



Old Chiswick Protection Society

Autumn 2020 Newsletter

Old Chiswick Protection Society exists to preserve and enhance the amenities of this riverside conservation area.



Even the geese are social distancing!

[Photograph: David Humphreys]

Chairman's Message

As we look back at the last months, the Old Chiswick Conservation Area has become even more precious to many of us who live here, work here or visit. We have seen and spoken with visitors, previously unfamiliar with our environment and its atmosphere and history, who are enjoying it for the first time.

Nature carries on here regardless, and our history continues to be relevant and vital to our future. We can't take anything for granted though. It is only with the support of our members' subscriptions and diligent work that we are here today and can be so proud of what has been achieved by the charity over the last 60 years.

Old Chiswick could so easily have looked and felt very different: no Chiswick Eyot, with its unique warty beds and nature reserve; houses where Homefields Recreation Ground South is; an entirely different main road into and out of London, sacrificing more historical buildings; post-war housing instead of Georgian houses along Chiswick Mall.



The dray being decorated with hops for the first Chiswick flower market

[Photograph: Alan Munro]

Our community has done much to help others this year, and we continue to build relationships with those like Asahi who are new to the area since taking over Fuller's Brewery, and who have expressed a wish to become part of the community.

We look forward to inviting you to join our AGM this year, which will of course be conducted on line, with the very latest advice on meetings. It will be held on Monday 9th November 2020 at 7pm. More information on format will be provided later.

Meanwhile, we hope you'll enjoy the articles here in our second eNewsletter.

The Thames Tideway Tunnel – Rachel Has Arrived

It was in November 2004 that we heard the news that Homefield Recreation Ground was earmarked for a construction site the size of two football pitches to build one of the shafts for a new 'Super Sewer'. The spectre loomed of noise, odours, disruption 24/7 and consequential loss of property values.

There was no doubt that drastic action on sewage was necessary, as the old sewer could no longer cope. It frequently overflows into the Thames at times of heavy rainfall through some 50 'combined sewer outfalls'. Thames Water planned to intercept 34 of those in a massive new tunnel of hardly less diameter than the Channel Tunnel. This was to connect their Acton Works to their rebuilt Sewage Treatment Works at Becton (East London).

This became a hot item on our agenda, which Tony Taylor took in hand. During the following years, meetings were arranged with Phil Stride (Head of Tideway Tunnels) and John Ramage (Tunnel Project Director), several on site. These helped us to understand their ideas and to explain our conservation concerns.

John Ramage kept Tony up to date with design modifications that could affect our area and invited him to join a panel of interested parties meeting at their Paddington office to hear the latest news and advise on public consultations. As a result, Tony was able to provide information not only to our own members but also to interested neighbours, including Millers Court Residents, Fuller's, Thamesbank (an anti-tunnel movement) and Thames21.

During the following nine years, the Homefield proposal was dropped in favour of the then disused hospital site, which in turn was abandoned when consent was given for the Riverside Lodge development.

In the event, nearly all the construction sites are being built out into the Thames, with a foothold on the foreshores. The delivery of plant and materials and removal of excavated spoil is almost entirely by river rather than by road. These sites will become reclaimed recreational areas and provide access for routine tunnel maintenance. Thankfully, our section of tunnel is being built without any surface works between Acton and Hammersmith Bridge.

There are six TBMs (Tunnel Boring Machines); currently three of them are working on two tunnel sections, two have finished and the last is due to start soon. Having launched in Fulham, TBM Rachel

has arrived! She crossed under our foreshore opposite Eyot Gardens mid-summer and in September reached her destination in Acton. Things did not work out as planned, however. Her original line was intended to run under Millers Court. Instead it arrived some distance east, in line with Eyot Gardens.

There have been reports of rumbles and vibrations. Now that boring has finished, the tunnel is being lined and fitted out. It has a railway delivering materials and equipment, and work is being carried out on the finishings, some 80ft below the surface.



TBM Rachel – 7 metres in diameter

The whole project was due to be completed and commissioned by October 2024. Working in the Covid climate, there are bound to be delays.

For those interested, Thames Water have produced on their website www.tideway.london/tbm-tracker, a weekly up-dated chart showing the progress of all the TBMs.

Hogarth Triangle

The Society continues to be in touch with TfL about the planting on the Hogarth Triangle. TfL is ordering shrubs (Hypericum Hidcote and Hebe Mrs Winder) as well as perennial wildflowers, to be planted by the end of November. This will ensure the triangle is not empty next summer and autumn. The daffodils and alliums that were so lovely on the triangle last spring will flower again next year.

We have notified TfL that the orache weed has reappeared and will chase them again on this.

Graffiti

Displays of this art are on the increase everywhere, some worth much more than the buildings they are sprayed on. Unfortunately, the ones we're seeing here can't exactly be described as Banksy's. These ugly, mindless examples have a regular canvas particularly on the white walls, fences and street furniture of the A4 at the corner of Netheravon Road South. We have reported these three times to the Hounslow Highways Fix My Street website since the last Newsletter. We're pleased to say removal was quick and effective on each occasion.

Not so successful was removal of the pointless defacing of the two brick walls enclosing the slipway at the end of Church Street earlier this month. These walls are a significant asset in our Conservation Area and this amounted to criminal damage. Unusually, Fix My Street, rather than cleaning off the graffiti, decided to paint over it, leaving big patches of contrasting colour. This process is not considered 'appropriate removal' and we are following up. Since then, these vandals have struck in the same place again, as you can see in this photo. Where else in our Conservation Area will they strike? Much more needs to be done to eradicate this scourge.



[Photograph: Bunty Taylor]

Chiswick Old Cemetery: Entrance Signs

The Cemetery has sadly been without its entrance signs at both gates after they were removed for refurbishment some four years ago and lost by the department responsible!

After allowing for a cessation of maintenance work because of Covid, we have yet again, with Cllr Todd's support, approached Hounslow Council for these signs to be replaced, as they contain mandatory Health and Safety information, as well as emergency contact numbers and 'dos and don'ts'.

Chiswick Old Cemetery: Proposed Tree Planting

In December 2019, the OCPS and local residents sponsored the purchase and supply of nine trees, which were planted at the perimeter of the cemetery. These trees, seven rowans and two black poplars, have been watered in over the summer and are doing well. The Dukes Meadows Trust provided the initiative for this project and the planting was a joint effort. The Vicar of St Nicholas' Church and Hounslow Council supported the project.

This year, a further planting of fourteen trees is proposed and a number of residents have already asked for details on sponsoring or making a donation towards a tree. In the future, we are hoping to extend this planting into a rolling project for the rest of the cemetery grounds.

If you would like to register your interest, please contact tibor.babic@gmail.com. Tibor is a trained arborist and is collaborating with the Dukes Meadows Trust. Funds will be received by the Trust, who will purchase the trees.

Timber Structure Emerging in the Thames

In 2016 Martin Richardson, who was doing a PhD with the Natural History Museum (*Measuring erosion caused to the banks of the Thames in London, England, by the invasive Chinese Mitten crab*), took photographs of a structure emerging from the mud on the north side of Chiswick Eyot, opposite Morton House/Osiers on Chiswick Mall. We have photographed it again recently after Thames21 extended the withy/pole revetment along the island.



Timber structure in the Thames, from the Eyot looking north, 2016

[Photograph: Martin Richardson]



Timber structure in the Thames, from the river bed looking south, 2020

[Photograph: Niall Leslie]

It looks as though at one time it might have been a jetty, perhaps for fishing. No one we have asked can remember since post-war times there being any jetty there, nor can they recall seeing the remains before the early 2000s. Looking at Old Maps Online, we can see no jetty marked.

We have alerted archaeologists with the Thames Discovery Programme based at MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology), but we wondered if anyone has any knowledge of a structure/activity in this position. A 1927 photograph of withy gatherers shows them loading bundles but not using a jetty (see article *Chiswick Eyot as an Historic Withy Bed* (2011) in OCPS Resources on our website: <http://www.ocps.btck.co.uk>).

Planning

It is nearly 10 years since I both moved to Chiswick Mall and became secretary of the Planning Subcommittee. During that period, there has never been 6 months with no activity on the planning front. It seems that the dramatic impact of Covid 19 has also hit the appetite for change within our conservation area. However, we remain vigilant, even if no formal applications have been lodged.

Last year, Fuller, Smith & Turner sold their brewing company, including the Griffin Brewery, to Asahi for £250 million, to concentrate on running their portfolio of over 380 pubs, inns and hotels across the south of England. They retained ownership of some properties around the brewery, for which they have no operational requirement. The first to come on the market was a parcel of land, 'Smith's Yard' (1), which is a collection of mixed commercial buildings behind The Old Burlington on Church Street. No planning application has been lodged, but it is only a question of time and will probably involve a change in use to residential. We believe that the terrace of buildings on Chiswick Lane South (2), adjacent to and possibly including The Mawson Arms, will shortly come on the market. These were Fuller's offices. However, since Fuller's have moved to new offices overlooking the river in Strand on the Green, these are no longer needed. They were originally residential properties and we think that there will be an application for them to revert to their original use.



The River and the Eyot

There has been no activity on Chiswick Eyot this summer. But here's a picture of activity in the river: a young herring gull on the pontoon outside the Furnivall Sculling Club eating an eel, with a young carrion crow waiting its turn.



[Photograph: James Stitt]

An onlooker, who had been watching for an hour, said that at first there were two gulls and it took them a long time to pull the eel out of the river and onto the pontoon. They then started eating it from the head, which is clearly missing in the photograph. The eel must have been a metre long. Sad for the eel, but it reminds us that there is life in the river.

Artists in Old Chiswick

Victor Pasmore (1908-1998)

To those of us fortunate enough to live near the river, it will come as no surprise that artists find an abundance of inspiration in Chiswick and Hammersmith. The moodiness of light and liquid, along with charming scenes of commercial and recreational activity and a profusion of wildlife on the river provide inexhaustible subject matter.

In our last Newsletter, we profiled the painter Hugh Cronyn, who was one of a group of artists whose work is closely associated with the area. Amongst those artists who lived here and, indeed, attended the sketch classes in Cronyn's studio in Black Lion Lane, was the celebrated painter and architect Victor Pasmore.

Having started his career as an amateur painter, Pasmore quickly became a major figure in inter-war representational art and a founder of the Euston Road School, which included established Bloomsbury artists Augustus John, Vanessa Bell (sister of Virginia Woolf), Duncan Grant and John Nash. Pasmore's work was typical of the school's murky interiors in oil. During World War II he was a conscientious objector and spent time in prison.



In the early 1940s, Victor Pasmore lived for some time on Chiswick Mall, in Number 1 Riverside (now Cygnet House). He used this studio just across the yard above the stables behind Oak Cottage. This is now the site of Eyot Green, designed by the architect Edward Armitage, who recreated the studio in the new development to engender a sense of continuity (1).

The Pasmores moved to 16 Hammersmith Terrace, where they lived from 1942 until 1947. Pasmore boasted to friend and fellow artist William Johnstone that he had on his doorstep 'the finest landscape in the world' and when the mist clothed the river, it was as if he were looking at 'the most beautiful reaches of the Nile' (2). It was during this time that he painted numerous scenes of the river and surrounding gardens, including one of his best-known works, *The Quiet River: The Thames at Chiswick* (1943-1944), now in the Tate Collection.



The Quiet River: The Thames at Chiswick (1943-1944) © Tate



Riverside Gardens, Hammersmith (c1944)
© estate of Victor Pasmore. All rights reserved, DACS 2020. Photo credit: Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre

Pasmore's river views were influenced by Whistler's Thames scenes, while his lifelong admiration for Turner is evident in his representation of light and water. This impressionistic manner was in evidence in the early part of his Hammersmith sojourn, as can be seen in the slightly dull *Riverside Gardens, Hammersmith* (1944).

However, it is Pasmore's series of paintings *The Hanging Gardens of Hammersmith* that mark a radical departure from figurative representation to abstraction in a very short period of time. These paintings capture the view down to the river from the artist's garden in Hammersmith Terrace. The geometric principles that would form the basis for Pasmore's later abstract paintings is hinted at in the series, as can be seen in the melting away of figurative elements and an obvious interest in pattern and repetition.



The Hanging Gardens of Hammersmith, No. 1 (1944-1947)

© estate of Victor Pasmore / DACS 2020



The Gardens of Hammersmith No. 2 (1949)

© Tate

In 1947 Pasmore was to leave Hammersmith and abandon figurative painting in favour of the abstract, becoming one of the pioneers in Britain of a style he would work in for the next five decades.

Pasmore was described by the art historian Kenneth Clark as 'one of the two or three most talented English painters' of the twentieth century. He represented the UK at the 1961 Venice Biennale and his influential works are in major museum collections.

Pasmore spent the later years of his life in Malta, where he lived and worked for 20 years and eventually died. The Victor Pasmore Foundation runs a gallery in Malta dedicated to exhibiting his work.

- 1) This information comes from John and Rosalind Brenchley, brother and sister, who lived at that time in Oak Cottage. We are grateful to them and to Alice Nissen, ex-Secretary of OCPS, who grew up in Thames Bank, for putting us in touch with them, and for permission to reproduce this photograph of the studio, taken from her book *Past Images of Chiswick Mall*.
- 2) William Johnstone. *Points in Time: An Autobiography*

A Little History: Chiswick 'tatty London suburb'?

This extract is taken from *Architect Errant: The Autobiography of Clough Williams-Ellis* (who, among other things, was the creator of Portmeirion). It's not clear when this incident happened, but probably around 1912.

Once I wormed my way through an iron fence to get a closer view of an obviously distinguished classical building that I had glimpsed through a straggling shrubbery and a grove of neglected trees.

It was in a tatty London suburb to which rumours of bygone splendour had directed me and if flagrant trespass was ever justified and generously rewarded, it was there and it was then. For, standing there behind its dismal screen of sooty evergreens was the little domed and porticoed palace that I had long known of but never seen – Chiswick House. Slighted, weather-stained and in obvious disrepair, it was none-the-less still magnificent, and in a daze of admiration I mounted the sweeping flight of steps to the main door, which opened to my push, and there I was, within, my footfalls on the dusty marble floor echoing from the vault above. But soon, standing agape beneath the dome, I heard other footsteps, the creak and flap of a swing door, nearer footsteps, and there was a man eying me strangely from a dozen feet away.

'Who are you? Where do you belong and what do you want?'

'Oh,' I said, 'I wanted to see the house, which I thought was empty and as the gates were locked, I got through the fence and I'm sorry if I'm trespassing but I'm an architect particularly interested in buildings of this period and especially those of Lord Burlington. As I am here, may I please have a look around?'

His reply was a firm, 'No, quite out of the question, it would disturb the inmates.'

It transpired that the place was a private lunatic asylum and that, knowing the gates to be locked and believing the perimeter fence secure, he had at first supposed me to be a new patient somehow at large.

However, my identity and harmlessness established, I was courteously allowed to have my look round outside, in return for showing him where his fence needed reinforcing.

Revisiting the scene of this half-exhilarating half-depressing adventure over half a century later, it was wholly delightful to find out how beautifully the whole place had been purged of irrelevances and restored to all its original elegance by the Ministry of Works. Now, open to the public, it has once more taken its place as one of the brightest gems of Palladian architecture that we possess.

Padre Joins Ton-uppers

Here's another – maybe rather surprising – little bit of Chiswick history. These are from a 1962 film for Pathé News. Maybe some of you remember Father Brown?



The 2-minute film is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yed2Qk3fAIM>

Books on Old Chiswick

In 1982, for the Silver Jubilee, OCPS published Humphrey Arthure's *Life and Work in Old Chiswick*, an excellent history of the conservation area, now in its second edition. This, and his history of the Thornycroft Works are on sale at Hogarth House, and at Bookcase and Waterstones on Chiswick High Road. They can also be obtained from Rosemarie Clifton, Brampton House, Church Street.

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