

U3A Bikers

Hyde Park revisited

Friday 7th May 2021

It is just under a year ago that we visited Hyde Park and twelve riders met at Brockwell Lido on a sunny but cool morning to follow a similar route across Albert Bridge to the park.

We divided the riders into two groups, both with leaders who were familiar with the route.

This took us along Brixton Water Lane and up to Clapham Common, past Eagle Pond, and across to the north side of the Common.



We noted a new feature on the Common, a number of street lights that were solar-powered.

After crossing Clapham Common North Side we cycled down Wix's Lane as an alternative to Cedars Road (although this is safe enough with a bus-lane and light traffic).

The route took us across Queenstown Road and Lavender Hill, joining Queenstown Road just before the turning under the rail bridge. Crossing Battersea Park road at the cycle lights, we arrived in Battersea Park at the Prince of Wales entrance.



The Putt-in-the-Park café offered enough outdoor space for us all to sit and have coffee and, it has to be said, an extended coffee break it was! But there was a lot to catch up with and the chattering cyclists made good use of the time!!

We left the Park at Carriage Drive North, opposite the Prince Albert pub. From here we headed along Prince Albert Bridge Road, and then crossed the **Albert Bridge**. We took careful note of the instruction to Troops to break step when crossing the bridge. The traffic was still quite light and caused no difficulty to us on the bridge.



By following the sign we arrived at Carlyle's House, closed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We were soon into the heart of Chelsea with its pretty period terraced houses and narrow streets and mews, observing one-way roads and no cycling restrictions.



(On a previous visit, the group had encountered a lady who was unhappy that the group wished to walk past her house!)

A detour took us down Lawrence Street where we paused to read the Blue Plaque that commemorated the novelist Tobias Smollett, and also the manufacture of Chelsea china in a property nearby.



Along Cheyne Walk, a chance encounter with a lady at the entrance gate to the Chelsea Old Church led to an invitation to see around the garden behind it. Our guide was very pleased for us to see the camellias thriving there, in bloom. She told us that one of them had been grown by her from seed some 15 years ago.



Resuming our ride, we crossed the Kings Road, Fulham Road and Old Brompton Road into Queens Gate, lined by the grand Georgian mansions with their porticos and balconies.

From here we turned into the grounds of Imperial College and paused to admire the **Queens Tower**. The Royal Geographical Society building is on the corner of Exhibition Road with its statue of Sir Ernest Shackleton in an alcove on the wall.

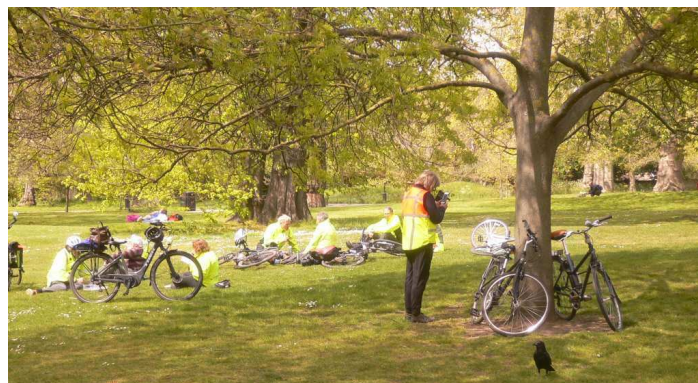


This brought us to the Alexandra Gate, the entrance to Hyde Park, and on to the dedicated cycle lane that runs all the way around the park.

Turning right and following the path we came to the **Princess Diana Memorial Fountain** and the statue beside the lake is entitled “Serenity”, an elegant representation of an ibis, and a beautiful place to sit by the Serpentine and reflect.



Our destination was the north side of the Serpentine where we found a grassy area to sit and eat our packed lunches, warm enough when the sun was out, cool in the north-east wind.



Setting out again, the group did a complete lap of the park on the cycle paths around the park. Just before the Alexandra Gate, turning left we had a lovely gentle downhill ride. On our left was the open space that was the original site of the Crystal Palace at the 1851 Great Exhibition

This brought us to Hyde Park Corner, to Apsley House (the fine Georgian house that was the home of the Duke of Wellington, now a museum) and the splendid modern Queens Gates, commemorating Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

We left the Park at Hyde Park Corner and cycled the route down Constitution Hill, around Buckingham Palace and into Westminster to join Vauxhall Bridge Road and crossed the bridge on a segregated cycle lane into Lambeth, and so home.



Notes

Queens Tower

The Queen's Tower on the South Kensington Campus of Imperial College is 287ft tall with a copper-covered dome at its top. From the base of the dome there are narrow spiral staircases, 325 steps in total. The tower used to be the central tower of the Imperial Institute; it is now the only remaining part of that building.

The Imperial Institute was founded on Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, and its partial demolition began in 1957. At that time it was known as the Colcutt Tower, named after its designer, the architect Thomas Edward Colcutt. The tower itself was due to be demolished along with the rest of the Institute, but it was saved by a public campaign led by the then Poet Laureate John Betjeman, a supporter of 19th-century architecture. He warned that tastes in architecture change, and that the destruction of this building (Victorian architecture had fallen out of favour) would be a loss.

In 1966, with the rest of the building demolished, the tower was repaired to enable it to stand on its own, which involved the construction of new foundations. There are also two stone lions at the foot of the tower which were once set at the entrance to the Imperial Institute.

There are ten bells hung for change ringing in the middle of the tower, about two thirds of the way up. These bells, known collectively as the Alexandra Peal, were a gift from Mrs Elizabeth M. Millar of Melbourne, Australia in 1892. They are rung on royal anniversaries and on the dates of the Imperial College degree ceremonies.

The highest viewing gallery is below the dome at the top of the building. Being one of the tallest towers in west London, the Queen's Tower enjoys an uninterrupted view in all directions. It has been estimated that in good viewing conditions the furthest visible point is 20 miles away. The viewing gallery, once open to the public, is currently closed to visitors.

The Albert Bridge over the River Thames connects Chelsea to Battersea. Designed and built by Rowland Mason Ordish in 1871-73 as a cable-stayed bridge. It proved to be structurally unsound, so in 1884-87 Sir Joseph Bazalgette incorporated design elements of a suspension bridge. In 1972-73 the Greater London Council added four concrete piers, which transformed the central span into a simple beam bridge. As a result, today the bridge is an unusual hybrid of three different design styles. It is an English Heritage Grade II* listed building.

Built as a toll bridge it was commercially unsuccessful. Six years after its opening it was taken into public ownership and the tolls were lifted. The tollbooths remained in place and are the only surviving examples of bridge tollbooths in London. Nicknamed "The Trembling Lady" because of its tendency to vibrate when large numbers of people walked over it, the bridge has signs at its entrances that warn troops to break step when crossing the bridge.

With a roadway only 27 feet wide, and with serious structural weaknesses, the bridge was ill-equipped to cope with the arrival of the motor vehicle during the 20th century. Despite many calls for its demolition or pedestrianisation, Albert Bridge has remained open to vehicles throughout its existence, other than for repairs. It is one of only two Thames road bridges in central London never to have been replaced (the other is Tower Bridge). The strengthening work carried did not prevent further deterioration of the bridge's structure. A series of increasingly strict traffic control measures have been introduced to limit its use to prolong its life. As a result, it is the second-least busy Thames road bridge in London; only Southwark Bridge carries less traffic.

In 1992, the bridge was rewired and painted in an unusual colour scheme designed to make it more conspicuous in poor visibility, and avoid being damaged by ships. At night it is illuminated by 4,000 LEDs, making it a wonderful landmark after dark. It featured in the film "Sliding Doors" with Gwyneth Paltrow and John Hannah.

Princess Diana Memorial Fountain

This memorial to Diana, Princess of Wales was opened by Her Majesty The Queen on 6th July 2004. The fountain was built with the best materials, talent and technology. It contains 545 pieces of Cornish granite - each shaped by the latest computer-controlled machinery and pieced together using traditional skills.

The design aims to reflect Diana's life; water flows from the highest point in two directions as it cascades, swirls and bubbles before meeting in a calm pool at the bottom. The water is constantly being refreshed and is drawn from London's water table. The Memorial also is intended to symbolise Diana's quality and openness.

Time: About 5 hours including stops

Distance:

Riders: Mike Lock, Mike Jones, Niesje de Boer, David Rosenfeld, Irene Skiadopoulou, Andrew Burke, John Clements, Felicity Henderson, Martin Dale, Joe Antos, Peter Saunders, Jane Evans

Acknowledgement: source material from Wikipedia

Group Convenor: Peter Saunders

Ride Leaders: Peter Saunders

Report and photos: John Clements, 7th May 2021