

THE BATTERSEA SOCIETY

Annual Report for 2002/2003

Chairman's report for the year 1st of April 2002 to the 31st of March 2003

Background and History of the Society

1. The Battersea Society was first formed in 1965 to preserve the character and traditions of Battersea, following the merger of the former Metropolitan Borough of Battersea into the present Borough of Wandsworth. It established itself as the effective amenity society for the area, but fell into abeyance during the 1970s as the original founders moved away or found that they had too many other commitments. This year marks the fifth year of the revived Battersea Society, which has been made possible partly because of the return of veterans such as the members of the 'Save Albert Bridge' group, and 'Save Battersea Square' campaign, as well as members who campaigned against the 'Motorway Box'.
2. The area of operation of the Battersea Society is, broadly speaking, the area of the former Battersea Borough, which in turn followed the medieval parish. The boundaries range from the boundary of the LB of Lambeth at Vauxhall; the Wandsworth Road; including the western half of Clapham Common; along Nightingale Lane to the South; the river Thames to the North; and the boundary with Wandsworth towards Trinity Road in the West.
3. There is a network of Civic Amenity Societies covering most parts of both the London Borough of Wandsworth and also the adjacent London Borough of Chelsea. The Battersea Society therefore works closely with such groups as The Cheyne Walk Trust; Oakley Street Residents Association; the Chelsea Society; the Putney Society; the Wandsworth Society; the Balham Society; and (newly) the Vauxhall Society.
4. We also seek to work with the Friends of Battersea Park, and often support the ideas and concerns of local 'single-interest' groups such as the Battersea Power Station Action Group, the Sands End Group and the Gargoyle Wharf Group, as well as more recently, a very large group of park users who are both concerned and angry about the Council's plan to close the Zoo in Battersea Park.

Executive Committee

5. The current members of the Executive Committee (Tony Tuck; Wendy & Peter Deakins; Cynthia & Brian Newman; Hilary Barton; Gloria Cottessloe; Mark Davie; John Garvan; Anita Jackson; John Johnson; Richard Jones; David Lewis; Julia Matcham; Chris Rice; David Rathbone.) have signified their agreement to continue. If members agree at the AGM, then there will still be the opportunity for others to be elected/co-opted at that time. Additional active members and new Officers are needed if the Society is to fully meet its objectives

Chair: Tony Tuck
Minute Secretary: Cynthia Newman
Membership Secretary: Wendy Deakins
Exhibitions: Brian Newman

Secretary: Peter Deakins
Treasurer: John Garvan
Publicity: Julia Matcham.

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General issues

6. This Annual Report sets out a record of the recent past and intended future work of the Battersea Society, where financial constraints remain a limiting factor, and the skills and particular interests of our members determine much of our activity. The Objects of the Battersea Society are set out in Annex B for information.
7. At Annex A is a financial statement for the year to the 31st of December 2002. I would like to take this opportunity for thanking our Treasurer, John Garvan, for the hard work that he has put in to make sense of our finances.
8. Our objective is to encourage a large and representative membership, rather than a small elitist one, and annual membership subscriptions remain deliberately set at a low affordable level, at only £7 for an individual or £10 for an organisation or family. While this will obviously limit the capabilities of the Society for the time being, it is anticipated that increasing membership, coupled with occasional donations together with greater activity by members will enable extensive results.
9. The rapid growth of e-mail usage may also enable our Newsletters and Events Lists to reach members swiftly, but it is recognized that very many of our members may prefer a more reflective form of communication. Additionally it has to be recognized that there are numerous associated administrative problems. Nevertheless we are asking members for their e-mail addresses on subscription renewal. We are also progressing towards our own Battersea Society Web Site.
10. Our membership grew to around two hundred two or three years ago, and we are always building upon this. Our Events Committee has greatly extended our scope and we have received a great deal of support around these new activities.

Organisation

11. For the furtherance of our tasks the Executive Committee has established a number of Sub-Committees. These comprise: -

Policy, Constitution & Resources: Chair - Tony Tuck
Events: Chair - Wendy Deakins
Town Design/Transport; Chair - Peter Deakins
DataBase: Chair - Vacant
Open Spaces: Chair - Hilary Barton
River Thames: Chair - David Lewis
Archives & Records: Chair – Vacant

The main activities of our other sub-committees over the year are described below, and it is hoped that we can develop and expand our Publicity Group with the additional involvement of publicity experts like Julia Matcham and (for Exhibitions and Displays) art expert and painter Brian Newman.

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Policy, Constitution and Resources

12. This sub-committee is concerned with the internal management of the Society. It drew up our Constitution as approved by the Civic Trust. It has decided that – until other backing is obtained - resources are best allocated to information materials i.e. paper, envelopes, postage, etc. It is responsible for co-ordinating other sub-committees between Executive Committee meetings, and also considering best future priorities for action. Chief amongst these must be to complete our application for Charitable status, whilst seeking grants from various sources to help the Society further its objectives.

Events

13. Over the past year we have organised public meetings on matters of current concern in Battersea, Thus we have had meetings on local Transport issues, Environmental concerns, as well as Waste Management, each held at Battersea Dogs' Home and well attended. On the social front we held a Quiz Night in early 2003 and held a summer Barbecue at St Mary's in the autumn of 2002, at which Tim West & Prunella Scales were our special guests. We also had a very enjoyable visit to Young's Brewery, and hope to visit Fuller's in Chiswick.
14. We particularly wish to thank those at St Mary's and Battersea Dogs' Home for enabling us to use their venues for many of our different meetings. Subject to successful fund raising in the coming year, we aim to hold more public meetings on matters of special interest to Battersea people. ***If Society members consider any additional issues need a public forum, do please let us know.***

Town Design & Transport

15. Almost of necessity, this Sub-Committee absorbs much of the energies of the Society. If Battersea is to develop in a way that best co-ordinates the visual quality of our surroundings in a way that relates to how our environment actually works in practice, then we have to be particularly thoughtful about new developments. It is only too easy for oversized new developments to dwarf their surroundings. What may, in isolation, be an intrinsically fine piece of design can become a monster in its actual environmental context. Sometimes a scheme is just bad, for one or more reasons.
16. We also consider that it is quite extraordinary that approval should be given to regeneration plans without insisting that a “planning gain” should include improved transport links, and particularly adequate rail links. Current proposals all too often appear to be a recipe for road gridlock in Battersea.
17. Over past year the Sub-Committee, often in close conjunction with other local groups, has:-
 - Submitted observations on a wide range of planning proposals in Battersea
 - Supported many small groups and individuals with local Planning issues

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- Continued with cataloguing notable and/or sub-standard local features
- Liaised with WBC about development standards in conservation areas
- Continued our photographic record of good, bad and indifferent views of Battersea
- Participated with such panels as the Wandsworth local Design Award Scheme
- Initiated a 'Town Design' Forum using as an example Battersea High Street through Falcon Road (the site of the old Falconbrook) to Clapham Junction
- Given press comment (and occasional radio interviews) about a variety of proposed changes and new proposals in Battersea.

We are currently vigorously opposing the threatened closure of the Zoo in Battersea Park as well as the Nature Study Centre on Wandsworth Common.

18. For the future, we consider that whilst Battersea may have relatively few buildings of high distinction, it does have clusters of dwellings which, taken together, merit conservation and preservation. We hope that it will be possible to take measures to prevent inappropriate piecemeal development in such neighbourhoods. For instance, what were until quite recently despised neighbourhoods of Victorian terraces, have become much loved as their intrinsic worth has become much clearer. Because of such new awareness, it has become clearer that random extensions and over-development in such neighbourhoods can be just as damaging to the local picture as can disproportionate riverside developments.
19. Other plans for the future may have more damaging impacts on Battersea. Perhaps the greatest change will be made by the piecemeal developments in the "Battersea Lowlands" along the riverside. From Gargoyle Wharf in the West to Battersea Power Station in the East (which are often strongly linked visually to similar developments in Hammersmith & Chelsea) the building of high-rise apartments and commercial buildings is already creating a very great change. The 'explosion' of new floor space must make all Battersea road transport much slower, unless a dramatic improvement in the transport infrastructure is developed through co-operation between all involved.
20. The Battersea Society will be lobbying over the coming months and years for a dramatic improvement for rail access, as well as sensible road and river access. ***We welcome your views on how this might be done most effectively.*** The Sub-Committee's wishes to encourage the debate about how we, as residents, move from place to place within Battersea and London (by whatever means of transport) and what that means in practice for the quality of life. The subject covers a broad canvas and, perhaps of necessity, can be an intensely emotive and often personal issue. The work of the Sub-Committee is to look at the issues in a wide-ranging way and weigh ideas to evolve cogent ideas and practical solutions to problems. Our public meeting on Transport attracted a full house at the Dogs' Home meeting. A specialist panel was assembled with representatives from public transport, local government, national government and a private

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consultant. The outcome provided an informed basis for a reasoned and stimulating discussion

21. The Sub-Committee makes representations to a number of local and regional bodies. We also seek to ensure effective liaison with both Wandsworth Borough Council and the Greater London Authority.
22. Whilst many new and high-density high-rise developments have already received formal approval, others – such as the Battersea Power Station complex – are still evolving. We believe that a proper understanding of all of the issues is essential if the Society is to make a constructive contribution to any debate. This is a complex area to which the Society hopes, with the help of its members, to make a very positive contribution, during a time of a maybe ‘cooler’ development market.

Open Spaces

23. Battersea’s larger Open Spaces are in two cases contiguous with other amenity societies, and in the case of Battersea Park, our interests are linked to those of the Friends of Battersea Park. As a part of the Society’s wish to develop firmer links with all neighbouring groups, the Battersea Society hopes to make even stronger our common purposes.
24. Our Open Spaces Sub-Committee has been very active over the past year and it has welcomed several new members. It has participated in the work of the Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee and liased with the Wandsworth Environment Forum. The Sub-Committee’s objective is to enhance the quality and uses of all open spaces in the locality.
25. **Battersea Park.** The scale, frequency and nature of private and commercial events in Battersea Park has continued to be a source of great concern. The use of the Park for indoor events is contrary to Wandsworth Council’s planning policy and the nuisance that they cause has been well documented in the Society’s policy document on the Park. English Heritage has recently added its voice and in a letter to the Council dated 12 February 2003 stated:

... the issue still remains that Battersea Park has been for several years and continues to be used very intensively for commercial events that in themselves have no legitimate connection with the park’s primary purpose as an open air amenity for local people and other Londoners and visitors.

There is a cost to park users in terms of the physical and visual intrusion of the marquees and construction and visitor vehicles, and it is not at all clear that the financial returns direct to the park are in reasonable proportion to that disruption.

26. We have continued to make our objections to these events known in a variety of ways, including:

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- Briefing the new ward councillor who leads on Battersea Park matters – he has raised various questions with the Council - but answers are still awaited.
- Commenting on the annual planning applications for events in the Park in January 2002 and January 2003. Both applications were granted, despite objections from English Heritage (see above), so 2003-04 will see the usual annual cycle of events including summer and winter seasons of private late-night parties, arts and antique fairs, trade shows and caravan and car parking for the Chelsea Flower Show.
- Responding to Wandsworth Council's draft paper "Updating of Events Strategy for Battersea Park" (September 2002).
- Objecting to liquor licences for late-night events has resulted in a presumption that weekday events will finish at 1am, rather than 2am.
- Pointing out specific problems to the Council, for example, has resulted in a ban on electric buggies to ferry visitors from the perimeter car parks to the British Genius Site.
- We have also continued to work with the main organiser of events in the Park, who has proved commendably willing to act on our suggestions for reducing the nuisance that these events cause to local residents and ordinary park users.

27. Wandsworth Common: Among the many issues dealt with by Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee, particular mention should be made of the Council's proposed cycle tracks across the Common, which resulted in a public inquiry. Additionally, and as previously noted, there is a very widespread concern about the threatened closure of the Nature Centre. We aim to work closely with the Wandsworth Society regarding these and other concerns.

28. Other Open Spaces: Small local parks (and, where there is scope for it, 'Parks-in-Roads') should provide a vital outdoor amenity in this crowded city, but they do not always get the priority they need or deserve. Our new Sub-Committee is pleased that, following considerable local pressure, many improvements have been made to 'Banana' Park (Falcon Park), The Park had become run-down and was frequented by drug abusers. Thanks to extensive liaison with Wandsworth Council – including strong representations by committee member Anita Jackson - the park now looks well cared for. Persistence has paid off!

River Thames

29. Despite the vast new developments which are overshadowing it in places, the Thames remains one of Battersea's main glories. The Society has taken responsibility for looking after the stretch of foreshore centred on St Mary's Church, as part of a Londonwide scheme run by Thames 21. We liaise closely with Iglesia ni Cristo in Parkgate Road (the London congregation of a church based in the Philippines), who have now adopted the adjoining stretch of foreshore below Battersea Bridge. In October a score of enthusiastic volunteers filled two skips with rubbish, despite the disruption caused by after-effects of heavy rain. We hope to make an even bigger impact on 17 May.

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30. The West London River Group, of which we are part, has drawn up a detailed landscape strategy from Kew to Chelsea. Three of the riverside boroughs have formally adopted this strategy as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Sadly, Wandsworth Borough Council is the odd one out. However, one project from the strategy which could well go ahead is a new bridge for walkers and cyclists, next to the railway bridge, from Lombard Road to Chelsea Harbour.
31. The Mayor's London Plan proposes to safeguard specified river prospects, but only between Tower Bridge and Lambeth Bridge! At the Examination in Public of the Plan at City Hall in March we joined with other amenity societies to argue that views across the river of Chelsea Hospital and Battersea Park are equally worthy of statutory protection. We now have to wait and see what the inspectors recommend and what the Mayor then decides.
32. We are keeping a close watch on the riverside walk (part of the Thames Path) as further sections are constructed and opened. The next stretch is likely to be in front of the new Chelsea Bridge Wharf development, with a tunnel under the road to Battersea Park. One problem needs attention. Following the opening of the stretch in front of Montevetro, quite large numbers of people are now walking across St Mary's churchyard, which is not at present designed to accommodate that.
33. One facility Battersea lacks at present is a pier for riverboats, which under the Mayor's policies may become a significant form of transport. All the piers are on the Chelsea bank; the last traces of the pier in Battersea Park have now been removed. We shall be looking for opportunities to remedy this gap.

Publicity & exhibitions

34. In order to fulfil our aims and objects we consider that visual displays of the heritage of Battersea (as well as some outlines of what may be our possible futures) can make a useful impact. Displays have been mounted at membership meetings and at various local gatherings, and it is hoped that we will increasingly be able to incorporate our developing publicity and archive material, which will be a useful resource and may attract more new members.

Other activities

35. The Society has representation on, or nomination rights to, a number of local bodies. We make every effort to encourage our members to play an active role in these local organisations. Thus, some of our members are involved in a range of local bodies - for example the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee (WBC); the Design Awards Panel (WBC); the Planning Focus Group (WBC); the Clapham Junction Town Centre Board (Local Businesses & WBC); the Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee; the West London River Group; the Environment Group; South Thames College; and Wandsworth Community Health Council.

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36. In addition, the Society seeks to have a constructive partnership with other neighbouring amenity groups and local groups, including the amenity groups for Wandsworth, Putney, Chelsea, Balham, Vauxhall and Clapham; and local groups for Gargoyle Wharf, Battersea Power Station; Cheyne Walk and Oakley Street.
37. Wherever possible, we hope to secure the active involvement in critical developments in Battersea of, not only our local Councillors, but also the MP for Battersea, GLA members, the Greater London Assembly and the Mayor.

The coming year

38. As a part of our wish to continue to serve the interests of our members, we have other targets for the coming year. In particular we shall seek to:
- a) Complete our application for charitable status;
 - b) Subsequently apply for donations and grants.
39. These are part of our drive to enable us to develop and grow. If we can increase our income, we can consolidate the ground we have made in the past five years. We need to have the resources to be able to host pertinent public meetings, to be able to continue to sample the views of Battersea residents, and to be able to use our Newsletters and other publications to inform people of developments and relevant events.
40. Over the coming year we shall seek to increase our membership base and seek grants from various organisations to enable us to fully undertake our objectives.
41. Irrespective of our success in these plans for expansion, the Battersea Society will endeavour to play its part over the coming year in preserving the best of the old and encouraging the best of the new. Our key aim is to continue our efforts in helping to make Battersea a more pleasing place in which people can live or work.

10 May 2003

Tony Tuck
Chair

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ANNEX: A

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ANNEX: B

The objects of the Battersea Society

The objects of the Battersea Society are to protect, foster and augment the amenities of Battersea, particularly by: -

Stimulating interest in the history, character and traditions of Battersea

Encouraging good architecture, town planning and civic design, the planting and care of trees, and the conservation and proper maintenance and use of open spaces;

Fostering the enrichment of communities in Battersea and seeking the abatement of nuisances;

Making appropriate and informed representations to the proper authorities on these subjects

The area of interest of the Society is the area that formerly constituted the Metropolitan Borough of Battersea.

The Battersea Society not only strives to preserve the historic parts of Battersea but also makes its influence felt wherever changes are proposed or improvements needed.

Now that Battersea is no longer a separate Borough but is part of the London Borough of Wandsworth, it is even more essential to protect the interests of all who live and work here and to preserve and enhance the unique character of Battersea.