



Friends of St James's Park
and The Green Park

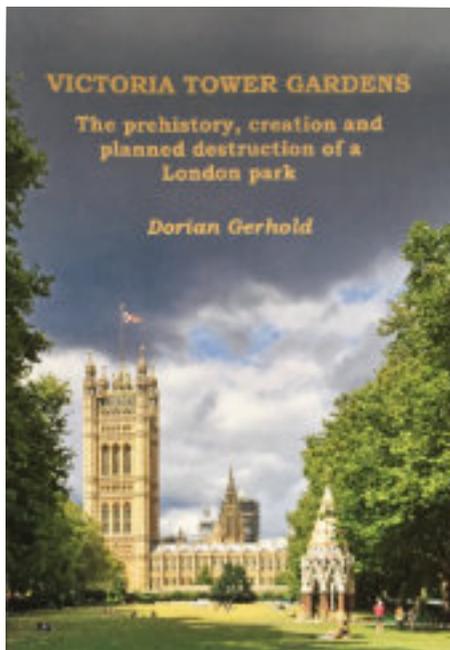
Sharing and protecting the heritage of old
Westminster village

NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer 2021

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Above: The fascinating book by Dorian Gerhold traces the history of VTG through to the threat it now faces and can be bought via our website (limited edition!).



Left: The outline of Townsend House on the wall of 10 Rochester Row. The developers, having got planning permission for a building of the same height as No. 10, are now asking for permission to add one more storey. We have opposed this. *Photo: Raymond Gubbay*

www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

For regular updates, follow us on Twitter: @ThorneyIslandSo
and on Instagram @thethorneyislandsociety



Our Spring/Summer 2021 newsletter is the second we've produced under lockdown restrictions. We can't wait until we are together again, seated around tables in the archives to stuff, seal and stamp envelopes and chat and laugh and think about new ideas for the Society.

We have changed our ways of working since March 2020 and adapted to the Covid-19 restrictions over the year. In common with many other charities, the pandemic affected our ability to generate income through our visits programme. Every aspect of our work (all carried out by committed volunteers) was affected and we developed new ways of offering a virtual visits/events programme. The upside has been the real joy of seeing Members during these Zoom calls. The **2021 Diary Dates** on page 12 offers a varied series of talks. We may even be able to meet safely in person later in the year.

The way Westminster City Council (WCC) deals with planning applications also changed. Face-to-face meetings with developers, council officers and councillors were replaced by online calls and it was extraordinary to experience a Public Inquiry held entirely online, at which the Society was represented in support of WCC's decision to refuse planning permission for a Holocaust Memorial and

This image of Thorney Island, annotated by Victor Keegan, is a coloured copy of an original black and white chalk drawing showing the concentration of church, state and monarchy. © Woodmansterne



Learning Centre in a listed public park (see pages 4 and 5).

For the second year running we posted photographs taken around Thorney Island on Instagram in the form of our **Advent Calendar 2020** with 'Windows' as the theme (pages 6 and 7). I'm delighted to report that from the beginning of December 2019 when we launched our Instagram account, the number of 'followers' has grown from 0 to 119. Do join in!

So with a full schedule of talks to look forward to, we will keep alert to the lifting of lockdown restrictions. We don't know how Members will react to joining 'live' visits again and meeting together in person for visits and walks. We have to play this by ear in the hope we can keep as many Members engaged and interested as possible. Your involvement is crucial. Please don't forget us because we are doing all we can to retain our membership numbers (a crucial source of income), although we will be calling on our reserves in these unusual times. ●



On 2nd February our member Andrew Jones kicked off the series of online events with a fascinating talk on *The Buildings of Green Park*, based on his recently published book. After spending much of his time travelling the world for work, with lockdown Andrew suddenly found himself restricted to exploring his immediate neighbourhood. He was lucky that this was Green Park. He delved into the history of both the park and the buildings surrounding it. Some of the more curious facts he revealed were that the building occupied by the Hard Rock Café is owned by the Seminole tribe of Florida and that the circle of

trees opposite Spencer House mirrors in dimensions the Pantheon in Rome, complete with oculus, where the tree canopy doesn't quite meet.

Our second talk was given by Vic Keegan and was a whirl around our fascinating area, introducing us to buildings still existing as well as many others that have vanished. We then learned how novelist Julie Anderson was inspired by history and able, through her working knowledge, to set her thriller *Plague* in and around the Palace of Westminster. ●

A smooth transition of the accounts was made by our long-serving Treasurer Gordon Slater to Robert Timms and also of our database and emailing system to new Membership Secretary, Louise Cartledge. At the Zoom AGM in November, the Committee contributed and presented Gordon with parting gifts of Dorian Gerhold's signed book on Victoria Tower Gardens, Tony Trowles's signed book *Treasures of Westminster Abbey* and a 117 piece model kit of the Elizabeth Tower. Then in the midst of Winter lockdown, Gordon proudly sent us this photo of the rather large, glorious finished item.

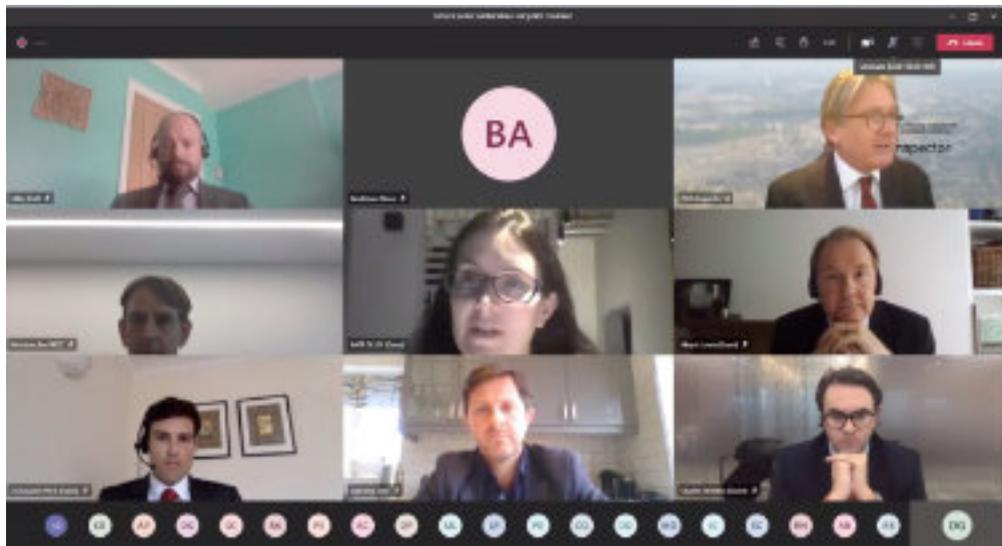


The big planning event since the last Newsletter was the Public Inquiry into the proposal to build the Holocaust Memorial and underground Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens. We have campaigned against it relentlessly, along with the London Gardens Trust (LGT), Baroness Ruth Deech and the campaigning group SaveVTG. We are extremely grateful to the hundreds of people who contributed to the fund, which has enabled the parties who opposed the scheme to employ extremely experienced lawyers, who themselves gave heavily discounted rates for representing us.

The Inquiry lasted twenty days, spread over five weeks. Because of Covid it was held remotely, using Teams. Most participants were working from home, so there were curious moments such as when the Inspector himself had to get up to answer his doorbell! Everyone found that online working was hard work, but one benefit was

that people could participate and watch from all over the country and we listened to a number of submissions from outside London, showing that the interest in this matter was far from local. Among a very distinguished group who spoke against the scheme were the former Archbishop Rowan Williams and the historian Sir Richard Evans. The range of topics discussed during the Inquiry was wide, from tree roots to the awful computation of the number of countries from which Jewish people were transported.

The Inspector is expecting to present his report at the end of April, but we will not know the content until the Housing Minister, who 'called in' the application for his decision, has made up his mind. This bears on the fact, which LGT has challenged, that a representative of a Government organisation (in this case the MHCLG) can be the final arbiter on an application made



by that same entity. (We have recently seen an example of this, when the Transport minister defied the views of numerous experts to allow the proposed tunnel past Stonehenge.) The attempt to ask the courts to challenge this situation was partially successful in that the judge said that handling arrangements within MHCLG had to be tightened up, but he did not accept their basic complaint.

Other Planning issues

WCC are still considering the applications to redevelop the Southside building in Victoria Street (currently House of Fraser) and the remodelling and roof extension to 10 Greycoat Place, the office block opposite the school. Our Society has objected to the Southside development for a number of reasons. 10 Greycoat Place is a more acceptable scheme in that it is reusing the existing structure while adding two floors and remodelling the façade - this unnecessary façade alteration has been through several unsuccessful iterations. Another ambitious office scheme is for the

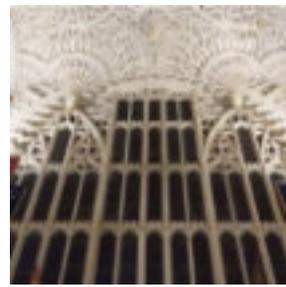
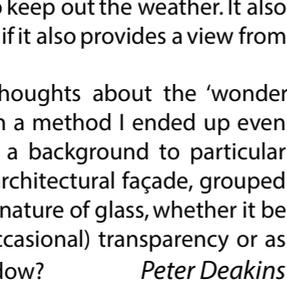
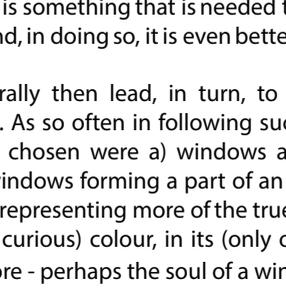
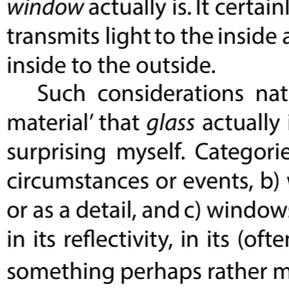
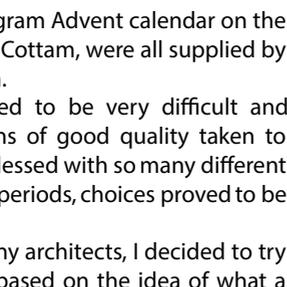
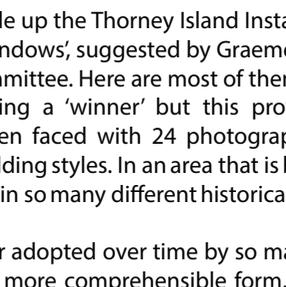
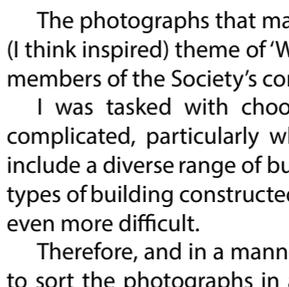
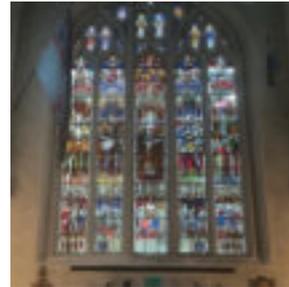
ebullient early 20th century building at 7 Millbank, which is losing parts of its exterior stonework due to the decaying steel frame supporting it. The whole building is to be demolished and the stone cladding rebuilt around a modern office interior.

These three office developments, being considered for planning permission during this long Covid period, are interesting. If they go ahead it will be because developers have confidence that office-working will become the norm again. But will they have that confidence? And if a large number of office workers continue to work from home, that will throw up the question of what city centres are for at all. There will still be museums, theatres, restaurants, universities and myriad other institutions that need a concentrated population. More people working from home will also create a demand for more spacious dwellings, freeing up many a kitchen table for its normal use. There are many new scenarios that would mean big changes in Westminster. ●



Left: A screenshot of the online Public Inquiry into the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens.

Right: 7 Millbank, as proposed, seen from above Smith Square. The whole building will be rebuilt and re clad with the existing stonework.



The photographs that made up the Thorney Island Instagram Advent calendar on the (I think inspired) theme of 'Windows', suggested by Graeme Cottam, were all supplied by members of the Society's committee. Here are most of them.

I was tasked with choosing a 'winner' but this proved to be very difficult and complicated, particularly when faced with 24 photographs of good quality taken to include a diverse range of building styles. In an area that is blessed with so many different types of building constructed in so many different historical periods, choices proved to be even more difficult.

Therefore, and in a manner adopted over time by so many architects, I decided to try to sort the photographs in a more comprehensible form, based on the idea of what a window actually is. It certainly is something that is needed to keep out the weather. It also transmits light to the inside and, in doing so, it is even better if it also provides a view from inside to the outside.

Such considerations naturally then lead, in turn, to thoughts about the 'wonder material' that glass actually is. As so often in following such a method I ended up even surprising myself. Categories chosen were a) windows as a background to particular circumstances or events, b) windows forming a part of an architectural façade, grouped or as a detail, and c) windows representing more of the true nature of glass, whether it be in its reflectivity, in its (often curious) colour, in its (only occasional) transparency or as something perhaps rather more - perhaps the soul of a window? *Peter Deakins*



Pelicans and Elephants

There are six pelicans in St James's Park, five of which are now in quarantine because of Avian Flu. The sixth, Gargi, who arrived in the park on her own, can fly and therefore cannot easily be caught and fenced in. She is also, legitimately, regarded as a wild bird so does not need to be quarantined. Three pelicans from Prague Zoo joined the existing ones in May 2019 and preparing their enclosure

was one of the first projects undertaken by The Royal Parks and TTIS volunteer groups.

We don't know how long the pelicans will remain out of sight but, by way of compensation, next summer it is hoped that the two parks will host **three elephant herds**, life size models installed by the charity Elephant Family, which works to protect Asian wildlife and its habitat.

Slime Moulds by Rachel Dowse, Volunteer Officer, The Royal Parks

Have you ever been out for a walk and spotted a strange, foamy substance on a fallen tree or blades of grass? It might have been bright yellow or orange and you'd be forgiven for thinking someone had dropped their ice cream! Or perhaps you spotted what looked like hundreds of tiny balls on stalks, seemingly growing out of some dead wood. That's exactly what

happened to the Duck Island volunteers in St James's Park in December.

Looking like insect eggs or tiny mushrooms, this startlingly orange organism is actually a slime mould. More specifically, it's the reproductive stage of *Trichia Decipiens*, a very common slime mould that can be found worldwide. To understand more, we need to look at the life cycle of these strange creatures.

Slime moulds can survive as single cells, moving around and eating small particles of bacteria. Despite being able to reproduce by splitting in two, this single-celled form is actually a sex-cell, with only one set of chromosomes. When they meet another, compatible cell, they join together, and this is where it gets unusual.

The two cells form what's called a plasmodium. While still technically one cell, the new form starts creating hundreds of nuclei (the brain of the cell). The plasmodium expands to accommodate these new nuclei, sometimes ending up several metres squared! In this state it can look like a large mass of foam, which can be white, brown or bright colours like yellow or orange. This is where some of the less attractive species get their common names – there is a Dogs-Vomit slime mould (*Fulgio septica*) and Dog-Sick slime mould (*Mucilago crustacea*)!

As a plasmodium, the slime mould can move around and eat things like it did as a single cell. It can also be taught to navigate mazes, which it does by 'reading' chemicals left in the slime trail it leaves behind. When it comes across its own slime again, it can tell

whether carrying on in that direction is worthwhile – a primitive form of memory.

When they are ready to breed, slime moulds undergo another change. In *Trichia Decipiens* this is when the plasmodium forms itself into the little mushroom-like balls we found on Duck Island. They do this by the different nuclei taking on different forms. Some elongate into the 'stem' part and die, in order to support those which cluster up and form the orange balls. Within these balls, the nuclei shuffle their DNA and split into haploid spores, with only one set of chromosomes each. These spores are released to the wind and if they land in suitable conditions they will become the single celled organisms I mentioned earlier, and the cycle begins again.

So we were very lucky to encounter this common but little-understood species on Duck Island. Slime moulds remind us that intelligence can reside in the most unusual of places – and despite some of the common names, I think they're rather beautiful! I hope you agree, and will look out for these alien organisms when you're out and about. ●

Trichia Decipiens

Right: Slime mould found on Duck Island (photo Rachel Dowse)

Below: Slime mould. © Janet Graham





- 1 How many figures are in the Rodin sculpture *The Burghers of Calais* in Victoria Tower Gardens?
 - a) 5
 - b) 6
 - c) 7
- 2 The Home Office building on Marsham St is divided into three sections. Whose name is commemorated in the northern section, closest to Great Peter St?
 - a) Mary Seacole
 - b) Margaret Thatcher
 - c) Mary Wollstonecraft
- 3 Where were the 1902 World Figure Skating Championships held?
 - a) By Somerset House
 - b) In Hyde Park
 - c) By St James's Park station
- 4 Which prominent suffragette's funeral was held at St John the Evangelist (Smith Square) in 1928?
 - a) Emmeline Pankhurst
 - b) Millicent Fawcett
 - c) Emily Davison
- 5 Margaret Batten died in 1739 and was buried in the graveyard in what is now Christchurch Gardens. According to folklore, how old was she when she died?
 - a) 106
 - b) 116
 - c) 136
- 6 In which year did this flood happen?
 - a) 1926
 - b) 1927
 - c) 1928



- 7 Where was this (almost completed) international opera house located?
- 8 Where would you find these birds?
- 9 Name the street in this 1764 view



- 10 Who served as British Prime Minister for the shortest period in total?
 - a) Theresa May
 - b) Spencer Percival
 - c) George Canning
 - d) Anthony Eden
- 11 Who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953?
 - a) Albert Camus
 - b) TS Eliot
 - c) Winston Churchill
 - d) Ernest Hemingway
- 12 Who wrote biographies of Queen Victoria and the Right Honourable Sir William Molesworth?
 - a) Lytton Strachey
 - b) Virginia Woolf
 - c) Millicent Fawcett
 - d) William Gladstone
- 13 Who wrote the novels *Sybil*, *Tancred* and *Coningsby*?
 - a) Benjamin Disraeli
 - b) Charlotte Brontë
 - c) Elizabeth Gaskell
 - d) Oscar Wilde
- 14 Who did the actor Anthony Hopkins portray in Richard Attenborough's film *Young Winston*?
 - a) Jan Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa
 - b) David Lloyd George
 - c) Viscount Palmerston
 - d) Lord Derby
- 15 Which advocate of Indian independence was assassinated at Birla House in New Delhi on 30 January 1948?
 - a) Jawaharlal Nehru
 - b) Mahatma Gandhi
 - c) Mohammed Jinnah
 - d) Sardar Patel
- 16 Who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993?
 - a) Mikhail Gorbachev
 - b) Nelson Mandela
 - c) Desmond Tulu
 - d) Jimmy Carter
- 17 Who established the Metropolitan Police?
 - a) Sir Robert Mark
 - b) Sir Robert Peel
 - c) Sir Robert Walpole
 - d) Sir Robert McAlpine
- 18 Who was the 16th President of the United States?
 - a) Abraham Lincoln
 - b) Andrew Johnson
 - c) Andrew Jackson
 - d) Ulysses S Grant
- 19 What links the answers to the 9 preceding questions to Thorney Island?



2021 Diary dates and other information

Page 12

- Tues 6th April, 6.30pm:** St Stephen's Church, Rochester Row - A Talk via Zoom by Member John Turpin
- Tues 27th April, 6.30pm:** Rediscovering the Medieval Palace of Westminster - A Talk via Zoom by historian and author Dr Elizabeth Biggs
- Tues 11th May, 6.30pm:** In the Shadow of St John's Smith Square - A Talk via Zoom by Member Rosalind Vincent
- Thurs 27th May, 6.30pm:** The Royal Aquarium, Westminster - A Talk via Zoom by Member and author Victor Keegan
- Tues 29th June, 6.30pm:** The Gardens of Westminster Abbey - A Talk via Zoom by Head Gardener and author Jan Pancheri
- Tues 13th July, 6.30pm:** The IncrEDIBLE RHS Collections at the Lindley Library - A Talk via Zoom by RHS librarian Susan Robin
- Thurs 29th July, 6.30pm:** Caring for the Poor & Vulnerable on Thorney Island - A Talk via Zoom by Member Michael Marriott
- Tues 9th Nov, 6.30pm:** The Society's 35th AGM and specialist Talk, details to be announced
- Mon 6th Dec, 6.30pm:** Christmas Party, details to be announced

Bookings 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 visits, reviews planning applications, and maintains a local archive. There are currently more than 350 members, and we would welcome more. A membership form can be found on our website: www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk. Registered Charity No. 1000751

Disclaimer: While The Thorney Island Society is concerned that the views expressed in articles are relevant and honestly held by the contributor, the opinions stated by individuals may not necessarily be held by The Thorney Island Society Executive, which is not in a position to vouch for their accuracy.

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