

**u3a Bike Rides
Fulham Palace
Tuesday 19th September 2023**

Autumnal weather had arrived, with grey skies and strong gusts of wind at our meeting point, Brockwell Lido for this ride to Fulham Palace, which was researched by Mary and Andrew.

We were joined for this ride by Helen who had cycled from Hampstead for her first ride with us. Welcome Helen!

Once across the Park, we headed up Brixton Water Lane, across Clapham and Wandsworth Commons to our coffee stop at the Skylark café.



We were very happy to find plenty of room inside the café to get shelter from the swirling wind.

Under blustery conditions, we cycled past the grim, foreboding walls of Wandsworth Prison, recently in the news because of the escape of a prisoner (soon recaptured), and then on down Allfarthing Lane to Wandsworth Shopping Centre.

After a short stretch along busy Garratt Lane using cycle and bus lanes, we crossed into Ram St. and past the new development at Youngs Brewery before turning down to the Thames where the River Wandle joins it.

At Wandsworth Park, sharp-eyed riders spotted three herons on the mud banks of the Thames. So, a 3-heron ride today. We crossed the river on Putney Bridge which does have a cycle lane, although this is not segregated from the traffic.



At the end of the bridge we turned into the entrance to All Saints Church where a railing provided somewhere to lock up the cycles.

We headed on foot to the Walled Garden of Fulham Palace, through the gardens and then to the Palace Café.

Once seated outside the café, which is at the rear of the Palace, sandwiches were unwrapped, tea and coffee drunk, and conversations resumed.



Admission to Fulham Palace is free, and in small groups we set out to explore this 15th century Grade I listed building. The Palace was the country home of the Bishops of London from the 11th century until as recently as 1973.

In the course of 1,300 years there were some 120 Bishops of London. It was once one of the most powerful positions in the country and the different Bishops have played a major role in shaping British history, involved in many important national and international events, from signing the Magna Carta, performing coronations and overseeing the church's activities in the British colonies.

The Church of England owns the Palace, managed by the Fulham Palace Trust. The look of the Palace has changed dramatically over time as each Bishop made alterations to suit their own taste.

Within it are a number of restored historic rooms and a museum with records its long history. There is the Library with pictures and photos of the Palace over the years, and the collection of historical records; the panelled Tudor Great Hall; the café which was formerly the bishops' dining room, and then there is the beautiful Chapel! Approaching this Victorian Chapel we heard the sound of organ music and saw the small organ.



The experience of entering the Chapel was in no way diminished by the realisation that this was recorded music. There were frescoes on both walls, and at the far end were fine stained glass windows. Continuing on through the Palace, the front entrance leads to an enclosed Tudor courtyard with its well. We admired the great oak doors at the arched outer entrance and I have since discovered that an analysis of the wood showed that these gates contain timber felled in the spring of 1495!



As we returned to retrieve our cycles, we had time to look at the splendid Palace Garden. This is ranked Grade II* on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, and it has been one of the most important botanical gardens since the 16th century. Although the garden now was past its peak there was still a fine display; a return in May would be very rewarding.

I was just reflecting on how many people were employed to look after the garden (my guess was 4), and chanced on a group of volunteers sitting in a greenhouse, enjoying their lunch; (there were 5); the garden is maintained by volunteers. On this visit we did not spot a large holm oak which is believed to be 500 years old and has been designated as one of the Great Trees of London. It needs a second visit!

Leaving Bishops Park, we followed national Cycle route 4 back to Chelsea Harbour and Lots Road before joining the cycle route along the Embankment. We crossed Albert Bridge and into Battersea Park before cycling back to Brockwell Lido.

This is a part of London that was new for many of the group. This style of ride – a short ride to an interesting destination with time to explore – is one that we will consider for future outings. We are very grateful to Mary and Andrew for organising this most enjoyable outing, based on their two recce rides.

Riders: Andrew, Chris, Christine, Denise Felicity, Helen Jane A, Jane E, John C, John D, Julia, Mark, Mary, Tony.

References: <https://www.fulhampalace.org/>

Ride leaders: Andrew and Mary Burke

Report and photos by John Clements, 20th September 2023