

# FRIENDS OF BATTERSEA PARK REVIEW

Issue 127  
Spring 2024



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BATTERSEA

# Review

Spring 2024



Editor Frances Radcliffe  
Production Lydia Jones

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February has been warm and wet, which is exactly what the plants in the Winter Garden like best. It is well worth a visit at any time, but particularly now, covered with daffodils and spring flowers.

This issue celebrates the seminal work of Walter Johnson, *Battersea Park as a Centre for Nature Study* published in 1910. By sheer coincidence, both Valerie Selby and Bob Barker have written articles about this wonderful book and it is felicitous to be able to publish them together so the Friends can better understand the value of his work. What a great schoolmaster he must have been! For a richer image, Bob has also found out that in his spare time he was a member to the Battersea Field Club which made 'excursions to the suburbs by train and bicycle to hunt for prehistoric flints'.

If anyone would like an A4 sized copy of Sydney Harrowing's intriguing map of the Park in 1909 on page 12, please email [media@friendsofbatterseapark.org](mailto:media@friendsofbatterseapark.org).

Last year, we committed £3,600 to the development of science lessons for primary schools. This builds on our previous project which enabled children from five local primary schools to visit

the Park to explore subjects chosen by their schools. Our new project has again been managed by the Sir Walter St John Educational Charity. A report will be in the next issue of Review. Walter Johnson would surely have approved of this initiative.

Your committee is busy planning three events, all bookable through our website:

On page 4, you will see our 'Save the Date' notice for our popular annual barbecue on 11 June. Last year, several Friends were disappointed when tickets had run out, so do book yours now!

In 2022, we celebrated Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee and last year we celebrated King Charles's coronation with a gathering of Friends in the Old English Garden. This year we are just celebrating, with a party for Friends. The wisteria should be looking glorious. Your invitation is enclosed.

A reminder that the Spring Lunchtime Lecture by Clive Freedman on 'Mosses in the Park' is on 25 March at the Ethelburga Community Centre. This is the first time that a lecture has been given by a Friend (who is also a regular contributor to this magazine).

We always need volunteers, not only for helping with BBQ planning and on the night but also for staffing our stall at summer events. If you can help, please email [secretary@friendsofbatterseapark.org](mailto:secretary@friendsofbatterseapark.org) or call 07495 542399. You will be sure of a warm welcome.

Enjoy the Park!

## Friends' Contacts

**Enquiries:** Secretary  
FoBP  
c/o 32 Brynmaer Rd  
London SW11 4EW  
07495 542399  
[info@friendsofbatterseapark.org](mailto:info@friendsofbatterseapark.org)

**Letters:** Editor  
Friends' Review  
32 Brynmaer Road  
London  
SW11 4EW

**Review:** [media@friendsofbatterseapark.org](mailto:media@friendsofbatterseapark.org)

**Advertising:** 07816 460744

**Membership:** [membership@friendsofbatterseapark.org](mailto:membership@friendsofbatterseapark.org)

**Twitter:** @batterseapark

## Park Contacts

**Park Office:** Staff Yard  
Battersea Park  
SW11 4NJ  
020 3959 0076  
[parks@enablelc.org](mailto:parks@enablelc.org)

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**Cover Image:** Mahonia in the Winter Garden in February

# Parkwatch

## Parkrun

Wandsworth Council's Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 23 November. The Executive subsequently agreed its recommendations to:

a) instruct officers to continue to work with Enable with the aim of starting [Parkrun] possibly in the Summer of 2024 and Junior Parkrun in Spring of 2024; and

b) instruct officers to review the impact of the event after six months and report back to the Environment Committee.

Parkrun and Junior Parkrun would take place every Saturday and Sunday respectively at 9am. No starting date has yet been announced for either.

The Friends as an organisation has adopted a neutral position. There are strong views amongst individual Friends both against and for Parkrun. A meeting is being arranged between the Friends and Council officials, ideally in the Park, to discuss our concerns and how they might best be addressed. The decision to review the impact of Parkrun after six months is welcome.

## Planning

*Application 2023/4553.* With the support of Enable, **The Pear Tree Café** has applied to extend the single storey outer ring at the back of the café along its northern side up to its glass windows. This extra space would provide one disabled, 6 women's and 2 men's lavatories plus 3 urinals, all accessible from the Park but not from

inside the café. There would also be a serving hatch for the café.

It is unfortunately all too clear that the Park and the café need more lavatories. The deadline for comments is 22 February but they are likely to be accepted for some time afterwards. The Committee's views are being finalised at the time of writing.

*Application 2023/1412* In January, the Planning Applications Committee eventually considered Enable's application of June 2023 to retain the temporary **Evolution events building** for a further four years without requiring it to be dismantled. The application was approved, allowing the building to be retained until January 2028. However, the Committee wanted the next application to be for a permanent

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building because it is against planning rules to keep approving a temporary structure. The Friends accept that repeated applications for a temporary building are anomalous, but would far rather a removable temporary structure than a permanent one.

The proposal to replace the **Glassmill** building next to Battersea Bridge with a 38 storey tower has appalled many Friends. The developer's target timetable envisages that a planning application may be made before the end of June.

### Winter Garden

The green plastic fencing has been removed. In an ideal world, it would be replaced by the same bow-topped fencing as around the outside of the garden, but the cost is huge and Enable has told us that it can't contribute. Chestnut palings could be used as a further temporary measure. The cost of permanent fencing for at least the paths between the gates and

the open oval space in the centre is being investigated.

Designer, Dan Pearson's annual visit was due to take place on 22 February.

More snowdrops have been planted by our Wednesday morning volunteer gardeners. Please join us whenever you can to help keep the garden looking good!

### Trees

There have been some sad losses, especially of the Italian alder in the Subtropical Garden, but some encouraging new plantings. Look out for the new Scots pine east of the All Weather Pitches planted in memory of longstanding Committee member, Claire Elliot, and the new black walnut which has replaced the horse chestnut by the Bowling Green.

### Swan

Our solitary male swan remains single.

### Elizabeth Hood

Elizabeth was our membership secretary for many years. She will be remembered with great affection and admiration. She moved to Park Mansions, overlooking the Park, in 1954 and died there in December. She was kind, firm and constructive, a brilliant organiser and, as one Friend said, 'one of those quiet people who Got Things Done without fuss'. She was ahead of her time in setting up the first of her two Montessori schools when her first child was only 6 months old. She made a huge contribution to the Friends.

### Filming

Look out for scenes from the Park in the film 'Bob Marley – One Love' and the television series 'A Very Royal Scandal' with Ruth Wilson as Emily Maitlis and Michael Sheen as Prince Andrew, Duke of York.

# Letter to the Editor



Dear Friends of Battersea Park Committee

My husband and I recently received your latest *Review* magazine. We walk through Battersea Park 3 to 4 times a week from the Chelsea Bridge end.

I read through your AGM report. Please may you indulge me with my thoughts and concerns, and possible solutions to help make Battersea Park even better.

## Cycling

I noted in the AGM, a Friend 'felt that cycling was out of control, particularly with electric bikes and that 'no cycling signs' were still unclear and not always in the right places.

This is absolutely correct. Please see the photo I took the other day that shows what appears (even though it isn't) to be conflicting signs with one saying 'no cycling' when the other seems to tell me you CAN cycle here. It is no wonder cyclists are confused.

## Possible solution

Replace all the very small no cycling signs and get some professional stencils made (you would need three, one for each colour). The resulting signs would be inexpensive and could be touched up whenever needed. They would be on the paths so that cyclists have to cycle over them. My husband and I were walking through

Hyde Park when they were creating the sign above using stencils.

I believe that the diagonal red bar through the cycle is clearer in getting the message across that you are NOT to cycle in this particular area. The small signs you have, although they are correct, do not make it clear. Not everyone knows that under the Highway Code, a red circle is prohibition.

In the places where you have gravel paths, you would need to put a slab of bitumen down first.

Also, particularly at the two main entrances to the Riverside Walk, I believe that you should put two staggered planters on the pathway, with enough room for strollers, and people walking with their bikes (not on them). There are planters along the Thames Walk towards Wandsworth which force cyclists to slow right down. If you put similar staggered planters on the path and had a sign on the planters telling cyclists to dismount, as well as no cycling signs on path, this could greatly reduce the amount of cyclists on the River Walk.

## Rubbish

Since the opening of the Battersea Power Station the amount of rubbish has greatly increased on the north side of the Park, as has the number of people waiting to catch the bus near the Chelsea Gate entrance, some

of them dropping rubbish over the fence into the Park onto the planted bank area. Although the rubbish problem outside the Park is not yours, it gives a negative image to entering the Park. The whole look is rather dismal. The rubbish has got so bad, that five times in the last 12 months I anonymously put a street clean up request to Wandsworth Council to have the area cleaned up. They did. However, I shouldn't have to do this, and believe the area should be swept once a week and a larger double rubbish bin provided. Could the Friends persuade Wandsworth Council to do this?

Inside the Park going from Chelsea Gate to the car park, there is an increased amount of rubbish. If there is an under-staffing problem, my suggestion is that you recruit volunteers who would agree to help keep the Park clean by volunteering 10 - 12 times a year. They would have to go Park Office and register, get a rubbish bag, grabber, gloves etc. As a reward they could get a free ticket to the Fireworks or Summer BBQ or something similar? I imagine you may only need 10 - 20 volunteers?

It goes without saying, Battersea Park is one of my favourite areas in London.

Kind regards

Robyn Tan

# National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid

We now have more information about Enable's proposed bid to the Fund for restoration of the Cascades and most other Pulhamite in the Park and for increased engagement with the community. This is a three stage process. An expression of interest was submitted to the Fund in December and the result is expected in March. If accepted as being potentially worthy of funding, the next stage is to make a Development Phase application for around £700,000 and if successful, a Delivery Phase application for around £3.5 million.

The application proposes:

- restoring the Cascades and certain other Pulhamite features
- connecting with more local people and promoting the heritage of the Park using the restoration as a catalyst for engagement
- developing new processes and skills in Pulhamite restoration that can be used elsewhere in the UK
- using local suppliers to install an innovative zero-carbon energy source to power water circulation and nearby

events in the Park

- creating interpretation boards, signage and exhibition and digital material to explain the heritage of the Park to a wider audience
- hosting interactive classes and events on heritage, biodiversity and climate adaptation
- developing and promoting accessible travel to the Park from the most deprived local areas.

A paper will be submitted to Wandsworth Council's Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee with full details of the proposal. If its recommendations are agreed, the Executive will be asked to approve the bid and the necessary commitments and financial contributions from the Council.

The total project cost will be around £4,150,000, subject to changes during the development phase. The total bid to the Lottery will be £3,735,000. The Council is required to provide a minimum of 50% of the remaining £415,000 i.e. £207,500. The plan is to use remaining ring-fenced



Formula E funding of £227,400 for this purpose (Friends may recall that when Formula E came to the Park, it was agreed that a percentage of the amount paid to the Council would be reserved for the Park). Enable would also need to provide resources.

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# Acers in the park

Clive Freedman and Brian Livingstone

For many readers the name *Acer* may bring to mind one of the numerous Japanese Maple horticultural varieties, in the form of a small tree with sycamore-like leaves, usually red. However, the name '*Acer*' is the Botanical Latin for a large and widespread genus of trees (the 'Maples'). It means 'pointed' referring to the tips of the leaf lobes found in many *Acer* species (Figs. 1 and 2). But the 330 or so *Acers* in the Park, including 12 different species, have leaves that range from being hardly lobed at all (e.g. the Snake Bark Maple) to some that have pinnate leaves i.e. made up of several leaflets (e.g. the Box Elder). The common feature of the whole genus is the typical paired winged seed, known as a 'samaras' to botanists, and as a 'helicopter' to the rest of us (Figs. 1 and 2). These seeds split into singles after being shed.

The Sycamore (*A. pseudoplatanus*, with over 150 in the Park) will be familiar to all with its palmate five-lobed leaves that have serrated or

toothed edges and long 'tails' or panicles of drooping yellow flowers (Fig. 1). It was introduced to the British Isles in about the 16th century or possibly earlier. If you have read our article about Plane trees (Latin name *Platanus*), you may recall that *their* very similar leaves are distinguished by being attached *alternately* on their shoots while, in the Maples, they are opposite each other. Attractive varieties to look out for when the leaves emerge in mid-April include 'Brilliantissimum', with orange/salmon-pink leaves on the grass south-east of the lake, the less conspicuous 'Prinz Handjery', on the corner of the path west of the Zoo entrance, and the yellow-leaved variety on the corner of the path leading north to the Old English Garden. Sycamores seed freely, and you can see little seedlings in many places.

The other Maple that is named for its resemblance to the Plane is *Acer platanoides*, the Norway Maple. There is a row of five on the southern border of the grass football pitches

and elsewhere in the Park there are specimens of decorative varieties, such as 'Crimson King' with yellow flowers contrasting with purple leaves in mid-April (in the border east of the Pear Tree Café). The leaves are more obviously 5-lobed than a Sycamore (in which the two lobes nearest the leafstalk are quite small) and the pointed tips look sharper. The flowerheads form upright clusters.

Similar to the Sycamore and Norway Maple is the Cappadocian Maple from South Eastern Europe (*A. cappadocicum*). This has no serrations of the leaf margins but prominent 'Acer' points to the leaf lobes. The flowerheads are upright clusters. Our trees, on the grass south of the Tea Terrace kiosk, are a variety which has attractive yellow leaves in October.

England's only *native* maple is the Field Maple (*Acer campestre*). Its 5-lobed leaves are no more than 10cm wide compared to 15-25cm for Sycamore. The leaf edges are not serrated. The flower heads are upright but smaller than the Norway Maple.

## Left to right:

**Fig 1.** *A. pseudoplatanus* or Sycamore flower heads. Inset, paired samaras.

**Fig 2.** *A. platanoides* or Norway Maple 'Crimson King'. Upright flowers, very pointed leaves. Inset samaras - the pair join at a wider angle than Sycamore seeds.

**Fig 3.** Flower heads: 1. Box Elder (male), 2. Red Acer (female), 3. Silver Maple (female). Despite the differing flowers, all produce similar paired samaras.

**Fig 4.** *Acer x "freemanii"*. This cultivar is a hybrid between Red and Silver maples.

**Fig 5.** The bark of Paperbark and Snakebark *Acers* compared (*A. Griseum* and *A. davidii*)



Fig 1.



Fig 2.

The paired seeds are almost in a straight line.

The leaf on the Canadian Flag is from the Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), which provides the sap which is the commonest source of maple syrup. It is rarely grown in Britain and we don't have one in the Park, but we do have other Canadian Maples, Silver Maple (*A. saccharinum*) and Red Maple (*A. rubrum*) (Fig. 3). These have green leaves with silvery undersurface. They can both colour orange or red in autumn, but *A. rubrum* is the more reliable and there are some very red ones in the Maple Avenue that leads to the cricket pavilion. Maple Avenue was planted in 2008 with a donation from Canadian benefactors. Both species produce their flowers before the leaves. In *A. rubrum* the flowers form drooping clusters, but they are not in 'tails' like a Sycamore. *A. saccharinum* on the other hand produces interesting flowers that sit directly on the wood. When the paired seeds form they are hardly angled apart at all. We also have

examples of a hybrid of these species, Freeman's Maple (*Acer x freemanii*) - the striking red foliage of the tree north of the cricket nets is at its best at the beginning of November (when the sight is unfortunately spoiled by the fencing erected for the fireworks display) (Fig.4).

Lastly, three *Acers* without maple-shaped leaves. *A. griseum*, Paperbark Maple, is from China and has leaves of three leaflets (each one with small lobes). The name "*griseum*" refers to the blue-grey undersurface. These go very red/orange in autumn, but the most distinctive year-round feature is the peeling 'paperbark'. They are not easy to propagate and we are lucky to have them in the Park; four trees can be seen in the Winter Garden behind the bench at the east end (Fig. 5).

*Acer davidii* (on the corner of the path leading east from the Subtropical Garden) is one of the Snake-bark Maples (Fig. 5). It is also from China and named after the missionary and naturalist, Père David. It has a

characteristic bark which looks like snakeskin. Its leaves are not lobed but rounded with teeth, similar to Lime trees. Its flowers are in drooping tails like a Sycamore.

*Acer negundo*, Box Elder, is a rather small tree. Neither its ash-like pinnate leaves nor its tassel flowers look like *Acer* (nor Box though they are rather like Elder). However the seeds are the typical winged pair. It was introduced to Europe by the later 17th century from North America. It can be a fast spreading pest in Central Europe but seems well-behaved in the UK.

At [www.treesofbatterseapark.org](http://www.treesofbatterseapark.org) you can access an interactive map which shows the location of some of the trees mentioned here, and also shows trees and shrubs of interest in particular months of the year. There are more photos of *Acers* at <https://www.treesofbatterseapark.org/treemap.htm?genus=Acer>.

To discuss *Acers*, or other trees and shrubs in Battersea Park, contact [batterseaparktrewatchers@btinternet.com](mailto:batterseaparktrewatchers@btinternet.com)

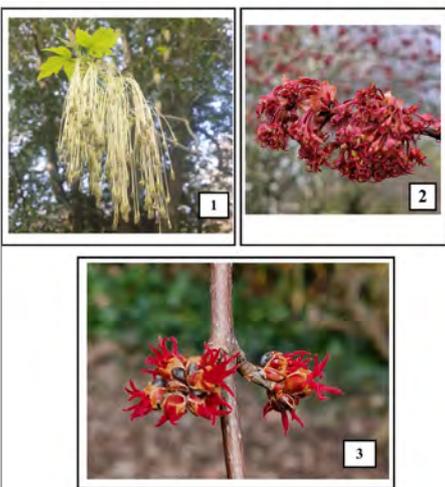


Fig 3.



Fig 4.



Fig 5.

# Autumn Lunchtime Lecture: 'Spiders in London'

Clive Freedman

On 13 November, Edward Milner gave us an illustrated talk on 'Spiders in London'. He has been the National Spider Recorder for Middlesex and London for over 25 years and has found the first specimens of two species which are new to the UK.

Edward showed us illustrations of a number of different species. He explained that even spiders of the same species can vary in colour, depending on their habitat, e.g. the Common Garden Spider, which is the spider most often seen in Battersea Park, usually on an orb-shaped web. It has spines on its legs as well as hairs and often has a distinctive white cross on its body. This species hibernates.

Some species can change colour to match their background or have males and females of different sizes.

The Cellar Spider is often known as a Daddy-Long-Legs on account of its long thin legs. But this name can be confusing as it is also used to describe Crane-flies and Harvestmen. Harvestmen (Opiliones) are also Arachnids, the Class to which Spiders (Araneae) belong, but they are different from spiders. Unlike Harvestmen, the body of a spider is in two parts – the cephalothorax, which comprises the fused head and

thorax, and the abdomen.

Spiders have a number of different ways of catching their prey. Those which make webs may make orb webs, sheet webs or funnel webs. The Spitting Spider captures its prey by spitting thread at it. Some, such as the Buzzing Spider, live in foliage and catch their prey by running after it.

The jaws of a spider are not strong, and although they have poison glands, the poison is usually weak. Even this can trigger an allergic reaction. Newspapers sometimes carry stories of people suffering painful symptoms after a bite from a False Widow Spider, but these stories have not been confirmed by a reliable identification. Noble False Widows are a common spider which can be seen in the Park, often on London Planes.

Spiders typically bite and wrap their prey before sucking out the fluids leaving a dry husk. A good time to look for them in the Park is after dark, using a torch. While most species have a time of the year when they can commonly be seen, spiders can be seen throughout the year, even under snow.

Web silk has high tensile strength, in some cases as strong as steel. Some



*A Common Garden Spider wrapping a Marmalade Hover Fly after catching it in its web*

spiders can move from one place to another by ballooning, i.e. using web silk like a kite. Spiders have been known to reach a height of 5,000 feet above sea level.

In some species the female eats the male after copulation.

We are grateful to Edward for giving us a very informative and enjoyable talk.

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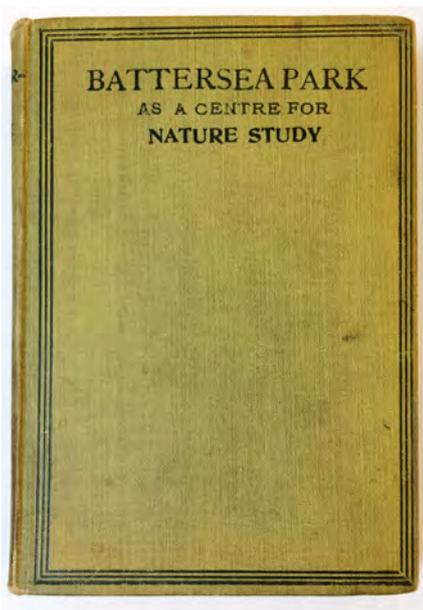
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# Nature recorded in the Park in 1910 and 1930

Valerie Selby, *Enable, Biodiversity and Parks Development Manager*



This isn't the article I intended to write but an internet outage has brought an end to my ability to fact check my work, so I have returned to the ever reliable bookshelf and will explore the nature recorded in the Park in 1910 and 1930, as documented in two wonderful old books: *Battersea Park as a Centre for Nature Study* by Walter Johnson FGS (published under the direction of the Battersea and Wandsworth Educational Council) and *Animal Life in London* by the same author in *The Nature World of London* series.

The preface to *Battersea Park as a Centre for Nature Study* states that the pages within 'seek to indicate the wealth of educational material which lies almost at our doors'. It begins with a history of the Park at a time when it had been only 70 years since 'the whole space was occupied by flat, marshy fields and the tract bordering the river was frequently flooded'. It then goes on to cover the archaeology, geology and geography of the Park and promotes local study over the 'fashionable' school journey. It even goes so far as to suggest that the Ladies Pond at the time demonstrated the geographical features of 'an isthmus, a

peninsula, a cape and a promontory'. Eventually it moves to a study of the bird life of the Park before covering mammals and fishes, miscellaneous animals, insects and botany.

Perhaps the most fascinating chapter is towards the back of the book when Mr Johnson details month by month the flowers and birds most likely to be seen. In January as I write this, for example, it indicates that we should readily see groundsel, chickweed, speedwell and shepherd's purse in flower in sheltered spots, with gorse coming into flower at the end of the month. There are also garden flowers listed including sweet-scented butterbur, yellow jasmine, Mezeoreon (known today as *Daphne mezereum* and which is loved for its wonderful scent), Christmas rose and *Laurustinus* (which we today call *Viburnum tinus* and which again we often smell before we see the small pink tinged flowers). The bird list is succinct, stating that thrush, redbreast (robin) and wren occasionally sing in mild weather; that house sparrows are noisy towards the end of the month and that starlings are 'still mostly in flocks, but restless and moving from place to place for food'.

By 1930, Mr Johnson states that 'during the last twenty years Battersea Park has undergone considerable change'. He goes on to detail the changes to captive animals in the Park along with noting rabbits on the lake islands and peacocks roaming the shrubberies 'while a heron stands like a statue by the reedy shores of the lake'.

Today we are still keen to support nature study in the Park with several local schools visiting regularly. We are hopeful that the proposed Natural History GCSE will bring about a further resurgence of students using the Park to develop an understanding of their local wildlife, environment

and ecosystems along with a critical understanding of climate change, the biodiversity crisis and sustainability. Whilst we won't have the scope to allow a detailed repeat study of 'the development of the antlers of the fallow deer in Battersea Park', we are investigating how schools can contribute to the long-term biodiversity monitoring programmes that we are embarking on, led by our Citizen Science Officer Briannah Mollison-Read.

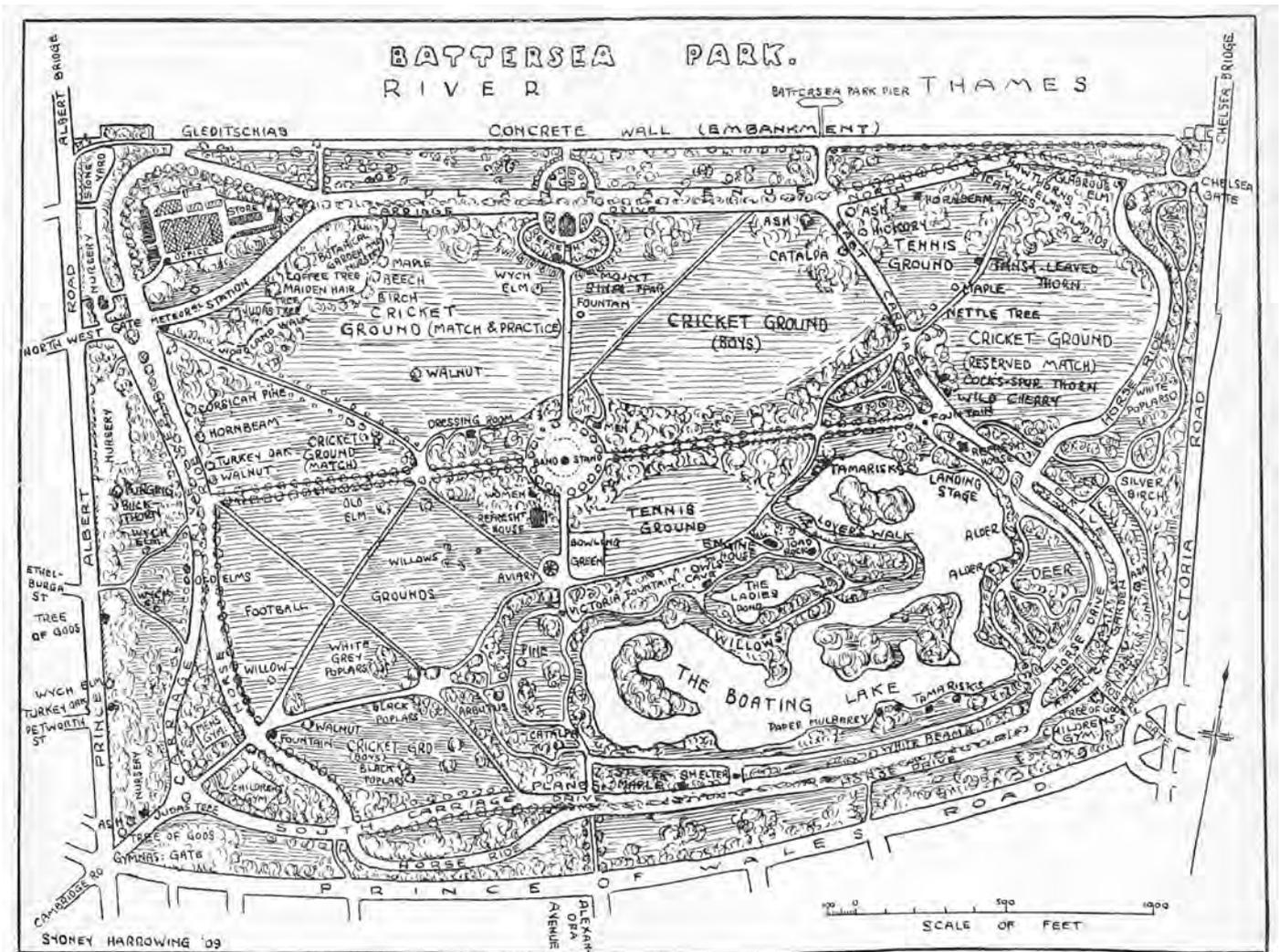
We are optimistic that in a further 100 years there will enough information to show clearly the change in species diversity in the Park and to be able to link any such changes to management and maintenance actions and/or climate records. For more information on how you can participate in these studies, do drop us an email at [biodiversity@enablelc.org](mailto:biodiversity@enablelc.org)

## Friends of Battersea Park Committee

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# 1910: Thrushes in the Fog

Bob Barker



*'November: Missel Thrush and Song Thrush sing during fog.'*

These rather eerie sounds are mentioned in *Battersea Park as a Centre for Nature Study* (1910), price one shilling, by Walter Johnson FGS, published 'under the Direction of the Battersea and Wandsworth Educational Council' to provide outdoor learning ideas for teachers. The author described the song of the thrush as 'knee-deep, knee-deep, knee-deep; cherry-du, cherry-du, cherry (*etc.*)'.

Today, the book provides us with many insights into how the Park

has changed, both before and since: there are now fewer November fogs (or rather smogs) and the thrushes must be outnumbered by parakeets.

In 1910 (strictly speaking, the final year of the Edwardian era), the Park was a determinedly correct place, with only a very few remaining signs of its more chequered past as Battersea Fields. For example, one 'ancient willow' somewhere near the Subtropical Garden was said once to have provided shade outside an 'old tavern known as *The Balloon*'. That tavern had apparently catered for various recreations, with a tea room, a

bowling green, a ballroom and regular walking races. However, almost all such relics of Battersea Fields had now been swept away (rather like the Battersea Funfair of 1951-74) and the Park was devoted almost entirely to healthy and edifying pursuits.

Johnson's book includes a map drawn by Sidney Harrowing in 1909. It shows the central bandstand, four cricket grounds, two (maybe three) tennis grounds, one football ground, a bowling green, two fountains (one dedicated to Queen Victoria) and several aviaries and animal enclosures. There were civilised Horse Rides and Carriage Drives (sometimes used

by male and even female cyclists). Distinguished people such as the philosopher Bertrand Russell, who lived for a while at both Overstrand and Prince of Wales Mansions, and his friend the eminent historian G.M. Trevelyan used regularly to enjoy what Russell called 'walking the Battersea Park round'. The Park then had three 'refreshment houses' (but no taverns, inns or dancing). There was a Men's Gymnasium, and two gymnasia for children (perhaps those would be called playgrounds today); there was no gymnasium for women, though they did have the Ladies' Pond for genteel skating. (How long is it now since that was possible? Sixty years?). There was an instructive Botanical Garden, and a nearby Meteorological Station, where readings were taken and an informative chart filled up every morning at 10am (have these records survived?). Slightly surprisingly, there was also a 'Lovers' Walk' by the Cascades, past the pair of Weeping Beeches on which many lovers since have scratched hearts and initials.

As for the natural history of the Park, there have been some remarkable changes since 1910. Johnson, for example, did not include magpies as resident, although he recorded having seen one on Wimbledon Common in January 1909. Likewise herons were not then resident, though we are told that 'a stray heron at times crosses the grounds...', whereas now there may be two dozen nesting pairs each year. An ongoing change was that since about 1890, gulls of several species had been becoming common all year round instead of just as winter visitors. No hawks were mentioned, though now we have sparrowhawks (but not so many sparrows). Today we have also gained, for example, grebes, woodpeckers and a wild Tawny Owl or two.

There used to be many more captive birds, as indeed there were then in people's homes. These included Tawny and Barn Owls in their secluded artificial cave by the Ladies' Pond; fed six nights a week, with one night being a compulsory fast. Hens were apparently kept on the large island to incubate the eggs of peacocks, guinea fowl and turkeys. Finches and linnets, pheasants and fancy pigeons were kept in aviaries. Twelve species of mostly ornamental duck are listed (11 today), six of geese (three today) and two of swans (Black and Mute; currently reduced to the one bereaved male).

Johnson makes no mention of foxes or hedgehogs, but in 1910 rabbits, fallow deer and three unfortunate red squirrels were kept in captivity. There were no grey squirrels, captive or otherwise, and an attempt to release a red into the park had never been repeated. Bats were more evident in 1910 and were 'often seen at dusk'; 'on mild afternoons in January and February, bats may be seen in the High Street'. There were no feral terrapins or Koi carp (nor salmon, errant whales or seals in the river).

Ever since it opened, the Park has held a wide range of exotic as well as native species (the terms are relative), including some individual trees which are still with us. For example, the rather gnarled Silver Birch at one end of the Rustic Bridge, which must now be nearing the end of its natural life; other notable survivors include a multi-limbed Hornbeam opposite the Chelsea car park; a Yellow Buckeye further west and a Whitebeam near the West Carriage Drive. Johnson also described the big Italian Alder beside the Subtropical Garden which sadly lost its leaves in the hot summer of 2023 and had to be felled only recently.

The bedding flowers in the Subtropical Garden as well have changed. In those days 'even in late autumn, the beds ... are aglow with tall hollyhocks and torch-lilies or 'red hot poker' ... and the evening air is scented by the sweet perfume of the tobacco plant'. Perhaps for us that evokes the final autumn of the Edwardian 'golden summer': there were no war memorials in the Park, but tragically 1914 was only four years off.

The November fogs in the Park, but not the eerie sound of those invisible thrushes, were recalled later by the poet George Barker (1913-91), who spent some of his childhood in Battersea:

*Now it is November and mist wreathes  
the trees,*

*The horses cough their white blooms in  
the street,*

*Dogs shiver and boys run; the barges  
on the Thames*

*Lie like leviathans in the fog...*

*I recollect it was so often thus; with*

*Diamonds and pearls like mineral  
water pointing*

*The Park railings and the gardens'  
evergreens.*

### **So who was Walter Johnson FGS? It makes an interesting story.**

On the one hand, he was the author of books and articles about natural history and archaeology, such as *The Nature-World of London*; *London Birds in June*; *Wimbledon Common: Its Geology, Antiquities and Natural History* and *Neolithic Man in North-East Surrey*.

On the other hand, his 'day job' was that of a Battersea primary school

*Continued on page 14*

*Continued from page 13*

teacher who worked for many years at an LCC school (the former Bolingbroke Road School) in a deprived area near the river, part of which was called 'Little Hell'.

Walter was one of the seven sons and six daughters of a Lincolnshire grocer. He was born in 1867 and at just 14 was a pupil teacher in Sheffield with his older brother, Frederick, who was a qualified teacher. Walter was in Battersea by 1891 and now a teacher himself. By 1908 he was established enough to marry and start a home and family of his own at 5 Berber Road (up in the more salubrious area between Wandsworth and Clapham

Commons) where he and his wife Mary lived for about thirty years until he retired (he would have been 70 in 1937) and moved to Dorking, just in time to miss the London Blitz.

According to Keith Bailey's monumental thesis *The Metamorphosis of Battersea 1800-1914*, Bolingbroke Road School (built in the 1870s, with 1,092 pupils by 1904) had been a factor in the area 'beginning to see a slight improvement'. Walter Johnson's evident energy and efforts to bring some fresh air and appreciation of natural history into the curriculum may well have played a part in this improvement, although it was not always easy, as Bailey also wrote that: 'The Bolingbroke Rd. School

log books confirm the problems in the slum parts with their accounts of ill-health, absenteeism, bad language and violence'.

Did Mr Johnson sometimes accompany school parties to Battersea Park and would they be welcome? It's noticeable that he does not mention such outings, although he says (p112) that 'classes may be held in the Park' and that 'the Superintendent will be glad to supply specimens for use in schools'. In his preface (p5), he 'heartily' thanks Mr J Rogers, the Superintendent of the Park, and Mr V Cockram, of the Botanical Gardens, for 'their uniform courtesy and assistance'.

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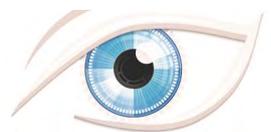


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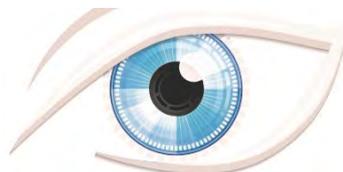
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# Metamorphoses

Annabel B Stein

Once the Chelsea Barracks was full of British soldiers; now it's full of luxury apartments, townhouses and a restaurant. Once the taxi shelter at the south end of Albert Bridge was for cabbies' use only; now Mr Joe Public can pop by for a coffee, snack or glass of wine (viz. Café Pier). Once The Stag in Westbridge Road was simply a neighbourhood pub; now it's a smart wine bar (viz. Aspen & Meursault); and once there was an enormous gas holder behind Battersea Dogs & Cats Home but now this area is home to flats, Tesco and a restaurant. Were these winds of change blowing in the right direction, I wondered? And in my search for new local restaurants at the upper end of the scale, I was on a mission to find out.

I'm a great fan of regeneration. Thus it was with joy, when seeking out Theo Fennell the jewellers who have moved into Chelsea Barracks, that I fell upon **The Campaner** and was immediately smitten. A few days later I returned with my younger daughter where we sat on their pretty terrace overlooking this peaceful square. Inside is a spacious, light, warmly-coloured, very attractive room filled with trees and plants with an open kitchen at the back. The menu covers all tastes. From the 'All day dining' selection I chose the queen scallop with romesco (a tomato and red pepper based sauce) and papado iberica (a special type of ham) (£20) with a glass of dry white wine (£7), whilst from the 'All day brunch' selection my daughter chose The Campaner Spanish Breakfast, a mix of eggs, potatoes, chorizo, ham and toasted sourdough (£20) together with a latte (£3.90). We had a wonderful meal, loved the ambiance and friendly staff and agreed that The Campaner (The Bell Ringer in English) - an off-shoot of a group of Barcelonian restaurants - and downstairs The Clandesti, billed as 'a dimly lit bar hidden away from

the outside world' are both huge assets to the neighbourhood.

**The Campaner**, Garrison Square, SW1W 8BG. 020 4580 1385. Closed Monday. Open Tue, Wed, Thur from 9.00 am until 11.30 pm. Fri & Sat until midnight and Sunday until 5.00 pm. The Clandesti opens from 5.00 pm. Dogs welcome.

My second good fortune, when walking along Battersea Park Road, was seeing the vibrant colours and floral displays blossoming from **Asiatique**. This wasn't a metamorphosis as such, but simply an unexpected contrast to the ashen décor of its Thai predecessor where I occasionally dined. The large Buddha was another attraction so I reserved a table for an early supper that weekend. It happened that my eldest daughter, who used to travel frequently to Thailand and is somewhat a connoisseur of Thai food, was able to join me accompanied by one of my delightful grandchildren. She ordered dim sum (£7.95) followed by green chicken curry and rice (£11.95) and her daughter, chicken satay with peanut sauce (£8.25) followed by plain noodles (£7.50), pad pak broccoli (£9.50) and an apple juice (£2.95). I chose the spicy squid (£8.25) followed by the kor moo yang i.e. pork medallions and roasted vegetables (£15.50) and we both had a glass of dry rosé (£7.50). We each rated our meal as 'excellent'. We were looked after by a delightful patron in wonderful surroundings, and were truly happy that Asiatique, which originated in East Sheen winning the Thai Select award in 2020, was Travellers' Choice in 2021 and later opened a branch in Richmond, has now arrived in Battersea.



**Asiatique**, 208-210 Battersea Park Road, SW11 4ND. 020 7207 6427. Open 7 days a week. Mon-Wed 17.30-22.30, Thu-Fri 12.00-22.30, Sat-Sun 13.00-22.30.

I nearly fell off my chair when the golfer asked me to book a table for dinner in a 'nice' nearby restaurant as a Valentine's Day treat! I enjoy trying all the various restaurants in Battersea Power Station where one is spoiled for choice, but as I'd been stalking **Boudica** for a while, it was there I wanted to go. When crossing the road from the final 436 bus-stop at Battersea Park Station, I'd admired its large outside terrace and its luxurious interior - liking the way the wine bottles travelled upwards to a wine bar gallery - and had mentally made my choice from their menu specialising in 'international' cuisine. However, when it came to reserving a table, I was told the restaurant was undergoing renovation with a yet unknown February reopening date. Sadly, too late for this article. I shall persevere, as I'm sure it will be worth it, though I'll probably have to remind the golfer that 'he owes me'!

**Boudica Restaurant**, 12 Palmer Road (or 1 Prince of Wales Drive), SW11 4FQ. 020 8017 3400. Open Wed-Thu 4.00 pm - 12.00 am; Fri-Sat 10.00 am-12.00 am, Sun 10.00 am - 10.00 pm. Starters approx £14 and Mains approx £25.

# Bali Starling success at Battersea Park Children's Zoo

Bali starlings (*Leucopsar rothschildi*) are one of the world's rarest birds. They are defined as 'critically endangered' and are found in just one forest in the protected Bali Barat National Park on Bali. In 2001, there were just six Bali starlings left in the wild due to habitat loss and poaching for the exotic songbird trade.

In-situ conservation efforts have raised this number to between 50 and 100 birds. However, the captive breeding efforts of zoos are essential in replenishing the numbers of Bali starlings in the wild. They are notoriously difficult to breed in captive environments and traditionally, suffering from a lack of genetic diversity, environmental issues and poor parenting. When it comes to courtship, Bali starlings have their own unique ways of showing affection. Males and females engage in

head-bobbing dances, like a charming avian tango. As if that wasn't enough to win hearts, they also serenade each other with loud and melodious shrieks that echo through the lush forests of Bali, and now Battersea Park!

In March 2020, as part of the European Endangered Species Breeding Programme Cleopatra, a female Bali starling, joined a male, Casper, at the Children's Zoo. Thanks to the efforts of animal manager Jamie Baker and senior keeper Lizzy Humphries, who implemented a new husbandry routine for the birds to reduce the chances of immunological stress, Cleo and Casper last year reared three chicks, with a life expectancy of 15 years. Their parenting behaviour has also improved through changes in the design and enrichment of their enclosure as well as changes in feeding patterns. Their low iron diet includes

a delicious medley of fruits, seeds, worms and insects, with locusts as a special treat. All three chicks have survived; two are likely to move to other organisations collaborating on the breeding programme.

This year, the Zoo hopes for similar success, potentially with a new Bali starling arriving to be paired with one of those born in 2023.

The Zoo's research has led to the creation of a new Bali starling care sheet, and the project recently won a Gold award from the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

The Zoo also won a Bronze award for its sustainable honeybee apiary in partnership with the London Beekeepers' Association. This has introduced hundreds of children to the world of honey bees and native pollinators.



# Events

MAR	<b>Thursday 6 to Sunday 10</b> Battersea Evolution	<b>Affordable Art Fair</b> See ad on page 14
	<b>Friday 8 to Sunday 14 April</b> Children's Zoo	<b>Easter Trail throughout the holidays</b> Activities and Games in the Hive at weekends
	<b>Saturday 13 &amp; Sunday 14</b> Chelsea Car Park	<b>Bungee Jump</b> From £99 01226 982771
	<b>Monday 25</b> Lunch from 12.15. Lecture from 1.00 to 2.00pm Ethelburga Community Centre, 60 Worfield Street, SW11 4RA	<b>The Friends' Spring Lunchtime Lecture</b> Clive Freedman on Mosses in Battersea Park. Tickets @ £7.00 and a pre-ordered lunch @ £6.00 from <a href="http://friendsofbatterseapark.org/events">friendsofbatterseapark.org/events</a> . Info from <a href="mailto:info@friendsofbatterseapark.org">info@friendsofbatterseapark.org</a> or 020 7622 5199
APR	<b>Sunday 28</b> 2.30 North Battersea and the Park	<b>Guided Walk led by Clare Graham in aid of the Katharine Low Settlement Centenary</b> Meeting and booking details on <a href="http://ksettlement.org.uk">ksettlement.org.uk</a>
MAY	<b>Tuesday 7 to Sunday 12</b> Battersea Evolution	<b>The Decorative Fair</b> See advertisement on back page
	<b>Monday 21 to Saturday 25</b>	<b>Chelsea Flower Show week so car parks busy</b>
	<b>Wednesday 22</b> Old English Garden 6pm to 7.30pm	<b>Drinks Party for Friends</b> Book £5 tickets to include first drink at <a href="http://friendsofbatterseapark.org">friendsofbatterseapark.org</a>
	<b>Monday 27 to Friday 31</b> Children's Zoo	<b>Love your Zoo Week</b> Animal related games, crafts and activities
JUN	<b>Wednesday 5</b> 4pm to 10pm from Bandstand	<b>Race for Life for Cancer Research</b> 1,000 runners
	<b>Sunday 9</b> Meet at Albert Gate at 2pm. £5 on the day	<b>Guided Walk as part of Wandsworth Heritage Festival</b> Email <a href="mailto:fhradcliffe@gmail.com">fhradcliffe@gmail.com</a> to book
	<b>Tuesday 11</b> Bowling Green 6pm to 9pm	<b>Friends' 17th Annual Barbecue</b> Live music and free children's activities. Tickets £20 per person, £10 for children aged 5-16, children under 5 free. Family ticket (2 adults, 2 children) £55. Prices will increase in May. Enquiries: <a href="mailto:secretary@friendsofbatterseapark.org">secretary@friendsofbatterseapark.org</a> or 07495 542399
	<b>Saturday 15</b> Peace Pagoda 2pm – 5pm	<b>Annual ceremony with Buddhist traditions</b> Messages, speeches, devotional music, tea
	<b>Saturday 29</b> 10.30 – 12.30 Meet at Rosery Gate	<b>Summer Tree Identification Walk led by Greg Packham</b> £10 from <a href="http://friendsofbatterseapark.org">friendsofbatterseapark.org</a> . info 07572 008329
	<b>Saturday 22 and Sunday 23</b> Bandstand 10.30 to 8.30pm	<b>Summer in Battersea Park</b> Live Music
	<b>Saturday 29 and Sunday 30</b> Bowling Green	<b>Summer in Battersea Park</b> Children's Activities
JUL	<b>Wednesday 3 &amp; Thursday 4</b> Car Parks close at 5pm Race begins 6.45pm	<b>J P Morgan Challenge</b> Beware 10,000 runners each night
	<b>Saturday 6</b>	<b>Summer in Battersea Park</b>
	<b>Sunday 7 Date tbc</b> Bowling Green 10.30am to 8.30pm	<b>Wandsworth Parks Police Dog Show</b> All dogs welcome. The Friends' prize for the best trick
	<b>AUGUST 24 - 26</b>	<b>Bank Holiday Concerts</b>
NOV	<b>Monday 18</b> Venue tbc in Review 128	<b>The Friends' Autumn Lunchtime Lecture</b>
REGULAR EVENTS	<b>Sundays 9 – 9.30</b> Start date tba <b>Sundays</b> from 11am - 12 <b>Wednesdays</b> 10am – 11 <b>Wednesdays</b> from 9.30	<b>Junior Park Run</b> from hut on All Weather Pitches <b>Litter Picking</b> Meet at Macduff pedestrian gate to Park opposite York Mansions. <b>Free Walk</b> open to all - meet at Albert Gate. Info: <a href="mailto:activelifestyles@enable.com">activelifestyles@enable.com</a> <b>Volunteer gardening in the Winter Garden.</b> Contact <a href="mailto:fhradcliffe@gmail.com">fhradcliffe@gmail.com</a> to check it's happening



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