

U3A Bikers Windmills and Wimbledon Tuesday 22nd February 2022

This ride had been postponed because of Storm Eunice. The group assembled at Brockwell Park Lido before cycling our normal route to Clapham Common but with a small detour to see Brixton Windmill in Windmill Gardens.

The windmill was built in 1816 and leased in 1917 to the Ashby family who produced stoneground wholemeal flour.

It became known as Ashby's Mill and was used till 1934 (apart from when milling moved to a water-powered mill on the River Wandle from 1862-1902).

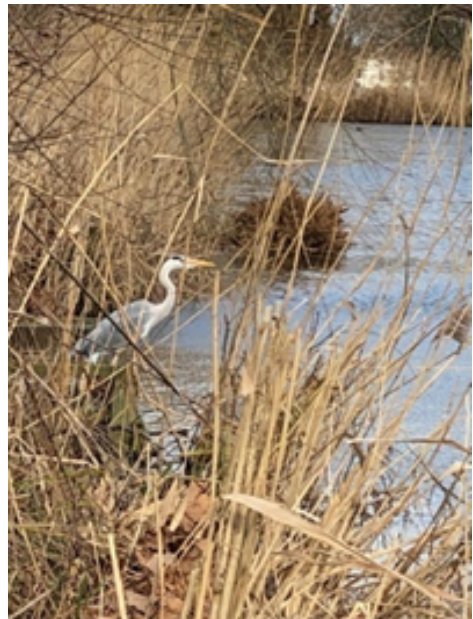
At Clapham Common we cycled along Windmill Drive past a fine heron and on to Wandsworth Common for coffee at the Skylark Café. Apparently, when a windmill's sails are at a standstill, their position has a meaning: <https://heavenly-holland.com/position-of-sails/>

Evidence of Storm Eunice could be seen with a fallen tree (now cut up to re-open the path) in Brockwell Park and two large uprooted trees on Wandsworth Common.

After coffee we walked past the bowling green to visit the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building (or Asylum), Grade II*, built for the 'Education and Training of three hundred Orphan Daughters of Soldiers, Seamen and Marines who perished in the Russian War ...'.

It was designed by Major Rhode Hawkins in a heroically ornate Gothic style, with the foundation stone laid by Queen Victoria on 11th July 1857 and the first phase was completed in 1858.

During WW1, it became the South Western General Hospital, with a temporary railway station built in front of it and thousands of wounded troops treated (about 1800 patients at any one time). After the war, the girls' school reopened until the pupils were evacuated to Wales in 1939. During WW2, the building became the London Reception Centre, a polite name for an alien



clearing station run by MI6. After WW2, it was used as a Teachers Training College till 1952 and then as Honeywell Secondary Mixed School before Spencer Park Comprehensive School for Boys. It was restored in 1980s to include halls, as well as 27 flats, 20 studios, 15 workshops and 1 bar & restaurant together with 2 large office units in the Chapel.



We had a short ride to Wandsworth Windmill, the remains of a smock mill constructed in the 1830s by the London and South Western Railway Company to pump water from the cutting into a nearby lake.

View of Royal Victoria Patriotic Building and windmill, circa 1865

Finally, we cycled along Windmill Road to join Earlsfield Road and onto Wimbledon Park for lunch. Wimbledon Park (Grade II*) is a remnant of the C18th landscape park that Capability Brown laid out for Earl Spencer of Wimbledon House. The lake is a survivor from the earlier landscape and is one of the largest in London but is currently fenced off for building work.



After lunch we cycled back via King George's Park, Wandsworth and Clapham Commons to Brockwell Lido.

Riders: Niejse, John & Denise, Gisela, David & Irene, Martin, Mary & Andrew.

References:

<https://www.brixtonwindmill.org/>

<http://www.rvpb.com/history.htm> and RVPB photo library

<https://www.wandsworthcommon.org/friends-news/2018/4/20/windmill-renovation>

<https://londongardenstrust.org/conservation/inventory/site-record/?ID=MER066>

Ride leader: Andrew Burke

Report by Andrew Burke, 28th February 2022

Notes:

Brixton Windmill

The windmill was built in 1816 and leased to the Ashby family the following year. The Ashby family were millers producing stoneground wholemeal flour and the mill became known as Ashby's Mill for the whole of its working life. It was used till 1934 (milling moved to water-powered mill on River Wandle from 1862-1902). In 1957, London County Council (LCC) bought the land, the windmill and the associated buildings to create Windmill Gardens. The windmill was restored in 1964 and opened to the public in 1968 but had to be restored again in 2010.

Royal Victoria Patriotic Building

Royal Victoria Patriotic Building (Asylum), Grade II*, built for the 'Education and Training of three hundred Orphan Daughters of Soldiers, Seamen and Marines who perished in the Russian War, and for those who hereafter may require like succour'. It was designed by Major Rhode Hawkins in a heroically ornate Gothic style, with the foundation stone laid by Queen Victoria on 11th July 1857 and the first phase was completed in 1858.

By the First World War the building had been renovated, its roof trusses strengthened, the Welsh slates replaced with Westmoreland, and the brickwork repointed in black mortar. A new heating system was installed and the building had become the South Western General Hospital. In the First World War a temporary railway station was built in front of the building and thousands of wounded troops were treated there. The field behind the building, now the cricket pitch, was filled with marquees full of wounded soldiers – approximately 1800 patients at any one time. After the war the school, still for girls only, reopened until the pupils were evacuated to Wales in 1939.

During the Second World War, the building became the London Reception Centre, a polite name for an alien clearing station run by MI6, under the direction of Colonel Pinto. It was rumoured that suspected spies were incarcerated for years, both in the building and in windowless concrete cells constructed in the south courtyard.

After the war the building was used as a Teachers Training College and then in 1952 purchased by the London County Council for £67,500 for initially Honeywell Secondary Mixed School and then Spencer Park Comprehensive School for Boys. It was restored in 1980s to include halls, as well as 27 flats, 20 studios, 15 workshops and 1 bar & restaurant together with 2 large office units in the Chapel.

Wandsworth Windmill

Wandsworth Windmill is the remains of a smock mill constructed in the 1830s by the London and South Western Railway Company to pump water from the cutting into a nearby lake known as the Black Sea. William Wilson, the founder of Prices Patent Candle Company, created a garden around the lake as part of his estate. The windmill stopped working in 1870 when the lake was filled in.

Wimbledon Park

Wimbledon Park is a remnant of the C18th landscape park that Capability Brown laid out for Earl Spencer of Wimbledon House, an estate that dated from the C16th, once owned by Queen Henrietta Maria and later by the Duchess of Marlborough. The estate was broken up from the late C19th, and in 1914 Wimbledon Borough Council purchased the northern part of the parkland and opened Wimbledon Park. Land to the west was purchased for Wimbledon Golf Course and in c.1930 the All England Lawn Tennis Club was established to the west. The lake is a survivor from the earlier landscape and is one of the largest in London.