

## u3a Bike Rides West Brompton Cemetery and Chelsea sights Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2025

A bright and sunny 4 degrees as we assembled for the group photo, well wrapped up.

We welcomed Lettie, a student studying Speech and Language Therapy at City, University of London. She was joining us as part of the requirements for her course on “an older people's placement”. We qualified.

We headed off on the usual route via Clapham Common to Battersea Park and the Thames Path, pausing just before Battersea Bridge to look across the river at a distinctive building built in the Tudor style.

This was Crosby Moran Hall and the brick building is mock Tudor, originally built in 1910. To the right is visible the grey gable end of the original Crosby Hall, of which more anon.

A difficult part of the route was the crossing of Battersea Bridge which does not have a cycle path.

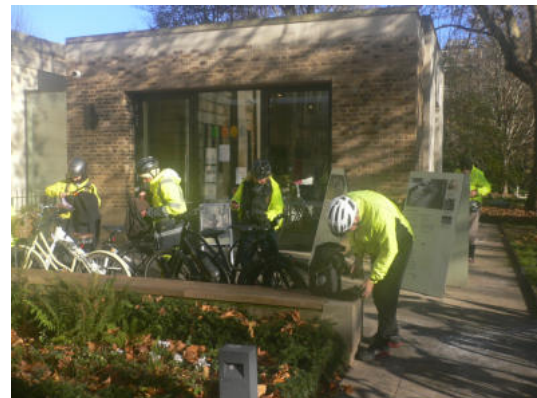
Then we turned left along the shared path to Chelsea Harbour and along Lots Road.

An easy right turn across the Kings Road, then left into Hortensia Road, past Morley College's Chelsea site, then across the Fulham Road and a left turn into the peace and quiet of the cemetery.

Passing many immense mausoleums and grand tomb stones along the central avenue, we arrived at the north entrance and the pleasant cafe and Information Centre.

Fortunately, there was sufficient indoor seating for us all and along with the coffee and croissant, the group was supplied with some information about Brompton Cemetery.

One of the Magnificent Seven Cemeteries, Brompton Cemetery is a Royal Park, and as such is well-maintained and lacks the wildness that characterises the other cemeteries. It is a haven for wildlife.



The cemetery opened in 1840 in what was then countryside outside of London to meet the need of a rapidly growing city because cremation was not made legal until 1884.

There are over 200,000 souls buried here, with 35,000 monuments, and is Grade I listed. The Information Centre provided us with some great maps showing who was buried in the cemetery.



The list includes Dr John Snow (who discovered the link between dirty water and cholera and the founder of epidemiology), suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst and Sir Henry Cole, founder of the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Royal Albert Hall, and 12 members of the armed forces who were awarded a Victoria Cross. There's lots more information on the Cemetery's website.

Author Beatrix Potter lived round the corner at Bolton Gardens, often visited the cemetery, and got inspiration for her characters' names. There are monuments to a Peter Rabbit, a Jeremiah Fisher, Mr Nutkins and Mr McGregor!

After refreshment we travelled across Gunter Grove, and on to Bolton Gardens. One James Gunter originally owned the land, then an orchard, providing fruit for his fashionable tea, chocolate and ice cream shop in Berkeley Square Mayfair (Gunters Tea Rooms, closed in 1956)



He built houses in Bolton Gardens between 1851 and 1860 for the wealthy; Madonna and Sir Jeffrey Archer have been recent residents. There is a charming church in the garden in the middle.

"The Boltons" is a highly desirable place to live. Out of curiosity I looked on-line at properties for sale, anywhere around £11 to £30 million. Here is one house with its Christmas decorations.

The route continued via the back streets of Chelsea to Danvers Street, which is adjacent to Crosby Moran Hall and here we stopped to admire the impressive Tudor Hall.

It was built in 1466 for a wealthy wool merchant, and in 1910 the whole structure was moved stone by stone to the current location from its original site near St Helens church in Bishopsgate where a new office block was to be built.

This new location was chosen because it was the site of Sir Thomas More's home Beaufort House (subsequently demolished) and he had purchased Crosby Hall in 1523.



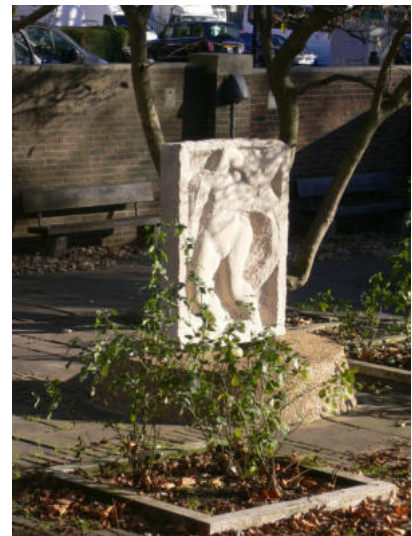
It is now owned by Dr Christopher Moran, who bought the Hall in 1988 and restored it. He is a successful businessman and well-known public figure. As a consequence of his investment, the Hall was renamed after him. The house is currently his private residence but there are pictures online if you are interested in seeing the wonderful interior of this splendid building.

Adjacent to Crosby Hall is Ropers Gardens, a sunken garden and a place of peace and quiet. Once there as an orchard here belonging to Sir Thomas More, who kept his barge on the river so that he could travel easily between the palaces at Greenwich and Hampton Court. Certainly the garden was a sun-trap when we visited More gave it to his daughter Margaret and son-in-law William Roper in 1521.



In the garden there is a Blue Plaque mural on the wall, which shows the large number of famous people who have lived in the area over the centuries, notably including Sir Hans Sloane. The mural at Ropers Gardens shows the area's extensive history and its famous residents.

Within the garden itself there are two statues, the figure of a naked woman and an unfinished relief by Jacob Epstein, a local resident.



We walked past Chelsea Old Church, which was almost completely destroyed in 1941 and rebuilt in the 1950's.

It houses a chapel built by Sir Thomas More, which is still there, and in the churchyard we passed by Sir Hans Sloane's memorial.

He was an apprentice apothecary at the nearby Chelsea Physic Garden (founded 1673), and who became a physician and botanist, making his fortune working as doctor for the Duke of Albemarle in Jamaica.



When he returned to the UK, he bought the land comprising the Physic Garden from Charles Cheyne, Lord of the Manor of Chelsea, and he let the garden to the Apothecaries for a peppercorn rent of £5 per annum in perpetuity. He donated his botany collection to the nation and it became the founding collection of the British Museum. And he also brought the cocoa bean to England...

Shown above is the Royal Society of Apothecaries Emblem on the Thameside Gates to the Chelsea Physic Garden. It was through these gates that all deliveries to the garden were made.

Then on along Embankment Gardens, past the site of Henry VIII's former manor house (demolished 1753) where lived Katherine Parr and her stepchildren Princess Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey, and coincidentally latterly also Sir Hans Sloane.

Along the Embankment, we crossed over to see Chelsea Quay, opened in April 2024, which is directly opposite the Royal Hospital Chelsea. This has lovely views up-river, and down-river to the Albert Bridge. The Quay is part of the Tideway flooding prevention project and there is an information post giving all the details of the several rivers underneath it.

The route continued over Albert Bridge, through Battersea Park and past the Power station, then Thessaly Road and Larkhill Park and so back to Herne Hill.

A big thanks to Jane Andrew for researching and leading this ride which has revealed parts of Chelsea that most of us knew very little about.

About 4 hours.

**The riders :** Alex Murdock, Brian Heatley, Caroline Strallen, Daniela Walther, David Rosenfeld, Eunice Zeffertt, Gerry Gavigan, Irene Skiadopoulou, Jane Andrew, Jane Antos, Jeremy Burke, Joe Antos, John Clements, Martin Dale, Patrick Mulhern, Peter J LeVair.

**Ride leader:** Jane Andrew

**Report and photos;** John Clements

#### **Acknowledgments:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crosby\\_Hall,\\_London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crosby_Hall,_London)

<https://www.christophermoran.org/news/crosby-hall-the-most-important-surviving-domestic-medieval-building-in-london/>

<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/parks-leisure-and-culture/parks/your-local-park/roper-gardens>



**Crosby Hall** was built in 1466 for a wealthy wool merchant, Crosby Moran Hall has had many uses over almost six centuries. It's been transformed from a home into a headquarters for the East India Company; a Royalist prison, a residence for royals, academic societies, a refuge, and a posh Victorian restaurant.

The Great Hall was built on Bishopsgate, next to St Mary's Church. It was moved in 1910, piece by piece to its present site in Cheyne Walk. It now forms part of a private residence, which in 2021 was renamed Crosby Moran Hall.

Sir John Crosby was the son of a wealthy fishmonger who became a freeman of the Grocer's Company in 1452-54. He traded in luxury textiles, especially silk, from his warehouse just off Poultry. Crosby was not merely a super-rich merchant; he was a diplomat, politician, soldier and a fervent Yorkist who was knighted by Edward IV in 1471.

The Great Hall, and additional work of 1910 and 1925–1926, are Grade II\* listed. Although fragmentary and not on its original site, this is the only example of a medieval City merchant house surviving in London. Between 1988 and 2021 it was restored, and further buildings added, to create the present complex. The Great Hall is considered to be the most important surviving secular domestic medieval building in London.

To create a setting for the great hall that could have really existed, a residential block was built at right angles to the great hall in 1925-27. The design was based on Tudor building.

In 1988 it was purchased by Dr. Christopher Moran, a successful businessman and well-known public figure. Besides his business interests, he has a strong commitment to wider society supporting institutions in a wide range of sectors including national heritage, the arts, architecture, health & well-being, faith, and international relations.

**Brompton Cemetery** since 1852 the first (and only) London cemetery to be Crown Property, managed by The Royal Parks,. It is one of the Magnificent Seven cemeteries. Established by an Act of Parliament and laid out in 1839, it opened in 1840.

Over 200,000 people lie in peace here, their lives commemorated with scores of spectacular memorials – from grieving angels and ivy-clad crosses to ornate mausoleums and imposing columns.

Those interred here include Emmeline Pankhurst, the pioneering leader of the suffragette movement and Doctor John Snow whose groundbreaking research linked cholera outbreaks to contaminated water.

**Chelsea Old Church** Chelsea Old Church dates from 1157. It was formerly the parish church of Chelsea, before it was engulfed by London. The building consisted of a 13th-century chancel with chapels to the north and south (c. 1325) and a nave and tower built in 1670.

**Ropers Garden** The site was part of the marriage gift from Sir Thomas More to Margaret, his daughter, and William Roper in 1521. It was once an orchard.

On 17 April 1941, a parachute mine destroyed the buildings here. A small sunken garden was created on the damaged area.