



Friends of St. James's  
Park and The Green Park

*Promoting interest and high standards in  
planning, design and the environment*

## NEWSLETTER Spring 2016

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Goldfinch  
Credit: Tony Hisgett



On a rainy day in March we had a fascinating tour of 55 Broadway from Edmund Bird, the Mayor's Heritage Advisor. Defying the weather, we enjoyed cloudy views across Westminster, from the outdoor terraces.

[www.thorneyislandsociety.org.uk](http://www.thorneyislandsociety.org.uk)

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## Editorial & news in brief

Recently there have been high-profile grass-roots campaigns against a number of proposed developments. None of these is on The Thorney Island patch, but we have watched with interest, and made representations in some cases. Renzo Piano's 72-storey tower, 'the Paddington Pole', was one of these, and would have been visible for miles around. The application has now been withdrawn, but no doubt the revised proposal, when it comes, will be modest relative to the original, but not so in absolute terms. Protesters against the development of Norton Folgate in Shoreditch have secured a judicial review of Boris Johnson's decision to overrule the local authority and allow British Land to demolish and redevelop this historic site. Meanwhile, opposition to the Garden Bridge has spread beyond the areas immediately affected by it, and indeed beyond London. As people learn more, they recognise that the Garden Bridge epitomises a wider trend towards privatisation of public space, undue influence from a privileged few, and the use of green promises to sweeten development. Whatever the outcome of these battles, it is encouraging to see Londoners fighting so hard against insensitive and inappropriate development.

Clare Annamalai

In October 2015 **Westminster Fire Station** was finally sold off. The purchasers, Alchemi Group, promise a sensitive residential refurbishment of the building, involving 'preservation of the heritage features and character of the building as an intrinsic part of Westminster's vibrant past'. Their record is encouraging; in recent years they have sensitively refurbished a number of period buildings on Strutton Ground.

Alchemi are very active in The Thorney Island area; their most recent development is 55 Victoria Street which, in the opinion of this writer, is now a handsome building, marred only by the great glass block stuck crudely to the top. Alchemi are also developing Great Minster North, on Horseferry Road. Having acquired the building for £97.5m in October 2013, on behalf of an investor, they managed to secure planning consent, in 2014, for complete demolition and construction of a larger, luxury residential building. In August 2015, less than two years after the original purchase, and before a single stone had been demolished, the building was sold on for £137m. Alchemi attribute their client's healthy profit to 'remarkable design work and comprehensive planning.' No doubt. But when that kind of money rests on nothing more than the outcome of a planning application, it is hard to see how local democracy can fail to be affected.

**A public exhibition of the plans for Westminster Fire Station will be held on-site on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> May, from 4-8pm. This is part of the community consultation process, and we would encourage any interested members to attend.**

We were saddened to hear of the death of [Dr Irena McCabe](#), at the age of 84, at her home in Bromley. For many years the Head of Library, Archives and Information Services at the Royal Institution, Irena also found time to act as Consultant Archivist to The Thorney Island Society, and many of our members will no doubt remember her warmly.

There has been only one major planning application in our area over the last six months, for the demolition of Dean Bradley House in Horseferry Road, and its replacement with yet more luxury flats. There have also been revisions to the two big residential schemes mentioned in the last newsletter: New Scotland Yard, for which approval has been given, and the Millbank Tower.

There is a lot of local concern about the loss of Dean Bradley House, which is an agreeable building and much valued for its short parade of shops. No decision has yet been made, but it is feared that once again Westminster will go against their own policy of putting the brakes on commercial to residential schemes. It has to be said here that this is partly the result of the Planning Inspectorate's habit of overturning negative decisions. It is also the result of the government's requirement that the planning system makes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, combined with the need for more housing, even though it is unclear how the construction of luxury flats helps solve this problem.

New Scotland Yard (10 Broadway) is the most startling building to have been granted planning permission recently. It is a massive development that will tower over Victoria Street, with buildings far higher than what would be allowable under the council's own policy on tall buildings in this area. The only compensation for local people will be a very small number of affordable flats and a direct pedestrian link from St James's Park station to Victoria Street. There will also be a few shops and restaurants, so the area will be livelier.

The application for the redevelopment of the Millbank Tower has been modified a bit: there are now to be only two storeys added to the tower and one storey to the Y-shaped building beside it. The restoration of the facades will be an improvement since the building looks very tired nowadays. Because of the building's Grade II listing, the renovation work will stick as closely as possible to the current design, although there will be differences: the curtain-walling will be replaced to upgrade the thermal insulation and to allow opening windows, and the ugly louvres on the rear face and the clutter on the roof will disappear.

The results of the applications for the Millbank Tower redevelopment and Dean Bradley House will probably be known soon, but whether these and other developments in the pipeline ultimately go ahead will depend on their financial viability, which will be affected by many issues, not least that there has been so much of this sort of development recently that the relentless price rise of luxury flats is faltering.

*Lucy Peck*



Proposed replacement for Dean Bradley House

## Mayoral Election 2016 & Crossrail 2

By the time this newsletter reaches you, we will be just days away from electing a new Mayor of London. Created just 16 years ago, this is now an enormously influential role, whose occupant holds great sway over the development and way of life of this wonderful city. There are many who would argue that Boris Johnson has been a powerful advocate and charismatic frontman for London. There are also many who would lament his fire service cuts (Westminster Firestation included); his tendency to side with developers over local planners; his relaxed approach to the construction of tall buildings, even outside designated cluster areas, and his fondness for ‘privately-funded’ baubles like the Orbit, cable car and Garden Bridge, which generally do end up costing the taxpayer, without delivering much improvement in quality of life. So what are the 2016 mayoral candidates promising for the built environment?

**Housing:** With the housing shortage in London becoming ever more acute, and vast numbers priced out of the market, all the leading candidates have made this their priority.

	Total housebuilding target	Affordable housing target
<b>Green</b>	200 000 over a 4 year term	64 000 social & low cost rent, 400 000 low cost ownership
<b>Con</b>	50 000 / year by 2020	
<b>Lab</b>	50 000	At least half of all new housing to be affordable. 180 000 new homes from Housing Associations, over 10 years
<b>LibDem</b>	150 000 over 4 year term	50 000 council homes over a 4 year term

These are not easy numbers to achieve, when you consider that all candidates have pledged to protect the Greenbelt, and that those candidates who propose estate regeneration wish to do it only with the fulsome support of residents.

**Homelessness:** There is remarkable consistency in the approach to rough sleeping. Sian Berry, Zac Goldsmith and Caroline Pidgeon all propose an expansion of the ‘No First Night Out’ scheme which has been trialled in three boroughs and aims to prevent individuals from rough sleeping for the first time. Sadiq Khan suggests a London-wide taskforce to achieve the same objective. UKIP’s Peter Whittle would set up a homelessness register at City Hall.

**Planning:** Most of the candidates’ planning policies revolve around housing issues and ways to facilitate the creation of new homes. Berry, Goldsmith and Khan all highlight the current problem with viability assessments for affordable homes in new developments, and would seek to make these assessments more standard or transparent. Pidgeon goes further, by proposing a benchmark of 50% of housing in new developments to be ‘affordable’ for the

majority of Londoners’. Sian Berry would give communities a say in the planning of opportunity areas and housing zones, while Sadiq Khan suggests planning rules to tackle ‘buy-to-leave’. More radical proposals include Zac Goldsmith’s idea of a Chief Architect for London, and expert ‘flying planners’ to support local authority planning departments. And from Peter Whittle, the suggestion that large development consents should be decided by local referendum.

**Tall buildings & mega basements:** Zac Goldsmith has vocally opposed a recent tower proposal for Swiss Cottage, and has stated that the community consent required to build new homes will be gained only if new buildings are not ‘ugly’. Sian Berry has no ‘evangelical opposition’ to tall towers, but does not like the current model of building for investment purposes. Caroline Pidgeon would establish a skyline commission to advise on tall buildings, and would review London’s protected views, while Sadiq Khan promises a crackdown on mega basements.

**Major projects:** Many of these are outside the direct control of the Mayor, or too far advanced to be significantly changed, so the role of the new Mayor will be to represent Londoners’ interests and ensure good project management. Only in the case of the Garden Bridge and the Bakerloo line extension will the new Mayor have a decisive role to play.

	Crossrail 2	Garden Bridge	HS2	Heathrow extension	Bakerloo extension
Green	For	Against	Against	Against	For
Con	For	For	For	Against	For
Lab	For	For	For	Against	For
LibDem	For	Against	For	Against	For
UKIP	Against	Against	Against	Against	-

**Crossrail 2** now looks certain to go ahead, following George Osborne’s announcement in the recent budget. Subject to acquisition of the land, and various consents, work is scheduled to start in 2020, for a launch in 2030. The central London part of the line will run from Tottenham Hale to Clapham Junction, via Euston St Pancras, Tottenham Court Road, Victoria and a controversial new station at King’s Road, Chelsea. In The Thorney Island area we can expect significant disruption during the construction process. Buckingham Palace Road, Buckingham Gate, Birdcage Walk and St James’s Park will all be affected by construction of the tunnels, some 20-30 metres below ground, whilst a larger area will be designated as a ‘safeguarding zone’. It is the size and location of this safeguarding zone that is likely to be challenged by campaigners in SW1.

## Spring comes early to Vincent Square

I always enjoy telling you about the birds that I have seen in our garden in Vincent Square. The bird that has become comparatively ubiquitous in the back garden this year is the Goldfinch. The pretty golden wing patches and bright red faces of these sociable birds goes just right with their lovely twittering song. Their distinct finch beaks are ideal for seed eating. Many of our Goldfinches migrate as far south as Spain in the winter but some of the adults seem to be over-wintering in the area. There is still no sign of one of my favourite London garden birds, the Great Spotted Woodpecker; it is said that they are disappearing nationwide. Still, they do have Green Woodpeckers next door on Vincent Square, and a Kestrel which visits occasionally, to take the odd unwatchful passing bird.

This Spring there have been a lot of Dunnocks around; the small brown and grey birds that hop along garden borders. Blackbirds are also much in evidence, with their yellow eye ring and bright yellow beaks. I so love their mellow song which is sometimes heard even at night, when they seem to sing to the streetlights. No sign yet of the Chiffchaff, whose distinctive scolding is a much missed part of the garden, or of the Long Tailed Tits that were so much in evidence last spring.

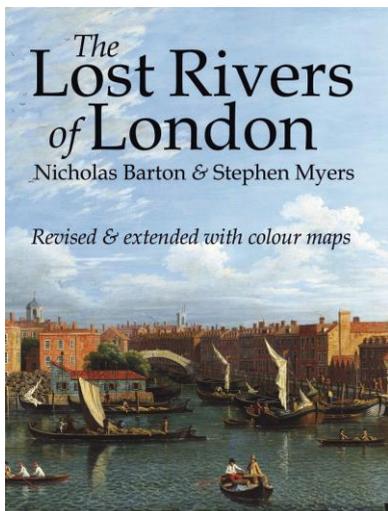
The other day there was a flurry of Robins feeding their young. Robins are very territorial and it was lovely seeing the next generation carrying on. These birds are the same year on year - the same birds I mean. Once they find a home, a territory and a place they find safe, they stay put. There are also a lot of Blue Tits, such colourful birds, whose nests are well hidden and not too exposed, so that they can safely bring up the next generation. The nervous, loud-singing, dumpy little Wren has brought up her brood again and is feeding them in the garden. She may have been helped by the mild winter.



Long Tailed Tit  
Credit: John Bridges

Aside from birds, we have a Grey Squirrel who will often appear suddenly and see off a Trafalgar Square pigeon munching peanuts, which he had wanted for himself! He is costing us a lot of money in fatballs, which he really seems to enjoy! There are also foxes, which are getting larger in the city. We have a little dog (a Bichon Frise called Indi) which I think the fox could manage for supper, but amazingly she manages to scare away the big bad fox that jumps in and out of the garden. Last year, Indi barked at the front door until we opened it, and there were three foxes by the door, including one cub who looked as if he wanted to play!

This year is so warm – apparently the warmest on record – that the birds and plants are not sure what is going on. The pear tree is already in bud, and perhaps we are seeing the effect of worldwide climate change, here on our doorstep. So we hope for a wonderful and more normal British summer ahead, with appearances in the garden from those Summer visitors, the Redstarts and the Whitethroats.



The most influential book about the hidden rivers of London - which is quoted in most of the numerous books published since - is ***The Lost Rivers of London*** by Nicholas Barton, a surgeon who became fascinated by lost rivers while a pupil at Westminster School. That was 52 years ago. A new edition was published in March and, amazingly, Mr Barton was there to introduce it with his new co-author, Stephen Myers. Although his speciality is the Walbrook, Stephen Myers has deep knowledge of the other rivers including the Tyburn. He has kindly agreed to accompany Thorney Island members on a walk along the final stretch of the Tyburn on 21<sup>st</sup> May. The book is highly recommended for anyone interested in the submerged history of London. Thorney Island Society members will be mostly interested in the chapter on the Tyburn,

which takes on board the results of the recent Crossrail excavations and raises fascinating questions about whether the route of the Tyburn from today's Buckingham Palace to the Abbey was natural, or man-made by the monks to have a regular way of flushing their toilets.

*The Lost Rivers of London* by Nicholas Barton and Stephen Myers (Historical Publications)

Earlier this year the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) approved plans for the creation of a new charitable public corporation to take over the running of **The Royal Parks** and be responsible for fundraising from private sources.

Of the £36.6m annual cost of managing the parks, about 65 per cent is self-generated through events, sponsorship, donations, catering, lottery funding, rental income, filming and photography. The balance of the Parks' income comes from a DCMS grant. But reductions in government funding are making it increasingly difficult to maintain high standards for the more than 77m people who visit the Parks each year. It is hoped that this new organisation will be 'increasingly self-sustaining...able to manage the parks even more efficiently, with better services provided at a lower cost while maintaining excellent visitor satisfaction'. Fine words that are liable to bring out the sceptic in even the most trusting of us, and when Andrew Scattergood, Chief Executive of the Royal Parks says 'We will have more freedom around how we raise and spend money.', it is clear that a more commercial age is about to dawn over our Royal Parks.

In the short term, however, the outlook is promising. Mr Scattergood told the AGM in April that the government had given the Royal Parks a £10m grant for capital projects. These include reconstruction of the nurseries and development of the little used lodges, to provide more revenue for the future. He strongly emphasized that there would be no fundamental changes to the way the Parks operate.



## Diary dates & other information

**Pippa Parsons**, who has organised so many wonderful visits over the years, has finally stepped down to devote more time to her family. The Executive Committee would like to thank Pippa for everything she has done for the Society as visits organiser. Her programmes have always been varied and interesting, she has arranged everything in unflappable style and has been unstintingly generous in opening up her home to members. Happily, Pippa will continue as a member of the Society, and will continue to indulge her curiosity about historic London, as a participant in future visits.

### Diary dates 2016

- Sat 21<sup>st</sup> May:** Tyburn guided walk  
**Tues 7<sup>th</sup> Jun:** History of Victoria Street talk  
**Weds 22<sup>nd</sup> Jun:** The Thorney Island Society Summer Party  
**Mon 26<sup>th</sup> Sept:** Gala fundraising dinner at Cinnamon Club

Visits bookings can now be made through Eventbrite:

<http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/the-thorney-island-society-10626269821>

Alternatively, they can be made in the usual way, by sending the completed application form found on the website, with cheque, to:

The Thorney Island Society (Events), 10 Old Pye Street, London, SW1P 2DG

Most events are now available to guests and non-members. This is to help raise awareness of the Society and attract new members. If you know anyone with an interest in the Thorney Island area, or London history, then do make them aware of our programme.

**The Thorney Island Society** is a voluntary amenity and civic society which came into being in 1985. It is concerned with the welfare of the physical environment of the area sometimes referred to as the 'Westminster Village'. It organises visits, walks and talks, reviews planning applications and maintains a local archive. There are currently around 400 members, and we would welcome even more. A membership form can be found on our website: [www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk](http://www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk). Registered Charity No. 1000751

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To comment on the newsletter, or to propose a story for the next edition, please contact: [info@thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk).

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