

U3a Bike rides South London Parks Ride Tuesday 23rd May 2023

South London is well served by its beautiful parks and on this ride we were to visit seven of them.

We started with one of our regular meeting points, **Brockwell Park**.

From the Brockwell Park Lido, the six riders toured the park, taking in the pond (which was originally a bathing pond before the Lido was built), the Walled Garden and the Tritton Clock Tower which was telling us that it was midday (or midnight).

From here, we crossed Norwood Road on the bike crossing, then on residential streets made our way to one of the oldest velodromes in the world, the **Herne Hill Velodrome**.

Today there was a class for young riders in progress in the area at the centre of the track.

The next stop was the **Dulwich Picture Gallery** where there was space to sit outside in the welcome sunshine and consume our (over-priced) coffee and croissants!

Our route around **Dulwich Park** was familiar to most of us but it is always a pleasant place to visit. The ride took in the boating pond and the boardwalk, then on to the community Dulwich Vegetable where John provided a short tour.



Leaving by the Court Lane gate, and past Dulwich Library, we set off down the long gentle slope of Friern Road to **Peckham Rye Park**.

The ride took in the newly-renovated bowling green, the Sexby Garden (the wisteria was in bloom - beautiful), the American Garden, and the duck pond.

We crossed Peckham Rye and meandered through local roads to Nunhead Lane and Nunhead Green.

Here we paused at the **Old Nun's Head** pub to read the story of the origin of the name "Nunhead".

Also here is the Pyrotechnist's Arms, so named because the workers from a local fireworks factory used to go there.



We then made our way to Rye Lane, down to meet the route of the Grand Surrey Canal which we followed to Burgess Park.

After crossing the Old Kent Road we headed for **Bermondsey Spa Gardens**. At its north-east corner stands Bermondsey Town Hall, a replacement for an earlier one that once stood on the site of the Sainsbury store.

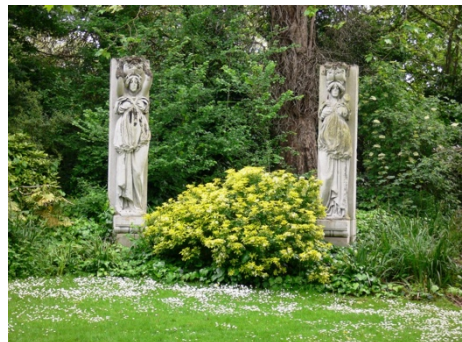
We had been here before, on the Salter ride. It was here that Ada Salter was the Mayor of Bermondsey in the 1920's in the old town hall; all that remains of it are the two pillars seen outside the supermarket.

A short ride brought us to the Kirby Estate, to an entrance to **Southwark Park** and the restored bandstand.



The first stop was near the entrance to view the **Caryatids**, two carved stone figures of young women in long flowing gowns, each balancing the prow of a ship on the head.

We supposed that these were from Bermondsey Town Hall, but research showed that this is not so.



The next stop was at the **Ada Salter Garden**, with its view across the lake to the Pavilion Café which, after circling the park, was our lunch destination.



Seated in the sun overlooking the lake with its water-fowl we reflected on our most enjoyable ride around some of the parks in the borough of Southwark.

But we had one final park to see - **Burgess Park**, with a tour around the pond, then on to the old lime kiln. The final stop was to admire the tiled image of the Camberwell Beauty, a butterfly once common in these parts.



Riders: Denise & John, Chris, Ian, Jane, John.

Ride Leaders: John and Denise Davies

Report: John Clements, 26th May 2023

NOTES

Brockwell Park Features of the park included the Community Gardens, the Walled Garden, the Tritton Clock tower, Brockwell Hall and the pond. An area of 126 acres, it is a “Site of Importance for Nature Conservation” and on the “National Heritage List for England” The **Brockwell Lido** is a Grade II listed Art Deco building. The grounds were purchased in 1891 for £12,000 in order to provide a park in the area and opened to the public one year later. Other areas nearby were purchased later to increase the size. The Tritton Clock tower has four clock faces and was a gift of a local MP, Charles Earnest Tritton, MP for Norwood in 1897. The Walled Garden was originally the kitchen garden, re-designed to create a formal flower garden by Colonel J J Sexby. (Sexby was a British civil servant who served as the first Chief Officer for Parks for the London County Council from 1892 to 1909, and was responsible for the creation of many of London's late Victorian and Edwardian parks.)



Herne Hill Velodrome. Built in 1891, the velodrome hosted the track cycling events in the 1948 Summer Olympics and was briefly the home of Crystal Palace football club during WW1. From 1903, it was the home of the annual Good Friday meetings and in the 1920's and 1930's would have audiences of 10,000. National and World records were set here but it gradually fell into disrepair. With support from top cyclists such as Bradley Wiggins (who started racing there when he was 12), Victoria Pendleton and Ben Swift as well as local residents Jo Brand and James Nesbitt, it was re-furbished and is a thriving venue once again.

Dulwich Picture Gallery Opened in 1817, it was designed by Sir John Soane using an innovative method of illumination of the exhibits and was the first purpose-built Art Gallery. It houses a fine collection of Old Masters from wealthy donors including Edward Alleyn, the actor and entrepreneur who was so wealthy he acquired the Manor of Dulwich and founded the college (the College of God's Gift) which became the three beneficiary schools.

Dulwich Park was created in 1890. It started life as farmland and a group of meadows, known as "five fields" and many of the ancient boundary oaks can still be seen. Queen Mary was apparently a regular visitor.

Peckham Rye Park. The Rye was recorded as being cultivated before the Norman Conquest in the 11th century but between 1894 and 1906 it was a railed enclosure with a man-made lake, woodland walks and open sports fields. The woodland was then annexed and the bowling green and several gardens were created: the Old English Garden or Sexby Garden, the American Garden, the Japanese Garden and the Arboretum.

The Nun's Head The origin of the name Nunhead is not certain but is believed to be derived from a local inn named variously *The Nun's Head* or *The Nunhead Tavern*. Local historians and legend maintain that the name refers to the beheading of a nun during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. One version is that the Mother Superior of a nunnery on the site put up resistance to Henry VIII's expulsion order and was murdered; her head was placed on a spike on the Green. The current public house now stands on the site of the monastery.

Grand Surrey Canal The canal was constructed in the late 19th century and one arm of it was extended to Peckham in 1826; its main purpose was to transport timber from the Surrey Commercial Docks. Despite the rationalisation of the docks and more railways, the canal survived until the expansion of roads but in the early 1970's it was filled in. Peckham Library stand on the site of the original Peckham Dock. Now it is a popular walking and cycling route to Burgess Park.

Burgess Park: At 56 hectares, Burgess Park is Southwark's largest park. It is more-recently established park, developed between the 1950s and 1980 as a result of the Abercrombie Plan for open spaces in 1943. The area was once home to factories, densely populated streets and the Surrey Canal and Basin (adjacent to the Walworth Road) before it was badly bombed during World War II. The park was named after Councillor Jessie Burgess, Camberwell's first woman Mayor in 1973. In 2012, the park re-opened after an £8m transformation, establishing it as a park central to the local community and recognised for its heritage, sports facilities, lake, wildlife, design and horticulture.