

Wandsworth Society

November 2008

A message from your Chairman

The Wandsworth town centre plans still take up much time. We are writing again to the planners and councillors about issues including the town centre Conservation Area and the failure of the new development proposals to respect it, and the misrepresentation of the impact on the town centre by the developers with the perspectives of their proposals.

The Rivers and Open Spaces sub-committee is due to reconvene very shortly under the guidance of Bruce St Julian-Bown and Lynda Ulrich's Roads and Transport has started to make steady progress and many contacts. Both sub-committees are open to members to join; they each cover such interesting, important and wide ranging topics and the more help they can receive from interested members the more effective they will be. They each meet about once a month and usually the finest refreshments are kindly made available to sooth the end of day nerves. Bruce's tel no is 020 8874 6966 and Lynda's, 020 8874 5648. Please get in touch!

We are trying to convene a meeting with the Putney and Battersea Societies to discuss the three current planning applications with the Council for tall buildings at East Putney station, the Ram Brewery at Wandsworth, and, this week, for

Clapham Junction. If that's not enough to handle and the 'Borough News' is to be believed, the Council is considering promoting Nine Elms as a new Canary Wharf in scale led by the news of the USA Embassy's move there and the opportunity to redevelop the area for up to 20,000 new homes!

Canary Wharf equals high-rise methinks. What is it about high rise? What is its appeal to Councils? Where does this idea figure in the Council's published plans? We don't recall 'Canary Wharf' scale developments referred to in the new LDF documents? When is the Council going to sit down to discuss and produce a plan for the future of the Borough with interested groups such as the Civic Societies like ours, instead of reacting piecemeal to prospective developers and their wild proposals? Change and development is a continuing process but there seems to be little thought into the wisdom or otherwise of some of the recent schemes which have been tabled by developers. The Council seems at times to pay little heed to its own policies and guidance into how changes should be incorporated into the Borough's congested and largely low, human-scale fabric.

A walk on the east side

London Bridge to Stratford

On a grey, sometimes very wet, morning in September a small, stalwart group of Society members, led by Alan Fennell, explored changing East London by walking from London Bridge to Stratford. The contrasts and changes that exemplify our city were apparent from the start and continued through the walk.

The walk extended from the station past Boris's office, over Tower Bridge to St Katherine Dock, by Wapping riverside to the Limehouse Basin, along the Regent and Hertford Union Canals to the River Lee Navigation. Here from the top of the nearby Bazalgette's sewer which crosses the Olympic site we saw the new stadium rising from the ground and the huge building operations to make it happen.

Many thanks to Alan for his time and enthusiasm – and particularly for his knowledge of “comfort stops”, an excellent picnic place, and for allowing us to visit The Prospect of Whitby en route.!

(A full description of the walk and a map will be included in the Bedside issue).

Bridging the North-South Divide

(or: 2 ½ thousand people can't be wrong)

On 24th September, over 80 local residents came to Alvering Library to ask questions of the Transport for London Stakeholder Engagement representative Peter Bradley. The premise was: can we have a bus service which runs from Trinity Road to Parsons Green and effectively links North West with South West London.

Richard Tracey, the local Assembly member who had called the meeting, fielded questions but Mr Bradley was unable to do more than write down our queries and promise to “feed them into the system”. Two main arguments surfaced: firstly, how can we augment our badly supplied public transport in

the Wandsworth Common area, and secondly, must Wandsworth be the only bridge with no North/South public transport link?

The campaign to instigate a Trinity Road-Parsons Green link has been gathering signatures since the beginning of the year. Over 2,500 residents have backed the campaign so far. Strong arguments, for example schoolchildren travelling to schools in the Parsons Green and Fulham areas, and patients needing transport to Chelsea and Westminster hospital, to the Royal Marsden and to health centres, in particular NHS dental practices, north of the river, both show the need for a new link. Residents spoke of being “trapped and restricted” in the area, and of their

desire to travel without having to use their cars.

The proposed link is a straight line: Wandsworth Common, under, or even over, the underpass and on to Fulham. There is an evidenced need for the service, in both directions, particularly as the demographics of the area have changed over the last decade and local residents are eager to travel ecologically.

Frustrated, the residents finally resorted to the question: well, why not? The TfL representative could only reply that it was expensive and difficult to create a new route. We therefore asked if we could create the link ourselves. Yes, we could – if we asked a bus company such as Aviva to come and do it, or if someone applied to run a mini-bus service, this is theoretically possible. I am not suggesting that we run the service ourselves ... or maybe I am – does anyone know how to drive a bus?

Linda Ulrich

The Bedside needs you ...

Not yet Guy Fawkes Night, Halloween may have come and gone, or still be a treat in store (these publishing deadlines are so hard to predict), so there may be those among you who think it a little early to be thinking of Christmas. Nonetheless the winter solstice edition of the newsletter needs your contributions. Do please get in touch with your views and news, preferably by e-mail to wandsworth.society@mac.com or by post to 5 Windmill Road LONDON SW18 2 EU

Wandsworth Historical Society

The Wandsworth Historian
Autumn 2008

The rise and fall of the fortunes of a short working-class street in Victorian Battersea, and a harrowing survivor's account of the bombing of the Cinderella Dance Club in Putney in 1943. These are the subjects of the two main articles in the latest issue of the Wandsworth Historian, which also carries a moving piece on women war workers in World War Two, and some intimate family memories of Ted Foster, the Tooting dustman who won the Victoria Cross in 1917.

All this and much more of great interest to all local-history enthusiasts in the Autumn 2008 issue of the Wandsworth Historian (ISSN 1751-9225), the Journal of the Wandsworth Historical Society. Copies cost £3.00 plus 70p for postage and packing, and are available via ngrobson@tiscali.co.uk.

The website address of the Wandsworth Historical Society is www.wandsworth-history.co.uk.

Roads and Transport: who are we?

The Roads and Transport Sub-Committee is a group of 4 to 5 people working unflaggingly to improve your journey (including the noise you suffer and the air you breathe) in the borough. We meet approximately once every six weeks and our main interests – recently – have been

- Bus services, particularly new routes and ride quality
- Roads, particularly traffic lights, counterflows and flooded corners
- The planned improvement of Clapham Junction Station
- The Heathrow expansion
- Battersea heliport
- Car sharing

Actually we are interested in anything to do with transport, be it bus, car, train, boat, cycle or plane, and we are also interested in new members. Do contact us via the Editor or talk to Linda on 0208 874 5648.

Greener transport

in conversation with Roy Vickery

Last month we spoke to Roy Vickery, Green Party member and recently retired from the Natural History Museum, about his views on 'greening' transport in Wandsworth.

Interestingly, instead of advocating the improvement of public transport, he suggested that we actively need to reduce the need for people to travel and gave us the following guidelines:

- Rediscover what's available locally in the way of entertainment, open spaces, sports facilities, etc., and use and enjoy these. If we can't find what we want locally we should organise so that we can get what we want – a long term concern of mine has been school facilities being unused for long periods when children are not using them.
- Support local shops and facilities; work to prevent the further closure of local post offices and medical facilities, etc.
- Stress that walking is an important part of transport over all and encourage it. Make it more widely appreciated that our streets are, on the whole, safe, and people can safely walk in them at all hours of the day and night.
- Promote a wide range of local jobs.

- Introduce bicycle sharing/hire schemes; increase the amount of secure parking available for bikes.
- Ensure that existing speed limits and parking restrictions are more rigorously imposed; work towards a 20 mph speed limit.
- Encourage car clubs/ car sharing schemes.
- Make greater use of the Thames.
- Gradually reduce the amount of car-parking space available at supermarkets.
- Improved public transport is not necessarily the answer. If the train services into central London are increased and improved, more people will travel to the West End to shop and to seek entertainment. Local shops and entertainment venues will suffer. If the bus services to our town centres improve, more people will travel to these to shop; local shops - which are essential for people who are carers and others who can only leave their homes for short periods – will suffer.

Although some of these points may seem a little radical at first, we hope they will encourage Wandsworth Society members to re-examine their life styles and even their approaches to work. Who knows, following some of these ideas may bring you healthier, happier and more fulfilled lives. We would welcome readers' responses to all or any of them, especially if they have practical thoughts on implementation.

Bus or Streetcar the choice is yours

Only very few locals were interested enough in alternative transport to turn up at the Wandsworth Society event on 8th October in Alvering library. This is a pity because the two speakers were experts in their field and were willing to answer even the most long-winded of questions.

Ms Belinda Danino, who represents Transport for London and works closely with our council, began with a series of presentations on both local buses and on the London bus network as a whole. She described TfL's responsibilities and explained how the individual bus companies manage bus services. Monitoring what we passengers want is a main part of TfL's remit and Ms Danino showed that our main concern is time spent – both at the bus stop and on the bus. There is no doubt that bus services have improved on their frequencies ("now 12 minutes or less, and mostly 24/7") in the last ten years and consequently the most rapidly

growing concern is now safety and security. This has been answered with CCTV on all services. Ride quality, as a fourth concern after comfort, is the one that addresses how the bus is driven. This is a concern that most passengers in the audience (particularly your correspondent) would like to see regulated.

Six and a half million people travel daily on the bus network in London – this is more than both the London underground and overground trains put together – so it is of vital importance to our capital and our locality. Though she could offer no good news on the Trinity Road - Parsons Green route (see the corresponding article elsewhere in this newsletter), Ms Danino promised both to remind TfL of our wishes and to keep in touch with the Society's Roads and Transport sub-committee. The argument of route creation being expensive was re-iterated here: but does a public service have to be cost-effective?

Did you know that the Streetcar scheme began in Earlsfield?

Jonathan Hampson of Streetcar explained that two local residents began the scheme in April 2004 with 8 cars in 4 locations. There are now 950 cars in the scheme, in 750 locations, used by over 40,000 members. The location and membership figures for Wandsworth are 75 cars available to 4,500 members, and the latter figure has more than doubled in the last year. There was some disappointment amongst the audience that the scheme, though publicising Polo cars for £3.95 an hour, has few Polos available for members, especially in Wandsworth. There is no doubt, however, that the scheme is a success and will continue to grow – the goal being a car always readily available to members within a 2 minute walk of their doorstep.

Fascinating flora

A Guided Walk with Roy Vickery, a former Curator of Flowering Plants at the Natural History Museum

The lashing rain on Monday, 7th July did not deter about 16 people from meeting Roy Vickery on Wandsworth Common for his walk and talk on the uses and folklore of our common plants.

It was a fascinating evening and here is a brief extract. First Roy led us to the hawthorn which, among myths both benign and malign, was thought to cause the death of a mother-in-law, if cuttings were brought into the house. He suggested that this could have been because the cut branches smelt like rotting flesh. Next he took us to a small ash tree and explained that someone searching for love would pluck a leaf, ignore the solitary leaflet at the top and successively give each of the paired leaflets a letter in alphabetical order. The last letter named would forecast the initial of the searcher's true love.

Nearby, grew St John's Wort. Roy told the tale of a medieval woman who was unaccountably distressed by visions of a handsome, young man. To banish the apparition she wore St John's Wort under her clothing but later abandoned the plant in favour of prayer, which was just as successful.

He said hogweed was misnamed, having nothing to do with hogs and walked us through wet grass and white clover. He pointed out Bird's-Foot Trefoil, also known as Lady's Slipper, which was a delicate plant, resembling a partially opened claw. Then we reached a sprawling bramble, which Roy thought might be the plant referred to in "Here we go round the Mulberry Bush," as there was a tradition of going round the blackberry bush, crawling under its branches.

Often customs would have romantic allusions and a desired person would be marked out by a plant. Roy demonstrated the adherence of Goose Grass, also aptly known as Cleaver. It would stick to whomever it was thrown at and hit. The spike arising from the leaves of plantain could be twisted to shoot its flower towards someone, possibly anticipating Cupid's arrow.

We passed a lime tree which had health-giving properties. Roy led us to where cowslips had grown earlier in the year, then took us to another yellow plant, ragwort. It was poisonous for horses, though he suspected that some equine deaths might be due more to bad management than eating the weed. The stinging nettle had both nutritious and chastising properties. Roy told us that he ate nettles as a substitute for spinach, they could be supped as soup and drunk as tea. In the past, the bare flesh of miscreants might be beaten by bundles of stinging nettles as a punishment.

Finally, we came to the elder, which was sometimes known as the hanging tree, because Judas Iscariot might have hanged himself from one. Roy said that this was the most useful of trees. It could cure warts, be used as a laxative and its berries and flowers be made into ointment to treat wounds. The elder yielded refreshing non-alcoholic drinks and also alcoholic ones: white wine from the elderflower and red wine from the berries. What more could one ask of a tree?

What a pity that Roy's book on the folklore of flora is out of print.

Diana Godden

New Members

Richard Clayson	Cicada Road, SW18
Martyn Davies	Fullerton Road, SW18
Mr & Mrs Hewitt	Melody Road, SW18
Mr P Hutchinson	Redwoods, SW15
Mrs E Ribbans	Point Pleasant, SW18
Mr A J Townsend	Harewood Road, SW18

Post script

This is the Newsletter of The Wandsworth Society, a registered charity no 263737. The Society is concerned with the quality of life and the environment in Wandsworth town centre, Wandsworth Common and adjacent areas. If you are not already a member and would like to join please contact the Membership Secretary Gill Gray, details on page three.

Please address Letters to the Editor, any comments, or, even better, contributions to -

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or e-mail to - wandsworth.society@mac.com