

HISTORY & SOCIAL ACTION NEWS

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FEEDBACK ON No. 19:

'Congrats on another bumper issue.'

Re-Leeds Northern Star Plaque item: 'Just a line to thank you for the generous space in the latest HSAN newsletter.'

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DIARY

20 February, 2pm. 'Unfree' labour in 18th & 19th century India. BASA & Equiano Society Lecture by Dr Andrea Major (Leeds University), Wilkins Old Refectory, University College London, Gower St, London, WC1 (nearest Tube: Euston Square or Warren Street). The lecture will be followed by questions & discussion, and then an opportunity for social networking over tea. There will be charge of £3 (includes tea/coffee/biscuits) payable at the door. For further information contact me as BASA Secretary: sean.creighton@btinternet.com.

24 February. 7pm. Outside Left. ILP in NE in 1930s. Talk by Dr Gidon Cohen. Newcastle Lit & Phil.

24 February. Mexican past. Gallery talk by Joanne Harwood (University of Essex). Free. Part of the British Museum's 'Revolution Paper. Mexican Prints 1910-1960'special exhibition which closes on 5 April. It features work by Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, Jose Guadalupe Posada and the Taller del Grafica Popular. Exhibition Free

25 February. 6.30pm. Mexican traditions and popular culture in Posada's time. Lecture by Luis Rebaza-Soraluz (King's College London). See 24 February. Lecture £5/£3. To book: 020 7323 8181. www.britishmuseum.org.

26 February. 6.30pm. Viva Zapata! 1952 film starring Marlon Brando, and directed by Elia Kazan. See 24 & 25 February. Film £3/£2.

27 February. 10am-2pm. My East End Home. Workshop. Geffyre Museum, 136 Kingsland Rd, Dalston, E2. Tutor: Leonie Hannan. (Note 1)

27 February . 10.30am-4pm. The Way We Were and Are. Conference to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first national Women's Liberation Conference. Free Word Centre 60 Farringdon Road, London EC1. On February 27 1970 more than 500 women met at Ruskin College in Oxford for the first National Women's Liberation Movement conference. It will explore History, Ordinary Lives, Power, and Sex, looking at how things have changed since 1970. £25 (inc lunch). Concessions and free creche available. To book 020 7324 2570 or info@freewordonline.com. www.freewordonline.com.

28 February. 5pm. Vauxhall, Battersea & Nine Elms Opportunity Area Consultation. Closure of consultation. See story below.

3 March 9am-1.15pm. Keeping the spotlight on fuel poverty: actions needed to tackle fuel poverty and child poverty in England. Centre for Life, Newcastle. Free seminar, followed by lunch, organised by NEA (Neighbourhood Energy Action). Aimed at managers, officers and elected members from local authorities, directors of children's trusts, CAF and Sure Start coordinators, LSP representatives, and representatives from regional and local agencies. To find out more visit www.nea.org.uk/keeping-the-spotlight-on-fuel-poverty/ and to reserve a place email heather.haynes@nea.org.uk.

6 March. 11.30am. Conference and Workers' Bookfair and 7.30pm Social. The Bridge Hotel, Castle Garth, Newcastle. For full details see: <http://nelh.org/forum/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Long-march-back-publicity.pdf>

6 March. Heart o the Race: Black feminism in Britain. 10am-5pm. Women's Library/Black Cultural Archives event. London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Rd, London, EC1. Free. For further details and to book 020 7320 2222; moreinfo@thewomenslibrary.ac.uk.

18 March, 1.15pm. The Life and Death of Frida Kahlo. 1966 documentary about wife of Diego Rivera. Free but booking advised. See 24 & 25 February.

24 March. Can prisons work. A view from the Inspectorate. 7.30pm. Lecture by Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. The Hall, Sacred Heart Church, Edge Hill, Wimbledon, London, SW19. Prisoner's Education Trust 21st Birthday event. £15 (students £7.50) inc. glass of wine. Owers was educated in Washington in County Durham, went to Girton College, Cambridge. She taught and researched African history in Zambia. She worked for Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants from 1981 and from 1992 was Director of Justice. She became Chief Inspector in 2001. To book tickets contact Prisoners' Education Trust: gertrude@prisonerseducation.org.uk. www.prisonerseducation.org.uk.

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27 March. 2.30pm-4.30pm. My East End War: London Metropolitan Archive, 40 Northampton Road, Clerkenwell, EC1. Tutor: Eleni Liarou. (Note 1)

1 April-12 September. Exhibition. Christopher Lloyd: A Life at Great Dixter. Garden Museum. (Note 2)

1 April. 6.30-8.30pm. Fergus Garrett & Anna Pavord - Reflections on Christopher Lloyd. Garden Museum. (Note 3)

8 April. 6.30-8.30pm. Reputations - How are Gardeners Remembered? Garden Museum. (Note 4)

10 April. 10.30am-5pm. Dianthus Day. Garden Museum. (Note 2)

13 April. 6.30-8.30pm. Christopher Lloyd: Friend & Host. Garden Museum. (Note 3)

21 April. 10.30am-5pm. Auricula Day. Garden Museum. (Note 2)

22 April. 6.30-8.30pm. Christopher Lloyd: His Life at Great Dixter. Launch of biography by Stephen Anderton. (Note 3)

24 April, 10am-2pm. My East End Childhood. Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, Bethnal Green, E2. Leonie Hannan (Note 1)

13 May. 7 for 7.30pm. 'Turner and the Masters'. Talk by Philippa Simpson, one of the curators of the recent Turner exhibition. Battersea Society. St. Mary's Church, Battersea Church Rd, London, SW11. The Society's contribution to the Wandsworth Festival of Arts. (Note 5)

20 May, 3-6pm. My East End Memories. Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, EC2M 4. Tutor: Anna Davin. (Note 1)

5 June, 10am-2pm. My East End People: Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, EC2. Tutor: Mike Berlin. (Note 1)

10 June. 7pm. Candles from coconuts. Talk by Jon Newman on Price's Candles. I will be there to sell the H&SAP pamphlet *Battersea's Global Reach. The Story of Price's Candles*. This is the Society's contribution to the Wandsworth Heritage Festival. (Note 6)

Note 1: Free local history study day to allow East Enders to share their experiences, everyday objects and memories with other local people and see how they have been part of the history of this part of London. They will be led by tutors from Birkbeck College. Part of photography and archive project led by Bishopsgate Institute, Four Corners, Geffrye Museum and Birkbeck College. To reserve a place on a study day contact Brett O'Shaughnessy on b.oshaughnessy@bbk.ac.uk or Becky Taylor on 020 7631 6672 or r.taylor@bbk.ac.uk.

Note 2: Part of Museum Admission: £6 Adults / £5 Concs / FREE Students, Under 16s & Carers of Disabled Visitors. (Note 5)

Note 3: Tickets £20 / £15 Museum Friends. (Note 5)

Note 4: Tickets £15 / £10 Museum Friends & Garden History Society Members. (Note 5)

Note 5: Garden Museum, Lambeth Palace Road, London, SE1. www.gardenmuseum.org.uk. Open Sunday to Friday 10.30am -5pm, Saturday 10.30am-4pm. Closed 1st Monday of each month. Book in advance on 020 7410 8865 ext. 822.

Note 6: Full details of all Battersea Society events at www.batterseasociety.org.uk/events

HISTORY ACTION NEWS

Price's Candles. I have had an enquiry from the United States about Jon Newman's Price's Candles pamphlet by a researcher into one of the companies taken over by Price's in 1910: the Clarke's Pyramid Light Works, Child's Hill. Jon explains that Price's took over Clarke's Pyramid and Fairy Light Co. Ltd of Cricklewood, and continued to market the Clarke products: Patent Fairy and Pyramid Lamps, "Cricklite" Lamps and fittings. The name 'Cricklite' came from Cricklewood. Jon's pamphlet is still available for purchase from me.

Wandsworth U3A is a very well supported group as demonstrated by the 70 people who came to hear me talk about Wandsworth Working Lives on 18 January. Penny Corfield will be talking to the group about Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. I am pleased that after considering my suggestion

the group has decided to advertise its June meeting in the forthcoming Wandsworth Heritage Festival and to request membership of the Heritage Wandsworth Partnership. Details about WU3A are on www.wandsworthu3a.org.uk.

Wandsworth Museum. Over 70 people packed into the hall of St Mary's Parish Church Putney (that of the Civil War Putney Debates) on 4 February, to hear the latest news about the progress with setting up the independent Wandsworth Museum. Wandsworth Council closed its Museum despite the protest of 20,000 people signing a petition to keep it open. Museum campaigners then set up the Friends of Wandsworth Museum, while a Trust was established to set up an independent Museum. The work put in by the Trustees, the Friends, the Director Andrew Leitch and the staff, alongside the agreement of Wandsworth Council to let the Museum set up in the former West Hill Library building, means that the Museum will open at the end of May. Leitch explained the re-design of the interior and exterior of the building, and the approach to mixing permanent and temporary exhibitions, the work being carried out with schools and the accession of the Young's Brewery archive. The event included the showing of a DVD of a project assisted by the Museum staff with Beatrix Potter School on school evacuation in 1939, which included a visit on a steam train to the village where many of those evacuated went. A well made and very moving film. The Head explained that the project which is on going has had a profound effect on his pupils. Since then I have had a meeting with Andrew Leitch. For the Wandsworth Heritage Festival the Museum will be hosting a talk by me on Music and Wandsworth and a workshop on Wandsworth and the Slavery Business.

Postgraduates Get Opportunity To Talk in Heritage Festival. At my suggestion two postgraduates, who sought my advice about Battersea History for their theses, will be giving talks in the Wandsworth Heritage Festival: Sandra Keen on Charles Booth and East Battersea poverty, and Jason Perry on William Stephen Sanders.

The Image of Black Website Re-launches. The Image of Black Arts and culture website has been re-launched as an information resource on the history of African people in western art and culture. It has been developed by heritage consultant and art historian, Temi Odumosu, who is currently writing her PhD thesis on the representation of African Characters in 18th century English satirical prints, at the University of Cambridge.

www.theimageofblack.com. Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/The-Image-of-Black-Discovering-the-Hidden-History/282581007025?ref=mf

A History of the World in 100 Objects. The British Museum was packed with visitors this afternoon, many of whom clearly had come to see the objects talked in the BBC Radio 4 series 'A History of the World in 100 Objects'. This series narrated by the Museum's Director Neil MacGregor is a fascinating telling of a wider story around individual objects. The Museum has produced a guide to where the 30 objects in the first 6 weeks can be found in the Museum. Each week's 5 objects is illustrated with a map showing where they are. Week One on the period 2,000,000-9,000 BC includes the Olduvai stone chopping tool and the handaxe from Tanzania. The text reminds us that 'Human life began in Africa'. Apart from 5 objects from Egypt and 1 from Sudan up to 300BC, there are no other objects from other parts of Africa. Does this reflect the nature of the collections the Museum has or does it reflect the choice made of which objects to highlight? Will more objects from sub-Saharan Africa be showcased among the remaining 70?

Anti-Slavery Day Bill. The 'Anti-Slavery Day Bill' Private Members Bill proposed by Anthony Steen, MP, is passing through the Commons. The Bill focuses on modern day slavery rather than the Transatlantic or other historical forms of slavery. The Government does not support the Bill but is neutral. It is important that MPs have your view on this. For details see:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/020/10020.1-i.html

[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100205/debtext/100205-](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100205/debtext/100205-0004.htm#10020534000004)

[0004.htm#10020534000004](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100205/debtext/100205-0004.htm#10020534000004). Arthur Torrington of the Equiano Society has commented as follows to his MP: 'Modern-day slavery is certainly NOT taking the place of the so-called transatlantic

slave trade. The so-called slave trade (human trafficking) existed for thousands of years before Africans were shipped to the Americas, but was also pandemic in India, China, Russia, and other countries. The Abolition Act of 1807 did not extend to the slave trade in British India, and trading continued there, and elsewhere for decades after. The Equiano Society is strongly opposed to any reference to 'the transatlantic slave trade' in this Bill, and asks that those words be deleted. The TST has no parallel, in terms of how enslaved Africans were treated, and the legacies today. It is no different to how Jews see 'the Holocaust' as being a peculiar Jewish experience.' He proposes that Clause 1(2)(a) be amended to read: 'acknowledge that modern slavery continues to deprive millions of men, women and children of basic human dignity and freedom.' Arthur urges other to contact their MPs.

OTHER NEWS AND INFORMATION

Greta Brooks. Streatham Quakers held a memorial service for Greta on 6 February. In line with the way Quakers run their meetings it was held in silence until someone felt moved to speak, silence then followed to enable people to reflect on what had been said, and then someone else got up. Several people spoke, including me. At the end there was lively chat over tea and cakes. Greta was a very special lady who had an enormous effect on the people who knew her, and whose community and Quaker activities also positively influenced other people's lives for the better. Martin Wright, a colleague in Lambeth Mediation, contributed an obituary in the Independent:

www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/lives-remembered-greta-brooks-1880949.html.

Jane Warwick, the Chair of the Lambeth Panel of Independent Custody Visitors to police stations, wrote about Greta in the newsletter of the February issue of the Metropolitan Police ICV Newsletter: www.mpa.gov.uk/downloads/partnerships/icv/newsletter/2010-02.pdf.

Railway Workers Dispute In Thailand. Labour Start, the trade union website, reports that a few months ago railway workers in Thailand went on strike, refusing to drive unsafe trains following a fatal crash. The employer's response was to sack six union officials and to sue the union for damages. The State Railway Workers Union and its global union federation, the ITF, have called for an international campaign to protest these decisions, to urge the company to stop fighting against the union and instead to "build a new safety culture in the Thai railways with the workers and the union where whistle-blowers are not penalised." But the Thai Transport Minister is pushing the railway to continue pursuing its case against the union in court. To find out more and to give support go to:

www.labourstart.org.

OFGEM Sees Sense - At Last! You could have knocked me over with a feather when I heard the news that Alistair Buchanan, the Energy Regular (Ofgem) uttered the ultimate heresy that the private sector could not deliver the security of energy supply the country needs. Is this the beginning of the end for the Thatcherite/Blairite/Brownite mantra of the wonderful ability of the private sector as against State ownership? Will we see the Water regulator (Ofwat) saying that the companies cannot deliver affordable water and sewerage services and that there is no longer any viability for the privatised small water only companies?

Abseiling at Battersea Power Station for Mines Advisory Group. Dale Ingram, a member of the Tooting Local History Group, has signed up to abseil on May 2 down Battersea Power Station to raise funds for Mines Advisory Group. The Group clears the remnants of conflict for the benefit of communities worldwide. It is co-laureate of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

www.maginternational.org The event website address is www.charityabseil.com to find out more or to register to take part, just in case you fancy it yourself, or know someone who might. Dale is hoping to raise £400. If you sponsor her at least £5 she promises to send you by email 10 digital images taken from the top of the abseil point, and on the way down. To do so go to www.justgiving.com/Dale-Ingram.

Interventions Project. This sounds like it may have potential for some of the things I was saying in my discussion paper on the AHRC Transfer on Knowledge programme last year and at a recent Long 18th Century Seminar discussion at the Institute of Historical Research. This project is seeking to create new ways for social and cultural research to resonate with the public and exploring the means by which academic enquiry can be expressed. Based at Newcastle University the team is looking for five researchers and five designers. The designers should have an appetite for knowledge and a desire to create meaningful social and cultural impact through design. For more information see: www.interventions.org.uk. Application deadline: Friday 26th February. Contact with any queries and applications to Joe Malia: joe@interventions.org.uk and Monica Moreno Figueroa: monica.moreno-figueroa@newcastle.ac.uk.

NO TO DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYOR IN TOWER HAMLETS

As someone who was against having an elected Mayor for London, it is good to see that there is a campaign in Tower Hamlets against having one there. May 6 sees a referendum in the Borough. An all party group of local residents is campaigning against the proposal on the following grounds:

- A directly elected Mayor will marginalise your democratically elected councillors.
- A directly elected Mayor would damage the representative nature of our council – only one view would matter.
- Scrutiny of decision-making would be weakened with the public and councillors powerless to hold the directly elected Mayor to account.
- A directly elected Mayor can appoint non-elected advisors who would not be accountable to local people.
- There is no provision to remove an incompetent directly elected Mayor.

One of the strong points against an elected Mayor is the group's argument that in mayoral systems 'the person at the head of the council has an even greater say in planning decisions with fewer checks and balances from local voices.'

'Under current government legislation Tower Hamlets will have to change - either to a mayor system or to a leader and cabinet system. Tower Hamlets contains an extraordinary diversity of people, professions, cultures and creeds. In some ways it is the most diverse place in Britain. The group believes that it would be difficult for a single person or single voice to represent the scale of this diversity; rich and poor, black and white, people of one faith or no faith. Tower Hamlets needs more voices in the town hall than the exclusive voice a single mayor.'

Not that I am in favour of a Leader and Cabinet - that seems to have been disastrous elsewhere, especially in terms of side-lining backbench Councillors. But with no seeming choice the group is backing that alternative requirement to one of the elected Mayor.

If you are against elected mayors, do not live in, but have friends and acquaintances in Tower Hamlets then please let them know. The group can be contacted at info@notodirectlyelectedmayorintowerhamlets.org
www.notodirectlyelectedmayorintowerhamlets.org

PEOPLE'S MUSEUM RE-OPENS

Following more than two years of re-development, the People's History Museum in Manchester will re-open on 5 March. The Museum explores many of the world-changing ideas fought for by the working people of Britain, and charts the history of democracy from the early 18th century to date.

The extensive re-development has been supported by a £7.18 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, along with £2 million from the Northwest Regional Development Agency and additional funding from the European Regional Development Fund.

Spanning two centuries, the Museum provides a journey through the lives, histories and issues of the working people of Britain, and houses an unprecedented collection of almost 1,500 historic objects, including the world's oldest trade union and miners' banner, the *Tinplate Workers*, 1821 and *Ashover Miners*, c 1825, and the table on which the 18th century writer and revolutionary Thomas Paine wrote his ground-breaking publication *Rights of Man*.

The main galleries open with the story of the Peterloo Massacre - a reform meeting held on St Peter's Field in Manchester in 1819, which turned to tragedy when magistrates attempted to bring the 60,000 plus workers and families under control and several people were killed. The aftermath resulted in the first reform of Parliament in 1832 which gave the vote to some, but not all, men.

The galleries then track the rise of the Revolutionaries and Reformers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, through to the Workers, Voters and Citizens of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries - those who gave birth to and fought for the ideas behind many political reforms taken for granted today, including the welfare state, the NHS and government housing. New displays include the museum's collection of radical banners across the ages - the largest in the world - and show how workers in the 19th century won and spent precious time off work, including the story of the Co-op.

Architects Austin-Smith:Lord have renovated the Museum's original location, formerly an Edwardian hydraulic pumping station, and revealed the elegance and workings of the site which originally supplied power to mills and warehouses, and famously wound the Town Hall clock. The multi-million pound re-development joins the original site to a four-storey extension.

Alongside the main galleries and collection, the Museum will present a changing exhibition programme throughout the year, opening with *Carried Away* - a photographic exhibition documenting over 100 years of protest across Britain. Protests captured within the exhibition include the suffragettes, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Miners' Strike.

Money also came from Unite trade union, Clothworkers' Foundation, Professional Footballer's Association (PFA), Allied London, and Government Departments.

The museum will open to the public on 13 February for a soft opening. The official opening event is on Friday 5 March.

People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, Manchester M3 3ER. 0161 838 9190.
www.phm.org.uk

Nick Mansfield, the Director, who has been in charge of ensuring the development of the Museum from when it was re-located to Manchester will be moving on during the year. Congratulations to Nick for what he has achieved, especially from me since he got the job and I did not. The Museum was formerly the National Museum of Labour History based in London. After its closure Michael Ward helped negotiate the rescue of its collection and its move to Manchester.

BATTERSEA POWER STATION & THE WIDER OPPORTUNITY AREA

Battersea Power Station is the largest surviving brick built structure in Europe; it's the UK's largest Building at Risk and it's an icon for many Londoners. No icon for me - I could never understand why it was listed and still consider it should have been pulled down. There's yet another planning application. For the view of the 20th Century Society go to:
www.c20society.org.uk/docs/casework/2009_autumn_battersea_power_station.html

The Power Station site forms part of the London Mayor's Vauxhall, Battersea & Nine Elms

Opportunity Area across Lambeth and Wandsworth which also includes the redevelopment of the Covent Garden Market and the site for the proposed US Embassy. His Planning Framework document is in its consultation period up to 5pm on 28 February. Over the next 2-3 years it is likely to get a lot of national press coverage. During the Wandsworth Heritage Festival I will be leading two walks through the Nine Elms area about its past, present and future.

Vauxhall Society Views

The reformed and revitalised Vauxhall Society has prepared a preliminary critique of the plans relating to Vauxhall.

While the Society favours a good and coherent development plan for the area around Vauxhall Cross, the riverside and the railway viaduct, it insists that the plan must contribute to and connect with the wider area around it 'It cannot succeed without adequate infrastructure in place, in particular a large increase in capacity of public transport, and proper attention to good travel connections. Nor can any plan succeed which keeps the blight of the Vauxhall Cross gyratory system: now is the time to fulfil the Lambeth Plan's accepted aim of restoring it to two way working. Redesign of Vauxhall Cross as a whole, especially the current road layout, should be the starting point of the plan.'

It argues that high density can be achieved with medium rise. 'Tall buildings create canyons and overshadowing which do not suit a damp, temperate climate. The tallest buildings should be in the centre of the opportunity area: some tall buildings could be sited over the railway over some of Vauxhall station and to its south but without blocking routes under the viaduct. Beside the river and at the east side tall buildings create a barrier between the development and its environment.'

Public transport

While the Society recognises that the proposed plan recognises that increased public transport provision is necessary, it points out that it 'does not make adequate provision for it. It envisages an extension to the Northern Line underground from Kennington to Nine Elms, with one intermediate station and with no connection at Vauxhall Cross. The Northern Line is seriously overcrowded at present. In the rush hour it is often physically impossible to get on a train, however hard one shoves: having to wait for the third train is common. Since expansion of its capacity is needed with present passenger numbers, it is hard to see how it could be made to cope with a large increase. No expansion of Vauxhall underground station is proposed. It is wholly unrealistic to suppose that a massive increase in population nearby or a short bus ride away would not enormously increase the demand to use it.'

Connection to the development's environment

'Existing piecemeal development has created barriers between North Lambeth and its Thames frontage and along the line of the viaduct, made much worse by the blight of the Vauxhall Cross gyratory system. Developers are continuing to put in one at a time proposals for a series of unrelated towers (always called "landmarks" - which means very big and high and blocking any other views). We consider it essential that there is a coherent design and plan, and that no applications for individual large buildings should be considered until a plan exists. The Vauxhall Society has questioned the need for high rise to achieve high density (the highest housing density areas in the UK are Mayfair and Bath). Furthermore, initial proposals envisage very high rise nearest the river, scaling down from it. This perpetuates the overshadowing of the river, the separation of a strip along Lambeth's only riverside cutting the rest of the area off from it, and the flood risk.'

'The riverside is not the best place for the tallest buildings: both for flood protection and to protect the Thames as our blue ribbon of tidal open space which should not be overshadowed or cut off from its hinterland. Some tall buildings could be placed over the south part of the

station and the railway viaduct, but not so as to block our views of the Houses of Parliament and beyond. Nor should tall buildings overshadow Vauxhall Park or Spring Gardens and other smaller green spaces.'

The Vauxhall Cross gyratory system

The Society regards this as 'a blight on the area, which makes civilised life around it impossible. It prioritises "through" not "to" the area. Dealing with this, especially removing the gyratory system, which is in the plans for the area, although - stupidly - only as an "aspiration" for the future, is the prerequisite for any regeneration. It needs to be a proper transport destination and interchange, and a worthy centre for the area, connecting with and encompassing the historic green spaces and access to the river, not an uneasy compromise with an urban motorway jam. Expansion of the capacity of the underground station, better access to and from the overground rail station, especially for the disabled, less able and people with burdens, draughtproofing the bus station, construction the pier for connecting to river buses, and a better taxi rank and drop off point are all needed before development starts.'

Lambeth's riverside

'Public access to and along the riverside needs to be continuous and have enough width for people to stop beside the river and for walkers and cyclists to co-exist in harmony, and we should be able to see the river rather than have it walled off by buildings that look continuous even if they are not.'

The Society suggests that the railway viaduct 'should act as a spine, with many connections through its arches, not a barrier. The study done ten years ago supported this strongly, and saw this an a major opportunity for the area.'

The American Embassy

'Planning for this should be integrated into the plan for the area and the plans should be included in local consultations now, especially to ensure that any security arrangements are not obtrusive and do not inconvenience local people.'

The London Plan and the Opportunity (for developers) Area

The Vauxhall Society says that it was one of the few local London bodies invited on the basis of its comments on the draft London plan to give evidence at the discussions on this. 'There was little sign that the then mayor was prepared to take any notice of anyone's view but his own. He imposed one of his "opportunity areas" on Vauxhall, and Lambeth has had to adapt its own planning to accommodate it, with little if any room to make it fit the locality and its surroundings' character and needs.'

The Society hopes 'that the opportunity will be taken to develop this area properly in the best interests of its environment and neighbours as well as the best interests of London as a whole.'

For information and the consultation documents see: www.london.gov.uk/mayor/planning/oapf-nine-elms/index.jsp

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR POST OFFICES?

The Government has said that it is committed to maintaining a network of 11,500 Post Office branches. Other political parties have been non specific, whilst indicating that the size of the network was inextricably linked to profitability.

Consumer Focus has the responsibility of monitoring the number and location of post offices and to defend and promoting the consumer interest in relation to the post office network more

generally. Its three priorities are:

Watchdog function: to improve quality and accessibility of post office services

Policy function: Influence decisions that help secure a viable future network that meets consumers' needs

Start to apply the lessons learned to other essential community services (applying lessons from engagement in closure programme to likely cuts in public services)

Customer views

The strong, consistent message that comes from its research and its contact with customers is that people and their communities value their post office. Post Office closures generated an outcry from 2.7 million consumers .

- There are 23 million customer visits throughout the post office network each week
- Even following the closure programme the post office maintains a national reach through its 11,500 branches (almost treble the network of the largest four supermarket chains combined; and greater than all the bank and building societies combined)
- Unrivalled coverage in rural areas and deprived urban locations
- 93% of population within a mile of PO
- Of every £1 in circulation 14p goes through a PO branch

Fall in Usage

Post Offices contribute to local economies - small businesses rely on POs for banking and parcels, especially in rural areas. And they often underpin key services: 73% of POs in rural areas are often located with other retail, often the 'last shop in the village'.

Yet research has shown that the number of people who visited the post office at least once a week to post mail fell from a half of the population to just over a third between 2007 and 2008. As the graphs show: the government services and transactions that have traditionally been available at the post office and have formed a pillar of the network's revenue are in decline. This trend is only going to accelerate.

A New Opportunity

The collapse of the banks and of consumer confidence in them presents the Post Office with a new opportunity especially in respect of the social groups that are in danger of been digitally excluded as more and more financial transactions are carried out over the internet. To take advantage of the opportunity will require a change in approach by Post Office management to be innovative and help deliver central and local government services. Both Central and local government need to understand the value of the Post Office network.

The Digital Britain report sets out ambitious proposals for a Digital Switchover of Public Services in which the internet would be the primary means of access to public service transactions, rather than one of many. While there are clear advantages for many consumers and for the taxpayer, those without internet access risk being left behind.

The Post Office is ideally placed to play a 'digital bridge' role, linking government departments that make a total shift to electronic channels with those consumers who cannot or do not want to utilise them. Staff and subpostmasters could check and authenticate identities and documents and digitalise forms before forwarding them to the relevant department.

Post Office Payout. Leeds City Council is working with Post Office Limited to pioneer Post Office Payout - a service through which consumers can receive direct payments via text message from a third party which are then paid out at the Post Office.

Identity validation. The Post Office Validate fraud detection scheme for housing benefit

recipients, in which recipients are asked to confirm their status in person either at post office or at council offices was piloted in Camden, with over 50% of respondents visiting the Post Office.

Council Kiosks. Lambeth has successfully trialled the use of Post Offices to achieve greater engagement with its residents, using interactive kiosks in branches.

Neighbourhood Bank. Consumer Focus would like to see the Post Office developing services that enable it to operate as a neighbourhood bank and offering on-line banking.

Support for the Post Office is dented by the experience of lengthy queues and the time it can take to be seen. It will need to improve on this.

Notes

- Adapted from a paper considered by Public Utilities Access Forum, which I was Secretary of in the 1990s until September 2000, and then a member until 2004: www.puaf.org.uk
- Consumer Focus: www.consumerfocus.org.uk
- The idea of developing public information kiosks was discussed in the report I assisted Claire Milne research and write for the Council of Europe (2000): www.antelope.org.uk/consumer_affairs/Access_For_All_To_Internet_Services_At_Community_Level.pdf

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