THE THORNEY ISLAND SOCIETY

Friends of St James's Park and The Green Park

Sharing and protecting the heritage of old Westminster village

NEWSLETTER

Autumn/Winter 2022

It is with great sadness that The Thorney Island Society mourns the death of Queen Elizabeth II. We extend our deepest sympathy to His Majesty King Charles III and the Royal Family.

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We hope this autumn is giving you greater confidence to plan visits to new places of historic and architectural interest, as well as enjoying nature and outdoor spaces. This issue of our Newsletter includes an article on our visit to Shepherd's Bindery. Among other trips we also enjoyed a Mudlarking expedition along the Thames foreshore below Victoria Tower Gardens, our first exploration of London's great river in this way. Another first was collaboration with the South Westminster Choir, celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with an outside concert in Christchurch Gardens (the corner of Victoria Street and Broadway). The performance was attended by Thorney members, local residents and passers-by. We were especially pleased that local MP Nickie Aiken and St James's Ward Councillor Mark Shearer came along to show their support (see below).

At last we were able to catch up on our postponed 2021 Christmas Party by holding a special event at St Andrew's Club (the oldest youth club in the world and our neighbour on Old Pye Street). We had a talk and tour of its extensive facilities, preceded by a visit to the Society's archives where we met Hari Kitching for the first time. We are delighted that she will be taking over the role of organising Events in future. Meanwhile she and Jules have put together an exciting programme for 2023 (back page).

My role as Chair of The Thorney Island Society has been a major part of my voluntary commitment - the last three years during pretty dramatic and uncertain times! With much regret I am standing down formally with effect from our AGM on 8th November. I was reluctant to take this decision, but I've been asked to spend significantly more time on a long-standing piece of work with which I've been involved for many years. As you will expect **we are reaching out to members to discuss the roles of Chair and Trustees on the Executive Committee.** If this is something you might like to consider, please get in touch at info@thethorneyislandsociety.co.uk.

While I am unable to attend the AGM in person this year, you can be sure that I will be signing up for as many visits and Zoom talks as possible. You have been marvellously supportive of the Society's work and all the volunteers who keep it going. I look forward to seeing you again.

In June we were given a fascinating glimpse into the book production world. At Shepherd's Bindery in Rochester Row we were first shown the interesting collection of books for sale, bound in a number of ways, some traditional, some contemporary. Among them was a striking set of the entire works of Ian Fleming (including *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*!), contrasting with a beautiful copy of *The Glittering Plain* from William Morris's Kelmscott Press.

Next we went round the workshop, seeing the crafts people at work: processes such as stitching, gluing, and box-making (books of this quality are often kept inside cardboard boxes). The tools, presses, and techniques are largely the same as those used in the past, but there have been some improvements – modern glue has replaced animal glue, which is prone to being eaten by rodents.

Following our tour of the bindery we were given a fascinating talk by TTIS member Anthony Davis, who collects books dating from the 16th to the 19th century, after which time binding was done by machine and was no longer an essential craft – although the skill was preserved.

Anthony explained that the same binding method has been in use for over a thousand years and that the already elaborate ornamentation of covers was given a fillip by the arrival of French and German craftsmen during the political turmoil in 18th and 19th century Europe. He also talked about the metal stamps that we had seen in profusion at Shepherd's, which are used to impress gold leaf into the leather – he pointed out that this must have been a great skill because the craftsman would not have been able to see the book cover beneath the leaf, but knew by experience where to place the stamp.

An array of tools in the Shepherd's Bindery workshop.

Since the visit we have heard the sad news of the death on 13 August of Rob Shepherd who founded the bindery. Anthony Davis writes: Rob was an important figure in the world of bookbinding and bookselling, very active in the Antiquarian Booksellers Association and the Worshipful Company of Stationers among other things and not only founded the bindery we visited but also the paper and craft materials shop with his name in Gillingham Street. He did a great deal to promote the training of new bookbinders and to encourage the preservation of the craft and was a charming and modest man who will be greatly missed.

Despite the difficult economic position in the country, there still seem to be a great number of developments under construction in our area. There have also been some new applications, but perhaps fewer big ones than in previous years. This statement, however, ignores the large number of applications over recent months for maintenance work in both the Palace of Westminster and Buckingham Palace, all of which in theory have to be considered by the Council Planning department. It would be interesting to examine the plans, but needless to say they are not available online.

A significant new office development is now underway on the corner of Broadway and **Carteret Street** – it might be thought that this is the kind of development that would be precluded by increasing concerns over the climate: a serviceable and not very old office block is being replaced by one that is not much bigger. The same applies to the Southside development in Victoria Street. It may be that in the future it will be more difficult for developers to get planning permission for this kind of scheme and the adaptation of existing buildings, as at 10 Greycoat Place, will be more common. After many consultations and iterations there is a new planning application for **Portland House** on Bressenden Place. This is a revamp of the existing office building with a two storey extension instead of the 14-storey extension or the earlier conversion to residential which both got planning permission.

The number of hotel developments is significant and, together with new residential schemes, suggests a fundamental change of focus from work-place to one on residents and visitors. For instance, our generous sponsor, Blue Orchid hotels, has two projects on the go: **55 Broadway**, above St James's Park station, has planning permission for a large hotel, the internal arrangements of which are still being resolved. They also want to improve the

Wellington Hotel, one of the two hotels on Vincent Square that have been the venues of a number of Thorney Island Society events. This will involve providing wheelchair access up the front steps via retractable steps that will reveal wheelchair lifts and, more controversially, creating a new underground room under the entrance courtyard. Their long-term plan may also involve amalgamating the Wellington with the neighbouring Rochester hotel – a tricky proposition because of differing floor heights, but sensible.

Planning permission is now being sought for a type of building that is less commonly proposed in the area: a very large residential care-home or alternatively a post-operative nursing home plus clinical uses in a new **Dean Bradley House** in Horseferry Road. This site already has planning permission for a residential development of the same sort of size, so our concern can only really be focused on whether this use will fit into an increasingly residential area. Its location on the 507 bus route and therefore easily accessible from Waterloo and Victoria, makes a good deal of sense to the developers who will be reliant on a large workforce who will not be able to afford the high prices in the area.

You may have read about the success of the London Gardens Trust and their team, in which we play a supporting role, in the High Court and then in the Court of Appeal, who supported the High Court judgement in saying that a 1900 LCC Act prohibits the use of **Victoria Tower Gardens** for the construction of a Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. Sadly the Government have declared that they are still determined to get the project built on that site, and believe that it will be possible to achieve via legislation. It does seem strange that they cannot concede that a modest Memorial in the gardens and a Learning Centre elsewhere, focussed on the delivery of education to schools all over the country, would be a more cost effective way of delivering the background to that ghastly episode of Europe's history. We still maintain that it is absolutely unacceptable for existing open space in the centre of London to be taken away.

Left: The proposed entrance extension of Portland House.

Right: The proposed care home/ medical facility in Horseferry Road.

The commemorative stamps brought out to celebrate the Queen's coronation, from our Archives.

Following on from my previous article, which focussed on the streets around Tothill Street, this time I am looking at the area around the Abbey, again using the 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1878.

Broad Sanctuary was once enclosed by buildings, with gateways giving access from the surrounding streets. Stow, quoted in *Old and New London* explains its importance:

> "The church at Westminster hath had great privilege of sanctuary within the precinct thereof, from whence it hath not been lawful for any prince or any other to take any person that fled thither for any cause. The charter granted to it by Edward the Confessor conferred this privilege in the following terms:—'I order and establish for ever that whatever person, of what condition or estate soever he be, from whence soever he come, or for what offence or cause it be, cometh for his refuge into the said Holy Church of the Blessed Apostle St. Peter, at Westminster, he be assured of his life, liberty, and limbs; . … and whosoever presumeth or doeth contrary to this my grant, I will that he lose his name, worship, dignity, and power, and that, with the great traitor, Judas, that betrayed our Saviour, he be in the everlasting fire of hell.'"

On the other side of the Abbey was a lane described as Poets' Corner. This was the access road to Poets' Corner in the Abbey, named thus in 1733. The route may have been established in Medieval times, when it connected the royal palace to the Abbey, and was once regarded as a more picturesque entrance than through the west doors; it was used for the funeral procession of one of George II's daughters. The door became the entrance to the Abbey visitors' toilets before it was turned into the entrance to the Triforium Galleries. The concept of Poets' Corner originated in Spenser's desire to be buried near Chaucer, himself buried here because he happened to live nearby, being the Clerk of the King's Works.

Nearby was the end of Abingdon Street. The seventeenth century saw a big change in the area south of Westminster Palace: from a bucolic tree-lined riverfront shown in Norden's 1593 map, by 1720 Snow's map shows a narrow road that led south from the Palace of Westminster through a congested built-up area. This was known as Dirty Lane until it was cleared and rebuilt with a row of Georgian Houses on the western side in 1750. On the other side were wharfs and warehouses that survived until redeveloped as Victoria Tower Gardens in the nineteenth century. The new wider street was named after Lord Abingdon, who lived in a house at the south end of the street early in the eighteenth century.

South of the Abbey are all the buildings connected with the functioning of the Abbey and Westminster School. The Abbey has been a Collegiate church since 1560 with the Dean as the head under the Queen. Dean's Yard was created by the Dean and Chapter in the eighteenth century when clearances were made all round the Abbey. Great and Little College Streets referred to the Chapter of Canons rather than the School. The same applies to College Garden, behind the wall.

Just to the south of Dean's Yard, Great and Little Smith Streets probably refer to Sir James Smith, the ground landlord, and not to be confused with Henry Smith who owned property in Smith Square. A less likely origin has been suggested as the clerk of works when the houses were built.

Barton and Cowley Streets are said to have been built by Barton Booth (1682-1733), a famous actor who was educated at Westminster School and was an admirer of Abraham Cowley, an accomplished poet, who had been published while himself still at the School. Alternatively, Cowley (near Uxbridge) was also where Booth was buried. He was, incidentally, the ancestor of John Wilkes Booth who killed Abraham Lincoln.

Shown as Wood Street on the map, this street became part of Great Peter Street in the twentieth century. Named after the Patron saint of the Abbey, Great Peter Street existed in 1624 as Saint Peter Street, carved, along with the date, into an old house that still existed in 1878.

In early 2021 I received a phone call from Buckingham Palace: "I am sure 2022 is on your radar, but just wanted to check that no events had been planned in St James's Park for early June 2022". I was not immediately aware that the conversation to follow was referring to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, but it soon became apparent that significant celebrations were planned for The Mall and the front of Buckingham Palace, to celebrate this joyous occasion. Many months of planning and Zoom meetings followed with such partners as the Royal Household, DCMS, Westminster City Council and the BBC. One marathon session lasted five and a half hours. The result was a wonderful spectacle over four days at the beginning of June. On the first day tens of thousands of people descended on St James's Park in unprecedented numbers for the Trooping of the Colours, forcing the closure of all park gates by 9.00am. While the Queen was not able to attend the ceremony on Horse Guards Parade in person due to mobility problems, the eagle-eyed in the crowd were delighted to see the Royal Standard raised on top of the Palace, as the procession made its way down the Mall, for Her Majesty to make the customary balcony appearance for the traditional fly-past of the Royal Air Force and the red, white, and blue smoke trails left by the Red Arrows as they flew along the Mall.

The BBC Party at the Palace on Saturday night saw a spectacular concert, but perhaps it was the clip of The Queen confessing to Paddington Bear that she kept a marmalade sandwich in her handbag that captured the imagination of the country. After the concert and accompanying lightshow, a display of drones above the palace delighted the crowds with images of a corgi, the Queen's trademark handbag, and the message "Thank You Ma'am" adorning the sky.

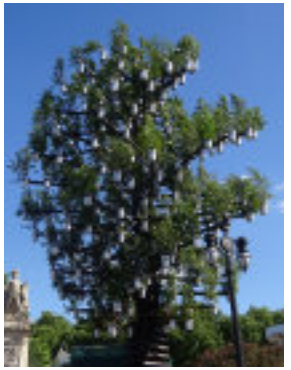
Sunday saw a colourful pageant process along the length of Whitehall, the Mall, and Birdcage Walk featuring all the decades, fashions and fads of the Queen's 70 years on the throne, involving 10,000 performers. I even commandeered one of the double decker buses the morning before in order to remove some offending branches from Birdcage Walk to ensure that the pageant could safely proceed!

Many people were left guessing by the large steel construction in front of Buckingham Palace in which were hung 300 native grown trees, which will now be given to community gardening groups across the country: the Tree of Trees to celebrate the Queen's Green Canopy Campaign (see photo, right), kept alive by our automatic irrigation system thanks to the ingenuity of Assistant Park Manager Mike Turner. It was here that Prince William initiated the lighting of the chain of beacons across the country.

Following the year's second great State occasion, the Queen's funeral, our staff and volunteers rose to the occasion once more and, with the help of The Royal Parks' Shire horses, processed the floral tributes left in The Green Park (see photo, far right).

The drought

We have had one of the most extreme summers for decades - certainly the driest since 1971: on the hottest day we recorded an all-time high of 40.2 degrees Celsius for London. The prolonged dry spell left the park looking like the Sahara, and it was difficult to see where the gravel of Horse Guards Parade ended and the grass in the park began! Luckily, four years ago we installed an irrigation system in our shrubberies and flower beds which uses non-potable water from our Victorian groundwater wells. Newly planted trees were watered with water drawn from our lake, which is also fed from these wells. While we have been largely successful in saving most of the trees that we planted in the last couple of years, it is evident that some established shrubs will be lost; we will look to replace these this winter, once the rains return. Lawn areas and parkland were sacrificed temporarily, but one or two thundery showers over recent weeks have led to the grass turning green again. There was unavoidable damage caused to the lawns and parkland in St James's Park and The Green Park from the infrastructure set up for the Platinum Jubilee and the funeral, but funding has been secured from the central government budget for the Jubilee Celebrations and we will be making these repairs later in the autumn as soon as the weather permits.



Drew Love-Jones

It is with sadness that we report that Drew, our wildlife officer who joined us in St James's Park twelve months ago, left us for pastures new in the middle of September. He will be greatly missed. He had widespread experience and soon settled into the role, responsible for looking after the welfare of the pelicans as they were contained for the winter on Duck Island because of Avian Flu. Drew met most of the Thorney Island Society volunteers during their sessions on the island and he was an able ambassador for The Royal Parks. Sadly, he found that he was not cut out for City life - living by the busy Marble Arch perhaps did not help - and while he loved his job with us, he made the very painful decision to leave the park. He is heading to West Dorset where he has been asked to set up a regenerative farming programme, and we wish him well, while we look for a replacement to care for the wildlife of St James's Park.

2022

Tues 8th November, 6.30pm	In person	The Society's 36th AGM and talk by Ptolemy Dean, Architect of the Fabric of Westminster Abbey, on the West Front Entry project and the Great Sacristy.
Mon 5th December, 6.30pm	In person	The Society's Christmas Party and Carols, Blue Orchid Wellington Hotel, Vincent Square

2023

Tues 24th January, 11am	In person	On the eve of Burns Night, tour of London Scottish House, Horseferry Road
Tues 7th February, 6.30pm	Zoom	Zoom talk by Westminster author Julie Anderson on 'Oracle' and 'Opera' the sequels to 'Plague'
Tues 7th March, 6.00pm	In person	Tour of the iconic 55 Broadway building, St James's Park Underground
Tues 25th April, 11am/2pm	In person	Tour of The Royal Society, Carlton House Terrace
Tues 9th May, 10am	In person	Tour of the Abbey Cloister Gardens by Head Gardener, Jan Pancheri
Tues 27th June, 6.30pm	In person	The Society's Summer Party (venue to be confirmed)
Tues 4th July, 6.30pm	Zoom	Zoom talk on the famous thoroughfare of Whitehall by Bryan Boese
Tues 7th November, 6.30pm	In person	The Society's 37th AGM and talk
Mon 4th December, 6.30pm	In person	The Society's Christmas Party

More events will be added during the year

Bookings and registration can be made through Eventbrite: *https://tinyurl.com/eventbrite-TTIS*
Or please contact us at *info@thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk* / 10 Old Pye Street, London SW1P 2DG

The Thorney Island Society is a voluntary amenity and civic society, which was founded in 1985. It is concerned with the welfare of the physical environment of the area sometimes referred to as 'Westminster Village'. It organises talks, visits and social events. It reviews planning applications and maintains a local archive. There are currently nearly 300 members, and we would welcome more. A membership form can be found on our website: www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk. Registered Charity No. 1000751

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter and at the Society's events are those of the writers and speakers and do not necessarily reflect the stance of The Thorney Island Society.

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