

**U3A Bike Rides  
Bushy Park  
Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

A couple of months ago, Jane and Joe had led a ride bound for Bushy Park but this had been cut short at Richmond Park because of the heavy rain they encountered.

So it was agreed to repeat the outing in better weather. Today was that day and 14 riders assembled at the meeting point, Brockwell Lido, in cool but dry conditions, welcoming new member Julie to her first ride with us.

A passing member of the public was approached and kindly agreed to take a group photo.



Caroline joined us on Clapham Common as we headed in two groups for Wandsworth Common, past HMP Wandsworth, down Earlsfield Road, across Garrett Lane and the River Wandle, then into Wimbledon Park.

From its north-west corner we headed up Woodspring Road and into Princes Way, a short uphill stretch that required several of us to dismount and push....mostly because we had only 6 gears!

Princes Way is a pleasant tree-lined residential street that leads directly to Tippet's Corner on the busy A3. The mixed-use underpass makes for easy transit across this junction.

The route was across part of Putney Heath on paths that were generally good but with patches of muddy ground after the recent wet spell. The mud was to cause one rider some difficulty as it filled the space between tyre and mudguard, making it hard to pedal.

Our destination was the Wimbledon Windmill and the tearoom for – some would say- an overdue coffee stop(!) where Tony joined us.



The service here was very efficient and soon the group was in full chattering mode again and enjoying a seat in the sun.

On returning to Tibbet's Corner, our route continued on past the Telegraph pub and the northern part of Putney Heath, then down through the traffic-free old part of Roehampton.

After crossing Roehampton Lane we had a pedal-free ride down Danebury Avenue, past some rather run-down council housing, before arriving at Priory Lane and the Roehampton Gate entrance to Richmond Park.

There's a choice of routes here. Left into Priory Lane is the longer but gentler route; ahead is Sawyer's Hill and the climb up the hill past the White Lodge. Our group chose the former.

Once past Pen Pond's Café and across the Queen's Road there was the exhilarating ride down the hill and out of the park at Ham Gate.

After crossing Ham Common it was just a short ride to the Thames at Teddington Lock and Weir. The river was in full flow over the weir.

The Thames Path along this part of the river is in good condition and allowed us to make good time, passing under Kingston Railway Bridge and then the road bridge.



Kingston Bridge has a dedicated cycle path and took us over to the north shore. After a short stretch of busy road we finally arrived at **Bushy Park**, Hampton Wick Gate.

Here we paused at the information board to read about Timothy Bennett. Bennett was a shoemaker who wanted to be able to walk across the park, the property of Lord Halifax, the Ranger of Bushy Park. In 1754 he challenged Halifax in court on the right of public access to the park, and won his case!





We were then in the glorious open spaces of the park and headed along a good gravel path to Chestnut Avenue and the Diana Fountain, dedicated to the goddess, not to the Princess.

The fountain and Chestnut Avenue were designed by Christopher Wren as a grand approach to Hampton Court.

At Cobbler's Way – named of course for Mr Bennett – we turned towards the **Water Gardens**.

This was a formal garden set out on a grand scale and dating from 1710, centred on the oval Lower Pool. The garden had become overgrown by 1800 but was restored to its original condition in 2000.

On each side of the ornamental cascade which tumbles over the five steps was an entrance to a tunnel which ran behind it and in the past it was possible to walk through it.

However, now the tunnel was blocked by boarding and each "entrance" was actually a painted trompe-l'oeil. The Upper and Lower Pools are connected by the cascade.

A circle around the larger Upper Pool brought us to an adjacent bridge from which we could see the 1710 Brewhouse, built for Charles Montague, the 1st Earl of Halifax to supply the household with ale, safer to drink than water at that time.

The bridge was now closed off and we could only glimpse the Brewhouse. Here's a view of the sunlit cascade seen from the bridge on previous occasion

The little river is the Longford River. It was extended in the reign of Charles I to take water down to Hampton Court. It rises near Terminal 5 of Heathrow airport,



At the end of the Lower Pool were the locked gates of the Upper Lodge, a fine building with a long drive and manicured grounds, currently being restored.

In 1945 the property was used by the Admiralty Research Laboratory and it remained in use for defence research until the end of 1993. It was sold to a private buyer in 2009 for about £9 million.



As we left the garden, light rain started and hastened our departure, back to Chestnut Avenue and then to the Pheasantry café to meet with the other group. The route back was down Chestnut Avenue to the Teddington Gate from where a five-minute ride took us to Teddington Station, with a frequent service back to Clapham Junction and Vauxhall.

The ride worked very well with the two groups riding separately, and we were pleased that the ride had been (mostly) in the dry. The Water Garden is only one of the features of the park and there is much more to see. The open parkland and the riverside paths provided for easy riding and the autumn colours were splendid. Thank you Jane for researching and leading this ride.

**Acknowledgments:** The Royal Parks website; Wikipedia

**Riders:** *Andrew Burke, Mary Burke, Caroline Strachan, John Clements, Felicity Henderson, Jane Evans, Jane Antos, Joe Antos, Jane Andrews, Chris Booth, Mark Stone, Martin Dale, Julia Carter, Julie Stent, Patrick Mulhern, Tony Glassborow.*

**Distance cycled:** 24 miles, 5 ½ hours

*Ride leader: Jane Antos*

*Report and photos by John Clements, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023*

### **The Water Gardens**

One of the hidden treasures of Bushy Park is the Water Gardens which were built for private use by Charles Montague, the 1st Earl of Halifax, in 1710. Montague was a poet, statesman and friend of Isaac Newton, and had been the Park Ranger since 1687. This Baroque-style collection of pools, cascades, basins and a canal disappeared beneath undergrowth and silt during the twentieth century. The gardens were largely forgotten until a major restoration programme was undertaken.

An interesting feature of the Gardens is a two-storey redbrick building, which was installed as part of Montague's original landscaping project. This Grade II listed structure was a brewhouse, providing beer to the household in nearby Upper Lodge – alcohol was safer to drink than water at the time. It is thought that cereal grain for the brewing process was grown in fields to the south of the Gardens.

The Water Gardens went on to play a unique role in twentieth-century events. During the First World War wooden buildings were erected to form an encampment for Canadian troops, while the Upper Lodge was used as a hospital. Later, swimming pools were provided here as part of an open-air school for impoverished East End boys with respiratory diseases. During the Second World War, the site was used as a US barracks. It was then taken over by the Ministry of Defence and played a significant role in the development of Cold War defence technology. The area fell into disrepair and remained closed to the public until a major restoration programme returned them to their former glory.

Restoring the Upper Lodge Water Gardens. Restoration plans began in the 1990s, with research by the Friends of Bushy and Home Parks, and the discovery by Sir Roy Strong of an eighteenth-century painting of the gardens.

The gardens became the centrepiece of a Bushy Park improvement project, with additional funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Crown Estate and other supporters.

The restoration included desilting and returning the ponds to their original shape and depth; a new water engineering system to restore the connection to the Longford River; rebuilding the southern flank cascade wall; restoring the cascade and northern flank wall; reconstructing the original stoop basins and alcoves.

The Water Gardens reopened in 2010, and visitors can now enjoy this tranquil spot just as much as the 1st Earl Halifax did over 300 years ago.

## **Bushy Park**

The area now known as Bushy Park has been settled for at least the past 4,000 years: the earliest archaeological records found on the site date back to the Bronze Age. When Henry VIII appropriated Hampton Court Palace from Cardinal Thomas Wolsey in 1529, the King named three parks that make up modern-day Bushy Park: Hare Warren, Middle Park and Bushy Park. Henry established them as deer-hunting grounds for his own use.

Later monarchs added several features, including the Longford River (a 19-km canal built on the orders of Charles I to provide water to Hampton Court) and the park's ponds. Chestnut Avenue was built as the main route from Park Road in Teddington to the Lion Gate entrance to Hampton Court Palace. The avenue and the Arethusa 'Diana' Fountain were designed by Sir Christopher Wren as a grand approach to Hampton Court Palace. The Park Ranger is an honorary position and includes residence at Bushy House.

During World War I, Bushy Park housed the King's Canadian Hospital, and between the wars there was a camp for undernourished children.

During World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower planned the D-Day landings from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) at Camp Griffiss in the Park. A memorial dedicated to the Allied troops who fell on D-Day now marks the spot where General Eisenhower's tent stood. The nearby Eisenhower House is named in the General's honour, and Shaef Gate is named after SHAEF (Strategic Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force).