

u3a Bike Rides West Brompton Cemetery and Chelsea Sights Friday 9 May 2025

A pleasant 18 degrees and sunny we headed off on the usual route to the river, via Clapham Common, Battersea Park, across Battersea Bridge and left down to Chelsea Harbour and Lots Road.

An easy right turn across the Kings Road, then left into Hortensia Road, past Morley College's Chelsea site, then across the Fulham Road and immediately left into the peace and quiet of the cemetery.

A glide along its central avenue with colonnaded walkways and straight to our refreshment stop at the pleasant cafe and Information Centre.



One of the **Magnificent Seven Cemeteries**, it is a Royal Park, and is a haven for wildlife, with 35,000 monuments. It opened in 1840 and is Grade I listed. The Information Centre provided us with some great maps showing who was buried in the cemetery: **Dr John Snow** (who discovered the link between dirty water and cholera), suffragette **Emmeline Pankhurst** and **Sir Henry Cole**, founder of the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Royal Albert Hall, plus many others (lots of information on the Cemetery's website). Tours are available at weekends.

Author Beatrix Potter lived round the corner at Bolton Gardens, and frequented the cemetery, and got inspiration for her characters' names because there are monuments to a Peter Rabbit, a Jeremiah Fisher, Mr Nutkins and Mr McGregor.

After refreshment we travelled across Gunter Grove, and on to Bolton Gardens. James Gunter originally owned the land, then an orchard, providing fruit for his fashionable tea, chocolate and ice cream shop in Berkeley Square Mayfair (Gunters Tea Rooms, closed in 1956)

He had the houses in Bolton Gardens built between 1851 and 1860 for the wealthy, and Madonna and Sir Jeffrey Archer have been residents. There is a charming church in the garden in the middle.

Then via the back streets of Chelsea to Danvers Street, adjacent to Crosby Moran Hall and **Ropers Gardens**. Here we stopped to admire the impressive Tudor Hall, built in 1466 for a wealthy wool merchant, and in 1910, moved stone by stone to the current location from its original site near St Helens church in Bishopsgate, where a new office block was proposed.

This new location was selected because it was the site of **Sir Thomas More's** home **Beaufort House** (now demolished) and Sir Thomas More had purchased Crosby hall in 1523. It is now owned by **Dr Christopher Moran**, who bought the Hall in 1988 and who painstakingly created the front and sides of the building in the Tudor style as an addition to the Hall.

There are pictures online if you are interested in the interior of this splendid building. As a consequence of his investment, the Hall was renamed after him.

A stop in Ropers Gardens to admire the Blue Plaque mural on the wall, which shows the huge number of famous people who have lived in the area over the centuries including **Sir Hans Sloane**, more on him later! Ropers Gardens was once an orchard belonging to Sir Thomas More, Henry VIII's Chancellor and he kept his barge on the river so that he could travel easily between the palaces at Greenwich and Hampton court.



The mural at Ropers Gardens, showing the area's extensive history and famous residents.

We walked past **Chelsea Old Church**, which still carries that name despite being almost destroyed in 1941 and rebuilt in the 1950's. It houses a chapel built by Sir Thomas More, which is still there, and in the churchyard we passed by Sir Hans Sloane's memorial. He was an apprentice apothecary at the nearby Chelsea Physic Garden (founded 1673), and who became a physician and botanist, making his fortune working as doctor for the Duke of Albemarle in Jamaica.



When he returned to the UK, he bought the land comprising the Physic Garden from **Charles Cheyne, Lord of the Manor of Chelsea**, and he let the garden to the Apothecaries for a peppercorn rent of £5.0 per annum in perpetuity. He donated his botany collection to the nation and it became the founding collection of the British Museum. He also brought the cocoa bean to England...

The Royal Society of Apothecaries Emblem on the Thameside Gates to the Chelsea Physic Garden. It was through these gates that all deliveries to the garden were made.

Then on along Embankment Gardens, past the site of **Henry VIII's** former manor house (demolished 1753), where lived Katherine Parr and her stepchildren Princess Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey, and coincidentally latterly also Sir Hans Sloane.

Along the Embankment crossing over by lights to see Chelsea Quay, opened in April 2024, which is directly opposite the Royal Hospital Chelsea and has lovely views up and down the river. The Quay is part of the Tideway flooding prevention project and there is an information post giving all the details of the many rivers underneath it. There are countless manhole covers within the Quay. Unfortunately on Friday, there were also rather too many transit vans for some reason!

Then back over Battersea bridge, into Battersea Power station and out along Thessaly Road, via Larkhill Park and Albert Square and finally over the Clapham road to Caldwell street and the familiar territory of Evelyn Gardens, Loughborough Junction and Herne Hill. We set off about 10.10am and returned to Herne Hill station by 1345.

The riders were Jane Andrew, (ride leader), Mary and Andrew, Brin, Gerry, Val, Eileen, Penny, Jeremy, and Ann May, Irene and David. One other was ill on the day, and unable to join us.

Report and Photos; Jane Andrew