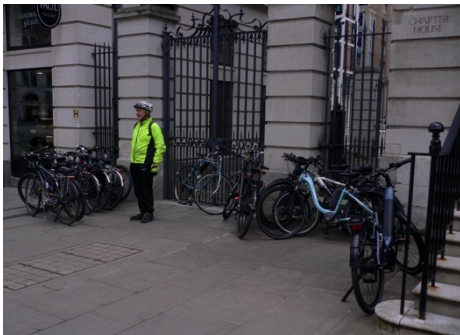


U3A Bikers St Pauls, Victoria Park and Limehouse Tuesday 28th February 2023

A high of just 8 degrees was forecast but with the stiff north-east wind the “feel-like” temperature was more like 2 to 3 degrees. So the 16 of us who assembled at Brockwell Lido were well wrapped up for the ride which took us to Southwark Bridge via Kennington and the dedicated cycle route around the Elephant and Castle.

This route up to Victoria Park, developed by Juliet and well researched, made good use of cycleways to keep us away from the traffic, with just short stretches of busier roads, usually in bus lanes.

We crossed the Thames by way of Southwark Bridge, turned into Cannon Street into the courtyard of St Paul’s Cathedral and to the café – Paul – for coffee and a chatter, parking all the bikes beside the entrance to an old street pump. Most – but not all – of the group found space to sit inside in the comfortable warmth of the café. Joe kindly remained on duty outside to make sure the bikes were safe. Thanks Joe!



Leaving the courtyard, urban roads took us along Wood Street and under the Lloyds Bank building that sits astride busy London Wall (Archive photo).



The main part of the route was on quiet, narrow roads after crossing Old Street and Shoreditch High Street; both were crossed on lights.

At Hackney Road we stopped for a short break; this provided an opportunity for those who had not visited before to see the **Hackney City Farm**, with its collection of poultry, sheep, rabbits, bees, pigs and a donkey.

From here it was but a short distance to the bridge over the Regent’s Canal which we followed east-bound for half a mile.

Several bridges where the canal path was quite narrow had to be negotiated, but always with the option to proceed on foot. Nobody gets left behind !



This brought us to the Canal Gate Entrance to Victoria Park, and the wide paths in the park to enjoy cycling freely.

A ten minute comfort break at the Rotunda café was welcome. Those who had visited the café before knew that excellent cinnamon buns were available but with limited space inside and the cold weather, these would have to wait for another day.

Then we were off along the Regent's Canal. Today the cold east wind had deterred all but a few hardy joggers, so we had a clear run all the way until we reached Johnson's Lock..... At the lock we stopped to admire this elegant heron as it slowly strutted from the lock-side to stand in the middle of the canal path. Here it remained for some time before moving. We were happy to wait.

And so we proceeded and soon arrived at Limehouse Basin. This is now filled with private yachts and power boats of all descriptions but some 140 years ago it would have been a hive of activity, full of sailing ships loading and unloading trade goods on to the canal barges that plied between here and the Midlands.

Circling the Basin and crossing the swing bridge at its entrance to the basin we arrived at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine with its two distinctive yurts, our lunch stop.

With very limited indoor seating, some hardy souls sat outside before retreating inside to warm up at the log fire. (We hope it was kiln-dried wood.) Our route home was along the Cycle Superhighway, heading back to London Bridge or Southwark Bridge, depending on our individual final destinations, Peckham Rye or Brockwell Park.

The group of riders should be congratulated on turning out in the cold conditions but all agreed it had been well worthwhile. We were delighted to have seen the heron so close, and it was suggested that this bird could be adopted as the Group logo.

Distance cycled: 18 miles; about 5 hours.

Riders: Andrew & Mary, Chris, Denise & John, Gisela, Ian, Jan, Joe, Jane, John, Judy. Martin, Patrick, Tony, Valerie.

Acknowledgement: source material from Wikipedia.

Ride leader: John Clements

Report by John Clements, 2nd March 2023



Notes

Hackney City Farm

This is a city farm and an independent alternative school in Haggerston. It was established in 1984 as a community and educational resource and to give residents, of Hackney, particularly young people, experience of animals. The facilities at include a farmyard, an area for grazing, a garden, a tree nursery and a butterfly house.

The amenity encourages children to learn about the natural environment, growing vegetables and caring for animals. The farm is home to poultry, sheep, rabbits, bees, pigs and a donkey. Animals can be adopted at the farm, and free range eggs are for sale.

Hackney City Farm is a registered charity and a limited company. It runs educational projects, exhibitions, courses in crafts and farm trails, and operates a café, *Frizzante*, which has won an award for best family restaurant. There is a cycle shop, Bike Yard East, in the farm. In 2015 Hackney City Farm registered with Ofsted as an independent alternative school.

Victoria Park

The park was created after a petition to the Queen, following a recommendation by epidemiologist William Farr. The Crown Estate purchased 218 acres which were laid out between 1842 and 1846. The land had originally been parkland, associated with the Bishop's Palace, the residence of the Bishops of London, but by the mid-1800s the land had been spoiled by the extraction of gravel, and clay for bricks. The Palace was demolished 1845 to make way for Victoria Park which was opened to the public in that year. It is reminiscent of Regent's Park, and is considered to be the finest park in the East End.

The bathing pond at Victoria Park introduced many to swimming at a time when many public baths were just used for communal washing. It has not been used for bathing since the 1930s; and now it is popular with anglers.

In the second half of the 19th Century Victoria Park became an essential amenity for working class people of the East End. For some children this may have been the only large stretch of uninterrupted greenery they ever encountered.

Victoria Park's reputation as the 'People's Park' grew as it became a centre for political meetings and rallies. The tradition of public speaking in the park continued until well after the Second World War, and was still later reflected in politically oriented rock concerts, such as those held by Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League in the 1970s and 1980s. And it is still not uncommon for marches or demonstrations to begin or end in Victoria Park.