swans safe and healthy. We are also lucky to boast the success of the survival of the cygnets in Brockwell Park, perhaps due to the railings, no fishing and extra precautions to prevent foxes going for the eggs and the little cygnets when they hatch. Not to mention the parental care of our 12-year-old female and

14-year-old male swan. The female came from Southall originally, the male from Hooks Marsh, Waltham Abbey. In 2016 there were sightings of the cob in Welwyn Garden City but who knows where they met? They are the first breeding pair in Brockwell Park for 50 years and long may they continue.

Kara Tritton (with grateful thanks to Ann Aitken-Davies)



The Brockwell Park swan team

OUR STRAW BALE NEIGHBOUR – HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

The church's tall Victorian Gothic spire is a local landmark, punctuating the horizon when you look south in Brockwell Park. But though you wouldn't know from the outside, the bold white modern hall, sitting confident and handsome in landscaped gardens behind Holy Trinity Church in Tulse Hill is made substantially of straw. Equally no-one would guess that the building was put together largely by hand and with changing teams of volunteers. On top of that, it is almost certainly the largest community-built straw bale construction in Europe and possibly in the world.

It's a long and unique story

There had been a parish hall here before, dating from the building of the church itself nearly 160 years ago. Over a long period it had decayed due to subsidence and no doubt the growing cost of maintenance, and was finally demolished in 1984. But Tulse Hill is not a wealthy parish, and the cost of building a conventional new parish hall, fit for purpose in today's world with the capacity to host church, parish and community events, posed an impossible challenge.



The community-built straw bale hall

But then distant rumours of straw bale building reached the vicar, the Revd Richard Dormandy, and thence the church council.

Straw bale construction is not entirely novel. It began after the advent of baling machines in the last quarter of the 19th century: the vast agricultural plains of Nebraska were, many think, the birthplace of this new construction material and technique, and the first such structures were built by farmers and their families. For single-storey barns and ranch houses, the walls were load-bearing then, as some still are today: no frame was needed because when the bales are compressed they become rock solid and can sustain a roof as well as walls.

Straw bales can also be handled, transported and often assembled by



Holy Trinity Church from Brockwell Park

non-specialist teams, as can other necessary materials such as timber, clay and lime. Another advantage of straw bale building is that the material has supreme insulation and soundproofing properties, besides being relatively cheap, and above all delivering a very low carbon footprint. Foundations can be constructed, as here, on recycled car and tractor tyres rammed with pea shingle. Some critics have questioned their longevity but there are 100-year-old straw-bale houses in the States. The wetter climate of the UK presents more of a challenge, but weatherproof lime rendering and a good moisture barrier means that there need be no problem. In areas where such things matter – hopefully not South London – straw bale buildings can also be highly seismically resilient, meeting or exceeding earthquake standards in areas like California.

Largely because of its numerous and obvious eco-friendly features, straw bale construction is nowadays promoted and adopted by many groups, perhaps especially in North America. But one of the disadvantages under modern building regulations is that the classic technique of building walls and roof support out of straw bales limits the height of the structure. If, as here, you need something taller than one storey, for example with an upper floor, you need also to have a roof-supporting framework, usually of timber, into which the bales are subsequently packed before being plastered inside and out. This was one of the challenges facing Holy



Trinity Church. Alongside came the need to acquire, assimilate and evaluate reams of information about an unfamiliar and almost alien building technique, in terms accessible to a changing cast of volunteers. A far cry from the brick and stone elements of traditional buildings in Britain familiar to generations of builders and lay people.

But the vicar and his team were immeasurably helped by Straw Works, a Natural Building Architecture practice. With their and other help, they faced and overcame numerous other challenges during the long project: legal and regulatory challenges at every stage of construction, sourcing the right materials without incurring punitive transport costs, the damp and uneven site, the need to recruit and monitor the services of experts from time to time without facing extravagant invoices, the motivation of an ever variable workforce Then there was Covid too.

Slow-paced approach

A professionally designed and managed straw bale project, blessed with a realistic construction budget (at which idea many householders will raise their eyebrows, knowing how such things can balloon) and cocooned by all the necessary prior permissions and conditions, could probably be achieved in a couple of years.

But the church did not have the luxury of a big budget, an overall contract supervisor (that would be the vicar) or retained teams of specialist builders and subcontractors for all the fire precautions, plumbing, electrics, lift shaft etc.



So a slower and more deliberate pace was required. They had the advantage of highly specialist and competent advice from the indomitable Barbara Jones, one of the UK experts on the technique, who was involved from the very beginning and led training courses after the team broke ground in spring 2017 – a time when many of the details and shape of the building had still to be determined, and were indeed still being agreed as it progressed.

Overall the aim was to build a community hall that could hold around 140 people and have flexibility for a whole range of activities useful to the community. There would of course need to be a good-sized kitchen and toilets. In addition to this they aimed to provide three extra meeting rooms on the first floor which could be accessed separately. And the new building should be connected to the church via a link that could either be open or locked.

This was all achieved through the assistance and confidence of over 600 volunteers, of many ages, abilities and backgrounds, including some teams supplied by the Community Payback Scheme.

Finally this all climaxed in 2024 and at the remarkable cost of just over



£1 million. It can be used for community and church groups, and private functions. Users will include parent and toddler groups, senior citizens' & kids clubs, half-term clubs, tutoring, counselling, fitness classes, social clubs, local resident meetings, cookery classes, church-based youth club, church social events, birthday parties, wedding & funeral receptions, and of course Sunday schools.

The project enjoys a carbon negative footprint of around 90 tonnes, compared to a carbon positive footprint of around 400 tonnes had they used conventional construction materials and processes. Energy is supplied mainly by solar photovoltaic panels on the roof and a heat pump system. The scrap tyres bring no embodied energy, and the straw walls, being by definition similarly waste product, hold approximately 35 tonnes of sequestered CO₂.

The hall was finally inaugurated in April this year, allowing Richard Dormandy and his army of amateur and professional volunteer helpers a well-deserved surge of pride. They have created a new facility of outstanding quality for the church and the community, and incidentally a quiet but unique landmark on our doorstep.



This long and complex project is now the subject of a book by the vicar, Richard Dormandy, available on Amazon and Kindle: *The Hand Built Hall – Our Adventure in Straw Bale Construction* (Amazon £20 paperback, Kindle £4.99)

See also the consultancy set up by Barbara Jones:

<https://schoolofnaturalbuilding.co.uk/>

Pat Roberts

ERIC MOTTRAM CENTENARY

December 29th marks the birth centenary of poet, academic, critic and editor Eric Noel William Mottram. Born in London, he served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1947 on mine-sweeping missions in Ceylon, Malaya, and Burma. With a Double First and MA from Cambridge University, he taught in Zurich, Singapore and the Netherlands before becoming the first Lecturer in American Literature at King's College London in 1961.

Two years later, he co-founded the Institute of United States Studies at London University. He was Reader and from 1982 Professor of English and American Literature at King's, becoming Emeritus Professor in 1990.

He also lectured in the US, meeting Beat poets including Allen Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams and, later, William Burroughs. His critical writings on these writers introduced them to the wider British public.

Mottram was a prominent member of the British Poetry Revival movement, and from 1970 published some 35 poetry collections. His work combined British landscape imagery with American avant-garde techniques. He also wrote about post-war music and other aspects of American culture. From 1971 to 1977, Mottram edited the Poetry Society's *Poetry Review*.

In search of alternative ways of living, he looked to utopian movements of his day and the past.



*Barnacled white over sandstone baked apricot a single rock
off Ram Island in the male peacock breasted sea
white lines of sand
sand under surf
scallop in sand*



Rejecting religion and the spiritual, he was inspired by the tradition of the Green Man and was ahead of his time in environmental concerns. His great work, *A Book of Herne*, uses Beat-type collage to evoke early medieval times and a wide variety of myths with an ecological vision of living in harmony with the natural world, exemplified by the figure of Herne the Hunter.

*but we can turn to you
take off masks of performance ask indulgence for freedom
to end solitude on some musical island
increasingly barren
rays leaves tendrils from his head
out of his lips a heart of named flowers
blaze currents without centre
Unbounded Creation*

From Herne the Hunter to Herne Hill: Professor Mottram lived at 40 Guernsey Grove from about 1973 until his death on 16 January 1995. In 1996 his siblings presented an extensive archive of his manuscripts, correspondence and ephemera, as well as his library and his collection of gramophone records to King's College London Archives. Held in the Foyle Special Collections Library and the Maugham Library, the Mottram Collection can be searched by the public through King's Library Search. Many of his books can also be found in the National Poetry Library at the Southbank Centre. There is a short biography of Eric Mottram in this Society's *Herne Hill Personalities* (2006, now out of print).

Jeffrey Doorn

CELEBRATING LOCAL ARTISTS

The social and cultural life of Herne Hill is enriched by many artists, working in a variety of media. With its expertly managed Artists' Open House programme, the annual Dulwich Festival does a fine job in reminding many of us in South London about their work and, more important, gives us an opportunity to see their work and sometimes meet them personally. But the Society also wants to give a little additional awareness of artists living and working here – those who are our closest neighbours. So we plan to mention at least two in this and subsequent issues. We are not likely to run out!

Pat Roberts reports

Lucy Duke

Lucy Duke works in both pastel and watercolour – mainly the latter, and mainly on landscapes. By preference she works in close and thoughtful engagement with her subject, en plein air, capturing and interpreting the infinite variety of land, skies and nature that she discovers from her chosen viewpoints after careful exploration. And many of her watercolours are untypically generous in size, doing justice to the breadth of her vision. But her still life watercolours and pastels also have a strong original appeal.

Her many loyal followers clearly feel in close harmony with the

naturalistic blues and greens that shine out vividly from many of her landscape paintings, making best use of watercolour's classic



facility for luminosity of paper and pigment, for subtle blending and for perfectly capturing and celebrating natural light.

After qualifying with an honours degree in painting at Camberwell School of Art, her reputation as a watercolourist to watch has been developed over many years, with exhibitions in France and Switzerland as well as Britain. Her works and exhibitions regularly feature in the Artists' Open House and Lambeth Open events.

Lucy lives in the Poet's Corner quarter of Herne Hill.

<https://lucyduke.com/>; [@lucydukeart](https://www.instagram.com/lucydukeart)

Marie Lenclos

Born in Paris, Marie came to London to study Graphic Design at Camberwell College of Art in 1995 and has made her life in London ever since. She paints in oils. She has shown her art in many exhibitions, most recently in the Mall Galleries.

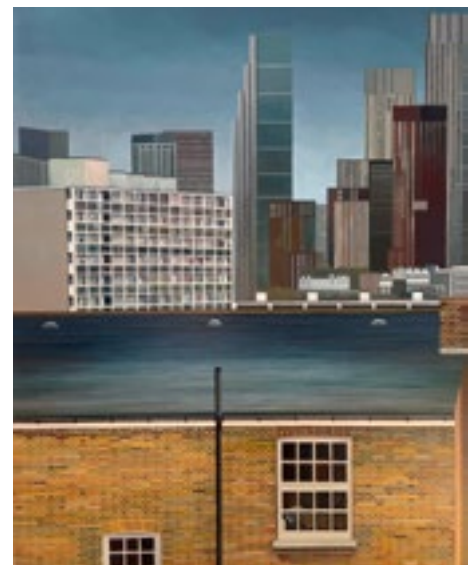
Her current work focuses on urban landscapes and buildings. She



bases these paintings on places encountered as she walks or cycles around London. Some are familiar places which come back repeatedly, such as the bridges near her studio in Loughborough Junction. She also has great affection for the post-industrial urban streetscapes of

East London, such as Spitalfields, where she recently had a very successful solo exhibition. For her, the industrial past is ever present and the richness of old brickwork is illuminated by the fleeting sunlight. There is indeed noise everywhere – traffic, trains, people hurrying. But for her there is a calm beyond: her focus on the scene in front of her, with its play of light and its colourful

texture, brings a mental pause. So there are no people in her paintings, no romantic implications or back stories – we see urban landscapes caught in a moment of precision and calm amongst the movement and chaos. The fine textures of brick, concrete, glass and steel are captured with detailed affection and



honesty. "Light is the most important actor, its role is to reveal the permanence and unexpected beauty."

Marie works at the Whirled Studios in Loughborough Junction and lives near Ruskin Park.

<https://www.marielenclos.com/>; [@marielenclos](https://www.instagram.com/marielenclos)

THE RESTORATION OF BROCKWELL HALL

– COLIN MACINNES HAS A PREVIEW

We are grateful to Lambeth and in particular to Millie Campanale, their Marketing and Sales Officer, for giving us the opportunity to get behind the barriers and inspect the exciting developments at Brockwell Hall. This ambitious project (plans for which we outlined two years ago, #155 of this Magazine) is now far advanced and due to open to the public in 2025. Colin's photographs were taken in early November 2024. Bookings are now being taken for events! (see below)



Image 1

In the foreground to this image, the main formal entrance to the house has been provided with new approach steps but ramped access will also be available. To the right of the main part of the house is the service wing, where the new café will be located. Just beyond this can be seen part of the roof of the new events space, located within the walled courtyard, not previously accessible to the public.

Image 2

Looking at the other side of the house, the steps in the foreground lead up to a new entrance into what will be the café. Again, ramped access is also provided. Just to the left can be seen part of the new events space roof. As part of the general restoration of the original house, window frames and metalwork have been painted a dark green which contrasts successfully with the pale brickwork.



Image 3

Readers may or may not recognise this ground floor room as the one that previously housed the serving area for the old café, something of an institution for many years. An operator for the new relocated café has still to be decided.

Image 4

A new welcoming entrance on the ground floor will host the Bristowe Bust and display a community notice where visitors can find out more about the organisations and activities within the Hall and Park, and direct people through to the new exhibition spaces.





Image 5

'Bristowe' is one of the three newly refurbished event rooms available for weddings and private and community hires with panoramic views of Brockwell Park. A fairly restrained colour scheme, with window frames and shutters in pale green, has been used throughout the original building.

Image 6

The main new-build element of the works is the events space which can accommodate up to 200 guests. This will be hired out for functions such as wedding receptions, but will also be available to host public events. The space opens out into the courtyard via a glazed frontage.



Image 7

The events space is itself built within what was previously the courtyard between the main house and stable blocks. This courtyard is enclosed by curving walls and the new building fills the space between them – here one of those walls and its buttresses can be seen. Internally it is faced with plasterboard, behind which is insulation.

Image 8

The partially completed glazed frontage of the events space building, seen from the courtyard.



Image 9

Within the courtyard and opposite the events space are the original stable buildings. These are also being restored and will be used by Lambeth for administrative offices.

Enquiries for wedding, private and community events can be made by email at venues@lambeth.gov.uk or via the website <https://venue.lambeth.gov.uk/venues/brockwell-hall> or follow [VenueLambeth](#) on Instagram

YESTERDAY'S NEWS – A FOOTNOTE

Feedback from readers of this Magazine is always appreciated, and we were especially impressed to receive some arising from an item published in our last issue, because it required an extremely observant eye to pick up a very short reference in a news cutting from 1896 and printed in a very small font size. So our thanks to Fred



Charlotte Despard, to the left in caravan

Taggart for bringing to our notice that the “Mrs Despard”, who as a member of the Lambeth Board of Guardians was willing to find a proper name for a foundling child, rather than having her named after the place where the child happened to be found, could only be Charlotte Despard (1844-1939), a remarkable figure in many aspects of British and Irish history.

Despard's life can be summarised in these terms: “Anglo-Irish suffragist, socialist, pacifist, Sinn Féin activist, and novelist. A founding member of the Women's Freedom League, the Women's Peace Crusade, and the Irish Women's Franchise League, and an activist in a wide range of political organisations over the course of her life, including among others the Women's Social and Political Union, Humanitarian League, Labour Party, Cumann namBan, and the Communist Party of Great Britain” (Wikipedia).

From a privileged background Despard (née French) became a leading radical of her day, inspired by the often wretched conditions of the poorest in society and the inequality suffered by women generally. After the death of her husband in 1890, leaving her comfortably off – though her generosity in funding numerous political and humanitarian causes led to her bankruptcy by the time she died – Despard threw herself into social work, concentrating on the poor Irish community then living in Nine

Elms, Vauxhall. There was legal uncertainty as to whether women could stand for election as guardians under the Poor Laws, but a change in the law in 1894 made this possible and this accounts for Despard being elected in Lambeth in that year, a position she held until 1903. Rather than mellowing with age her radicalism grew. Unlike many suffragettes who

suspended their activism in 1914, she was a fierce opponent of the war, despite (or possibly because of) her younger brother being the commander-in-chief of British forces for the first one and a half years of the war. He was Field Marshal Sir John French (later 1st Earl of Ypres).

After unsuccessfully standing as a Labour Party candidate for Battersea North in 1918 Despard moved to the Republic of Ireland. By now well into her seventies she remained as politically active as ever. She was among many on the political left who visited the Soviet Union and were full of admiration for what they saw – or were allowed to see. It led to her joining the Communist Party of Great Britain. When she moved to live near Belfast in her nineties it is said that a police car was regularly stationed outside her house to follow her every move.

Charlotte Despard's name is remembered in an avenue running between some 1960s tower blocks not far from Battersea Park and joined, some might say rather incongruously, by an avenue named in honour of Sir Francis Chichester. In North London a pub on the Archway Road a pub has been renamed, in recent times, in her honour. And in June 2024 a commemorative plaque was unveiled in Embassy Gardens, Nine Elms, by Mary McAleese, the former President of Ireland.

Laurence Marsh

Advertising in the Magazine

Do you want to promote your business to Herne Hill residents? We publish three issues each year. Our advertising rates are very competitive. All our members in Herne Hill get a magazine through their door. So target your advertising by placing an advert in the next issue of Herne Hill magazine, also published online.

See inside the front cover for our rates, which start at only £60 for all three issues in 2025.

And you'll also be supporting the work of the Herne Hill Society.



TIRZAH GARWOOD: BEYOND RAVILIOUS

Readers may remember Dulwich Picture Gallery's superb 2015 exhibition celebrating Eric Ravilious, reviewed in this Magazine #132. The curator of that show now presents the first major exhibition since 1951 devoted to that artist's wife, Tirzah Garwood.

Born Eileen Lucy Garwood in 1908, she was called Tirzah by her sisters, mishearing her being referred to as the third child. At 18, she began studying wood engraving with 23-year-old Ravilious, revealing such talent that she exhibited with the Society of Wood Engravers one year later, in 1927.

Early engravings present intimate scenes, for example that of the window cleaner viewed outside her oblivious father's study, and a modest self-portrait yawning, reworked in embroidery. By contrast, a large portrait of Garwood by Phyllis Dodd shows her as a calm, thoughtful young woman. There is also a showcase with photographs.

While Ravilious painted big, expansive watercolours, 10 of which are on show throughout the exhibition, Garwood took a closer, small-scale view. One can compare how the couple developed the same themes. Eric's famous *Westbury Horse* on a hill, with a steam train below sits beside Tirzah's playful *Etna*, a toy train in a hilly landscape. Trains feature in many of her works, some placing actual toys in a box frame before a pretty painted scene. Another painting looks from an empty carriage to *Westbury Horse* in the distance, while *The Train Journey* woodcut has Tirzah sitting apart from four other passengers in a third class compartment, facing out at us rather than the passing view.

When in 1931 the family moved into Brick House, Great Bardfield,



Tirzah juggled her roles as artist, mother and member of a rural community. Here are pictures of the house, drawings of animals, the garden and pencil sketches of her three children. She also developed a new skill in marbling, creating designs that sold well to interior design shops, publishers and private clients. A dozen intricately layered, colourful marbled papers hang on the walls while a showcase displays patterns for lampshades and a business card. The process "gave me pleasure because I felt no one else could do this".

Another enterprise that grew from her needlework and embroidery was making patchwork quilts. The exhibition has one for a child's cot and a painting of her friend Peggy Angus sitting on

another. She also did drawings for a child's counting book, e. g. one spider, six eggs, thirteen wasps.

In 1942 Tirzah had an emergency operation for breast cancer,



followed by the tragic death of Eric in the course of his work as an official war artist. Grieving, slowly recuperating, she wrote her autobiography and eventually began oil painting, combined with printmaking and collage. She chose a deliberately naive style, a "return to the Garden of Eden ... when you have eaten the apple of knowledge".

Remarried to BBC Producer Henry Swanzy in 1946 and moving to Primrose Hill, she portrayed houses, street views with shops plus leaf prints, paper collages, pictures in deep box frames. One has a mechanism to make ducks move (blocked to avoid damage). Children feature, including daughter Anne looking out of the window and also on a swing in a tree. A showcase includes photos, a Christmas card and, poignantly, an invitation to her memorial exhibition at the Towner Gallery.

The final room displays works from 1950 to her death in 1951. Despite being confined to a nursing home in pain with terminal cancer, she called it her happiest year, as she was in the countryside and free to paint. Sixteen small paintings depict happy childhood scenes: nine-year-old Anne playing hide and seek among blossoming trees, spring flowers with a butterfly and antique aircraft above, a doll surrounded by giant tulips, *Jenny Unaware* carrying flowers against a background of trees. There are references to favourite Victorian illustrations; and her last work celebrates the abundance of loaves and fishes at a Harvest Festival.

Tirzah Garwood: Beyond Ravilious opened 19 November and runs until 26 May 2025. Most of the works come from private collections, so this is a very rare chance to see the output of a remarkable artist, out from the shadow of her more famous husband. It is a charming, joyous, life-affirming exhibition.

Jeffrey Doorn

A CEILIDH ON VILLAGE WAY

– COLIN WIGHT WENT TO FIND OUT

Imagine most readers will know where the Grafton Dance Centre is. But even if you don't recognise the name you must surely have walked past this undistinguished building with a Southwark blue plaque on Village Way.

I had never been inside. But one Sunday afternoon, for no obvious reason, I bravely approached the front door. It was shut, but my eye was caught by a poster advertising a Ceilidh, with a live band (Kingsfolk), on Saturday 19 October. Oh, why not? My Travolta nights may be over but - as a Scotsman - surely I could cope with an evening of Scottish country dancing?

We arrived a little late, my dance partner having travelled down that same afternoon from Windermere. Inside, the hall was a lot bigger than I'd imagined and there were about 50 people on their feet. The Gay Gordons was already going full swing, so we decided to sit it out and get some Dutch courage down our necks while sizing up "the opposition", so to speak.

Some couples were very slick, others less so, but nobody looked utterly useless ... Finally it was time to enter the fray; "Mairi's Wedding", "A Hundred Pipers", "The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond" and all the usual suspects came and went, expertly played by Kingsfolk. By the time "The Flying Scotsman" reached full speed I had worked up a head of steam ... literally reeling.

After an hour or so the band took a break but, accompanied

by recorded music, the dancing carried on, the regulars showing their familiarity with the cha-cha-cha, the rumba, the paso doble etc. We moved on to American line dancing: about as simple as it gets and with no partner required. I felt that I handled that well enough, though afterwards I needed a sit down and another drink.

With Kingsfolk back in action, off we went again. I danced with thin women, big women and short women, one with freezing cold hands, another with hands as rough as sandpaper. It took me back to primary school days. I no longer cared if I looked ridiculous. With "advance and retire" dances it's pot luck who you get paired with, and after a minute you move on to your next victim. Eventually the evening concluded with "Strip the Willow" (not "Strip the Widow", as a friend once referred to it).

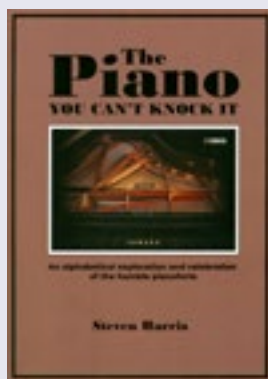
Did I enjoy myself? Yes, and I would happily go again. More importantly, by buying a couple of tickets we contributed towards manager Paul Burbedge's campaign to raise funds for the repair of the roof, to prevent water leaking into the building and improve insulation. The Grafton Dance Centre is an important venue for both amateur and professional ballroom dancing, as well as for local groups such as Dulwich Ballet School.

Here's the link if you would like to make a contribution <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/graftonhallroof>

CELEBRATING THE PIANO

Steven Harris is a local author whose lifelong involvement with the piano has led him to write a very engaging book about the remarkable instrument. His first published book looked at old surviving firms of South London and included stories gleaned from interviews with the firms of Kennedy, the butchers, and Kingston, the grocers, who both had shops over many decades in what is now Station Square. Since then he has written a light-hearted memoir recalling his days working in the magnificent piano department at Harrods (sadly no more), starting as a teenage apprentice. This sparked his fascination with the instrument and led to him becoming a piano tuner, a surprisingly rich fund of stories.

Now, in *The Piano, You Can't Knock It: an alphabetical exploration and celebration of the humble pianoforte* the author uses a lifetime's love of the piano and hands-on experience and returns to South London to include Herne Hill's street piano, first installed 10 years ago; albeit a fleeting mention – there are so many other pianos that deserve mention – among a huge collection of fascinating and unusual facts. In the book you can, for example, find out about piano-themed graves, and that Glenn Gould's memorial stone has bars engraved from Bach's Goldberg Variations; or that John Lennon refused to accept delivery of a



mahogany-cased Steinway grand before it could be redelivered in pure white; or that on average 45 keyboards could be made from one elephant's tusk (in the days when it was legal to use ivory for piano keys); or that Robert Louis Stevenson loved his piano and in 1891 had it sent from Scotland to his home in Samoa; or that the piano has been the second most popular choice as luxury item (writing materials being the first) on the BBC's Desert Island Discs, to which Richard Ingrams added, as

his book of choice, "Teach Yourself Piano Tuning" – curiously, Arthur Rubinstein did not choose a piano for his luxury, preferring a revolver; or that it took until 1889 for piano manufacturers to agree on a standard pitch; and not forgetting that Lego now make a grand piano that can be assembled from 3,662 pieces (price only £349.99).

With more than 200 illustrations, the result of what can only have been, like the text, prodigious research, this is a most rewarding read for all those with an interest in what has been voted the world's most popular instrument.

The Piano, You Can't Knock It: an alphabetical exploration and celebration of the humble pianoforte by Steven Harris

ISBN 9780992619749, available from Herne Hill Books

Laurence Marsh

THE HIDDEN RIVER EFFRA AND THE STINK PIPES

I first became interested in stink pipes about 20 years ago when I realised there was one at the end of my road in Herne Hill. Like a lot of people, I originally thought it was an old Victorian lamp post that had had the light removed. A few years later I noticed there were more of these pipes running down Dulwich Road and I decided to do a bit more investigating.

So, what is a stink pipe? To answer that question, we have to go back to 1858 and to something called the Great Stink of London. After a long, dry summer that year the River Thames started to reek very badly. The waste disposal systems of the city were totally overwhelmed by London's rapidly growing population and untreated human waste as well as industrial effluent were pouring directly into the river that ran right through the heart of the city. Things got so bad that MPs decided to shut the Houses of Parliament and relocate to Oxfordshire – while most people had to stay, living and working in the smelly city! On top of this, a few



Adrian takes a tour group

years before there had been a terrible cholera outbreak when over 10,000 Londoners had died. Something had to be done to improve how the city dealt with its waste water.

The responsibility fell to a man called Sir Joseph Bazalgette, Chief Engineer of the Metropolitan Board of Works. He came up with a huge engineering masterplan to divert the city's waste through a series of sewer tunnels which would take it outside the



Plaque marks route of the River Effra

city and avoid polluting Old Father Thames. Bazalgette had previously worked on the railways and, in particular, the early development of the Underground railway network so he was very used to working on land drainage and reclamation, something that was essential in this new grand project. He came up with the genius cost-saving idea to brick over (technical term – to “culvert”) some of the existing tributary rivers that fed into the Thames in order to carry the waste water away. Some of these rivers had already become open sewers as the locals threw

their rubbish and waste into them. The local river Effra that starts from a spring at Crystal Palace, flowing down through West Norwood, Herne Hill and Brixton and eventually running into the Thames at Vauxhall, became one of these culverted rivers so has now disappeared from sight but still flows beneath our feet.

Bricking over the rivers obviously creates an enclosed, confined space. Sewers were needed as more and more people began to move to the developing area and new roads and houses were built. A by-product of collecting household waste are some pretty nasty gases which form as sewage decays, such as ammonia, methane and carbon dioxide. The stink pipes were added along the sewer routes to vent these gases and release them high above the residents' heads and therefore avoid the sewers blowing up with a pressure build up. The stink pipe at the end of my road is over eight metres tall, although they seem to be of varying heights. Made of cast iron they were installed in the 1860s, they have quite elaborate bases and the Dulwich Road ones are instantly recognisable in their attractive green and gold livery, although a repaint would not come amiss.

Stink pipes form an important part of our area's history as well as still performing a very practical function and I am passionate we should keep an eye on them and their preservation. Just last year, Thames Water demolished a Victorian stink pipe on Lilford Road in Brixton, despite it being Grade II listed (protected in law from demolition or development). Thankfully, they will now have to replace it with an exact replica, hopefully using the original base thanks to the tireless campaigning of local historian Tracey Gregory.

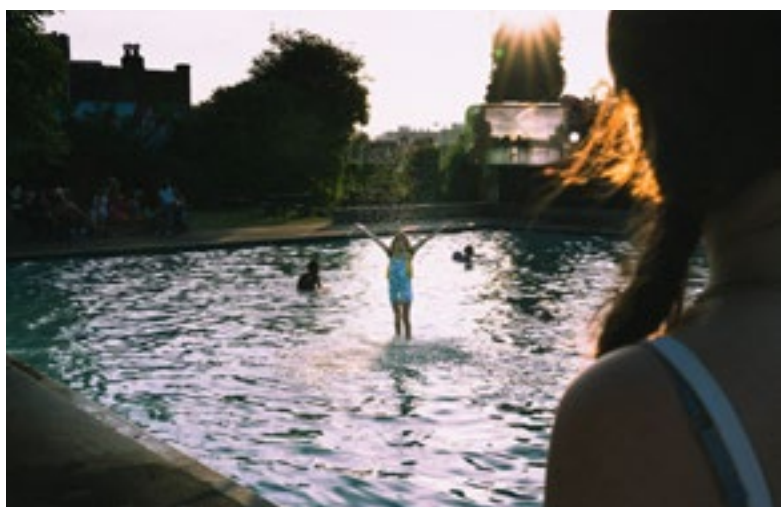
If you would like to learn more about the Hidden River Effra and the Stink Pipes you can join me on my Lambeth Tour Guides Walk, where we follow the route of the river and learn how it has helped to shape and influence the local area.

Further details available on the Lambeth Tour Guides website www.lambethtourguides.org

Adrian Gibson

WINNING PICTURES FOR RUSKIN PARK

In the annual photographic competition organised by the Friends of Ruskin Park there was plenty of photographic talent on show. Our thanks to the Friends for allowing us to reproduce four winning entries. In the adult category congratulations to Zoë Penfold in third place with “Ola butterfly” (the young woman with swirling dress), to Chris Tremain in second place for the trapeze with sunset, and to Emmanuel Logan Moll in first place for “Superstar”, a scene at the paddling pool. Congratulations also to Jess Cashmore for “Fire on Air”, the winner in the under-16s category.



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