

U3A Bikers To Battersea Power Station Friday 20th January 2023

After a period with overnight sub-zero temperature, it was slightly less cold this morning, with just a little frost on the roads to watch out for.

The nine riders, well wrapped up, set out from Brockwell Lido. The route was via Loughborough Junction to Hackford Road and Van Gogh Walk.

Once we had crossed Clapham Road we were at Albert Square (but not the one on telly).



On a corner of Wilkinson Street we stopped to look at a memorial to the Tradescants who were gardeners and botanists in the 17th century.

They worked in a garden hereabouts that was the property of King Charles I.

By minor roads, and after crossing South Lambeth Road, we passed Nine Elms Underground Station. The path took us under the arches of the main railway line from Waterloo to Clapham Junction.



This was a new development, Embassy Gardens. Above us was the unique Sky Pool, claiming to be the world's first "floating" swimming pool, and bridging a gap between two high-rise apartment buildings.

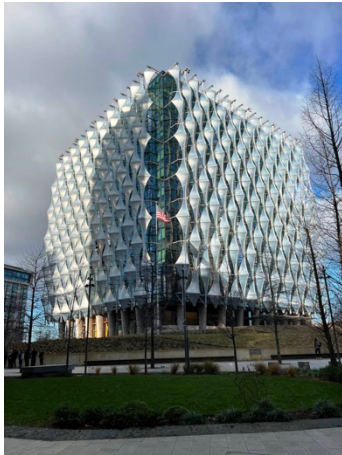
The heated pool is suspended 115 feet above the ground. Its total length is 82 feet with the middle 45 section suspended.

The publication *Architectural Digest* reports that the pool is believed to be the "world's largest single piece of load-bearing acrylic". The acrylic frame weighs 50 tonnes; it is 8 inches thick with a 12-inch thick base and is nearly 10 feet deep, resting on an invisible steel frame.



Turning the corner we saw at close quarters the US Embassy, with a long line of visa applicants queuing outside.

The press has reported that *the interiors are “stunning”*. Rather than a slick and hard-edged high rise building, the embassy exterior is given a “soft and pillow-like” feel by the plastic polymer veils that drape three sides of the building and which enhances its energy efficiency.



Then, bizarrely, beside the road there is a sculpture of a severed foot, just a bit too graphic.



We negotiated a short busy stretch of Nine Elms Lane and crossed to the Thames path. Turning a corner we saw the immense wall of brick that is Battersea Power Station.

We followed signs that directed us to the Cycle Hub, an underground parking area for cycles alongside one of the car parks.

At last, a facility serving the needs of cyclists for secure storage! So far, so good.

However, the cycle racks proved to be a bit of a disappointment. They were very closely-packed together, making it very difficult for anyone larger than Twiggy to access them to secure the bikes. Only the wheels could be locked, not the frames. With an upper tier of racks further obstructing access, it was wise to keep the helmet on!



The exit led to an outside concourse, the approach to the entrance doors of the vast structure. We were somewhat puzzled by what appeared to be someone's washing line strung up high above the walkway.

Niesje's research revealed this to be one of the exhibits in the Light Festival 2023.

There are more details at:

<https://batterseapowerstation.co.uk/events/light-festival-2023/>



Entering at the Lower Ground level we found ourselves in the vast Turbine Hall B.

Still in place is the huge gantry crane, running on rails on each side and spanning the space. This would have been able to lift the immense turbines that were here. There were three turbines in each hall, fed with steam from boilers.

The turbines in the two halls supplied electricity for one fifth of the needs of London in the late 1950's and 1960's.

Midway along at the Upper Ground level is the Turbine Control Room B which overlooks the giant Turbine Hall itself. The Control Room has been incorporated into a cocktail bar.

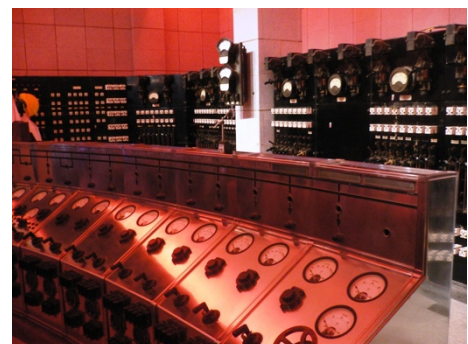
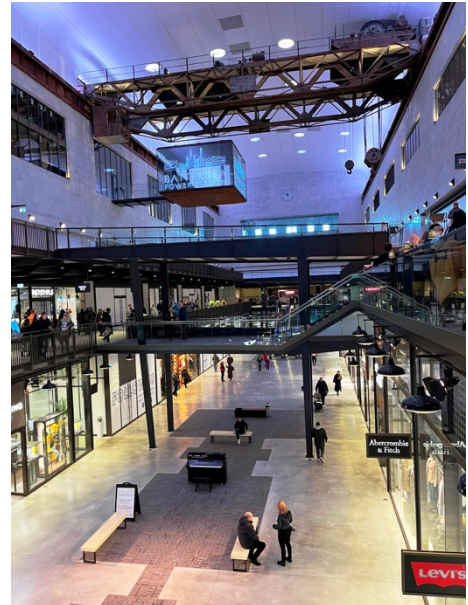
At this time it is open to all to view but it is very soon to be open only to clients, paying a £5 fee for a glass of champagne and a tour!

Here is a close-up- view of the Control Room's original dials, control desks and switchgear racks. These have all been restored to their former glory. The industrial design and the stainless-steel control desks are characteristic of the 1950's. There is a YouTube tour with Tony Robinson available to view (see NOTES).

Continuing the walk-about, we visited the Turbine Hall A which was completed in 1935; this too has a Control Panel but it is hardly visible, set high above us. Control Panel is built in the *art deco* style of the 1930's. Sadly it is destined to be a private club and so not open to the general public!

At the main entrance, one level down, there is a small exhibition documenting the appearance of the power station during the period it was operating. It also show the re-development of the site since Power Station A and B were closed down (in 1975 and 1978, respectively).

Here the "tour guide" is pointing out the boiler house on the side of Power Station B which housed six massive boilers, the largest ever built in the UK at that time. This station also had the highest thermal efficiency of any power station in the country for the first twelve years of its operation.



Well-informed about the power station and its history, we found our way back to the Cycle Hub. We returned to grapple with the challenge of the unlocking our bikes from the storage racks.

Heading down the slope towards the Underground station, this was the view of the Power station over our shoulder.



Some of the group wished to take lunch and so we set off along Nine Elms Lane to Vauxhall, through the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, along the Cut and on to the Turkish restaurant Ev, off Blackfriars Bridge Road.

Riders

Chris, David, Felicity, Ian, Irene, John, Martin, Niesje, Tony.

Acknowledgement: source material from Wikipedia

Photos: John Clements and Niesje de Boer

Report: John Clements, 22nd January 2023

NOTES:

The Battersea Power Station Control Rooms

If you would like a virtual tour around the control rooms with Tony Robinson then go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=1hzuXTRsO-o>

Battersea Power Station is a decommissioned Grade II* listed coal-fired power station built by the London Power Company (LPC). The architects included Giles Gilbert Scott (who designed Bankside power station, and the red telephone boxes). The power station is one of the world's largest brick buildings and notable for its original Art Deco interior fittings and decor.

The two power stations were built in two stages in a single building. Battersea A Power Station (built 1929-1935) and, on the eastern side, Battersea B Power Station (built 1937-1955; construction was delayed by WW2). Battersea B was built to a similar design, creating a symmetrical building with the well-known four-chimney structure.

After the construction of the Battersea B the generating capacity of the power station made it the third largest generating site in the UK. It supplied a fifth of London's electricity needs; the rest was supplied by smaller generating stations. It was also the most thermally efficient power station in the world when it opened.

The power station consumed one million tons of coal annually. After the end of World War II, the LPC used the waste heat from the boiler condensates to supply 1600 council homes in Pimlico by piping the water under the river.

By 1983 both power stations had been decommissioned. The building remained empty until 2014, during which time it fell into near ruin. Various plans were proposed for its use before eventually an agreement was made with a Malaysian company to develop the site with residences, restaurants and bars, office space, shops and entertainment venues and offices. The building and site are now owned by a consortium of Malaysian investors.