

**u3a Bike rides  
South London Parks  
Tuesday 2 December 2025**

South London is well served by its beautiful parks and on this ride we were to visit several of them. Three of the signed-up riders had to cancel because of illness and so we were just 15 assembled in Dulwich Park under a clear blue sky.



Lottie Sims, a student studying Speech and Language Therapy at City, University of London joined us for the ride. For her course she had to complete as a requirements a 'placement' on an older people's event.

We left the park by the Court Lane gate, past Dulwich Library and enjoyed the ride down the long gentle slope of Friern Road to Peckham Rye Park.



We crossed Peckham Rye Park and meandered through local roads to Nunhead Lane and Nunhead Green.

We took a few minutes at the Old Nun's Head pub to read the story of the origin of the name "Nunhead".

There was a nunnery on this site. During Henry VIII's reign and the dissolution of the monasteries Cromwell's men arrived and the Mother Superior confronted them. For her resistance she was murdered and decapitated, and her head displayed on a pike on the green. But her bravery allowed the nuns to escape through an underground tunnel into Meeting house Lane and make their escape.

Just along the road is the Pyrotechnist's Arms, so named because the workers from a local fireworks factory used to go there.

We then made our way across Rye Lane, through Bellenden and so to Peckham Square and the quiet route of the former Grand Surrey Canal to Burgess Park and Glengall Road.

After crossing the Old Kent Road we headed for Bermondsey Spa Gardens. At its north-east corner stands Bermondsey Town Hall, a replacement for an earlier one that once stood on the site of the Sainsbury store.

Several of us had been here before, on the Salter ride. It was here that Ada Salter was the Mayor of Bermondsey in the 1920's in the old town hall; all that remains of it are the two pillars seen outside the supermarket.

A short ride brought us to Jamaica Road and the cycleway, with a diagonal crossing at traffic lights and so to an entrance to Southwark Park; we rode past the recently restored bandstand.

The first stop was to view the Caryatides, two carved stone figures. Originally, in the 1920's, they stood at the entrance of the Rotherhithe Town Hall, which was destroyed in WW2; they were then moved to the Heygate Estate at the Elephant & Castle.



The figures were finally relocated to the park in 2011 after the estate was demolished.

The Caryatides are figures of young women in long flowing gowns, and are commonly found in Greek temples, including the Coliseum in Athens. Each figure is balancing the prow of a ship on the head, a reference to Rotherhithe and its ship-building heritage.

They have just recently been restored; the figure on the right has had replacement arms added.

The next stop was at the newly restored Ada Salter Garden, with its view across the lake to the Pavilion Café.



The Pavilion Café was our coffee stop -- about time too was the view of several !

We left the park by the Dilston gate and soon arrived at Burgess Park and thence on to Brockwell Park. The rain shower arrived in the last ten minutes of the ride which ended at the home of Andrew and Mary where about 30 of the Group members gathered for festive fare of mulled wine and mince pies.

**Riders:** Daniela Walther. Denise Davies. Gerry Gavigan, Jan Rae. Jane Andrew. Jane Antos. Jeremy Burke, Joe Antos. John Clements. John Davies. John Zeffertt, Julia Carter, Patrick Mulhern Tacey Kobayashi, with Lettie Sims

**Ride Leaders:** John, Jane Andrew, Andrew

**Report:** John Clements, 4 December 2025

## NOTES

**Dulwich Park** was created in 1890. It started life as farmland and a group of meadows, known as “five fields” and many of the ancient boundary oaks can still be seen. Queen Mary was apparently a regular visitor.

**Peckham Rye Park.** The Rye was recorded as being cultivated before the Norman Conquest in the 11<sup>th</sup> century but between 1894 and 1906 it was a railed enclosure with a man-made lake, woodland walks and open sports fields. The woodland was then annexed and the bowling green and several gardens were created: the Old English Garden or Sexby Garden, the American Garden, the Japanese Garden and the Arboretum.

**The Nun’s Head** The origin of the name Nunhead is not certain but is believed to be derived from a local inn named variously *The Nun’s Head* or *The Nunhead Tavern*. Local historians and legend maintain that the name refers to the beheading of a nun during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. One version is that the Mother Superior of a nunnery on the site put up resistance to Henry VIII’s expulsion order and was murdered; her head was placed on a spike on the Green. The current public house now stands on the site of the monastery.

**Burgess Park:** At 56 hectares, Burgess Park is Southwark's largest park. It is more-recently established park, developed between the 1950s and 1980 as a result of the Abercrombie Plan for open spaces in 1943. The area was once home to factories, densely populated streets and the Surrey Canal and Basin (adjacent to the Walworth Road) before it was badly bombed during World War II. The park was named after Councillor Jessie Burgess, Camberwell's first woman Mayor in 1973. In 2012, the park re-opened after an £8m transformation, establishing it as a park central to the local community and recognised for its heritage, sports facilities, lake, wildlife, design and horticulture.