

U3A Bike Rides

Autumn ride to Chiswick House

Friday 27th November 2023

Several of us set out from home to meet at Brockwell Lido in light rain which continued at the start of the ride, but soon stopped. It was to be a feature of the day, pleasant sunny spells, with some light rain between.

By way of Brixton Water Lane and Clapham Common we made our way in two groups to the Skylark Café on Wandsworth Common for our coffee stop and a group photo.

A short stretch of Garratt Lane and Ram Street was soon negotiated and we were on to the Thames Path at the mouth of the River Wandle, heading up-stream beside the Thames, Wandsworth Park, under Fulham Rail Bridge and on to the busy crossing at the end of Putney Bridge.



A joy to cycle along Putney Reach, past all the boat houses belonging to some of the private schools and on to the Putney Towpath; despite recent heavy rain the path was in fair condition on the stretch to Hammersmith Bridge.



Closed to motor traffic, the bridge is undergoing an assessment of the work that needs to be done to make it safe and the carriageway was closed to cyclists. So, off the bikes for a walk over the bridge. (The current estimated cost of repair? A cool £150-200 million!). The group stopped for a couple of minutes to wait at the end of the bridge for Andrew's group.

The current Hammersmith Bridge (the second on the site and opened in 1887) was designed by Sir Joseph Bazalgette and rests on the same pier foundations constructed for the original structure.

The Thames Path here is called the Upper Mall and I was pleased to see signs that welcomed considerate cyclists, so **we** were OK to go!

The river was full but still rising (it's spring tides); this was the view from the Upper Mall.



Chiswick Mall led to Pumping Station Road where we turned away from the river, across Burlington Lane, and so we arrived at Chiswick Park.

Hogarth House lies just to the east. The house, now a museum, is small and so one group headed there while our group headed for the café in the park.



Along the way, we paused to admire the magnificent glass and steel structure which is the Conservatory.

The café does a home-made soup in the winter months; today was sweet potato and garlic.

Lunches consumed, the arrival of the second group from the museum visit prompted our group to head off there, a ride of less than ten minutes.

I first visited Hogarth House some eight years ago on a ride with the group led by our first Convenor, Peter Saunders. The garden has been completely transformed and is well cared for. The house too has changed, with a modern extension added at one end. (There's a photo of the garden as it was previously below). Hogarth's House was his country home and now tells the history of his life, his family and staff, and the building.





It contains a collection of prints and engravings by the artist and we smiled again at the caricatures set in some of London's less salubrious parts, depicting "Gin Lane" and "Beer Street", amongst others. We had only half an hour to tour the house, but could have stayed longer.

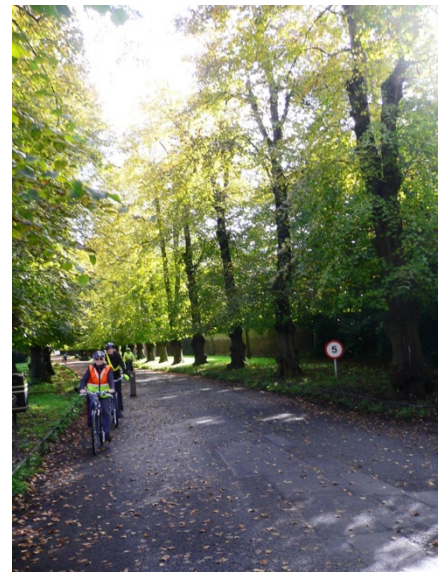
(During the visit, I was amused to learn that Hogarth was a member of "The Sublime Society of Beef Steaks"; apparently this is the oldest surviving dining society in Britain, and quite possibly the world. It was founded in 1735.)

Outside in the garden, the mulberry tree still survives; it is said that the Hogarth's made mulberry pies for the Foundling children who stayed with them.

The museum tour over, we re-joined the other group at the café and we were reminded by the fallen leaves that it was indeed autumn, as we headed down the park avenue.

From the café we set off along the garden paths and stopped to admire the wonderful building that is Chiswick House; it is among the most glorious examples of 18th-century British architecture.

The third Earl of Burlington, who designed this Roman-style Palladian villa, drew inspiration from his Grand Tours of Italy. Sadly, the house was not open today.



A park path took us along the side of the lake, past the Ionic Temple, and on to the Classic Bridge, built by the 5th Duke of Devonshire.

The Gardens are generally recognised as the birthplace of the English Landscape Movement and underwent major restorations twenty years ago to repair the statues and garden buildings and which revealed the original vistas.



Time for a photo at the Obelisk!

We left the park and made a small detour to see a commemorative stone that marked where the first V2 rocket landed in England in 1944, useful information perhaps for a pub quiz....?

From there we had a ride of just a few minutes to reach Chiswick Station, with level access to the platform for the return to Clapham Junction or Vauxhall.

Two riders elected to return by bike and later reported that they had a very exciting time navigating flood water along Chiswick Mall as the tide was up! Fairly scary, I imagine!!



Riders: Andrew (co-leader), Caroline, Chris, Daniella, Jane A, John, Judy, Julia, Martin, Valerie.

Ride leader: John Clements

Report by John 25th October 2023

This ride, and the recent ride to Fulham Palace, has shown that the Group riders enjoy rides to interesting destinations, with time to view them. The Bike Team will investigate other possible venues: Boston Manor House (free, recently refurbished); Gunnersbury Park Museum (free entry); The Ranger's House, Greenwich (English Heritage member free / £10, over 65).

Chiswick House and Gardens

The gardens at Chiswick were an attempt to symbolically recreate a garden of ancient Rome which were believed to have followed the form of the gardens of Greece

Chiswick House is one of the earliest examples of neo-Palladian design in England and the gardens are the birthplace of the English Landscape Movement and the inspiration for great gardens from Blenheim Palace to New York's Central Park.

Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington designed and built Chiswick House from 1725-1729. The villa was inspired by the architecture and gardens of ancient Rome. The sumptuous interiors and key items of furniture were designed by William Kent and house a rich collection of Old Master Paintings.

The 65 acres of Grade I listed gardens have been loved for centuries, with their combination of grand vistas, architectural delights, water features and wilderness areas. A £12.1m restoration of the gardens in 2010 has returned them to their mid-18th century glory with new additions including picnic and play areas that create a unique oasis in London.

Apparently, the Beatles visited Chiswick House in 1955 to shoot promotional films for both sides of their latest 45 RPM single, "Paperback Writer" and "Rain". There are scenes shot in the conservatory and in the walled garden.

Hogarth's House

Hogarth's House holds an extensive collection of the artist's 18th century prints, of which a selection will always be on display, and a set of his engraving plates.

The panelled rooms also house some replica pieces of 18th century furniture. These were commissioned from the Chiswick Art-Workers' Guild by Lieutenant-Colonel Shipway who rescued the house and opened it to the public as a museum to Hogarth in 1904.

Shipway gave the house to Middlesex County Council in 1909 and ownership passed in 1965 to Hounslow Council. The house was refurbished in 1996-97 to mark the tercentenary of Hogarth's birth.



View of the garden as it was in 2016