

**U3A Bikers
To Deptford Creek via the Waterlink Way to see Peter the Great**

Friday 14th August 2020

The guided rides continued to be popular and for this outing there were twelve of us ready to pedal our way across a part of south-east London which was not well known to some.

Much of the route was along quiet roads, through parks and open fields, alongside streams, past play areas and sports facilities. For a short time we found ourselves crossing the car park of the retail shopping area of Catford, but soon left that behind.

Most of the outward route was on the Waterlink Way which runs to the Thames at Creekside, Deptford Creek, from the south coast at Eastbourne on National Cycle Route 21.

Welcoming Ann May to her first ride with us, we assembled in the somewhat insalubrious area outside Penge East Station, having avoided the climb up to Crystal Palace by catching a train through the Sydenham Hill Tunnel.



(Before construction of HS1 this was the longest rail tunnel in London at 1.2 miles).

The forecast was for thundery showers, a cooler, overcast day after the period of sunny conditions with the temperature in the mid-30s. These were better conditions to be out on a bicycle.

From the station we turned out on to a road for a gentle downhill ride for about a mile. An ideal start to the outing! An inconspicuous path off the road led us into Waterlink Way, on good paths alongside a small stream which led us to Bell Green.



This stream was the River Pool which flows through the former Bell Green gasworks, dating from the 19th century. At that time the river was “canalised” and put into a stone culvert 3 metres underground so as not to interfere with gas production.

With the recent creation of the new park the river was put into an open culvert and became a feature of the park, with gravel beds, in-river planters and cascades. The River Pool continued on to join the Ravensbourne River near Catford.

The route continued on through the accurately – but unimaginatively - named Linear Park, alongside the Ravensbourne River. The route was well sign-posted and with information boards along the route; we read that the Ravensbourne is an important water catchment area for the Thames.

Leaving the park we found ourselves at Catford, passing Wickes and the other retail stores we have visited by car. In the far corner of the car park we found the exit leading directly into Ladywell Fields.

Here we re-joined the River Ravensbourne and followed it through Ladywell Fields.

Our route then crossed a railway line over an eye-catching bridge; we learned that this is a helical bridge – it is **not** a spiral bridge as we might have described it.



It was Peter who put us right about this on our first visit in 2016.

At the far end of Ladywell Fields was a very convenient café with plenty of outside space, and with table service, a safe environment. Niesje and Gisela were seen checking the correct distance for social separation....



At the far end we pedalled up a short slope and found ourselves on Ladywell Road, beside Ladywell Rail Station.

We crossed Ladywell Road safely at the pedestrian lights and continued on through back streets to Lewisham, which brought us to Ravensbourne Gardens, to re-join the River Ravensbourne.



The route took us past Elverston Road DLR station, down a short path and into Brookmill Park.

It was here that on a previous springtime outing I had taken a photo of a beautiful display of daffodils.

Leaving Brookmill Park we soon crossed Broadway Fields.



At the exit of the fields we found we were in Deptford, and crossing the busy road junction at Deptford we pushed on past Deptford Bridge.

Continuing on cycle paths in Deptford we then negotiated a short stretch of quiet roads between industrial properties.

This route brought us to the busy junction at Creek Bridge and crossing the road on a green cycle light we cycled on a short distance to Deptford Creek where it meets the River Thames.

Today the creek was full, unlike the earlier visit when the creek was revealed in all its muddy glory.

We paused here to take in the view of Greenwich, the *Cutty Sark*, and the Royal Naval College downstream.



Here we are at the statue of **Peter the Great**. He came to England in 1698 (age 26) and visited Greenwich where he obtained details and plans for building ships, which he subsequently used to build the Russian navy.

(Niesje said that he also visited Holland but found that the plans were not written down; they were kept in the heads of the ship-builders, or so he was told, perhaps.)

Our Convenor, Peter, was not able to join us today but nevertheless the photo shows us assembled in the company of Peter!



We noted the very small head on the tall figure but in fact Peter grew to be extremely tall as an adult. He was 6 feet 8" but his hands and feet were small, his shoulders were narrow and his head was small for his height.

Leaving Deptford Creek we headed along the Thames up-river and a short ride brought us to Sayes Court Park, a suitable quiet, green space for the lunch stop.



The route took us along Deptford Wall and keeping to the Thames Path wherever possible, we crossed the South Dock by the narrow footbridge, past Greenland Surrey Pier, and skirted Greenland Dock with its marina. Martin left us at this point to return via Canada Water Overground, because of a broken rear brake.



We paused to read about **Dr Salter's Daydream**. In 1900 he established his medical practice in Bermondsey, and he and his wife worked together in trying to alleviate the effects of poverty in the largely working class area, offering services free to those who could not pay. The bronze memorials of Alfred Salter and his daughter Joyce and cat were installed in 1991; the one of Dr Salter was stolen in 2011. In 2014 the statue of Alfred was re-installed (cost £12,000) and the one of Ada was added, creating the first public sculpture of a female politician in London.

From here we followed the Thames through Rotherhithe Street, Bermondsey Wall, past Butlers Wharf with its view of Tower Bridge, City Hall, Bankside, The Globe Theatre, under the Millennium Bridge, past Bankside Gallery, and then turned south for the route home via Burgess Park to Denmark Hill station, the end of the ride.

Riders

Mike Lock, Ann May, David Rosenfeld, Irene Skiadopoulou, Martin Goffe, Andrew Burke, Gisela Robinson, John Davies, Denise Davies, Niesje de Boer, Chris Booth, John Clements

Acknowledgements: Source material from *Wikipedia* and *London Remembers* websites.

Ride leader: *John Clements*

Report and photos: *John Clements, 15th August 2020*



Notes

Peter the Great ruled the Tsardom of Russia and later the Russian Empire from 1682 (when he was age 10) until his death in 1725, jointly ruling before 1696 with his elder half-brother, Ivan V. Through a number of successful wars, he expanded the Tsardom into a much larger empire that became a major European power and also laid the groundwork for the Imperial Russian Navy after capturing ports at Azov and the Baltic Sea. He led a cultural revolution that replaced some of the traditionalist and medieval social and political systems with ones that were modern, scientific, Westernised and based on the Enlightenment. Peter's reforms had a lasting impact on Russia, and many institutions of the Russian government trace their origins to his reign. He is also known for founding and developing the city of Saint Petersburg, which remained the capital of Russia until 1917.

He achieved this initially by sending some young nobles abroad to study nautical matters. Then in 1697 he went with the so-called Grand Embassy of about 250 people to western Europe. Its chief purposes were to examine the international situation and to strengthen the anti-Turkish coalition, but it was also intended to gather information on the economic and cultural life of Europe. He travelled incognito under the name of Sgt. Pyotr Mikhaylov but since he was far taller than most others, he did not fool anyone of importance. Peter familiarized himself with conditions in the advanced countries of the West. For four months he studied shipbuilding, working as a ship's carpenter in the yard of the Dutch East India Company at Saardam; after that he came to Great Britain where he



"Sgt. Pyotr Mikhaylov"

continued his study of shipbuilding, working in the Royal Navy's dockyard at Deptford, and saw a Royal Navy Fleet Review; he also visited factories, arsenals, schools, and museums and even attended a session of Parliament. Meanwhile, the services of foreign experts were engaged for work in Russia. When he left England he gave the singer, and his mistress, Letitia Cross £500 to thank her for her hospitality. Cross said it was not enough.

Dr Salter's Daydream

Text from information board:

One was a youth worker whose social clubs transformed the lives of Bermondsey's toughest working girls. The other was a doctor who treated his poorest patients without charge. Together, they overcame personal tragedy to lead a revolution. Ada and Alfred Salter were legendary, and beloved, figures in Bermondsey. They were also famous nationally, and each has a separate entry in the Dictionary of National Biography.

Ada Brown (1866-1942) was born in Northamptonshire. At 30, she left her well-off home in Raunds to do social work in the London slums as a Methodist 'Sister of the People'. Alfred Salter (1873-1945), born in Greenwich and reckoned the most brilliant student Guy's Hospital ever produced, was a bacteriologist with a great career ahead of him when in 1898, also stirred by social conscience, he arrived at the Bermondsey Settlement where Ada was working. In 1900 the two married, became Quakers, had a daughter, Joyce, were active in the Liberal Party and then the ILP (Independent Labour Party). They dedicated their lives to the impoverished people of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. Ada's concern for working women led to her election in 1909 as the first woman councillor in Bermondsey and first Labour woman councillor in London. To counter dire conditions in some local factories Ada recruited women to trade unions. This bore fruit during the 'Bermondsey Uprising' of 1911 when thousands of women went on strike. After Ada organised food supplies for their starving families, she was honoured by the trade union movement and in 1914 elected National President of the Women's Labour League.

Alfred believed the slums would never improve without political reform and set his sights on becoming MP. However, during World War One he and Ada, as pacifists, endured fierce hostility, even from stone-throwing mobs, especially after he wrote a pamphlet against the war acclaimed all over the world. But by 1922, now admired for his anti-war principles, he was elected MP for Bermondsey and, except for one year, remained MP until his death.

In the same year Ada was elected (at a time when borough mayors had considerable power) the first woman mayor in London and first Labour woman mayor in Britain. She and Alfred launched what was later called the 'Bermondsey Revolution', an experiment in municipal government that attracted attention throughout Europe.

Alfred promoted free medical treatment using modern methods: a health centre, a solarium for TB sufferers, and educational films about hygiene shown from vans on street corners. By 1935 infant mortality had fallen from 150 to 69 per year, and not one mother died in childbirth. This was his 'NHS before the NHS'.

Meanwhile, Ada's 'Beautification Committee' transformed the slums. She planted 9000 trees (hence the spade she is holding), offered prizes for best window boxes or gardens and filled all public spaces with playgrounds, musical events and sports. She was a 'Green before the Greens'. The Daily telegraph said Ada's work was "an object lesson in what can be done to beautify even the poorest neighbourhood". In 1931 Ada was elected Chair of the National Gardens Guild, and in 1934 was deployed by the LCC to beautify all of London and establish London's Green Belt.

The Salters destroyed the worst of Bermondsey's slums, Alfred pushed through a vast slum-clearance programme admired all over the country, while Ada was in charge of designing the model council houses still to be seen in Wilson Grove.

The Salter Statues

The Salters' lives were marred by a great personal tragedy. In 1910 their only child, Joyce, aged 8, died from scarlet fever. To win trust, and to avoid privilege, they had chosen to live amidst the disease-ridden slums and have their daughter educated locally, but the cost proved high. Though Joyce's death bonded the Salters for ever with the people of Bermondsey, they were inconsolable.

For further details about the work of Ada Salter see:

<https://thetreetree.com/2019/07/14/ada-salter-and-the-beautification-of-bermondsey/>

Photos



Coffee break



Chattering cyclists



Where's Peter?



Coffee finished



Thames at Deptford Creek



Lunchtime



Niesje and pet cat



Dr Salter and friends



Butler's Wharf



The group with Peter the Great