Effravescent BRIXTON

What lies underneath?

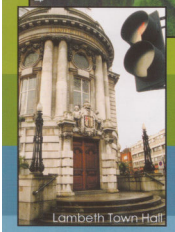
Brixton

The 'Brixton Riots' in the 1980's were focused in the Brixton Road / Atlantic Road area. These events and subsequent incidents have meant that Brixton has made the headlines - often unfairly and for all the wrong reasons.

Brixton Market

Lambeth Town Hall is a striking building - a marked contrast to the council building just up the road (Olive Morris House), where Council Tax is collected and Housing Benefit dispensed or withheld. Pevsner says it is a "jolly Town Hall". It has had a stormy history: a strong anti-politax stance. Previous Chief Executives include Faith Boardman and Hermann Ouseley.

Brixton Hill: This forms part of the original A23 London to Brighton road, and the steady climb away from Brixton is a feature of the London-Brighton motor rally and cycle race. Brixton prison is a short distance up the hill beyond Corpus Christi church (see map).


Lambeth Town Hall

Effra Road and Brixton Water Lane hint at the presence of the River Effra - one of seven South London rivers that have been built over and now run underground in culverts, before depositing their contents into the Thames. The Effra surfaces only occasionally (and not near the route). This whole fascinating 'underground' subject is explored in Nicholas Barton's book "Lost Rivers of London".

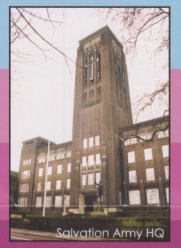
Winkworths - local estate agents. A look in the window as you pass by will give you an idea of just how much it would cost to buy property in the Brixton area (at the end of Railton Road, near to Herne Hill station).

The Ritzy cinema has a fashionable reputation, and bills itself in guidebooks as being "in the West End"! E. C. Homer and Lucas designed the Ritzy as the Electric Pavilion in 1910. The client was Israel Davis, one of a noted family of cinema developers who created a large chain in south and west London. The Electric Pavilion opened on 11 March 1911 and was one of England's earliest purpose-built cinemas, with over 750 seats in the single auditorium.

The cinema closed in 1976 and came close to demolition - it was saved only through collaboration between Lambeth Council and the management of the cinema at that time. It was reopened in 1978.

The road called Herne Hill marks a divide between Lambeth and Southwark, and also between overcrowded Brixton and the even more expensive residential areas towards the east, going down towards Dulwich, where house prices are astronomical!

The international training college of the Salvation Army occupies a large site in Denmark Hill, opposite the entrance to Ruskin Park; sometimes named the "William Booth Memorial". (Last year we visited his grave in Abney Park Cemetery - this year a living memorial!).


Salvation Army HQ

Denmark Hill: The Maudsley Hospital is a major psychiatric hospital, with an international reputation for research and treatment.

Maudsley Hospital

Kings College Hospital is a famous landmark that has had an architectural facelift in the last five years. Its various departments now cover a large area, having spilled out into the surrounding streets. Look out for its distinctive logo. The hospital specializes in liver, renal and paediatric treatment.

Camberwell

Used by Londoners as a health resort in the 19th Century (due to its very clean air), Camberwell is perhaps less in the news than Brixton.

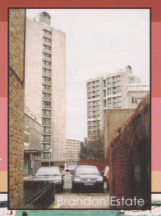
The Damiola Taylor murder took place on the borders of Camberwell and Peckham - to the east of Camberwell Green. The "Green" sounds quite idyllic, and is in fact a unique remnant of the old village green. Camberwell was heavily bombed during the Second World War, which led to the building of many council estates - mainly flats - in the post-war years.

The Camberwell Beauty: Above Superdrug, near Camberwell Green, the large butterfly draws attention to the story of this rare and spectacular butterfly. It is so named because the first recorded sightings were around willow trees along Cold Harbour Lane near Camberwell in 1748 - when it was a village rather than a busy urban area.

It is a scarce and irregular immigrant from Scandinavia, though it was thought for a long time that there was also a British specimen. It was rumoured that this was brought in accidentally on timber shipments via the local canal. Sightings are quite rare, usually in August / September (bonus points for sightings on May 3rd).

Kennington

Cleaver Square, on the far side of Kennington Park Road (between Kennington Underground and Kennington Park) is an interesting example of renovated housing. The houses here were multi-occupied in the early years of the last century, with four or five families to a house. They are now very expensive. One is owned by John Major, from where he can easily walk to the nearby A.M.P. Oval, where he is president of Surrey County Cricket Club.


Brandon Estate

Evangelical Alliance: Their headquarters, Whitefield House, are named after George Whitefield - famous preacher of the evangelical revival - who used to preach in Kennington Park.

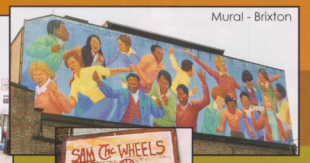
Kennington Park: Scene of mass political rallies in the 19th century - especially chartists, it is the starting point for Gay Pride rallies now. The house for the park-keeper was designed by Prince Albert.

Brandon Estate: The tower blocks on the Brandon Estate were the first GLC high rises. Some of the early buildings are now 'listed'!

Walworth Garden Farm: One of a small number of farms in the area, some of which keep animals. This one is a local nature resource and offers training schemes for the young unemployed.

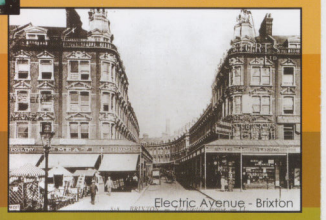
Stockwell

Note the mosque in Stockwell Gardens - this used to be the Union Chapel - a congregational church (near Stockwell URC, checkpoint C). CAFOD (Catholic Aid For Overseas Development) have their HQ and a shop (open Mon-Fri) in Stockwell Road.


Mural - Brixton

2 Famous Victorians:

John Ruskin (1819 - 1900), was an 'art and social critic'. His parents moved to Herne Hill when he was four, and subsequently to Denmark Hill when he was twenty. He returned to live in Denmark Hill, in-between his various travels, until well into his adult life. His name is remembered in the local park and in the street named after him (where Roger Dowley used to live, @ No.20!). Ruskin was influenced in his early days by the Dulwich College Picture Gallery.


Electric Avenue - Brixton

Sir Henry Tate (1819 - 1899), born within a few weeks of Ruskin lived at Streatham Common - just over Brixton Hill. He is described as a sugar magnate, art patron and philanthropist. He made money after patenting a new method for cutting sugar cubes in 1872 in Liverpool. He is famous for his collection of British paintings, specialising particularly in the work of JMW Turner. He donated his collection to the nation in 1889 and in 1897 the Tate Gallery was opened. On our walk you may see his name at the entrance to the Tate Library in Central Brixton and the Nurses Home at No.47 Tulse Hill - evidence of his generosity.

Map © Unlock 2003

The Unlock London Sponsored Walk

No.20 - Saturday 3rd May 2003

NB. If you would like to shorten the route, there is a bus you can catch between checkpoints F and G. Catch a No.68 or 468 between Herne Hill station and The Maudsley Hospital (Fare: £1.40 adult; 70p child)

Notes: Stan Lane
Map: Peter & Jill Hall; David Vernon-Edwards
Thanks also to Bruce Stokes & Roy Dorey!

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