

u3a Bike Rides Waterloo churches and a graveyard Friday 2nd August 2025

The Waterloo churches (also known as the Commissioners' churches) were built in the 1820's to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815.

There are four in the Borough of Lambeth and we would be visiting three of these on this outing.

Eight riders assembled at Brockwell Lido for the ride which was originally conceived by Niesje (who was unfortunately indisposed today).



After a short briefing to keep us all safe, and a description of the ride, we were off along back roads to the first church, **St Matthew's**, at Brixton. Andrew, the architect amongst the group, told us that the church is in the "neoclassic Doric" style.

We remarked on the very solid construction in stone, but noted that the rear part of the building was constructed in less costly brick.



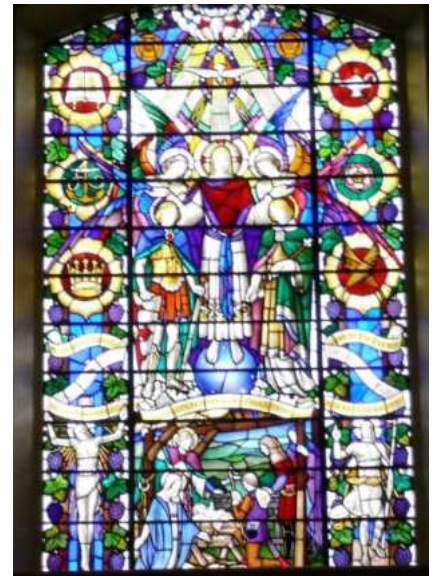
The doors were firmly closed and locked on this occasion; on a previous visit we had been fortunate to be admitted to see the interior where we had found that there was just a small area for the congregation; most of space was used for offices.

But a most striking feature was the three stained glass panels of contemporary design. It was created by a local Jamaican artist, Anthony Moo-Young and the story of how he came to create these can be read here:



<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/sep/09/the-buddha-of-brixton-whose-spiritual-quest-started-when-his-sister-was-shot-mooji-tony-young>

We next headed via Kennington Park to the second church, **St Mark's**, also finding it closed and locked. Here too we had been fortunate on the earlier occasion to have access to the church.



On that occasion we had been able to see the nave which featured a glazed dome lit by a large roof light above.

(I was reminded of the film "Titanic" which also featured such a dome). There is also a fine stained-glass window.

For coffee we headed to the café in Kennington Park which was just a very short ride away, pausing to read the information board about the park.

The cafe offered seating outdoors in the partial sun. It was reported that the quality of the hot chocolate was not the best.

The next Waterloo church was **St John's** at Waterloo Station.

By way of Kennington Road, Black Prince Road, Lambeth Walk and the Cut we arrived at the church.

At the time of the previous visit in 2022 the church was completely cloaked in scaffolding and plastic sheets. Today it stood fully revealed.

The churchyard has been turned into a garden, now well-maintained by a local community. We were delighted to see that the doors stood open and we were able to venture in.

We were invited to look inside and the warden told us something of its history. Bombed during the war, the roof was completely destroyed. However, the walls had remained intact. The church was rebuilt and the interior was re-designed.



The building stood open for ten years until it was restored and remodelled internally in 1950. In 1951 the church was rededicated as the Festival of Britain Church. The recent work had been the (controversial) restoration of the nave and crypt.



The three churches now visited, I suggested a small extension to the ride to see, not another church but a graveyard.

Threading our way through back roads towards London Bridge, we arrived at the Crossbones Graveyard and Garden of Remembrance.

This was a paupers' graveyard and memorial shrine. Today it was open and several volunteers were busy tidying up the garden. We were made very welcome and were shown somewhere to leave our bicycles.



This is an old burial ground in an area previously known as The Mint, one of London's poorest and most violent areas.

Here are buried the "Winchester Geese", medieval sex workers who were licensed by the Bishop of Winchester* (no less!) to work in local brothels.

When closed in 1853 it held the remains of an estimated 15,000 paupers and prostitutes.

The photos above show a collection of pottery figures commemorating the many small children, prematurely lost, who are buried here; and the multitude of coloured ribbons attached to a fence, each left by a visitor who wished to leave a memento of someone who died. So many! (Thanks go to a volunteer, Andrea, for this information.)



*Prior to 1889 this was a part of the County of Surrey, which was a part of the Diocese of Winchester.

Time for lunch and we headed for *Ev*, a restaurant we had visited several times before and which serves “Classic Turkish mezze dishes and grilled meats, in a comfortable eatery under the railway arches”.

A big “thank you” to Niesje who had had the idea for this ride and had developed a good, safe route for us.



This also added to our knowledge of London. I for one had not heard of the Waterloo churches before the outing in 2022.

Distance: 12 ½ miles, about 4 hours

Riders: Andrew, Brin, Chris, Jeremy, John, Mark, Mary, Valerie

Ride Leaders: Andrew and John

Report: John, 3rd August, 2025

Group Convenor: John

FURTHER INFORMATION: Here are some more useful links:

A list of the Waterloo Churches in London (144 built, about 100 survive).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Commissioners%27_churches_in_London

The total number of Waterloo churches (also called Commissioners' churches) built in England and Wales was about 600, at a cost of £1.5 million, equivalent to about £150 million in current prices.

St Mark's Church, Kennington

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Church,_Kennington

Acknowledgement

Information from Wikipedia