

**U3A Bikers
Van Gogh revisited
Tuesday 26th August 2022**

It was two years since the first visit of the Bike Group to the house of van Gogh and the dozen riders who assembled at Brockwell Lido on a fine sunny morning were looking forward to the ride to Hackford Road where he lived, albeit briefly.

But before setting out, we took a moment to extend a warm welcome to two new members of the Group joining us for their first ride with us. Welcome Christine and Ian!

The route, well researched by Niesje with her interest in art, was planned to visit two of the places where Vincent van Gogh was known to have lived and worked.

We set out in two groups on a well-Dulwich Road, into Road, Shakespeare Coldharbour Lane, Road, Akerman and on to Vassall with Brixton Road.



worn track, crossing Hurst Street, Railton Road, across into Loughborough Road, Eynsford Road Road at the junction

Crossing straight over at the lights into Caldwell Street, a short ride took us to Hackford Road and there we stopped outside a small end-of-terrace Georgian house with a blue plaque showing that **Vincent van Gogh** had lived there from 1873-74.

The house underwent extensive renovation and was opened to the public for pre-booked tours in June 2019. (For more details see <http://www.vangoghhouse.co.uk/87-hackford-road/>). (The website currently shows that tours take place on the last weekend of the month and last about an hour and fifteen minutes. Tickets cost £12.)



Niesje told us that van Gogh walked from here to his place of employment at the London Branch of *Goupil and Company* (art dealers) in Southampton Street, Covent Garden,

We would be following the route he walked to work (except where a safer route was advisable).



From the house three right turns brought into Van Gogh Walk, a lovely area of tranquillity, with olive trees, giving a Mediterranean atmosphere, and quiet seating areas, complete with a little cabinet on a post - a small book exchange. On one side of the walk was a bronze bust of Vincent van Gogh, two ears in place.



Returning along Hackford, we crossed Brixton Road for a short ride around Kennington Park to Kennington Lane and so into **Cleaver Square**.



Cleaver Square is a very fine example of a residential square surrounding an open space, originally laid out in 1789.



The abundance of fallen leaves at this early date were a reminder of the recent drought.

This was further confirmed by (one of) the first sighting of a conker!



We joined Kennington Road and crossing the traffic lights arrived at *I due Amici*, our chosen coffee stop.

The café has an outdoor seating area and here we settled to enjoy an excellent cup of coffee; I can also vouch for the delightful biscuits!

Suitably refreshed, we turned into Black Prince Road, following it towards the river, and along Lambeth Walk and across Archbishop's Park.

This was originally a part of the garden behind Lambeth Palace.

Joining Westminster Bridge Road, we used a cycle lane with cycle lights to safely reach Westminster Bridge and then turned right at the traffic lights beside Big Ben.

Once on Victoria Embankment we had a clear route along the Thames on dedicated cycle lanes, so it was easy cycling.



At Savoy Place we turned up a short hill of Savoy Street to the Strand and crossed into Covent Garden, and Southampton Street.

It was at number 17 where the artist worked. However this building no longer exists.

Instead we took a look at a plaque that identified the various fruits and vegetables that were sold by the merchants in the market.

And so on to Covent Garden, now very busy with crowds of tourists, back in large



numbers.
St Paul's Church.

We took a few minutes to look at

Here a local lady very kindly stopped to tell us that the church was designed by Inigo Jones in 1631 (although the façade is from a later date) and that it is known locally as "the actors' church" by a long association with the theatre community. (The photo is from an earlier visit.)

A ride along Long Acre, Great Queen Street and Remnant Street, and across busy Kingsway brought us to Lincoln's Inns Fields. Taking Newmans Row, Serle Street and Carey Street, we arrived at Fleet Street.



Directly opposite is one of the very few houses in London which survived the 1666 Great Fire of London, located at 17 Fleet Street.

The building was rebuilt in 1610 and became a tavern called Prince's Arms. One of the rooms on the first floor was called **Prince Henry's Room**. Prince Henry was the son of James I.

We crossed directly over Fleet Street and into the Inns of Courts, starting in Middle Temple, in the western part of "The Temple". (Here was the headquarters of the Knights Templar, until the organisation was dissolved in 1312).

Leaving the Temple we arrived on the Victoria Embankment and joined Cycle Highway C6 which took us safely across Blackfriars Bridge and along the dedicated cycle route.

Just before Southwark Underground Station, a narrow pathway took us into a veritable jungle of potted plants that almost hid our lunch destination.



We had arrived at a Turkish restaurant, *Ev*, with its wonderful selection of hot and cold dishes and salads.



After lunch, the Group made their way back across Kennington Road and into Methley Street where at No 39 was one of the several blue plaques in this area with the name of Charlie Chaplin on it; this one was erected by "The Dead Comics Society"!

The ride ended at Loughborough Junction and the riders made their way back home.

Riders:

Christine, David & Irene, Denise & John, Felicity, Ian, Jane, John, Julia, Martin, Niesje.

Ride leader: Niesje de Boer

Group Convenor: John Clements

Report and photos: John Clements, 27th August 2022

Acknowledgement: Wikipedia for source material

NOTES

Vincent van Gogh.

In July 1869, Van Gogh's uncle Cent obtained a position for him at the art dealers *Goupil & Cie* in The Hague. After completing his training in 1873, he was transferred to *Goupil's* London branch on Southampton Street, and took lodgings at 87 Hackford Road. This was a happy time for Van Gogh; he was successful at work and, at 20, was earning more than his father. The wife of his brother Theo later remarked that this was the best year of Vincent's life. He became infatuated with his landlady's daughter, Eugénie Loyer, but was rejected after confessing his feelings; she was secretly engaged to a former lodger. He grew more isolated and religiously fervent. His father and uncle arranged a transfer to Paris in 1875, where he became resentful of issues such as the degree to which the firm commodified art, and he was dismissed a year later. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_van_Gogh
For more details on the house restoration see <http://www.vangoghwalk.org/>

Cleaver Square. Residential squares with a communal open space proved so popular in 17th and 18th century London that they became the capital's most characteristic townscape. The first was Covent Garden designed by Inigo Jones in 1631, and by the 18th century every major development in the West End featured at least one square. The appeal is readily appreciated: the formality and lack of through traffic made for neatness and quiet, and the open centre gave light and air. With the expansion of Georgian London the idea began to spread further afield.

Cleaver Square, laid out in 1789, was the earliest to be developed south of the Thames. Until the middle of the 18th century, the landscape was of hedgerows, fields and meadows crossed by the turnpike road from the city to Clapham. There were very few buildings, mostly scattered farms and taverns, although there had once been a palace at Kennington Cross, built in the 14th century by the Black Prince on land that had been royal property when the Saxons called it *keening-tun*: "the King's place". Widespread development followed the building of Westminster Bridge in 1750 and Blackfriars Bridge in 1770.

Mary Cleaver had inherited the estate consisting of a large open pasture, screened from the high road by a line of trees in 1743 and leased the land in 1780 to Thomas Ellis landlord of the ancient Horns Tavern on Kennington Common, who laid out and developed the square. The first houses within the square were built in 1789 on the North West side. A map of 1799 shows forty houses in what was then called Princes Square. By the 1870s the once-fashionable area had deteriorated and the houses, each occupied by a number of families, were severely overcrowded. The name was changed to Cleaver Square in 1937.

The centre of the square was enclosed by Ellis in 1792 as a grazing ground. On the 1871 Ordnance ordinance survey it is shown planted as a garden circumscribed by a formal path,

but by 1898 it had been cultivated as a nursery with greenhouses. It remained like this until 1927 when it was brought by the County Council to forestall an application to build garages on it. More trees were planted and the garden was gravelled over as a recreation ground. Gradual dereliction was to follow, especially during the war years, and it was only in the 1950s that Cleaver Square's inherent charm was recognised anew and its fortunes once more began to rise.

In 1995, the London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust organised The London Squares Conference to encourage their renovation. Cleaver Square featured prominently and Lambeth Council resolved "to restore the centre of the square to provide once again an attractive and peaceful public space for the people of Kennington", with the backing of English Heritage, a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and donations from residents. The result is this attractive square that we see today.

St Paul's Church is located in Bedford Street, Covent Garden, It was designed by Inigo Jones as part of a commission for the 4th Earl of Bedford in 1631 to create "houses and buildings fit for the habitations of Gentlemen and men of ability". (How times change!) As well as being the parish church of Covent Garden, the church has gained the nickname of "the actors' church" by a long association with the theatre community.

Prince Henry's Room is situated on the first floor at the front of No. 17 Fleet Street, London. The house is one of the few surviving buildings in the City of London dating from before the Great Fire of London in 1666. It is a Grade II* Listed Building. The site was once owned by the Templars, but after the dissolution of the Order of St John, the building was rebuilt in 1610 and became a tavern called Prince's Arms. This coincided with the investiture of Prince Henry, son of James I, as Prince of Wales.