

u3a Bike Rides

An Autumn ride to Chiswick House and Hogarth House

Tuesday 7th October 2025

It was a cool Autumn morning start for us as we convened at Brockwell Lido, 15 in number.

We welcomed three new members on their first ride with the Group; Josie, Graeme and Lyndon, with a “buddy” to accompany each of them on the ride; one member was no-show (subsequently messaging that the cycle was discovered to have a flat tyre).



By way of Brixton Water Lane and Clapham Common, where Caroline was awaiting us, we made our way in two groups across Wandsworth Common and by way of Ram Street joined the Thames Path at the estuary of the River Wandle, heading up-stream through Wandsworth Park, under Fulham Rail Bridge and on to the busy crossing at the end of Putney Bridge.

Time for a coffee, at the Putney Pantry, attached to St Mary’s Church, parts of which date from the 15th century and was the venue for the Putney Debates in 1647 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Putney_Debates)

The café had plenty of space for the Groups and we were soon drinking coffee and chattering!



The crossing at the end of Putney Bridge is not ideal for a largish group but soon we were cycling along Putney Reach, past all the boat houses belonging to some of the private schools and on to the Putney Towpath; despite some recent rain the path was in fair condition on the stretch to Hammersmith Bridge.

Closed to motor traffic, in 2019 the bridge has undergone an assessment of the work that needs to be done to make it safe and the carriageway which was closed to cyclists is now open. So after I did a quick check of my tyres for flint spicules (I had a puncture on the recce ride), off we went on bikes over the bridge.

(The current estimated cost of repair? A cool £150-200 million! Unsurprisingly discussions on how this will be funded are on-going!).



Hammersmith Bridge is a suspension bridge (and the second one on the site) opened in 1887) which was designed by Sir Joseph Bazalgette and rests on the same pier foundations constructed for the original structure.

There are eight chains, composed of wrought iron bars. From these, vertical rods are suspended, supporting the roadway, formed of strong timbers covered with granite.

The Thames Path upstream from the bridge is the Upper Mall and I was pleased to see signs that welcomed considerate cyclists, so we were good to go.



Chiswick Mall led to on Pumping Station Road where we turned away from the river, across Burlington Lane, and so we arrived at Chiswick Park.

By prior arrangement my group headed for Hogarth House which lies just to the east alongside the ever-busy A4. The house, now a museum, is small. The second group headed for the Chiswick House Café in the park, and lunch.



I first visited Hogarth House some ten years ago on a ride with the group led by our first Convenor, Peter Saunders. The garden has been completely transformed since then and is well cared for. The house too has changed, with a modern extension added at one end. (See below for a photo of the garden as it was previously below.)

Hogarth's House was his country home and now tells the history of his life, his family and staff, and the building. It contains a collection of prints and engravings by the artist and we smiled again at the caricatures set in some of London's less salubrious parts, depicting "Gin Lane" and "Beer Street", amongst others. We had only half an hour to tour the house, but could have stayed longer. The house is now managed by Hounslow Council.



During the visit, I was amused to learn that Hogarth was a member of "The Sublime Society of Beef Steaks"; apparently this is the oldest surviving dining society in Britain, and quite possibly the world. It was founded in 1735.)

Outside in the garden, the mulberry tree still survives; it is said that the Hogarth family made mulberry pies for the Foundling children who stayed with them.

The museum tour over, we returned to Chiswick House Café.

Along the way, we paused to admire the magnificent glass and steel structure which is the Conservatory (stock photo).



The second group in turn set out to visit the Hogarth Museum and we settled down to lunch.

When the second group returned the whole group reconvened at the café for a photo.



From the café we set off along the garden paths and stopped to admire the wonderful building that is Chiswick House; it is among the most glorious examples of 18th-century British architecture.



The third Earl of Burlington, who designed this Roman-style Palladian villa, drew inspiration from his Grand Tours of Italy. The house is only open in the summer months.



A park path took us along the side of the lake, past the Ionic Temple, and on to the Classic Bridge, built by the 5th Duke of Devonshire.



The Gardens are generally recognised as the birthplace of the English Landscape Movement.

The gardens underwent major restorations twenty years ago to repair the statues and garden buildings and which revealed the original vistas.

Time for a photo at the Obelisk! We left the park and made a small detour to see a commemorative stone that marked where the first V2 rocket landed in England in 1944, useful information perhaps for a pub quiz....

Three riders elected to return by bike, one had remained at the Hogarth Museum.

The rest of us had a ride of just a few minutes to reach Chiswick Station, with level access to the platform for the return to Clapham Junction or Vauxhall.



This ride, together with the recent ride to Fulham Palace and last year's ride to Boston Manor House has shown that the Group enjoys outings to interesting destinations, with time to view them. There are other possible venues: Gunnersbury Park Museum (free entry) and the Ranger's House, Greenwich.

Riders: Ann, Caroline, Daniella, David, Gerry, Graeme, Irene, Jane, Josie John, Judy, Lyndon Mary, Niesje, Valerie.

Ride leaders: John Clements and Jane Andrew
Report: John 9th October 2025

Chiswick House and Gardens

The gardens at Chiswick were an attempt to symbolically recreate a garden of ancient Rome which were believed to have followed the form of the gardens of Greece

Chiswick House is one of the earliest examples of neo-Palladian design in England and the gardens are the birthplace of the English Landscape Movement and the inspiration for great gardens from Blenheim Palace to New York's Central Park.

Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington designed and built Chiswick House from 1725-1729.

The villa was inspired by the architecture and gardens of ancient Rome. The sumptuous interiors and key items of furniture were designed by William Kent and house a rich collection of Old Master Paintings.

The 65 acres of Grade I listed gardens have been loved for centuries, with their combination of grand vistas, architectural delights, water features and wilderness areas. A £12.1m restoration of the gardens in 2010 has returned them to their mid-18th century glory with new additions including picnic and play areas that create a unique oasis in London.

Apparently, the Beatles visited Chiswick House in 1955 to shoot promotional films for both sides of their latest 45 RPM single, "Paperback Writer" and "Rain". There are scenes shot in the conservatory and in the walled garden.

Hogarth's House

Hogarth's House holds an extensive collection of the artist's 18th century prints, of which a selection will always be on display, and a set of his engraving plates. The panelled rooms also house some replica pieces of 18th century furniture. These were commissioned from the Chiswick Art-Workers' Guild by Lieutenant-Colonel Shipway who rescued the house and opened it to the public as a museum to Hogarth in 1904. Shipway gave the house to Middlesex County Council in 1909 and ownership passed in 1965 to Hounslow Council. The house was refurbished in 1996-97 to mark the tercentenary of Hogarth's birth.



View of the garden as it was in 2016

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