



TUTUS IN TOOTING

Where, on a sunny February day, would you find floating icebergs, several hundred scantily dressed Scandinavians, a rotating pig and beers called Blue Tits, Brass Monkeys and Chilly Willy? The answer is the World Winter Swimming Championships at Tooting Bec Lido on 8 and 9 February. This is the first time that this international event has been held outside Finland, where winter swimming is an old tradition. There, competitors may have to swim among real ice, unlike the polystyrene icebergs here.

Although the Tooting sky was brilliantly blue and the air temperature warm, the water was a distinctly unwelcoming 6 degrees centigrade. Gasps and occasional shrieks arose from the swimmers as they submerged themselves. "It felt freezing, a real shock to the system," said Paul Ledingham, an IT consultant who lives near Clapham Junction and who competed in a relay race. "I don't actually enjoy the feeling, but after a swim you get an intense feeling of well-being."

Enthusiasts from Finland, Russia, Latvia, Canada and Australia shared the 100-yard pool with British

swimmers, many from the Tooting-based South London Swimming Club, which organised the event. Another Battersea-based swimmer is Katherine Mearman, who works in advertising. A serious swimmer, she has swum the Channel – "the most amazing thing I have ever done" – and round the island of Manhattan. At 28 ½ miles this is an even longer swim than the Channel but is quicker because of the tides. "And you can see how you are getting along – if you pass the Empire State building you know there's only 30 blocks to go."

Katherine loves the Lido and enjoys winter swimming. "It's really refreshing," she says, "and it's good for the circulation. You get a terrific sense of camaraderie here, with a lot of like-minded people and a good atmosphere, and it's easy to get to from home."

Artist and former Battersea resident Philippa Tunstill swims regularly throughout the winter. She competed in the breast stroke and freestyle races. "This felt a lot colder than the Channel on Christmas Day," she said.

After the excitement of the races, with multi-lingual cheering and the waving of Slovakian flags, came the



water performance competition. The highlight was a trio of large, elderly Russian men. Emerging from the changing cubicles in yellow feathers and chicken feet to the Birdie Song, they transformed themselves into swans (complete with white net bras and tiny tutus) to plunge into the pool and swim in decorous, synchronised circles as the music changed to Swan Lake.

And the rotating pig? That was a hog roast, stripped bare by the ravenous swimmers.

Jenny Sheridan.



pic. courtesy www.garethharmer.com

WEST SIDE HOUSE COLLAPSES

A house on Clapham Common West Side split in two on 10 January. A builder working on the site suffered severe leg injuries and had to be dug out from the rubble and taken by air ambulance to St. George's Hospital.

According to neighbours, the builders had been putting in a loft extension, but had then started

digging in the garden. The Health and Safety Executive is investigating the cause of the collapse while the site is made safe.



BATTERSEA SOCIETY GOES WORLD WIDE

Just before Christmas, the Battersea Society's official website was launched thanks to members Mike Roden and Gail Treves-Brown, who had volunteered their professional expertise to the Society's website working group. Chair Tony Tuck – an internet enthusiast – hopes that over the coming months the site will develop into a very useful Battersea focused asset for members and non-members alike. Take a look for yourself at www.batterseasociety.org.uk.

On page 8 Mike Roden gives an insight into the way the site was planned and produced and outlines some possibilities for the future.



We want to expand! We want to be more representative and more active, and that can only happen if we grow. So I have two requests for members.

First, you will find with your newsletter a postcard and a membership form. Please pass these on to a friend or neighbour who might be interested in joining the Society. If you need more, do contact me at the address below.

Second, I would like to ask again for your email addresses. Printing and postage form a large part of the Society's expenses. The newsletter will be printed and sent to you as an essential part of your membership, but to keep our costs as low as possible it would greatly help if we could send out other information by email. If you would be happy for us to do this and you have an email address,

please could you send it to Sara Milne at sassymilne@hotmail.com I know that some of you have already done this, but please bear with us and do it again so that Sara can build a database. We promise that we will never reveal your email address to any other person or group.

Thank you.

Jenny Sheridan.

jennysheridan@btinternet.com 020 7350 2749

LOCAL SCHOOLS WIN TOP MARKS

Following the success of Belleville School (see Newsletter winter 2007), two more Battersea primary schools have been rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted inspectors. Honeywell Junior School, in Honeywell Road, is singled out for its excellent care and guidance and its exemplary relationships. Pupils are described as being "delightfully confident in talking to adults and exceptionally polite to everyone and kind to each other". The "superb" headteacher, Duncan Roberts, is supported by a conscientious and effective staff team. Test results at the end of year six are consistently well above average in English and maths.

John Burns School in Wycliffe Road serves a more culturally and economically diverse area than Honeywell's. One third of its pupils are eligible for free school meals and a similar proportion comes from homes where English is not spoken. Ofsted reports that the school has gone from strength to strength since its last inspection in 2002. Children from non-English-speaking homes make rapid progress. Staff consider it "a wonderful place to be" and a pupil commented "Everyone is gentle and nobody is without friends." Staff provide consistently good and often outstanding teaching and classrooms

are "a hive of purposeful activity." Pupils' progress is similar to that of the top five per cent of schools in the country.



John Burns' Headteacher Ms Maura Keady with some of her pupils.

A LOOK AT LIFE

Woken up at 4.39 again the other morning by the dawn chorus of a 747, and lay there raging about the scheme to expand Heathrow to the size of Rutland and give us twenty-four hour noise. Of course the consultation document gives us a chance to have our say, if you feel able to answer questions like "...do you agree that full mixed mode operations (up to 540,000 ATMs) could be introduced within the noise limits set out in the White Paper?" Don't all rush at once.

So my day had begun badly and my mood was not improved on my morning stroll to the park when I note that the Prince Albert pub on Parkgate Road is being (awful word) refurbished. A modest pub, but hardly worthy of extensive plastic surgery. Then on my return I see that the Settle Inn on Battersea Bridge Road has been transformed into the Prince of Wales. Perhaps the Duke of

Cambridge fifty yards away felt in need of royal company. But still worse was to come. I learn that my trusty 239 bus route is to be swallowed by the 170 Roehampton route. Is Battersea shortly to change its name? I think we should be told.

As I write this the words of the hymn ring through my head: "Change and decay in all around I see..."

But to happier things: a convivial Battersea Society gathering at the Galapagos recently. Like most people we sat with fellow members we knew well and had an enjoyable meal but I did wonder afterwards where the society bit came in. Really we could have been in any restaurant at any time. Sometimes despite our mature years we're a little like two-year old children in the nursery playground: tripping over one other, eyeing one other shyly, desperate to join in and yet something stops us sharing our toys. Brothers and sisters, join me in making a pledge: the next time we

attend a Society function we'll speak to at least two people we do not know. And if you happen to be on a Battersea bus don't be alarmed if a grey-haired man in spectacles sits down next to you and starts talking animatedly... it might just be me honouring the pledge. See you next time.

Mike Roden

The Man on the Battersea Omnibus



BATTERSEA BUNDLES

The story of how Battersea's market gardens helped to feed London

The Asparagus pub on the corner of Falcon Road is a reminder of the days when the market gardeners of Battersea carried their bundles of asparagus over the river and up to Covent Garden. Most people probably know that parts of Battersea Park were originally used for smallholdings – there's a plaque near the gate opposite Parkgate Road giving brief details of the park's history. However a quick look at the 1832 map shows that the extent of Battersea fields was much larger than the area now covered by the park, extending as far as Lavender Hill.

Very early on the area became famous for the growing of medicinal herbs. These were often known as simples, used by apothecaries who came every summer to select their stock for the coming year – or 'to cut their simples'. Another meaning attached to the word simples was 'youthful follies' and apparently it was considered a great joke to advise young people to go to Battersea to 'have their simples cut.' It was probably the way they told it!

The first asparagus ever grown for the London market was raised here – probably introduced by Flemish refugees. Samuel Pepys writes of enjoying it with 'a little bit of salmon'. Martha Bradley, an early cookery writer, commented in 1756 on the fashion for thin green spears rather than the pale fleshy ones favoured elsewhere in Europe. This variety became known as Battersea asparagus and its fame spread rapidly. A country house sale near New York in 1767 advertised the garden as containing 'eighteen beds of the best Battersea asparagus, in full growth for cutting.'

Daniel Lysons, writing in 1792 noted that "above three hundred acres of land in the parish of Battersea are occupied by the market gardeners, of whom there are about twenty who rent from five or six, to near sixty acres each ..." There were around 367 individual farm plots growing carrots, cabbage, peas and melons as well as asparagus and the area was also noted for its lavender – which of course explains how Lavender Hill got its name.

London had an expanding and hungry population, and by 1800 had almost ten thousand acres of market gardens. It has been calculated that each acre had sixty cartloads of horse manure dug into it each year. The growers set off each day with

each acre had sixty cartloads of horse manure dug into it each year

loaded carts around midnight aiming to get to Covent Garden by three or four o'clock to get the best price from the dealers. We know that one Battersea market gardener, John Gaines, had his own stall at Covent Garden because in 1820 his daughter told an Old Bailey trial about a man who had passed her a forged banknote in payment for two bundles of asparagus (which cost the princely sum of two shillings).

Market gardening was still important in 1839, when Pigots directory of Battersea recorded that much of the land was occupied by market gardeners "who furnish to the London market immense quantities of vegetables". Yet it was almost over. Much of Battersea Fields had already been earmarked for a different use. As industry expanded more housing was urgently required. One hundred of the

landowners in Battersea held less than five acres each which made it easy for the developers to move in and buy up the smallholdings. The most prominent families in the business, the Carters and the Gaines, soon succumbed to the lure of ready cash, and rows of terraced houses began to cover for ever the celebrated asparagus fields of Battersea.

Of course, the old Covent Garden has long gone, and it's perhaps fitting that Battersea was chosen to be the new home of London's fruit, flower and vegetable market in Nine Elms.

Mike Roden

Main sources

Battersea Past by Patrick Loobey (Historical Publications Ltd.)

The Neat House Gardens – Early Market Gardening Round London by Malcolm Thick (Prospect Books)

History of Battersea - from *The Environs of London* by Daniel Lysons (1792)

Websites:

Genealogy and Family History: <http://www.londonancestor.com>

Maps of Old London: <http://www.oldlondonmaps.com/19thclondon.html>



NORTHCOTE CHRISTMAS TRAVELS AFAR

Battersea was briefly twinned with a tiny village in central France in February. A primary school pupil in the village of Vallon-en-Sully discovered a balloon which turned out to hail from the Northcote Road Christmas Fair. Escaped from a child's hand, it had crossed the Channel and landed 400 miles away in the Auvergne.

Eleven-year-old Anthony Renaudet and his friend Kelly Sevret showed their find to their English teacher. She traced it to Northcote Road via a website. Madame Creuzet said "The children are really excited about it: to imagine that the balloon has travelled all the way from London. We had just learned to tell the time and Kelly was very proud to translate the 4pm-8pm that was written on the balloon."

As well as balloons, the Northcote Road Fair boasted carol singers, mince pies, the lighting of the Christmas lights and a fine festive feeling.



Carol-singers at the Northcote Road Christmas Fair.



For all Battersea Society Events - please go to the website
www.batterseasociety.org.uk



VIEWING THE LORD MAYOR'S MASTERPIECES

The Battersea Society's first visit of 2008 was to the Mansion House, home and offices of the Lord Mayor of London since 1752. On the ground floor our excellent guide showed us the Entrance Hall and Waiting Hall, painted in stone colours with carpets and rugs in deep red with oriental medallions. Here there are busts and paintings of past Lord Mayors and other City dignitaries. A grand staircase lined with paintings by famous Dutch artists led to the first floor, where visitors wait to meet the Lord Mayor.

Again, these rooms are richly decorated with 22-carat gilding on the columns and a crimson and gold cut-pile carpet, with magnificent chandeliers. More paintings by Dutch masters line the walls. The Long Parlour, used by the Lord Mayor for

dining and receiving visitors, has panelled walls with elaborately carved friezes over the doors, a heavily compartmented ceiling based on the Banqueting House in Whitehall, and a rich Turkish carpet.

All grand banquets, dinners and receptions are held in the Egyptian Hall, which can seat 360 people. On these occasions valuable objects such as candelabra, the Lord Mayor's regalia, salvers, etc, are displayed. We left via the State Drawing Rooms - again richly decorated and thickly carpeted, with beautiful antique furniture and brilliant chandeliers, the walls lined with Dutch masterpieces.

In the gold and silver vaults we were dazed by the magnificent pieces on show, including the Fire Cup of 1662 which was saved from the flames during the Great Fire of 1666, and the

Lord Mayor's famous gold Collar of 1520, as well as precious gifts presented to the various Lord Mayors through the centuries.

The old Servants' Hall has been sub-divided; its principal features, the chimneypiece, 19th century range and board showing rules for the servants, are part of the gentleman's toilet. As a treat, the ladies were allowed to view this at the end of the tour!

NOTE: There are special tours of the Mansion House to view the paintings only - this is probably the largest collection of Dutch paintings in the U.K. Let me know if you would be interested in such a tour.

Maureen Larkin
(020 7228 4873)

membership@batterseasociety.org.uk

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HOUSE HISTORIES

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Email: rjmbarker@talk21.com



FROM NINE ELMS TO RANSOME'S WHARF

Monica Tross gives an update from the planning sub-committee

Clapham Junction

Members of the Society's planning sub-committee were invited to a special presentation of early proposals for a major housing and shopping development at Clapham Junction on 29 January. We felt that details remain sketchy and we are planning a further meeting before making a formal response to the developers.

Preliminary work on the lifts to be installed at the station was due to start in February, with completion scheduled for 2009.

Ralph West Halls, Albert Bridge Road

The developers have presented amended proposals to Wandsworth Council, which is expected to consult on these prior to a discussion at its March planning meeting. These new proposals do not appear to be significantly improved from earlier plans and the Society is likely to maintain its objection to the over-

development of this site within the Battersea Park conservation area.

Battersea Power Station

Our chairman is maintaining contact with English Heritage. He hopes to visit the site in their company to discuss the details of the remedial work currently being undertaken on the site.

Ransome's Wharf: Land in Parkgate Road and Elcho Street.

At the time of writing an application for a major development on this site has just been received by the Council. (Application no 2008/0407)

Nine Elms Planning Brief

The paper prepared by David Lewis following a special meeting of the Society's planning committee has been circulated to both the Clapham and Vauxhall societies for comment. It has also been sent to the Chairman of the London Forum as an example of an initiative by a local amenity group. You can download it from the

Battersea Society website. An article on Nine Elms by David Lewis will be published in the next Newsletter.

London Heliport

A new guidance leaflet on helicopter activity at the London Heliport is now available from local libraries. It can be requested from the Council, 020 8871 7524, or downloaded from the council website.

Complaints about local bus services?

Phone London Buses on 0845 300 700, send a fax to 020 7027 9914 or email customerservices.buses@tfl.gov.uk. Please tell us too so we can better represent your views to TfL.

Do you have any comments on these or any other planning or transport matters? If so please contact David Lewis, the chair of the planning sub-committee on drlewis27@yahoo.com or phone him on 020 7622 8017.

APRES-SKI IN THE PARK – THE ROTARY CHRISTMAS LUNCH

If you were in Battersea Park on Christmas morning, apart from getting very wet, you would have seen 38 green and red buses arriving for the annual Rotary Club of Battersea Park's Christmas Day party for elderly local people. This takes place each year in the events arena, which is generously donated for the occasion by the management, who also organize the catering. The arena is decorated with a different theme each year; this time it was après-ski, with an alpine feel – snowy Christmas trees and icicles.

Over 370 guests did not let the torrential downpours dampen their spirits and arrived ready to party. Though flu bugs and bad weather meant that numbers were down this year, 120 volunteers were on hand to help as escorts on buses, and to serve lunch and make sandwiches for goody bags.

On arrival the guests were offered tea and coffee, followed by sherry while singing carols. There was a full traditional Christmas lunch accompanied by wine and beer. Later in the afternoon tea and mince pies were served. The afternoon flew by with sing-alongs, a professional

entertainer, dancing and spot prizes. Finally there was bingo to calm everyone down and to give the opportunity to organize coats and the return home. Then it was back onto the bus, clutching their presents and a plant to brighten up the dark days of winter.

Our guests had a lovely time. One elderly person wrote, "I had never been before. I was dancing on Christmas afternoon when normally I would be having 40 winks – I hope to attend again next year." Another, in a lengthy letter of appreciation, wrote, "The driver and helper were a wonderful team. Nothing was too much trouble for these wonderful gentlemen... seeing each one to their door, even to coming up 10 flights in the lift to make sure each person was safely installed in their home The tables were wonderfully decorated, the food hot and the organization perfection. On leaving a 'goody bag' an extra treat. Thank you to one and all"

Our volunteers come from all over London. Some regulars come every year and are a blessing as they know the ropes. For most this was their first Christmas in the park. We had mums



and dads with their kids, students from abroad with nowhere to go, people of all ages who want to do something useful on Christmas Day. Without them we would be unable to function, and they enjoy it as much as the guests. One wrote "Your event is certainly one that has to be seen to be believed. I've never experienced such a festive or terrific atmosphere before."

The Rotary Club of Battersea Park has organized this event for over 40 years. It is a celebration that involves everyone in Wandsworth, from residents donating funds to volunteers who offer help on the day. For elderly people who would otherwise be alone on Christmas Day, it's the party of the year.

Re Johnson
Event co-ordinator
Rotary Club of Battersea Park

THROW AWAY YOUR CAR KEYS!

Leslie Mitchell found that joining a car club saves time and money – and helps the environment.

What is a car club? To quote from Wandsworth Council's website, "a car club is a membership scheme that offers people use of a car on a pay-as-you-go basis, from £5.95 per hour. The scheme saves you the additional costs and inconvenience of owning or using your own car, and means that you have easy access to a car for those occasional journeys when you need one. A number of club cars are parked across an area so that members are close enough to walk to one easily. Membership of a car club isn't suitable for all people, but if you don't use a car very often it can be an attractive alternative to car ownership, or to having a second car in the household. Car club members tend to drive only when they really need to – much less than car owners – so having a club in the borough can help cut car use overall.'

Reduce pollution

I joined a car club as a trial in March 2006, after selling my car and not finding a satisfactory replacement for it. My annual mileage had dropped from 14,000 miles per annum to 6,000 over a three year period. As city dwellers there is increasing pressure to discourage car use, EU directives aim to reduce pollution in cities, and the automotive industry is not producing an appropriate range of 'clean' cars for inner city living. To date I have not replaced my car and as time goes by I am less inclined to do so.

The benefit has been a considerable saving both in financial and environmental terms and in peace of mind. I no longer spend time and money on maintenance, MOT and repair bills, rising fuel, car tax and insurance prices, plus repairing scrapes and paintwork damage. The car club takes care of all this as part of the package. Most cars are up to date and under a year old. I book online, sometimes at short notice, and get confirmation by text and email (you can also do this by phone). I can almost always find a car parked close to home – there are over 100 Streetcars in the borough. Each car has a charge card which you use to fill up with petrol, with the hourly rate

and mileage amount added to the monthly bill (the first 30 miles driven are included in the hourly rate).

Billing

I am sent an itemised monthly bill. If I use the club car just for a couple of shopping trips, the cost will be around £19-24. It costs £49.50 a year to join Streetcar, including insurance. Family members, such as my husband, can be added at around half price.

You need to do your homework before selecting a car club (try searching on Google (in your local library if not at home); from experience you also need to 'do your

I no longer spend time and money on maintenance, MOT and repair bills

sums' as to whether to use a club car or hire a car. We mostly use our membership for local trips, particularly for short periods of time as you can book in half-hour modules. The benefit of hiring instead of using the club car is that there is a greater choice of vehicle size, which is useful for family gatherings or showing visitors around in comfort. We are currently considering taking the train to the nearest main station and then booking a club car for local visits to save time and our energy eg Clapham Junction to Brighton return, then booking a local car club car at Brighton to go to Eastbourne and Ditchling. I have not costed this, but the thought that we could avoid a 60 - 90 minute drive, sitting in traffic, to London appeals. Streetcar also has a small number of vans (I have used one, and it was very useful as well as economic).

Car club membership is growing. I chose Streetcar because it started in Battersea so it is supporting a local business initiative. Wandsworth Council has a contract with the company which increases the number of car club vehicles available locally. The council allocates ten dedicated parking bays for the exclusive use of Streetcar vehicles across the borough. Others are mainly parked by arrangement in

private bays. Already, more than 2,300 Wandsworth residents are Streetcar members, and the number is increasing rapidly. To find out if there's a car near you see www.streetcar.co.uk.

Alternatively you can call their customer service line on 0845 644 8475.

There is now another car club in our borough, Zipcar (www.zipcar.co.uk) which has a range of different vehicles. An American company, they are growing in the UK and you need to compare their offer to others.

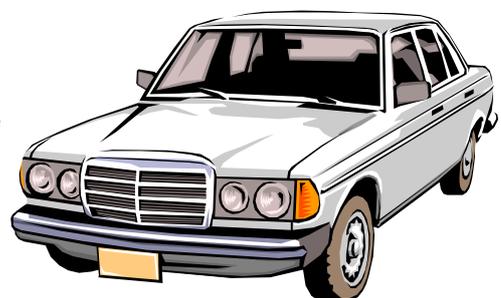
Future links

The car club market is in its infancy. I would like to be able to travel to more parts of the UK and be able to book a car club car from anywhere in the country for short periods of time, instead of having to hire a car for a fixed 24 hour period. The organising body for Car Clubs is Carplus, with a useful website www.carplus.org.uk. At present there does not seem to be any reciprocal links between car clubs, but maybe in the future this will happen.

Further ahead, ideally it would be great if I could go to Paris, Milan, Warsaw or San Francisco and log into a local car club and use a car for a few hours. Some of the bicycle hire schemes like Velibre in Paris are beginning to make this possible – it may eventually happen with car clubs.

Personally, I have found this to be an advantageous experiment that I am likely to continue. On the environmental front, Streetcar reckons that each shared car takes six privately-owned cars off the road, reducing pollution and congestion.

Leslie Mitchell



PROMISED MEMORIAL GOES UNPLACED

Richard Jones laments a lost memorial to the Clapham Sect

Over a year ago, Wandsworth Council announced its scheme to place green plaques on buildings of significance in the borough as a lasting tribute to historically important people and places. The public was asked to nominate sites and, with the approval of the Battersea Society, I nominated the site of Battersea Rise House, the mansion where the Clapham Sect held their meetings. The Sect was heavily involved in the campaign to end the British slave trade.

Battersea Rise House was one of several large properties facing Clapham Common at the top of Battersea Rise. It was bought by Henry Thornton, an MP and director of the Bank of England, in 1792. He enlarged the house so that eventually it had 35 bedrooms and a fine oval library facing south over splendid gardens. It is said that the library was designed by none other than William Pitt the Younger, a close friend of Thornton's. Another friend was William Wilberforce, who lived with the family for four years before his marriage in 1797. He then moved into Broomfield, a house which Thornton built on his estate.

House demolished

In 1907, the Thornton family sold the mansion to a Battersea estate agent for £51,000. Despite some local

opposition, it was demolished and Muncaster, Canford and other residential roads were built on the site.

Plaques commemorating the house's distinguished residents were put up. Wilberforce is commemorated in Broomwood Road and, until a few years ago, there was a plaque to the Thorntons on a house at the corner of Clapham Common West Side and Muncaster Road. It vanished. Did the owner of the house remove it or was it stolen by a collector? Nobody knows. Wandsworth Council has no record of the date it was put up or who was responsible for doing so.

Black History Month

It was to replace this missing commemoration that I nominated the area. As 2007 was the bicentenary of the first legislation to end slavery, a move to commemorate members of the Clapham Sect was received enthusiastically. It was suggested that the plaque should be unveiled during black History Month last autumn. Due



to administrative hold-ups this did not happen. However Martin Stratton of the council's leisure and amenity services told me that the first plaque, commemorating Clement Attlee would be going up shortly on the house in Portinscale Road, Putney, where the former Prime Minister had lived. The Thornton plaque would follow.

As yet no site for the plaque has been decided. Battersea Rise House was roughly behind 115-120 Clapham Common West Side, so the former site at the corner of Muncaster Road would, if the owner of the house agrees, be eminently suitable.

Richard Jones

Borough objects to increased plane noise

The consultation period for the expansion of Heathrow Airport is over, but campaigners have vowed to fight on. At a packed meeting in Belleville School on 5 February, speakers from Hacan Clearskies urged angry residents to attend a rally at Central Hall Westminster on 28 February.

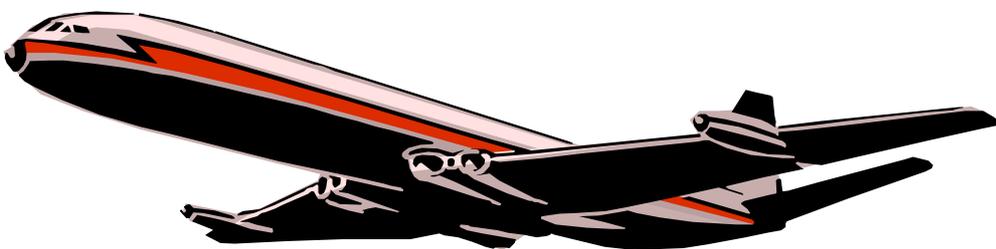
Wandsworth Council is a member of Hacan, the association of local groups and councils which oppose the airport's expansion and the additional noise and pollution it will bring. Council leader Edward Lister said that the government's consultation document and questionnaire had been confusing and misleading. The expansion plan could bring in an extra 220,000 flights a year, resulting in planes flying over the

borough all day and early in the morning. Changes to the flight schedules, as well as the additional runway, would mean more landings and take-offs with devastating effects on the borough's noise levels and quality of life.

John Stewart, chair of Hacan, said that recent research showed that government figures on the economic benefits of airport expansion were flawed. They took no account of the

numbers leaving the UK on holiday rather than bringing business in to the country and also failed to mention the tax anomaly between road and air transport.

For more information, see www.wandsworth.gov.uk and www.planestupid.com and www.hacan.org.uk



BATTERSEA'S RADICAL PAST

Councillor Tony Belton celebrates the history of the Battersea Labour Party

The Battersea Labour Party has a long and fascinating history. Its first meeting was on 11th March 1908 and this year its members are celebrating the centenary. Some of us have got together to create a DVD recording the history of the BLP.

The story starts with the early years of Battersea's municipal radicalism. It built the Latchmere Baths and the Latchmere Estate with directly employed labour – the first in the country. Battersea built its own power station, in Lombard Road, elected the first black Mayor in the country, John Archer, and John Burns became the first working class man to enter the Cabinet.

The DVD continues through the First World War when the party, in turmoil,

was divided between pacifism and jingoism, the General Strike and the much less contentious struggle of the Second World War. Austerity and the massive reconstruction of North Battersea dominate the post war years. Finally the DVD moves on to grapple with the local Conservative control of the borough during the last quarter of the century – though the constituency retains its Labour MP

The BLP hopes that many people in Battersea, and not just Labour Party members, will find it an interesting record of one of the two main political powers in the area. This is not just the story of a party but a core element of Battersea's history.

The script is mainly the work of Professor Penelope Corfield, a London



university history professor. The many narrators include the distinguished actors Timothy West and Prunella Scales. Much of the picture research was done by Suzanne Perkins and the DVD was directed by Mike Marchant.

We plan to show a preview on 10th March and to have the DVD completed and available for all from August.

Tony Belton Councillor, Latchmere.

WELCOME TO OUR WEB

Mike Roden, who created the Society's new website, introduces its delights

After months of planning, the Battersea Society website was launched just before Christmas. It has been designed, and will be managed on a completely voluntary basis by Society members. I have worked professionally as a website designer and Gail Treves-Brown added a detailed knowledge of accessibility issues. Tony Tuck offered invaluable and enthusiastic support throughout. But ultimately the design of the website was my responsibility and all questions, observations and complaints about the site should be sent to me.

I've always believed that websites should work – in both senses of the word. They should be simple to navigate, not depend on particular software, and when you click something it should take you somewhere. I hope we've achieved that but please suggest any improvements you would like to see. It's your site.

The second way in which a site should work is that it should earn its keep. An elegant website which never changes sends out a signal that the organisation is moribund. Like the Battersea Society itself the website has to be dynamic, outward-looking, making its presence felt in the community which it seeks to enhance.

These are early days, but website visitors will have seen that it does change. There is a frequently updated page of news items, the events list is amended whenever necessary. These changes are made swiftly using a simple online database system. The site is given an added sense of topicality by the inclusion of the latest headlines from the Borough News and press releases from Wandsworth Council.

This newsletter will be available online, with the newsletters from the last few years, together with archived reports produced by Society committees. It is a way of reaching out beyond the membership, to enhance a particular campaign or simply to market ourselves. And it may soon be possible for new members to sign up, and pay their subscriptions online.

In one small way, the site is already really earning its keep. Our online bookstore (linked with Amazon) lists books of local interest. A percentage of each sale goes to Society funds, and we have already earned a few pounds from that source. We're planning to add a DVD section to the store, so if anyone would like to suggest films with a Battersea connection, just get in touch.

The site will develop over time. It isn't perfect yet, and it probably never

will be. I hope it will be seen as complementary to the newsletter, and not as a competitor. I still prefer to read longer articles on the printed page, and I'm sure I'm not alone in that. But there are some things that the website can do better than a printed newsletter, particularly in the use of photographs. We're currently deciding on the best way to show Battersea past present and future in images. If you have a collection of photographs (especially older pictures) you think are worth sharing, please let us know.

Finally, one of the great pleasures in managing in a website is looking at the statistics showing how many visitors we've had, and just where they've come from. The numbers are relatively small still, a few dozen a day, but increasing all the time. Mostly from Britain, of course, but in the first month we also had visitors from the USA, Canada, Sweden, Italy, even Japan! It's rather heartening to think that the Battersea Society website is acting as an international ambassador for Battersea.

Visit the website at
www.batterseasociety.org.uk

Contact Mike Roden at
website@batterseasociety.org.uk



'A FINE AND UMBRAGEOUS ENCLOSURE'

Philip Wright outlines the role of the Friends of Battersea Park

"In ten years hence the park should be a fine and umbrageous enclosure and in 20 years it ought to bear comparison with any of the ornamental grounds around London." *The Times* 26 December 1857.

It is now 150 years since this forecast was written, the last 20 of which have seen the formation and development of the Friends of Battersea Park. In 1858, Queen Victoria declared the park and the newly built Chelsea Bridge open. 130 years on, in 1988, a handful of Battersea residents came together with the collective aim of doing what they could to protect and enhance the park as an oasis of tranquillity, natural beauty and recreation. This double cause for celebration provides an opportunity to show how the Friends, as an organisation, has remained true to its founding aims of providing a "responsible group of people who Wandsworth Council can consult with as representatives of Park users."

The Friends' aims are studiously non-partisan and it has deliberately refrained from being yet another protest group. Our objectives are to preserve the natural and historic layout of the park, and monitor any proposed

changes; to organize events, including an annual sculpture award, and to raise funds in order to make other positive contributions to the park's amenities. We publish a quarterly magazine which provides a forum for members' ideas and opinions and a website at www.batterseapark.org. Friends' views and ideas are represented at monthly meetings with the park management.

The Friends use funds raised to sponsor a wide range of improvements. As part of the restoration of the park begun in 1999, the Friends contributed £3,000 for a fountain in the Old English Garden, £1,000 for a camellia collection and a grant of £9,000 towards the restoration of the Russell Page Garden. Our application to the Western Riverside Environmental Fund gained £24,600 for wheelchair accessible paths in the Nature Reserve. This contribution is recognized on the bronze plaque which was unveiled by the Duke of Edinburgh at the reopening in 2004.

We successfully applied to Living Spaces for £24,000 to build a new Winter Garden in memory of Elaine Hodges, our former secretary. This, together with other generous donations and £10,000 from Elaine's estate

enabled us to complete phase 1 of Dan Pearson's design in 2006. That year also saw successful applications for grants of £3,200 from two Canadian companies to purchase 32 maple trees for a Maple Leaf walk and from Awards for All for £9,845 for interpretive signs in the park. In 2007, two major donations to the Winter Garden were received which have resulted in phase 2, the top soil and landscaping being started this year.

The Friends are proud of the role we play in representing the interests of park users and doing what we can to preserve and enhance Battersea Park. We form a conduit of communication between all the users of the park and those responsible for its management, in order to represent their views. If you love the park, as we do, please join us, get involved and get pleasure from the experience.

Philip Wright OBE , Chairman



CLAPHAM JUNCTION TO GET NEW HEALTH CENTRE?

How easy is it for you to reach your GP? Would you prefer to visit a hospital for outpatient appointments or to go to a health centre? Are health services fairly distributed around the area? Wandsworth Primary Care Trust (PCT) is conducting a major consultation exercise to look at options for improving the NHS in Battersea and north Wandsworth. The area was chosen because it contains three of the borough's most deprived wards, Queenstown, Latchmere and St Mary Park, with resulting increased needs for health services. The PCT says that while some areas have specific needs, across Battersea people need services for obesity, diabetes, kidney and mental health and for people with learning disabilities.

Having carried out a preconsultation exercise last year, the PCT has now decided on their preferred option for the future. This is to build a new primary care centre in Grant Road,

just north of Clapham Junction. Two or three local GP practices, currently in sub-standard accommodation, would move there. It would also house community, outpatient, diagnostic services and a walk-in centre for minor injuries. The PCT also outlines the options for basing a new primary care centre in three other centres, Bridge Lane, the Doddington and Bolingbroke Hospital.

Friends' proposals

In its consultation document, the PCT recognizes the strong local support for keeping services at the Bolingbroke Hospital. Formerly a hospital for elderly in-patients, the building currently houses some outpatient services such as X-ray, blood tests and ante-natal care. These are moving to St John's Therapy Centre on St John's Hill for a three to five year period. The Friends of Bolingbroke Hospital have put forward a proposal, backed by

Wandsworth Council, for choosing the ground floor of the Bolly as the site for the primary care centre. The refurbished upper floors would be mainly devoted to elderly care, including hospice and residential services; there would also be accommodation for NHS staff.

However, Wandsworth PCT believes that the Grant Road proposals offer the best option in terms of providing more services for more people closer to their homes. St George's NHS Trust, which owns the Bolingbroke, has agreed that it will not sell the site before the end of the consultation period.

The 15-week consultation period ends on 12 May. If you want to see the proposals and have a say on the future of local health services, you can find the consultation documents in GP surgeries and public libraries or on www.wandsworth.nhs.uk. You can also phone the PCT on 020 8812 7605 for a copy of the full document.

Jenny Sheridan.

PARAKEETS – MENACE OR BLESSING?

Valerie Selby describes some of Battersea's exotic birdlife



A wide range of birds has been recorded in the Battersea area, from peregrine falcons at Battersea Power Station to goldcrests in Battersea Park. Just last year, 3 raptor species were recorded in the park – kestrels and sparrowhawks as well as the peregrines. The park is also a great place to see waterfowl – the most obvious residents are a pair of swans, but we also host mallard, coot and moorhen, overwintering gadwall, pochard and tufted duck, and there is one of the largest herons nest sites in Greater London. At this time of year there up to 30 nests in the trees on the lake islands and as spring progresses you can see up to 90 individual birds as the young herons take their first flights.

In the last couple of years the most frequent comments we have heard have been about the large, bright green, noisy birds that fly across the park. They are ring-necked (or rose-cheeked) parakeets. The first documented breeding of Ring-necked

Parakeets in Britain was in 1855 in Norfolk. Small populations were intermittently present in the Greater London area for the next century and the first documented breeding of the twentieth century occurred at Gravesend, Kent in 1969. Since the 1970s they have appeared more widely, resulting in a collection of urban myths. Some say they escaped from a quarantine holding at Heathrow, others that they escaped from an exotic film set in the Shepperton Studios. The biggest roost is at Esher rugby club where 3–4,000 can be seen, with some birds having flown 15 miles to get there each evening.

Ring-necked parakeets' natural habitat is a broad belt of arid tropical countryside stretching from West Africa across all of lowland India south of the Himalayas, where it is a common bird. There they are vegetarian, but in Britain they are omnivorous, taking any kind of scraps available. They are hole-nesters, often taking over an old woodpecker nest hole, or a larger sized nestbox. These colourful birds are sometimes loved, and sometimes hated as garden visitors, primarily due to their gaudy colours and noisy demeanour. There are concerns of how they may affect our native fauna – are they competing with woodpeckers for nest holes in trees, for example? There is no reason for concern at present: on sites in Wandsworth where we have parakeets on a daily basis we still have woodpeckers too. They may have an impact on fruit-growers, where

they are fond of devouring the tasty buds, which we would perhaps prefer they left to become fruits! We will continue to welcome records from our local volunteers, and from other organisations like the RSPB, and will use this information to monitor the impact of these birds in Battersea, for better or worse.

To take a closer look at the birds in Battersea Park this spring why not come along to the RSPB's Aren't Birds Brilliant events which will held on the south side of the lake, between 10.30am and 4pm, every weekend from 23rd February to 30th March, including Good Friday and Easter Monday.

The Council's ecology office maintains biological data for the whole borough, covering all aspects of wildlife, from ants to falcons. We have records of 1,600 different species in 27 different habitats. Our records of birds are extensive, thanks to some very knowledgeable and supportive volunteers who record bird sightings on commons, parks and open spaces and copy this information to us. We use this information to guide our management work in these places, making sure we are maximising their value for biodiversity.

For more information on the wildlife and biodiversity of Wandsworth please visit our website at www.wandsworth.gov.uk/wildlife or contact us by emailing vselby@wandsworth.gov.uk.

Valerie Selby Principal Parks Officer (Biodiversity)

THE FARMERS COME TO BATTERSEA

The new farmers' market in Battersea High Street was re-launched on Sunday 24 February. On alternate Sundays, there will be stalls selling fresh produce direct from producers. These will include organic meat, free-range chicken and a wide range of sausages as well as organic vegetables, fruit and fruit juices. There will also be fish, game, bread and cheese stalls. Almost all of the produce comes from within a 35-mile radius of Battersea.

The market organizers also want to encourage local allotment-holders who

may have surplus produce, and enthusiastic jam or cake-makers to try out a stall. If any members are interested please get in touch.

newsletter@batterseasociety.org.uk

Dates for future markets are Sundays 9 and 30 March and the second and fourth Sunday of the month thereafter.



Clapham has its own farmers' market in Bonneville Gardens.

OBITUARY – WANDSWORTH MUSEUM



At 5.00 pm on Sunday 30th December 2007, Wandsworth Museum passed away after a long and valiant battle. Over the preceding weeks, hundreds of friends and supporters came to pay their respects and share in the Museum's final days.

Wandsworth Museum was born in Putney Library in 1986. The idea of establishing a local museum had been gathering support since it was suggested by a member of the Wandsworth Historical Society in the 1960s.

Wandsworth Borough Council agreed to make available three floors in Putney Library and appointed a professional museum development officer. The Chairman of Leisure & Amenity Services at this time was Councillor Edward Lister, who gave the project his full support. The Museum drew on the collections of the Wandsworth Historical Society and the Wandsworth Local History Library; local residents presented artefacts and purchases were made with grants and donations.

Move to Courthouse

The Museum's popularity rose rapidly with visitors increasing from 11,000 in 1988 to 20,000 by 1991, the year that the first Museum Education Officer was appointed. The Museum was so successful that the Council decided to move it to the larger Courthouse in central Wandsworth where it opened in 1996, attracting over 30,000 visitors annually by 2007.

As the Museum's reputation grew, other museums and historical organisations outside the borough began to lend items of unique importance to Wandsworth. The resulting displays covered a huge span of Wandsworth's past, from pre-historic artefacts to recent cultural and ethnic changes.

Most of the Museum's social history material was donated by local people. Wandsworth's artistic heritage was

represented by artists such as Miles de Montmorency and Edward Ashenden. The Olney collection of 2,000 photographs was another local donation.

The Museum was particularly noted for housing over 300 watercolour paintings, recording local views from the late 18th century, the Wandle mills, River Thames, bridges, villages and large houses of the area as well as portraits and memorabilia of famous residents such as the

'Dockers' Champion', the radical MP John Burns, the poet Edward Thomas and Saklatvala, the Indian MP for Battersea.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the Museum was its education service, which offered object-based sessions on topics such as Roman Putney, Victorian life and World War II. Linked to the national curriculum, these were used by most primary and special schools in the Borough. In the year 2005-06 alone, 325 school visits were made to the Museum involving over 8,000 pupils. Special sessions focused on key individuals who had left their mark on Wandsworth, such as John Archer, Battersea's black mayor. These activities often made use of the Museum's oral history collection - over 150 individual recorded memories, many about the personal experiences of residents during World War II.

Oral history

Wandsworth Museum was also notable for its illustrated talks at community centres, church groups, elderly day centres, stroke clubs and hospitals. Travelling exhibitions were organised that toured libraries around the Borough. The Museum's programme of community engagement included a project in Roehampton where young people worked on recording oral history with local residents

Jenny Kershaw, Putney resident and education officer at the Museum of Fulham Palace, said:

"I am extremely sorry to see the demise of Wandsworth Museum. Both in my capacity as a fellow professional and as a local resident, I always found it to be of the highest calibre. Within the museum world it was always acknowledged to be a centre of excellence with a good and well attended schools service. The Museum gave quality to the Borough, reflecting all the very diverse mix of communities. Without it there, the

Borough loses its voice and sinks into mediocrity."

As well as formal events, the Museum provided regular holiday activities accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. Mrs. Subha Iyer, a regular family visitor explained:

"My son, Siddarth, definitely learned a lot from the Museum over the last three years. He developed an interest in history and the craft workshops helped him to think creatively. He developed an ear for music from the soap opera workshop and the story-telling sessions encouraged him to read and act out stories."

Another frequent visitor to the Museum, Lyn Clark, said:

"Already sorely missed are the light-hearted "Tea and Talk" sessions held for adults in the afternoon. We all learnt so much and enjoyed sharing snippets of our own knowledge and experiences; these were always very popular with WOFA (Wandsworth Over Fifties Activities) members."

Irreplaceable role

The Museum's remarkable range of temporary exhibitions included wartime in Wandsworth, transport, health, working lives, architecture, brewing and pubs, Asian festivals, the black presence in Wandsworth, all reflecting and communicating Wandsworth's rich history and cultural roots.

In 2006, Wandsworth Museum became one of the first London museums to be awarded the new national Museum Accreditation Standard from the Museums Libraries & Archives Council. This award recognised the outstanding quality of its work in education and in outreach with all sectors of the community of Wandsworth. It was the highest possible acknowledgement of the vibrant and irreplaceable role the Museum played in the Borough and its vital contribution to promoting a sense of inclusion and identity.

The Museum leaves behind 10,000 orphaned artefacts, a collection that embodies the collective memories and heritage of a community it served for twenty-one years.

Can the Hintzes and the new museum board produce a phoenix to rise from the ashes? We all fervently hope so.

Balham Society, Battersea Society, Putney Society, Friends of Wandsworth Museum, Wandsworth Historical Society, Wandsworth Society, Wandsworth Museum Campaign Group

WHAT NEXT FOR NORTHCOTE ROAD?

Northcote Road is to some extent a victim of its own success. Over the last ten years, while losing many useful shops, it has re-gained a vibrant atmosphere, especially at weekends. But this success has seen rents rise to levels which small independent food shops cannot afford. In the summer 2007 edition of this newsletter I outlined the issues and the Northcote Road Action Group's hopes for the future, including a Council-commissioned study.

The consultants, Urbed, have now produced their draft report. The Action Group has not seen this but it has been sent a copy of the Council officers' report which is based on it. This sees the way forward as

developing the existing street market and making the road more attractive to those whom it identifies as its core users, ie families and young people. It identifies Northcote Road as 'one of London's special places'. With little through traffic, it acts as a sociable place for people to meet and chat. There is also a strong theme around food in the shops and market stalls (though since the report was commissioned all the new shops that have opened have been fashion boutiques).

The report makes a number of comments on parking and also on the need for stalls and shops to change their opening hours to match the changing ways in which people shop.

It sees advantages in the businesses along the road acting in a more concerted way.

Although it acknowledges that the appearance of Northcote Road does not cause concern, the report goes on to propose a number of rather expensive measures to improve physical conditions, such as "the creation of a hierarchy of gateways and focal points at key street corners". There is also a mention of "playful street furniture."

The Northcote Road Action Group is currently discussing the report. It hopes that its comments will be of use if the Council agrees to further consultation on the initial findings.

Jenny Sheridan.

FRED WELLS – WHO WAS HE?

Gloria Cottesloe's article on Fred Wells Gardens (Newsletter Winter 2007) set me to wondering how many of your readers would have any idea who Fred was. I must confess that I don't know a lot but I do have a few personal memories of him.

Frederick Charles Wells was a Labour Party and trades union man of the old school. He lived in Totteridge House, the tall Council block behind Badric Court on York Road. Fred was a man of few words but he was very reliable and well respected.

On the 16th November 1966 the Council minutes note that he was

elected an Alderman of the Council. This must have been a contentious vote, as two years earlier at the start of Wandsworth Council, the Labour Party decided to take all 10 aldermanic places rather than share them with the Tories. So when this vacancy arose Fred was nominated to stand against Mr. Ron Ash, later to be the Conservative Leader of the Council.

He next appears in my records as being a losing candidate along with Marie Jenkins, Cabinet Minister Hugh Jenkins wife, in a Putney by-election on 27th June 1968. Ten years later,

however, Fred was successfully elected as a Labour councillor for Latchmere along with Maurice Lawson and Elsie Hoadley. Unfortunately for him, that was the year the Conservatives won control of the Council, never to relinquish it.

Fred died not long after the 1982 Borough election, in which he did not stand. But he was well liked by his Tory opponents as well as his colleagues so when I suggested to the Council that the Gardens should be named after him it was agreed unanimously.

Tony Belton
Councillor, Latchmere Ward.

RESTAURANT REVIEW - L'Antipasto

511 Battersea Park Road, SW11 3BW tel: 020 7223 9765

For the past 22 years Battersea has been fortunate to have this friendly neighbourhood restaurant with its welcoming atmosphere and consistently high standards.

L'Antipasto has two dining areas, the back with masses of greenery, the front with an attractive floral display leading into a more traditional atmosphere. The restaurant attracts a chatty local crowd.

The comprehensive menu and board of daily specials provides plenty of choice. Fresh, good quality ingredients are used and the Italian standards are well executed. These include veal escalopes, calves' liver, varied pasta dishes and favourite antipasto dishes such as grilled vegetables with fresh basil or pasta fagioli, a thick bean and pasta soup.

While waiting for one's order one can enjoy what must be the best garlic bread in London and a glass of the adequate house wine. I particularly recommend the chocolate mousse but all the desserts come in generous portions and are reasonably priced.

The staff are on first name terms with some of the locals who are frequent visitors. However the service, while friendly, is always efficient and professional.

On days when the already reasonable food prices are slashed by half it is advisable to book a table. L'Antipasto has hit on a winning formula of consistently high standards and a lively atmosphere, which at these prices is exceptional. No

wonder so many local people come back again and again.

Joan Brittain

Average prices: starters £6, pasta £7, main courses £9-£12. Lunch and dinner half-price Sat, Sun, Mon, Thurs (not including drinks or dessert).

