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Notes and News

The Society’s 117th Annual General Meeting was held on 6 July 2017 at Queen Mary University, Mile End Road, and attended by some 200 members. Our meeting place, hidden in the heart of the university campus, was the remarkable top-lit octagonal library, a gothic version of the British Library. It was designed for the University’s forerunner, the People’s Palace, intended as a beacon of culture in the Victorian East End.

Apart from the setting the meeting was notable for the absence of the keenly anticipated annual publication, London Prints and Drawings before 1800. We learned that the courier had arrived with the books, was uncertain where to deliver them, and had departed. The books were retrieved later; 500 copies were delivered by volunteers; the remainder were posted; 300 were paid for by the delivery firm, which agreed that it was at fault. If anyone has not received their copy please contact the Treasurer.

Apart from this unfortunate mishap, the AGM ran smoothly. Professor Michael Port, who has retired from the council, was thanked for his long service. Andrew Thorp was elected as a new council member; others were re-elected (for details see the back page of this Newsletter). Minutes of the meeting will be published in the May Newsletter. Bernard Nurse spoke about the antiquarian, Richard Gough and his collection of prints and drawings now in the Bodleian Library, from which he made a selection for this year’s publication.

Our editor, Sheila O’Connell has many treats in preparation. For 2018 there will be two volumes reproducing panoramas of London. Thomas Girtin’s dates from 1801/02 (see our front cover). In contrast there will be views of the city after the Blitz, by Lawrence Wright. Hubert Pragnell writes about his discovery of these on p.7. In addition there will be a new edition of the Map of Tudor London, to be published jointly with the Historic Towns Trust. In 2019 or 2020 there will be a catalogue of parish maps (see below) and in 2020 a volume of the London Topographical Record.

Our front cover: This is from Thomas Girtin’s panorama: Study for the ‘Eidometropolis’ Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth, c.1801, which we will be publishing in 2018. Gregory Smith comments that although Girtin claimed that it was taken from the British Plate Glass Warehouse, this is not possible and the drawings must have been made from the roof of the Albion Terrace facing the ruined Albion Mills overlooking the Surrey end of Blackfriars Bridge. It is fascinating to see so many red roofs; at this time clay tiles of various kinds had not yet been replaced by Welsh slate.

Subscriptions

These are due on 1 January 2018. Renewals are being managed this year by our new Council member Andrew Thorp (email andrew.thorp@ramboll.co.uk, postal address 45 Stanton Road, London SW20 8RW.) Standing order payers need take no action unless you have changed bank accounts since the beginning of the year. Our bank statements make it difficult to distinguish between standing order payments and individual payments made using the BACS bank transfer, so if there is no invoice attached to your Newsletter you may still need to take action to renew your membership. If you are not sure, ask Andrew, preferably by email. Your January 2017 bank statement may clarify matters.

Please ensure your name is included in any direct bank transfer to help us connect you to the transfer.

Future Publications

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21st Century Media!

The Society now has a Twitter account: @LondonTopSoc. You can follow it up via the link from the homepage on the LTS website.
New Website

The Council has decided the time has come for the Society to have a new website. The current one has done us very well for many years but it has become more and more difficult to maintain.

Following a tendering exercise in the summer a company in Burton upon Trent, Plain Design, was chosen to build the new website and they started work in early October. It is hoped the website will go ‘live’ early in 2018.

Obituary

We are sorry to report the death of our member and former council member Stephen Croad on 12 September 2017. Stephen was head of the architectural section of the National Monuments Record (later part of RCHME) from 1981-94, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and for many years assistant editor for the Ancient Monuments Society. Many members will be familiar with his two excellent books, London’s Bridges 1983, and Liquid History, the Thames through time, 2003 (reprinted 2016), there will be a fuller obituary in the next volume of the Record.

The Parish Map Project

The Society’s parish map project continues apace and is now moving towards completion. The late Ralph Hyde, formerly Keeper of Maps and Prints at Guildhall Library and a member of the Society’s Council until his death, compiled the standard catalogue of London maps from 1850 to 1900. At the same time he worked on a meticulous manuscript catalogue of London parish maps from the earliest up to 1900. This he passed to us for completion, and a working group of members has been engaged on this challenge for several years.

The work of completing Ralph’s catalogue has entailed visiting each local history library in the inner London area (including one we now discover Ralph never reached) to check the few queries in his entries and to record new acquisitions. This is not as simple as it sounds since the libraries have often been completely reorganised since Ralph noted their holdings some 30 to 40 years ago. We have frequently re-catalogued their maps and discarded the old references, and have occasionally misplaced items. A further complication has been the wholesale removal of Guildhall Library holdings to the London Metropolitan Archive.

We have additionally checked the National Archives, the University Libraries and the main overseas libraries, and have traced London parish maps as far afield as Staffordshire, Edinburgh and Harvard; interestingly, maps of Hammersmith are particularly peripatetic, turning up in a number of far flung depositories. However, it is fair to say that the overwhelming number of London parish maps are to be found in London, including at the Church of England Record Office, an important repository we had overlooked until suggested by Dr Ann Saunders.

In sum, we can confirm that Ralph catalogued the great majority of London parish maps. However, we have managed to trace a significant number of additional maps; some through the internet (when Ralph was cataloguing the maps, hi-tech meant an electric typewriter) and others through simple physical inspection. Islington Library, for instance, has a filing cabinet stuffed full of uncatalogued folding maps of the former Borough of Finsbury. Other gems include perhaps the earliest map of Whitechapel, spotted at Brasenose College Oxford by Peter Guillery, an unrecorded cholera map of Islington, and many other items.

Work is nearing completion in most boroughs; there are one or two loose ends that will need tidying up, but we are nearly there. The task is now to check the drafts, arrange photography and hand over to Roger Cline, who is sub-editing, and Peter Barber, who is writing the introduction. Together with Lawrence Worm’s bibliography of map-makers, we hope that the book will make a welcome addition to members’ libraries in 2019 or, if we need a bit longer, 2020.

– Simon Morris

Events and exhibitions

London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road EC1R OHB, to 6 December. Free. Life on the London Stage, a glimpse of the challenges and joys of theatrical life since the days of Elizabeth, drawing on photographs, prints and documents in the LMA’s collections.


Tate Britain, 2 November to 7 May: Impressionists in London. An exciting range of paintings has been borrowed for this exhibition from galleries abroad, including six of the many views of the Houses of Parliament painted by Claude Monet. Other London views include Pissarro’s Charing Cross bridge, and there are varied subjects by Sisley, Derain, Tissot and other French artists who spent time in England, some of them to escape the disruption created by the Franco-Prussian war in the 1870s.

Newcomen Society: Changing Waterscapes: managing water in 18th-century London. A talk by Dr Carry van Lieshout, Dana Studio, Wellcome Wolfs building, 165 Queens Gate, London SW7 5HD, on 14 March 2018; 5.45pm, entry free; a party usually goes to a restaurant in Gloucester Road afterwards.
Two recent awards draw attention to some of London’s exceptional buildings.

The US-born social housing pioneer Neave Brown has belatedly received the 2018 Royal Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects for his 1960s/1970s work in the 1960s-70s, when, like Walter Segal (see Reviews), he sought alternatives to high-rise housing. He is the only living British architect so honoured. The October 2017 presentation was private because of his poor health. His best-known work is Camden’s Alexandra Road Estate, now listed, together with his other major schemes in the borough – the prototypes at Winscombe Street and Fleet Road. Alexandra Road was the UK’s first public housing scheme to be given Grade II* status and was a 2017 Open House London venue. Its completion marked the end of Brown’s UK career – following a three-year public inquiry into cost and time overruns which eventually exonerated him. He subsequently worked and taught on the mainland of Europe.

Alexandra Road slots over 500 homes into its curving, terraced concrete structures. It has featured regularly in films and TV, mainly as a backdrop for crime and spy dramas (sometimes dirtied up to add atmosphere), music videos and album covers. Once derided as a brutalist ‘concrete crocodile’, it has won the affection of residents, who collectively supported Brown’s medal nomination. In 2010, they premiered a documentary in which one contributor, who had originally compared it to Alcatraz, now relented. For others, it was like ‘a big family house’ or a ‘hill town’.

Other people like it too. Property agents The Modern House have recently sold five flats that had been bought by previous tenants, a typical price being £499,000 for one with two bedrooms.

– David Crawford

Making its mark in a very different way is the ‘new’ St Pancras church (built 1822), the striking neo-Grecian landmark built by the Euston Road to serve the expanding northern suburb. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings has selected the exceptional conservation work carried out on the portico for its John Betjeman Award. Time and heavy pollution had contributed to cracking and movement of the lead roof, decay of the terracotta decoration, erosion of the stonework and damage from corroding iron cramps. The meticulous cleaning and repair of all these elements included the creation of a new terracotta piece to match the old ones – recognising the value of retaining the consistency of the crisp classical design (in this case surely a sensible exception from traditional SPAB practice of allowing repairs to be visible).

The Visscher Panorama

It is a happy coincidence that in the year when two later panoramas are being prepared for publication by the LTS, it is also possible to celebrate the conservation, with funding from the LTS, of one of the most famous earlier examples owned by London Metropolitan Archives. In this article Jeremy Smith, Assistant Librarian of the LMA, considers its changing status, and Caroline De Stefani, Conservation Studio Manager of LMA, writes about its repair and repackaging.

A survey of the Visscher panorama in the context of London historical writing is in preparation for a future volume of the London Topographical Record.

The Visscher panorama is an engraving by Claes Jansz. Visscher first published in Amsterdam around 1616 with the title ‘Londinum Florentissima Britanniae Urbs Toto Orbe Celsiberrimum Emporiumque’. It is one of the most iconic images of medieval London; a low-rise cityscape dominated by the spires and steeples of its churches. Published in the year of Shakespeare’s death, Visscher’s engraving is one of the few visual records of London before much of it was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666.

London Metropolitan Archives holds two copies of the Visscher panorama. One copy (ref. SC/GL/FR/LBV/p7494086) was recently displayed (2016) at Guildhall Art Gallery alongside artist Robin Reynolds’s panorama of today’s metropolis.
Robin Reynolds’s revelatory revisiting of Visscher’s iconic London view marked its 400th anniversary by drawing a dazzling new version and in doing so prompts thoughts on the status of the original image, and how attitudes to it have changed.

Today ‘Visscher’ (only the one word is needed) is one of the best known and certainly most frequently reproduced depictions of late medieval London. It is an image, an almost unconscious or subliminal one, carried in the minds of all London historians, and those interested in the past of the City. But it was only in the later twentieth century that it reached this status and managed to shake free of its earlier more equivocal position. It was a work purporting to depict London, but originating entirely from a desk in Amsterdam. With no clear evidence of a ‘research trip’, or any obvious stylistic references being traceable to contemporary published works, its status has understandably caused suspicion.

Early historians of London ignored Visscher’s view. This is not surprising since they ignored all graphic works in favour of the supposed authority of the document. Later, especially in the nineteenth century, when graphic works slowly enter the literature of London history, Visscher makes isolated appearances. This is normally accompanied by awed references to its rarity but with little or no analysis of content. Bernard Adams’ cites a prominent example in Robert Wilkinson’s successful Londina Illustrata of 1816 where the plates consist of ‘uncritically presented and topographically useless details enlarged from the long views of Visscher and Hollar’.

The evidential usefulness of the panorama was, at much the same time, recognised and utilised by J. T. Smith – but he was an historian with an unusually open mind to evidence, especially graphic evidence. For others the panorama was to be held at arm’s length as an appealing novelty, tolerable for its attractiveness. Writing in The London Topographical Record in 1904 T. Fairman Ordish, in what is probably the first text concentrating on the panorama (the occasion being the publication of the LTS four-sheet facsimile), commented as follows: ‘The Visscher panorama is so attractive as a picture that we feel no surprise when we find that it was frequently reprinted.’

He refers of course to the multiple copies and re-engravings of Visscher’s panorama which quickly followed its first publication, and included a version published in Venice in 1629. Ordish will also have been aware of the Victorian facsimile editions of the view, without a word of commentary and seemingly produced with little intention of satisfying the historian, but of providing decoration for many an office or tavern wall in the City.

The responsibility for the re-habilitation of Visscher’s view is largely down to William Shakespeare – or at least indirectly. Controversy about the precise positioning of a plaque in Southwark to mark the site that would have been occupied by the Globe Theatre caused officials of the London County Council (LCC) to take up serious archival research. A number of publications followed including that by W. W. Braines, The Site of the Globe Playhouse, published in association with the LCC in 1924. This and other texts provided close contextual reading of Visscher’s view, the fulfillment of their work, in a way, being John Orrell’s The Quest for Shakespeare’s Globe in which Visscher is presented as one of the most significant documentary sources for the topography of ‘Shakespearean’ Bankside – and in a sense for the outstandingly popular townscape that so many people enjoy there today.

Visscher, by the mid-twentieth century, had at last proved himself useful to historians, and was then carried forward in the wave of popular, very well-illustrated London history books that proliferated in the 1970s and 80s; and again by the massive tide of historical television documentary of the past two decades.

Views of Visscher

Visscher panorama, page with Old St Paul’s and Bankside, engraved c.1616 ‘One of the most iconic images of medieval London’
The conservation of the Visscher Panorama

The copy of the Visscher panorama which was the subject of the conservation project (ref. LMA SC/PD/XX/01/04) is by far the better impression. The panorama is made of four panels of handmade paper measuring 535 x 422 mm. The quality of the etching is very good, the black printing ink lines are very sharp and the chiaro/scuro areas are well defined.

The Condition of the print before treatment

Although the overall condition of the print was generally good, inappropriate storage and extensive handling in the past had caused damage to the paper which now presented ingrained surface dirt and long tears along the folds. The panels had been repaired extensively in the past and lined on the back with heavy white handmade paper cut to the size of the print. The backing paper of one panel had larger margins and therefore made the entire panel bigger than the other three. The panels were stiff and discoloured along the repairs probably due to the deterioration of the adhesive used. Some tears had been mended, but the edges were not aligned accurately. Other tears had not being joined, only stabilised leaving a gap between the edges. Other losses around the print were present especially along the edges. The infill repairs had been made with western handmade paper that had caused distortion and fraction of the original paper. Some repairs had been retouched to complete the missing etching. Other infills were made with paper that replicated the original print.

In this state the panels could not be accessed and displayed without the risk of increasing the distortion and tears.

Conservation treatments

LMA’s paper conservator Hilary Ordman was in charge of the conservation treatment of this print. All four panels were thoroughly dry cleaned by means of a soft brush on the printed side and a vulcanised latex sponge on the edges and on the back of the print. All the different media were tested against fugitivity with distilled water. As all the inks proved to be stable it was therefore possible to wash the print to remove all the soluble acidity and the stains. The print was washed in three consecutive cold water baths until the water was clean.

While the panels were still wet the paper lining of the back was removed. It was decided to remove also the old repairs that were causing fractures on the print. All the other repairs that were stable and made using a paper similar to the original print, and the infills where hand drawing had been made to replicate the missing images, were kept. The panels were left to dry under light weight between thick blotting paper.

The paper repairs and infills were done first on the back of the print using Japanese paper of the appropriate thickness and wheat starch paste. The missing areas on the front of the print were then repaired using Japanese paper toned with watercolours to match the colour of the original paper. All four panels were interleaved with acid free tissue and housed in an archival four flap folder.

Following conservation, the panorama has been digitised and made available on LMA’s Collage: The London Picture Archive alongside the other copy.

Hilary very much enjoyed working on this project not only owing to its aesthetic value, but also because it allowed her to discover and discuss details of the history of the print with curatorial staff in the Graphic Collections team.

LMA is grateful to the LTS for its generous support of this project.

– Caroline De Stefani

4. Few were without an illustration of Visscher, quite often on the cover: works such as London 2000 years of a City and Its People (1974), a model of its genre by Felix Barker and (former LTS Chairman) Peter Jackson.
Discovering the Lawrence Wright panorama of London

The panorama mentioned in this article will be one of next year’s publications. LTS member Hubert Pragnell, who suggested this, describes how he first discovered it.

Hubert was born in London and from earliest childhood developed a fascination for London architecture and history nurtured by visits to the London Museum as it then was. He studied fine art at Goldsmiths’ College and the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Oxford. He has an MA in history from the University of Kent and a Ph.D from the University of York on early Victorian railways. He taught for 29 years at The King’s School, Canterbury, and since 2003 has been a part-time tutor in history of architecture for the University of Oxford, Department for Continuing Education. His publications include books on architectural history as well as the 1968 publication for the London Topographical Society on the London Panoramas of Robert Barker and Thomas Girtin.

Introduction

Why publish a panorama of a relatively recent aspect of London’s history? The London Topographical Society was founded in 1880 which was sixty years before the German blitz on London. Go back sixty years from 1880 and one is in the age of John Nash and the London maps of Greenwood. A time which by the 1880s seemed distant, when the West End was re-planned on strict classical lines, gas was being introduced to the streets, the southern suburbs were expanding beyond the medieval London Bridge which was a few years away from demolition, and the impact of railways on London was still a decade or so away. An age when the City housed a working population ‘over the shop’. Now the blitz and destruction by V bombs is some seventy-five years away and the City as depicted by Lawrence Wright is in some ways as remote as Regency London from the 1880s. Then St Paul’s Cathedral stood supreme on the London skyline along with the towers and spires of surviving Wren’s churches. The nearest recent competitors in height were Faraday House and the Bank of England. It was only in 1962 that a modern building rose in height above that of St Paul’s, the Vickers Building on Millbank, over a mile to the west. The Barbican blocks on the northern edge of the City to exceed the height of St Paul’s rose between 1969 and 1976. However the still-growing ‘forest’ of skyscrapers in the financial centre around Lombard Street and Bishopsgate were still thirty years away, and the vision of the Shard towering over The Borough, and often lost in the clouds was perhaps a dream on a level with space travel experienced by readers of Dan Dare in The Eagle.

When Lawrence Wright started to paint his panorama the bombed sites in the vicinity of St Paul’s had taken on a sense of permanence with cellars covered by ragwort and inhabited by the occasional stray cat. When things seemingly stand still there seems little need to record them, although fortunately visitors availed themselves of the open view of St Paul’s from the east along Cannon Street to take numerous photographs from this hitherto obscured viewpoint of office blocks and narrow streets. Ealing Film Studios availed themselves of the area in 1946 to film their black and white comedies, including Hue and Cry. As colour film increasingly took over in the early 1950s the British Travel Association featured the City as it then was, so their promotional pictures also provide a record of the open spaces in the vicinity of St Paul’s. Since the London Topographical Society published my study on the London panoramas of Barker and Girtin in 1968, much has been subsequently revealed on this once popular form of art, part topographical, part entertainment. Could there be still be one of London, little known to the public at large? The publication of the Rhinebeck panorama of about 1810, which had been rediscovered in New York, suggests there still could be works or evidence of works now lost. Lawrence Wright’s panorama was not lost but simply put into store in the Museum of London where it has been rarely exhibited since its completion in 1956. It was there as a child that I saw it that summer and was fascinated even then by its artistic skill, and Wright’s ability to convey the atmospheric quality of London at that time. Like many things encountered in childhood it was pushed to the back of the mind but not forgotten.

Quite by chance in the following autumn, having been sent by my parents to the local barber for a haircut, and whilst waiting my turn ‘to be shorn’, I found beneath a pile of magazines a copy of The Illustrated London News for the 10 November, opened it and scanned the sepia toned illustration of weekly world events, many not terribly interesting to a fourteen year old, but then to my delight and amazement I found a double-page spread devoted to Lawrence Wright’s Panorama from St Paul’s. Immediately the visit earlier in the summer to the museum, then in Kensington Palace, came back and my interest was aroused. I gazed at the reproductions transfixed, unusual perhaps for a boy of my age, but then I was fascinated by London and its history, and had been frequently walked round the City by my parents and was familiar with its buildings, some, especially Wren churches, standing as gaunt ruins in a landscape of green covered cellars. What should I do, could I ask to take the journal home? Perhaps, better still as a compromise, ask if I could take the pages home by carefully removing them from the staples holding the journal together. To my immense relief and pleasure the manager allowed me to do this and I have retained the pages to this day. On subsequent visits to the museum over the years it
was not on display due to shortage of space.

Years later I happened to be talking about the panorama with my daughter who revealed to my amazement that Lawrence Wright's granddaughter was a close university friend. We subsequently met as my interest in this neglected work was rekindled. In 2004 I made an appointment with the Museum of London to see the works which were brought out from store. They allowed me to take photographs of each sheet for my own interest. I then approached the London Topographical Society with the suggestion that it might make an interesting subject for a study. At the time society funds were limited and there was the question of the cost of possible copyright, let alone costs of quality reproduction? With the publication of the London Bomb Damage Maps in 2005, I wrote again suggesting Wright's pictures would complement the evidence of damage shown on the large-scale maps, and would be of great interest with the City skyline so dramatically changing year on year. In 2012 several members of the LTS committee visited the museum to view the work, again brought out of store, and agree that it would make suitable study for publication. The Wright family and museum have agreed to the publication rights, with the result that this hitherto neglected work of Wright, created over six years, will reach an appreciative public and act as a visual record of the City, as valuable as Hollar's views in the seventeenth century.


2. The Illustrated London News, 10 November 1956, pp. 800-801. This feature was to mark the panorama's exhibition in the London Museum. It was last exhibited at the Museum of London in the Barbican in 1995. As far as I know it was not illustrated in any other Journal.

Changing London

This is a picture of a new building which will have disappeared by the time you read this. Starting in 2000, every year an eminent architect whose work has not yet been seen in Britain is invited to create a summer pavilion outside the Serpentine gallery in Hyde Park. The variety of shapes and materials has been huge, and have sometimes been self-consciously showy.

This year’s calm circular timber pavilion, with an ingenious roof which funnels rain into a central waterfall, is something different. The architect is the West-African-born Diébédo Francis Kéré, principal architect at Kéré Architecture, based in Berlin. Kéré was trained in Berlin but born in 1965 in Gando, Burkina Faso, and is celebrated for innovative buildings in his home town influenced by traditional architecture. His pavilion is inspired by a tree, a traditional West African gathering place in the centre of a village.

The sheltering walls of slatted timber in triangular patterns, allowing air and light to penetrate, are painted blue, which he explains is a colour traditionally associated with special occasions. These ideas are skilfully integrated in a creation which has a crispness and reticence that reflects the influence on Kéré of his hero Mies van der Rohe, whose motto was ‘less is more’, but has a relaxed informality as appropriate to a London park as to an African village.

Although the pavilion is a summer event there are two permanent galleries nearby: the Serpentine, opened 1970 in a former tea house, and the Serpentine Sackler, in a former gunpowder store. See Serpentinegalleries.org.
Copyhold tenure and the nature of development in the manor of Stepney

Mark Ballard was the Archivist on Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives’ Land and Lives project, and a cataloguing assistant on the Manorial Documents Register for Sussex and the Survey of London’s Whitechapel project. He has now returned to Maidstone as an archivist at the Kent History Centre. This article is adapted from a blogpost on the Survey of London’s Histories of Whitechapel website.

There has been controversy between historians seeking to account for the cheaper housing and piecemeal nature of development in the East End compared with more structured planning in the eighteenth century further west. Since Dorothy George’s London Life in the Eighteenth Century (1925) they have sought to explain it in the context of custom of the manors of Stepney and Hackney, originating before the Reformation when the bishops of London were the landlords. By one particular custom, copyholders could lease their land for a maximum of only 31 years, risking forfeiture of their copyholds by the lord of Stepney manor if they transgressed. Such short building leases would dissuade tenants from building to proper standards. This explanation was broadly accepted by Alan Palmer, for instance, in his book on the East End, though he pointed to areas such as Wellclose Square and Swedenborg Gardens as exceptions to the usual lack of pattern. “The persistence of the ancient copyhold system of tenure ruled out rich rewards for speculative investment on a large scale... So curious a restraint helped to make land cheaper, but it also favoured the spread of small houses, haphazardly packed into narrow streets.”

John Marriott also believes the 31-year limit on lease terms accounts for speculative low-quality house building in seventeenth-century Stepney, yet apparently loses sight of the fact that the restriction applied only to copyhold land.

Derek Morris, indeed, does not accept the orthodoxy of Whitechapel property as the poorest investment on the Monopoly board. He has used sources such as land tax and insurance records to portray it in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries not as a squalid den of poverty and vice but instead as a respectable suburb, the home of naval and professional men, and a thriving industrial and trading centre. He has recently argued that the 31-year leases could be renewed on the payment of a fine to the lord of the manor. What is more, “Local historians have known for many years that while [short leases] may have been the original intention of the lord of the manor, the actual practice was very different. Leases were granted of 66, 99 or 500 years in order to obtain the fines.” If this is so, the post-Reformation lords of Stepney manor, first the Wentworths and then the Colebrookes, were open to corruption, as they could be induced to break their own rules to authorise development.

Most of the area of the present-day Borough of Tower Hamlets, including the parish of Whitechapel, lay within the manor of Stepney. While working on two projects to revise the catalogues of title deeds held at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, I have certainly found that long lease terms were not uncommon within Stepney manor. But they would not have been possible on copyhold land, which reverted to the lord of the manor on the tenant’s surrender or death. Tenants’ admissions to and surrenders of copyhold land in the manor are recorded in its court rolls and books, which survive with some gaps from 1318, including an uninterrupted sequence of 88 court books at London Metropolitan Archives dating from 1654 to 1925. It would be difficult to indicate on a map of Stepney which land was copyhold at any particular date, because it was so fragmented even by early modern times, and the property descriptions in the court roll rarely precise enough. But those deeds held at Tower Hamlets Archives corresponding to copyhold transactions are usually easily recognisable as they take the form of copies from the court roll.

The cornerstone of Tower Hamlets Archives’ holdings of title deeds is those parts of the private collections of J. Coleman and F. Marcham that related to Stepney, which the Metropolitan Borough purchased in 1909. Among these, I have recatalogued 89 titles to land in Whitechapel parish or in close proximity to it, whose deeds date from 1574 to 1838, and of them only nine are obviously copyholds. In a further group of deeds of unofficial origin, dating mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, either for land in Whitechapel or described as Stepney (as they predate the successive separation of Shadwell, Wapping, St George in the East, Spitalfields, Limehouse, Bow, Bethnal Green and Poplar from the ancient parish of Stepney), the number of obvious copyhold titles is 31 out of a total of 155. Although there are, in addition, a number of short leases of 31 years or less, some of which might within the rules have been of copyhold land, the majority of the titles are for freehold land, which could be bought and sold, or leased for unlimited periods.

For instance, land at the east end of Whitechapel High Street and on the Thames foreshore at Limehouse was being leased in the 1580s for 500-year terms by Henry lord Wentworth. As he was lord of Stepney, this land might have been part of the manorial desmesne or waste, and there seemed to be no subsequent restriction on the leaseholders assigning these leases for the remainder of the term, nor about private individuals leasing freehold property for even longer terms. Such long leases of copyhold land would have been impossible, though copyholders could express intentions in their wills to keep it in their family, and even entail it. As for
the manorial fine, it was a customary payment to the lord whenever a new manorial tenant was admitted to copyhold land. It should not be regarded as punitive, although elsewhere in the country entry fines are known to have increased during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially if rents to the lord, set by custom, remained unchanged. 

If the lords of Stepney wished or needed to raise cash from copyholders willing to purchase, they could enfranchise copyhold land, i.e. convert it to freehold, long before the Copyhold Act of 1852 allowed tenants to demand this. One major copyholder of the mid-eighteenth century was the Reverend Edward Baynes of County Mayo, who held about 60 plots on the south side of Whitechapel Road and Mile End Road, including the ‘Prince of Orange’s Head’ and the ‘Black Horse’. On his death about 1765, his son was admitted to them but soon disentailed and then surrendered 4½ acres to Sir George Colebrooke, lord of Stepney, to which a ‘gentleman of the Tower of London’, Anthony Forman, was then admitted. Colebrooke then enfranchised it, allowing Forman to purchase the freehold and then to develop the area of Fieldgate Street and Greenfield Street in a succession of leases to builders. 

The restrictions of copyhold, then, were generally limited to relatively small pockets of Stepney and could be overcome prior to development by legal means. Other parts of Tower Hamlets’ deeds collections indicate that copyhold tenure might be more common in areas of the manor where urbanisation came later, such as Ratcliff, Limehouse and Poplar. So while this has no claim to be a representative survey, it suggests that Alan Palmer’s and Derek Morris’s assumptions about the persistence and generality of copyhold in urban Stepney are misplaced. We must look to other causes to explain the pattern of development in the East End. The Survey of London is finding parallels elsewhere, for example Clerkenwell, to indicate that the East End’s development was not the result of manorial constraints unique to Stepney. If we suspect its lords were open to corruption, we need more evidence, and probably comparisons with the degree to which lords of the manor in other London suburbs adhered to custom.

– Mark Ballard

5. Now recatalogued within Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (TDLHLA), P/SLC/1.
6. TDLHLA, P/SLC/1/17/3-4; L/SMB/G/1/3.
8. TDLHLA, P/SLC/2/16/16-17; P/SLC/2/7/1-30.

The Newsletter Editor welcomes suggestions from readers for items in the Newsletter.

The deadline for contributions to the May Newsletter is 16 April 2018.

For contact details see the back page.
A railway through eight millennia of London

David Crawford discusses some of the varied discoveries made during the excavations for Crossrail, which throw new light on London’s history.

For those that missed the recent Museum of London Docklands exhibition, ‘Tunnel: The Archaeology of Crossrail’, a permanent digital record is now accessible at: https://archaeology.crossrail.co.uk/?view=1&heading=284&pitch=-1

The DNA of the 1655 Great Plague bacterium, embedded in human teeth, is one of the more unusual finds among tens of thousands of archaeological relics unearthed during the excavation of London’s new Elizabeth Line (formerly Crossrail) which is due to start carrying passengers in 2018. The discovery is now aiding epidemiological studies worldwide.

Others evoke the capital’s industries – from Mesolithic flint toolmaking to Victorian pickling and preserving; entertainment – from Roman feasting to a much beloved scene of pop music spectacles; and transport – from Bronze Age waymarkers to a resurrected train tunnel.

Teams from Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA – an archaeological and built heritage charity spun off from the Museum) and partner organisations have followed the below-ground route of the railway from east to west.

Fitting their work into tight slots in the construction programme, they have explored layers of subsoil uncovered at station and portal sites to find long-buried evidence of 8000 years of London’s history. The exhibition took place within a year of tunnelling ending – a remarkable achievement.

Among the historical gaps in knowledge that have been filled, excavations near Liverpool Street Station have produced rare physical evidence of the practice of body snatching, which delivered much needed specimens for dissection to the London hospitals. One coffin had been weighted down with a heavy stone slab, to discourage attempts to rob it. A shortage of legitimate teaching material (the remains of executed criminals) spawned a flourishing illegal trade. Members of the shadowy ‘Corporation of Corpse Stealers’ could earn sixpence (2.5p) per burial in their official role as gravediggers – but as much as a guinea (£1.05) for disinterring a corpse and selling it on. (Despite its members’ undoubted mercantile acumen, the ‘Corporation’ failed to attain the formal status of a City livery company.)

A MOLA publication on the work, The New Churchyard: from Moorfields marsh to Bethlehem burial ground, Brokers Row and Liverpool Street is due out by end-2017 and will be available from www.mola.org.uk/publications.

Another fruitful central area site for exploration lay near Tottenham Court Road station, where Crosse and Blackwell had their preserves and pickle factory until 1921, flavouring the air of the neighbourhood with what a contemporary writer called ‘a distinctive pungency’. Tonnes of glass and stoneware bottles and jars have surfaced to tell their tale of Britain’s kitchen cupboards over the decades.

After the company moved away in 1921 there arrived on the site the Astoria Cinema, later a theatre and pop music venue until it was compulsorily purchased in 2009 for demolition as the site for a Crossrail ticket hall. Like other buildings that have disappeared in the path of the project, it had been meticulously surveyed and photographed as part of an extensive recording process.

One defunct structure that has regained its life, rather than losing it, is the Connaught Tunnel, completed in 1879 to carry a section of the former North London Railway, much of which now forms part of the London Overground network, underneath the Royal Docks. The only pre-existing stretch of tunnel along the 42km subterranean network, it has been cleared of its original ironwork and effectively rebored, to gain the height needed to accommodate the necessary overhead cabling for trains.

The sheer length of the new line, above and below ground, has served to bestow a share of the limelight to outlying areas of London, whose archaeological history has previously been thin, from Old Oak Common in the west to Plumstead in the south-east. The former is a major railway heritage site, developed in 1899 as a depot for the Great Western Railway as its needs outgrew the environs of Paddington Station and continuing in partial use until 2009. A depot for the new line’s rolling stock will form part of a 670ha new town-scale regeneration zone with its own new transport
links. In the latter area, Bronze Age wooden posts, roughly shaped by adzes, once marked a safe path for travellers over what were then marshy and dangerous wetlands.

An archaeologist studies a Bronze Age waymarking post (© Crossrail)


As a postscript some other recent MOLA activities are worth noting:

The 2016 excavation of the site of Shakespeare's Curtain Theatre in Shoreditch revealed remaining parts of the original structure. These are being showcased in a dedicated cultural centre forming part of the £750 million The Stage scheme. The developers hope this will be Hackney's first scheduled ancient monument. (see The Stage Shoreditch.com)

A dig at Bloomberg Place, between the Bank of England and St Paul’s Cathedral, has yielded the largest quantity of Roman leather ever to have ever been unearthed in the capital, including hundreds of shoes. The marshy conditions around the now buried Walbrook river had served as an excellent preservative.

Recording techniques deployed by the archaeologists include not only conventional surveying and photography, but laser scanning, which can quickly generate a digital copy of a vanished structure for future observation and analysis, as for example the former GWR depot's repair shop at Old Oak Common.

An isometric laser scan of the former GWR depot’s repair shop at Old Oak Common (© Crossrail)

From red boxes to blogs

The value of historic photographs in local collections is well known. It is often the first port of call for those researching their area. and is one which has been much exploited by recent popular publications. Perhaps less familiar are the photographs of all parts of London which can be found in the national collection now in the care of Historic England at their centre at Swindon. Those with long memories may recall the 'red boxes' of mounted photographs in what began as the National Buildings Record, which used to be housed in Savile Row, and in the more distant past in Great College Street, Westminster. Their move to Swindon was much lamented by London historians. But the welcome news is that 600,000 of the photos in the Red Boxes have been digitised and can be consulted on line. Coverage is patchy, and searching is somewhat idiosyncratic, but the digital collection is a welcome asset for those reluctant to make the trip to Swindon. The records rather charmingly capture the original character of the material: photos mounted on roughly A4 size brown card, identified bottom left in various styles of often rather scruffy handwriting. The photos are often attached only at the upper edge so that one can access details of acquisition and photographer recorded on the back – and the backs have been photographed too, with the helpful facilities of ‘rotate’ and ‘zoom’ so that one does not have to read the details upside down. Not all the photos are dated. Although one can hazard a guess from two digits on the acquisition record these may reflect date of acquisition not date of photography. The scope is wide, including nineteenth-century views of subjects such as Tower Bridge under construction; small wartime photos from when film was scarce and expensive; and the excellent records of churches made in the 1960s by Gordon Barnes. In some cases the information is amplified by a listing description, map and other notes. A
high proportion of the older photos is devoted to churches, demonstrating the priorities of sixty years ago. Tower Hamlets has 2304 cards in 36 boxes: of these churches account for 844 cards in 14 boxes. One cannot anticipate what the collection is likely to hold. I searched for the People’s Palace and Queen Mary College, site of our last AGM, and found photos of the sleek art deco hall rebuilt in the 1930s after a fire, but nothing showing the splendid Victorian Octagon where we held our meeting. You may not find what you want but you may certainly find something interesting. To search the collection, visit: http://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/archive-collections/englands-places/ (or google Historic England photographs).

Modern digital technology not only allows us to access past records, but enables the dissemination of history as it is being discovered. An example is the excellent blog site of the Survey of London, which provides bite-sized previews of research in advance of formal publication. The current Whitechapel project invites contributions from the public and is proving to be a lively forum. The most recent blog to arrive in my inbox is ‘The Royal London Hospital Estate, a self-guided walk in Whitechapel’ with excellent photos of both the imposing old hospital buildings (under conversion to a Civic Centre) and the ‘assertive purpose-built’ new hospital block behind. If you too sign up you will be notified by email whenever there is a new entry. Congratulations to the Survey also on the recent publication of its two recent Marylebone volumes, which will be reviewed in our next issue.

– Bridget Cherry

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Reviews

ISBN 978 1 42142 204 6 £40.50
Electronic version 978 1 42142 205 3

Water has many uses. We are urged to take a bottle of water with us on our tube travels, we shower or take a bath in it, the firemen put out fires with it, industrial processes use it, streets are cleansed with it and sewers are flushed with it. There has been much literature on the various London Water companies – this book concentrates on the organisation and management of the companies in its middle years. There is a brief introduction describing conduits of lead or stone for bringing water to London population centres from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Initially only trade users had to pay, private individuals getting a free supply but soon all were charged. Conduits like almshouses could be endowed by benefactors but the cost of the infrastructure soon demanded a more organised industry and imported expertise, such as the waterwheel pumps of the German Peter Morris who started what became the London Bridge Water Works company leasing several northern arches of the bridge from the Corporation. Boring machine for hollowing out tree trunks as water pipes facilitated distribution until the advent of cast iron pipes.

Many jobs were created, including water carriers to bring water from conduit heads to people’s homes, turncocks for controlling valves in pipe network to allow a water supply to certain areas only at certain hours and payment collectors (working on commission). The Corporation changed from water provider to facilitator, allowing pipes to be laid in streets and providing loans to entrepreneurs. The latter soon formed joint-stock companies in which investors sought profits rather than provided philanthropy. The City and later the Crown made profit from the grant of patents. Hugh Myddelton successfully negotiated the politics of Crown versus Parliament in setting up the New River company whose sources in Hertfordshire were much purer than that of the London Bridge company, but that company’s open channel was at risk from bathers and fly-tippers, so had pollution problems as well.

There are maps, but the small page size means that detail is hard to see. There are illustrations of company buildings and of the equipment used in distribution and tables of consumption and dividends. Each chapter has a page or so of summary at the end and there is an overall summary as the final chapter, followed by 60 pages of notes and bibliography. You may not find details of when water reached your inner London street, but this is a scholarly account of the way the industry as a whole was organised and financed within London before the Victorian era.

If you have read this far you may be interested in a talk on managing water in eighteenth century London – see p.3.

– Roger Cline


Anyone who has read Charles Dickens’s Little Dorrit will have formed a vivid impression of the Marshalsea Prison: a congeries of old, ramshackle buildings on the east side of Borough High Street in Southwark, breeding anomic and despair among those who were unfortunate, or foolish, enough to spend part of their lives there. The title of Jerry White’s lively, readable book is taken from a letter written in 1802 from the Marshalsea by Thomas Prattant, an engraver, describing his own incarceration. His engraving, published in the
*Gentleman's Magazine* in 1804, shows a collection of dilapidated buildings of different dates and styles, including a seventeenth-century court room supported on Tuscan columns, arranged around an irregular courtyard known as the ‘Park’. Here the inmates on the ‘masters’ side’ – men like Little Dorrit’s father, most but not all of them debtors – paid (or persuaded others to pay for them) to be housed with a modicum of comfort and privacy, comparable perhaps to a cheap and noisy hotel in one of the less salubrious parts of London. There was a bar, a coffee shop and chop house, together with a ‘snuggerly’ or common room in which the ‘collegians’ could entertain friends, and it was even possible to leave the premises (accompanied) on occasion.

Conditions for the poorer prisoners on the ‘common side’ were squalid in the extreme: filthy, insanitary, desperately overcrowded, the prisoners’ lives sometimes made worse by the exactions of cruel and rapacious gaolers such as William Acton, the Deputy Marshal who appears frequently in the diary of John Baptist Grano, a musician incarcerated for debt in 1728-9 whose colourful diary of John Baptist Grano, a musician is described here in detail. Some of the prison’s worst excesses were remedied following a Parliamentary enquiry prompted by James Oglethorpe, later to achieve fame as one of the founders of the state of Georgia in North America. But the prison remained a sad place of forlorn hopes and thwarted ambition until its closure in 1811 and its relocation 130 yards to the south, next to the church of St George the Martyr. It was in this second prison, a grim, though less insanitary, block of four-storeyed back-to-back houses looking out on to a blank wall, that Dickens’s father, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, was held in 1824, when the future novelist was 12 years old, and few tears can have been shed when it too was closed in 1842. It later became a printing works and a warehouse before being demolished by the London Borough of Southwark in the 1970s; the Borough’s Local Studies Centre now occupies part of the site.

Jerry White is careful historian and experienced writer with a good eye for detail, and anyone wanting to know more about pettifogging lawyers, bailiffs and sponging houses – in which many debtors were arrested – can do much worse than to read the first chapter of his book. Most writs against debtors did not end in imprisonment, and White points out that three-quarters of the Marshalsea’s inmates in the second half of the eighteenth century spent less than three months there; the long sojourn of Dickens’s ‘Father of the Marshalsea’, around whom much of the action of *Little Dorrit* revolves, was an exception rather than the rule. Much – perhaps too much – of the book is taken up with the life stories of real prisoners such as James Cooke, a confidence trickster *par excellence* who unsuccessfully claimed the Stafford peerage in the 1820s, and the lawyer uncle of the poet Walter de la Mare, who managed to spend three spells in debtors’ prisons, including the Marshalsea, in the 1830s and 40s, having been relentlessly pursued for ‘criminal conversation’ by a naval captain with whose wife he had had an affair. The establishment of the Insolvent Debtors’ Court and the passing of a new law in 1838 led to the end of the Marshalsea, but the prison lived on in Dickens’s imagination as a metaphor for the constraints that stifle human potential everywhere. That is one among several reasons why Jerry White’s book is worth reading, and if it encourages readers to return to Dickens’s incomparable novel it will have more than served its purpose.

– Geoffrey Tyack

**Lambeth’s Victorian Architecture**


Edmund Bird’s previous excellent books have established him as a perceptive recorder of twentieth century Lambeth architecture. Here, in the same handsome four-square format, he and Fiona Price turn their attention to the riches of Victorian Lambeth, the period when the area developed from a corner of rural Surrey into a part of London, with its own churches, civic buildings and amenities, becoming one of the capital’s most densely populated and heavily industrialised suburbs. There is a helpful historical introduction drawing attention to some significant milestones: the appointment of the first Medical Officer of Health in 1855 and the creation of sewers; then the arrival of the railways followed by the development of commuter housing. The photos start with the first public buildings: Vestry Hall, Police station, Fire stations. Cemeteries and libraries followed, (the latter after 1888 when ratepayers voted in their favour). One of the many merits of the book is the inclusion of a scattering of well chosen older photos contrasted with today’s views. The magnificent Tate Library in South Lambeth Road is revealed to have once been even more imposing, with crowning cupolas and a grand entrance porch. There is a striking and rather unexpected transformation of an old landmark at Gypsy Hill, where the church was demolished after a fire in 1998, but its tower has survived as centepiece of a surprisingly sympathetic house. Churches are prominent in a telling final section called Lost Lambeth, which also tells us what has happened to their sites. Some had (often mediocre) replacements, others have vanished completely, as in the case of the proudly spired Trinity Presbyterian church in Clapham, which gave way...
to a printing works in 1959 which is now a tool hire depot. Other losses recorded here include many industrial buildings and forgotten older railway stations such as the grandly named London Necropolis Railway terminal of 1900, which stood in Westminster Bridge Road until destroyed in 1941.

But this is not a book of nostalgic reminiscences, it is a celebration of the enjoyable variety of Victorian buildings that remain. Many of these are not major buildings by famous architects; they are minor service buildings for the local community, created with pride in their function, and with details designed to impress or delight the passerby, such as the grand façade of the Mail Delivery office at Brixton proclaiming the significance of Royal Mail, or the attractive park buildings for the new suburb of Myatts Fields Park, demonstrating concern for local amenity. The Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company proudly advertised its existence with its surprisingly exotic Moorish-style Pumping Station at Streatham. This, we are told, is listed II*, but not all the buildings mentioned have that level of protection, and the book will be an invaluable tool in drawing attention to the merits of lesser buildings deserving preservation and sensitive treatment. Pub enthusiasts will be pleased to find 30 pages devoted to public houses of every type. Housing is divided by areas, giving some idea of the separate identities of the different parts of the present borough: the poorer working class housing among the industries near the river, the more middle class commuting areas expanding around the older settlements further south. The book is an admirable example of how to connect architectural and social history through excellent photographs and informative short texts. It should be a reference work for all Lambeth planners and in the hands of anyone interested in south London.

– Bridget Cherry

**Up in Smoke: The Failed Dreams of Battersea Power Station** by Peter Watts, Paradise Road, 2016, 270pp. ISBN 978 0 99357 020 9, £20 available from Central Books, orders@centralbooks.com

Will Self has described it as an inverse pool table that “squats on the beer-soaked pub carpet of the London sky”. Self would probably rather see Battersea Power Station demolished and the site redeveloped with genuinely affordable housing. But demolition has never been an option since Michael Heseltine, reacting to the wilful destruction of the Firestone Factory Building in 1980, gave the power station later that year Grade II listed status. In Peter Watts’s most engaging and superbly researched book the story of Battersea Power Station starts with a failed scheme from the Edwardian era to build on the site of the disused Southwark and Vauxhall Waterworks Company an amusement park inspired by Coney Island, New York. It ends with the acquisition of the site by a Malaysian consortium in 2012, leading to the huge project now under way and scheduled for completion in 2026 at a cost of £9 billion.

Improved technology, in the form of ‘gas scrubbing’, overcame the initial concerns about a coal-fired power station so close to central London. But it was the choice of architect, Giles Gilbert Scott, that ensured for the industrial cathedral its enduring place in most Londoners’ affections. After providing electricity for 50 years, interspersed with use of the landmark as a film and photographic location (most famously for Pink Floyd’s 1977 *Animals* album cover), the power station ceased production in 1983. Over the next 30 years the schemes of one developer after another foundered. These often extraordinary events are vividly described by Watts, who sees them in the wider context of the economic and social trends of the time. His account is helped by the use of interviews he has obtained with many of those originally involved.

In his conclusion Watts views the scheme that will see the transformation of this grand survivor of London’s industrial past with no enthusiasm. The failed projects “may have been gauche or simply unbuildable, but at least there was passion and a vision. It is hard to view what came after as being about anything other than money.” He likes to imagine the power station still proudly standing a century from now with the massed buildings of the Viñoly masterplan the victim of the wrecking ball of redevelopment. One hopes that a New Zealander as imagined by Macaulay and another Gustave Doré will be there to ponder and record the sight.

– Laurence Marsh


According to the Streatham Sketchbook, Streatham is a corner of the Capital ‘too often overlooked’: a place the *Evening Standard* not so long ago declared the third least desirable postcode in London (even in a race to the bottom – Streatham only made ‘Bronze’) and a neighbourhood with the worst high street in Britain according to some poll or other published around the same time.

But the creators of the Streatham Sketchbook, an offbeat, patchwork quilt of a book – which stitches together the old and the new, the familiar and unexpected, the mundane and the beautiful – know
much better. Their book could go some way to restoring Streatham’s reputation (amongst those who take their cue from the property pages) and reignite interest amongst those who live and work in the neighbourhood. The term ‘sketchbook’ is apt, as this is a richly illustrated book, as much about art and creativity as about Streatham. Every page is filled with imagery and the inventive design, layout, photography and illustration contribute as much to its charm as the comprehensive research, journalism and ideas behind the text.

The book is largely based on the work of local artist Jiro Osuga, a Japanese painter who trained at St Martins and the Royal College of Art. Osuga’s work: paintings of Streatham and other suburban scenes, as well as numerous (often fantastical) self-portraits and still lives, provide a frame around which the author, Mireille Galinou, weaves her narrative. To some degree, the book is set-up as a conversation (and sometimes juxtaposition) between Osuga’s work and the fabric, history and character of his adopted hometown.

But along its meandering journey, the sketchbook also takes in a panoply of local, artistic associations, from the great Streatham-based patrons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Thrale, Leaf and Tate, who supported the development of British art, through to the artists whose own lives and works intersected with the area at one time or another. These include the famous names of Millais, Turner and Van Gogh, alongside lesser known figures such as Winifred Knights, or William Dyce who, in 1838, helped establish the Royal College of Art, providing a coincidental (maybe auspicious) connection back to Osuga. The book also draws upon Streatham’s Art Deco heritage and the contemporary art ‘scene’ in order to paint a picture of an area that continues to surprise anyone willing to dig a little deeper in pursuit of arts and culture. Osuga himself, however, readily admits that Streatham has not provided inspiration for his work. It’s just where he lives. His paintings, more than 40 of which are reproduced here, sometimes make use of Streatham locations but they are not specifically concerned with Streatham as a subject. Osuga’s work seems to be more about our culture and his place within it. Frequently featuring self-portraits, his work combines humour with a touch of pathos. Occasionally tinged with a sense of solitude or detachment, for the most part Osuga’s paintings are witty (comical even) with the artist poking fun at himself as much as at the world around him.

The Sketchbook pairs Osuga’s art (and his own thoughts on his work, Streatham and life in general) with a more conventional survey of Streatham the place. This includes a short history of Streatham; an overview of the contemporary character, demography and cultural mix of the area, along with an appraisal of Streatham’s artistic connections, past and present. The overall effect is to create a kind of collage; food for thought rather than a structured narrative. For Osuga, Streatham is an unremarkable place and he confesses to having no particular fondness for the area. As someone who grew-up in Streatham in the 80s, I can empathise. Yet this book has reawakened my interest and reminded me to look a little closer. As a child, you generally absorb your environment rather than study it and so the Sketchbook has drawn my attention to much of what I’d missed. I’d never come across the Victorian pumping station on Conyers Road for instance; had no idea about the area’s silk weaving; never knew that a Streatham mason had built the National Gallery and was only vaguely acquainted with the Art Deco architecture dotted throughout its streets.

While Osuga plays against Streatham’s apparent ordinariness in order to share his own observations on life, Galinou manages to reveal the exceptional hidden just below the surface. Whichever approach appeals most, this combination should prove more than enough to intrigue any reader with an interest in London topography beyond the well-worn themes of ‘historic’, ‘quirky’ or ‘vibrant’.

– Richard Wells

Mobilising Housing Histories. Learning from London’s past edited by Peter Guillery and David Kroll, RIBA Publishing, 235pp 2017
ISBN 978 1 85946 631 5

This is a collection of essays which developed from a conference held at the Institute of Historical Research in 2013; a response to London’s present severe housing crisis. Examining the past, as David Kroll observes in his introductory essay, can help to dispel myths and explain how we have reached the present situation. A number of approaches are offered by the broad spectrum of authors – who include architects, academics, architectural critics, historians and, not least, researchers for the Survey of London (which is now a part of the Bartlett School of Architecture).

Peter Guillery’s introductory historical narrative is followed by case studies of different areas and housing types. These include much that will fascinate the London topographer. David Kroll provides a detailed account of the estate developed from 1870 by the Minet family on their land in Lambeth, while Colin Thom analyses the variety of Victorian house types to be found in Battersea (the subject of a recent Survey volume). One of the key themes is the adaptability of the ostensibly single family Victorian house at different times, whether for accommodation for a family on each floor, for
households taking in lodgers, or (today) as a luxury pad for the wealthy. Another is the changing fortunes of different areas. This aspect is explored revealingly in Tanis Hinchcliff’s analysis of the gentrification of Canonbury from 1850, which unravels the improving efforts of the private landlord, the Marquess of Northampton, and of the property investors who became involved from the 1930s, followed by discussion of the post-war role of the local council, and the rise of the private owner able to buy once mortgage lenders were convinced of a reliable investment. One of the more under-researched areas of London’s history, the purpose-built privately rented mansion flat, is investigated by Richard Dennis. Flats for the wealthy were promoted from the later nineteenth century in imitation of a Parisian lifestyle, but met with some suspicion (as the French ‘chambre’ was mistakenly assumed always to denote a bedchamber). It was feared that interconnecting rooms could promote immorality. Flats at the top were cheaper; the expensive ‘penthouse’ (an American term), only became fashionable after World War II. But there were plenty of successful flats (mostly in North and West London) which catered for the middle classes as well as the wealthy, and Dennis presents them as examples of ‘densification’ of housing on small sites which may offer lessons for the future.

The huge subject of housing for the poor, and the social engineering that it could entail, is tackled in various ways; Irina Davidovici examines the ruthlessly plain but functional character of the Peabody housing built by the architect Alfred Darbishire, while Simon Pepper chronicles changing government and local authority approaches to high rise flats after World War II. Current pressure to build at high density is considered by the architect Simon Hudspith, who reflects on the need for a sense of identity and how this was achieved in crowded urban communities in the past. Two thought-provoking essays discuss the reactions of inhabitants to the enforced reconstruction or remodelling of their environments. Peter Guillery’s account of South Acton sadly demonstrates the failure of both social and architectural sustainability in the long-drawn-out period of post war reconstruction, a pattern repeated in the rebuilding campaigns of recent years, despite local efforts to foster a sense of place. David Roberts’ subject is Goldfinger’s famous Balfron Tower in Poplar: he describes how through ‘performative workshops’ and oral history he campaigned with current and former tenants to maintain Balfron as ‘a beacon for social housing’. But in vain. Attempts to stop refurbishment and privatisation were unsuccessful, despite the II* listing of the building which recognised its design as a social entity.

The book demonstrates that much thought is being given to what might be learned from the past, not producing instant solutions but setting today’s problems in perspective.

—Bridget Cherry


The two small South-East London streets celebrated here have yet to figure in most guides to the capital’s architectural assets. Yet their combined tally of a mere 20 low-cost homes helped give the modern concept of self-building a foothold in the UK.

Walter Segal, who died in 1985 having arrived in Britain 50 years earlier, was a modernist architect and pioneer. His 1948 Home and Environment set out a post-war vision of low-rise, high-density, individual housing – his thinking similar to that of Neave Brown (see Notes and News).

While this was never realised on any scale, Segal’s 1963 creation of a temporary timber family shelter in the garden of his Victorian house in Highgate, while this was being demolished and replaced, brought external commissions and sowed the seed for the two Lewisham enclaves. (The shelter has now succumbed to the ravages of time. But the current owner of the property, Matt Gibberd, grandson of Sir Frederick Gibberd and a director of the Modern House estate agency, has commissioned a replacement from design collective Assemble, who won the 2015 Turner Prize.)

An important step forward for Segal’s thinking came in 1977, when Lewisham Borough Council’s Housing Committee made two small sites available to families on its housing waiting list who were prepared to build their own homes, using the Segal approach. (The then committee chair was Nicholas Taylor, the architectural historian and author of The Village in the City.)

Thirty and more years on, the houses have matured, most of them having been imaginatively adapted, as the design was intended to allow, by their original or later residents. The minimal foundations: timber frames, bolted and screwed together; industrial external cladding panels and non loadbearing interior walls were all designed to dispense with the need for specialist skills and wet trades.

Some of the current owners first saw their homes during a London Open House weekend. Two of them, journalist Alice Grahame and photographer Taran Wilkhu, tell the story of their properties in this densely illustrated volume.

Meanwhile, Segal’s concept is now being given a new lease of life by the Lewisham-based Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) which, earlier in 2017, launched a crowdfunded campaign so create a self-build knowledge hub. This will be the first
stage of a Segal-inspired community housing scheme at Church Grove, in the borough.
May it thrive.

– David Crawford


This is an elegantly produced small picture book by an author and photographer who wants to share his enthusiasm for the concrete architecture of the 1960s-70s, that distinctive episode in London’s architectural history. He is not concerned about whether his subjects functioned successfully, or indeed, what their function is; he aims to celebrate their visual impact. Phipps depicts his buildings as abstract sculpture on a grand scale: dramatic, often aggressive, shapes austerely pictured in black and white to accentuate form and detail, and viewed from unusual angles, with no distracting human interest. The camera is used to accentuate what the author in his introduction calls the ‘urban sublime’. Subjects are arranged under boroughs, each with a map. It is no surprise to find well-publicised examples such as Alexandra Road in Camden and Balfron tower in Tower Hamlets (both are mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter); but the buildings in (for example) Southwark and Hammersmith may be less familiar. The brief end-notes reveal that 28 of the examples shown are listed buildings, but the other 50 are not; a few of those shown have already been demolished, the future of others may be uncertain. Go and experience them while you can.

– Bridget Cherry

**London My London** by Victor Keegan.
Shakespearemonkey 2017.
ISBN 978 0 95407 625 2

Former Guardian journalist Victor Keegan much enjoys wandering around London, and has distilled his insights into over 80 idiosyncratic poems. “Don’t walk the streets, let them walk you” advises his London Walker – excellent advice for serendipitous pedestrians. There are oblique glimpses of Tate Modern, “where people are the art”: the Shard “looking down… like a godly chaperone”: St Mary Woolnoth, which welcomed the Northern Line into its crypt at the expense of reburying its one-time rector, the ex-slaver and abolitionist John Newton; and Centrepoint, “monstrously built à la mode” and dwarfing the “mere mound” of Fishmongers’ Hall, once the City’s tallest secular building. Nature thrusts her way through in The Longest Garden (the one alongside the railways); the London plane (deserving election as “arboreal mayor” for its role in filtering pollution); and Château Tooting, pressed from grapes harvested London-wide. Lines Written on Lambeth Bridge, on which “wordy Wordsworth turned his back”, evokes William Blake’s south-bank home near the steam-powered, flour producing Albion Works, the subject of its own tribute. Blake saw it as a symbol of the impending industrial revolution and took its shell, after a disastrous fire in 1791, as the inspiration for his ‘dark satanic mills’.

Born in a low rise London, Keegan sees the City’s spires as ‘urban sculptures’, ready to form a ‘churchscape of Hawksmoors and Wrens’ in the event of our losing the intervening office towers. (“Have we nothing to show more fair to our Creator, than a Gherkin, a Walkie Talkie and a Cheese Grater?” he plaintively asks.) He has also walked from Trafalgar Square to Islington without once crossing a road (a poem gives the clue). LTS members might like to try it. An unusual and jolly Christmas present for lovers of London to give and receive.

– David Crawford

**Editor’s omnium gatherum**

Our Newsletter can take note of only a few of the vast number of books published on London. But here is a selection of others which may be of interest. Details are listed below.

**The English Heritage Guide to Blue Plaques** is a straightforward compact reference work, updating earlier guides. It is arranged by area, each with a map, and 200 word mini-biographies for the c.900 people commemorated, whom you can also chase through the index. London in the Company of Painters by Richard Blandford is an enjoyable mixture of the familiar and the less familiar, with views by both British and continental artists, mostly of the nineteenth and twentieth century, arranged by geographical areas. Another picture book is the magnificent After the Fire, a record of late seventeenth- to early eighteenth-century architectural masterpieces by the eminent photographer and historian Angelo Hornak. On a much more modest scale are the unending flow of books produced by Amberley Publishing, which rely on illustrations for their appeal. Among them, Colin Manton’s Victorian London through time has instructive captions to the appealing illustrations taken from Thornbury and Walford’s Old and New London (1872-97), useful for those who do not possess that six volume work, while London’s East End by Michael Foley is explained by its subtitle, ‘Images from the archives of Historic England’. Guides to churches and burial grounds seem to be perennially popular. At last there is now an up to date comprehensive Guide to the churches of Greater London (both Anglican and Catholic) by Michael Hodges, well illustrated with colour photos. More specialised studies are on Sculpture in London cemeteries by Richard Barnes, and an attractive picture book on East End Jewish cemeteries. Finally a selection of local guide books for those keen to explore unfamiliar territory: Michael Foley is responsible for two small picture guides introducing Hornchurch and Barking and...
Dagenham: the Hornsey Historical Society has published two well-researched sets of walks, covering Muswell Hill and Highgate. But the prize in this field must go to the Blackheath Society for its attractive *Walking the Village. An introduction to its History* by the well-known local historians Neil Rhind and Roger Marshall, pocket-sized but packed with information and interesting illustrations.

Books mentioned:


ISBN 978 1 91025 808 8


ISBN 978 0 95669 408 2

The Art of Memory. in the Cemeteries of London by Richard Barnes, with an introduction by James Stevens Curl, Kirkstead. Frontier Publishing 2016, 34 col. ills. £44 paperback
ISBN 978 1 87291 444 2

ISBN 978 1 44566 290 9

Barking and Dagenham History Tour; Hornchurch History Tour both by Michel Foley, Amberley 2017, unpaginated, each with 40-50 subjects illustrated, £6.99 each.
ISBN 978 1 44566 888 8/978 1 44566 892 5

Muswell Hill Four Walks by Eleri Rowlands and Lesley Ramm, 2016, 38pp. £4.50.
ISBN 978 0 90579 455 6

ISBN 978 0 90579 451 8

ISBN 987 8 09565 3276 3

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**Bookshop Corner**

*Roger Cline introduces an exceptional bookshop in Bloomsbury*

Skoob bookS, a palindrome, is a mainly secondhand bookshop housed in the depths of The Brunswick. Patrick Hodgkinson’s concrete structure of the 1970s in Bloomsbury (there is a lift to get you there if required). I first encountered the shop when it was in Sicilian Avenue, off Southampton Row, but it has had various sites in The Brunswick over the intervening years. It is now under the energetic ownership of Chris Edwards who encourages the local students with discounts and plenty of academic stock; he recounts how three of a winning UCL University Challenge team of four were regular browsers in the shop. There is plenty for the non-academic reader, including fiction and a large London section. There is usually a Skoob stall at the monthly Royal National bookfair and in the local street pop-up markets. The staff are good at finding new stock and I have learnt of the demise of several LTS members by seeing their books on the shelves before the executors have got round to telling me.

The Brunswick had got rather sad towards the end of the last century, but the property company Allied London invested heavily in it, refurbishing the exterior and completely changing the character of the shops in the main courtyard. Replacing the Safeway supermarket with Waitrose provided a draw for many high street names, mainly in the clothing, mobile phone and eating fields. I thought the investment might be a disastrous mistake but it has turned out successfully, with a mainly young clientele of students and local office workers. The art cinema is now part of the Curzon chain. There is Judd Street Books (confusingly in Marchmont Street) and several other specialist bookshops in the vicinity (not to mention the British Library and Senate House), so if you are looking to buy or sell, a visit to Skoob can be combined with an exploration of the new Brunswick and its surroundings.

**Skoob Books, 66 Brunswick Centre, Bloomsbury, off Marchmont Street, London WC1N 1AE; 020 7278 8760**
The London Topographical Society was founded in 1880 for the study and appreciation of London. It is a registered charity (No. 271590) with around 1,200 members. The Society remains true to the vision of its founders by making available maps, plans and views illustrating the history, growth and topographical development of London at all periods, and by publishing research in the London Topographical Record. Details of all publications can be found on the Society’s website: www.londontopsoc.org

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ISSN 1369-7986
The Newsletter is published by the London Topographical Society twice a year, in May and November, and is issued by the Newsletter Editor Bridget Cherry, Bitterley House, Bitterley, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 3HJ.

Produced and printed by The Ludo Press Ltd, London SW17 OBA 020 8879 1881 www.ludo.co.uk