

## u3a Bike Rides Burgess Park Tour Friday 16 January 2026

After Thursday's heavy rain we were very happy that the day was dry with the prospect of sunshine for this short local ride as 12 cyclists assembled in Dulwich Park, looking forward to exploring Burgess Park.

Before setting out, we took a moment to extend a warm welcome to Tom, a new member of our Group who was joining us for his first ride with us. (Tom is an experienced rider with the Saturday Southwark Healthy Cyclists Group.)



From Dulwich Park we took the Court Lane exit, up to the top of Barry Road. Leaving Barry Road, we let gravity take us down the slope of "the Spine" to Peckham Rye and on to Burgess Park by low-traffic local roads.

Before entering the park, we stopped for a short briefing on the park itself, its origins, changes over time and a number of historic features. Both Martin and Andrew had lived in the area in the 50's, 60's and 70's and were able to contribute personal experiences of the area at that time.



Setting off around the artificial lake, the first stop was at the **Little Houses** commemorating the ten people killed in a WWI German Zeppelin bombing in 1917, the "Silent Raid".

Continuing round the lake we arrived at a memorial plaque, dated 1935, to a Foundry and other works that stood alongside the canal. No other information seems to be available.



Continuing the ride we arrived at the **Bridge to Nowhere**, recently restored to former glory. In 1810 the construction of the canal along this route would have bisected the local community here; a journey to the other side of the canal would have required a mile-long walk.

The answer was to build a bridge spanning the canal, which was duly completed.....but only some 100 years later!!



A short ride brought us to our coffee stop at the Stomping Grounds café.

This was already quite busy but somehow we managed to find space to sit and enjoy a coffee and a chatter.

Coffee break over, we headed into the **Chumleigh Gardens**, a peaceful retreat with almshouses.



These are set in a multi-cultural garden which was established to reflect the area's diversity.

Two features of the garden were the bronze figure of local hero Kieb Thomas (1947-2007), an inspirational community activist, volunteer, and teacher, devoted to ethnic and inter-faith harmony, justice and equality; and sculptor Heather Burrell's gate, marking a community and police partnership against hate crime.

Continuing our journey we arrived at **The Camberwell Beauty** which is a large mosaic iconic art work of Royal Doulton tiles on the gable end of a large brick building.



It depicts a rare migrant butterfly normally found in Europe and Scandinavia.

The mosaic is on the gable end of the **Passmore Edwards Library, Baths and Wash House** which was partly funded by Victorian philanthropist John Passmore Edwards.



Its aim was to improve the health and leisure of local working people in a busy industrial and residential area, at a time when many houses lacked bathrooms, clothes-washing facilities and books.

The three parts to the building can be seen, the Library on the left, the Public Baths, and the Public Washhouse.

The building, Grade II listed, is now home to a boxing club while Southwark Council consults on the long-term use of the building.

The next stop was at the **Lime Kiln**. We have frequently cycled past this but never stopped to look in detail at it.

Around the base are four information plaques which provided useful information.

The kiln was built in 1816 and was in use up until the 1960's. It is now Grade II listed. Very few still exist in such good repair as this one.



Barges unloaded the raw materials to be processed in the kiln at wharves along the canal. This kiln was in use until the 1960s. It was left here as a memorial to the building workers of a century and a half of London's growth.

Burgess Park was developed over the second half of the 20th century to give South Londoners more open space. The area was cleared by degrees and built up slowly to create the Park.

Kilns were built to turn limestone with the fossils it contained into the quicklime that was used in mortar for building. The lime works of E.R. Burtt were founded here in 1816.

This lime kiln was sited close to the Grand Surrey Canal, built between 1801 and 1811. The canal was designed to help market gardeners in the area ship produce to London markets, but it stimulated industrial development.

Leaving the lime kiln, better informed about the production of quicklime from limestone, its use in building, agriculture and the old-time theatre, we made our way to Addington Square.

From there we cycled back to Herne Hill via Loughborough Junction, feeling happy once again for the good company of the Chattering Cyclists and the opportunity to explore some of the rich history of London.



And a "thank you" to ride co-leaders and backstops Andrew & Mary, and Mark, and to Martin for the insights into the area from his early life in Camberwell.

**Distance:** 8.7 mile

**Riders:** Brian Heatley, Daniela Walther, Eunice Zeffertt, Gerry Gavigan, Jane Evans, Jeremy Burke, John Clements, Mark Stones, Martin Goffe, Mary Burke, Tom Parker.

**Report and photos by** John Clements

## NOTES

**Burgess Park** is Southwark's largest park. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, this area was rich farmland and market gardens supplying London's growing population. In 1810 the Camberwell branch of the Grand Surrey Canal was opened to transport agricultural produce. This then stimulated the industrial and residential development in the early 1800's. The area was heavily bombed during World War II. In 1943 it was adopted as part of the Abercrombie Plan for open spaces.

Between the 1950s and 1980s the area was gradually cleared and became open green spaces; thus, the park was developed in stages in a process of "de-urbanisation". It was named after Councillor Jessie Burgess, Camberwell's first woman Mayor in 1973.

In 2012, the park re-opened after an £8million transformation, with facilities for the local community; sports facilities, a lake, wildlife, horticultural features, barbecues and a skate-park. Some historic features were left; the Bridge to Nowhere, the Lime Kiln, the Little Houses, the Chumleigh Gardens, the Camberwell Beauty mosaic, and the Passmore Edwards Library, Bath & Washhouse, which we visited.

**The Little Houses** in Burgess Park are sculptures by Sally Hogarth called "Silent Raid" and commemorates the people killed in a WWI Zeppelin bombing in 1917. On October 19 a bomb from a German Zeppelin landed in Albany Road and Calmington Road. It killed 10 people, injured 24 and demolished three houses, a fish and chip shop and a doctor's surgery. The houses represent the lost lives and are located in the Albany Road woodlands and Chumleigh Garden. The launch in 2018 was exactly 101 years after the attack and was part of the Zeppelin 2017 programme of "Events about the First World War".

**Chumleigh Garden** today provides a peaceful retreat with a multi-cultural garden established to reflect the area's diversity. Before welfare reforms in the 20th century, looking after the elderly and infirm was mainly carried out by local charities. Many of them established almshouses – groups of sheltered housing for local people like this one, the *Female Friendly Society Asylum*.

The Society was started in 1802, by and for women, operating "by love, kindness, and absence of humbug"! It gave small grants to "poor, aged women of good character". The charity opened its first 'asylum' here in 1823. The alms houses offered modest bedsits to 20 residents, many in their 90s, affectionately dubbed "the old objects"! Expanded by the 1840s to the three buildings here now, the almshouses were damaged in WW2 and fell into disrepair. They were saved from demolition during the creation of the park, and later renovated as 'Chumleigh Gardens' in 1981.

The multi-cultural garden established in 1995 - a hidden gem. – is designed to reflect the area's diversity; Mediterranean, Islamic, Oriental, African & English gardens and form a fittingly peaceful spot to commemorate local hero Kieb Thomas (1947-2007), inspirational community activist, volunteer, and teacher, devoted to ethnic and inter-faith harmony, justice and equality.

Sculptor Heather Burrell's gate, marking a community and police partnership against hate crime, frames the Heart garden beyond, tended by those with recent or ongoing health issues.



**The Bridge to Nowhere** now serves no purpose, spanning a footpath but originally it crossing the Camberwell branch of the Grand Surrey Canal.

When the canal was built in 1810 local communities were completely separated with nowhere to cross the canal for over half a mile. Camberwell Council finally build this footbridge, opened in January 1906. This was a steel lattice girder bridge 410 feet long with a central span made from oak planks and providing seven feet of headroom above the water. As local trade declined the canal was no longer needed, so in 1970 it was closed and subsequently filled in. The houses and factories were demolished and the bomb-damaged areas cleared. But the footbridge remained.

It has recently been repaired, restored and opened to the public. Work was completed in 2023 - at a cost of £323,553, around 100 times the original cost of the bridge in 1905!

**The Lime Kiln** was built in 1816 by builders' suppliers Edward R Burtt & Sons. Coal and limestone brought along the canal by Thames barge and were burnt in the kiln for 3 days to produce quicklime, which was then reloaded on to barges for distribution. Quicklime was a key ingredient of mortar for houses and fertilizer for agriculture. As 'limelight' it was used to illuminate Victorian theatres. The kiln was in continuous use until the 1960's and it is now Grade II listed.

Producing quicklime by burning limestone is one of the oldest chemical reactions known to man, being used by the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Limestone is abundant, and quarried and mined widely. Quicklime ('lime') has many industrial uses, importantly in making lime mortar.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century building boom in this area many local houses were almost certainly built using quicklime from this kiln. In theatres of the time the bright incandescent glow of limelight (from burning quicklime) was widely used.

To make quicklime, 25 tonnes of limestone arrived by barge and broken into small pieces. The four openings in the kiln were loosely bricked up, the kiln loaded with limestone, layered with coal, and lit from below. It burnt at over 1000°C. Loaded on day 1, it burnt for three, allowed to cool for two days, then unloaded on the seventh day.

It was usual to have seven kilns in close proximity, with loading/unloading gangs working a constant rotation.

This kiln eventually finished for good in the sixties. But in 2002 it was restored. Schools and community groups helped reveal its story in the paving which you can still read at your feet as you circle the kiln. Lime kilns were once common; few now survive in such beautiful condition.

**The Camberwell Beauty** is a large mosaic iconic art celebrating a rare migrant butterfly. It is now on the gable wall of the former library and bathhouse and is the trademark of local stationers Samuel Jones & Co. The Royal Doulton tiles were moved here when the factory in Southampton Way, Peckham, was demolished in 1982. The butterfly itself rarely breeds in the UK, migrating from mainland Europe and Scandinavia and only occasionally seen here.

**Passmore Edwards Library, Baths and Wash House** was partly funded by Victorian philanthropist John Passmore Edwards; opened in 1903 its aim was to improve the health and leisure of local working people in a busy industrial and residential area, at a time when many houses lacked bathrooms, clothes-washing facilities and books.

The **Grand Surrey Canal** was constructed during the early 19th century. It opened to the Old Kent Road in 1807, to Camberwell in 1810, and to Peckham in 1826. Its main purpose was to transport cargo, primarily timber (“deal”) from the Surrey Commercial Docks.

The **Croydon Canal** ran 9¼ miles from New Cross via Forrest Hill to Croydon. The canal had 28 locks arranged in two flights. The Croydon Basin was on the site of what is now West Croydon railway station. At the northern end it linked into the Grand Surrey Canal, midway along the present-day Surrey Canal Road. It opened in 1809 and closed in 1836., never a commercial success, plans for further extension to the south coast were never realised.

For a route map see:

[https://www.outdooractive.com/en/r/332817848?share=%7E33dmptuv%244ossypko&utm\\_source=mail&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=user-shared-social-content](https://www.outdooractive.com/en/r/332817848?share=%7E33dmptuv%244ossypko&utm_source=mail&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=user-shared-social-content)

#### **Acknowledgements:**

Wikipedia

South London Guide. <http://www.southlondonguide.co.uk/camberwell/burgesspark.htm>

Archive photo of a German Zeppelin.



Archive photograph of the area in 1949 showing industrial and residential properties. St George’s Church can be seen in the middle.

