Going for gold - Olympic ambitions for Wimbledon a century on

Wimbledon Going for Gold is a commercial campaign launched last year by Merton Chamber of Commerce to capitalise on the borough’s role in hosting lawn tennis during the Olympics in 2012. Read more about this inside in connection with the Society’s Annual General Meeting.

Wimbledon last had this role over 100 years ago in 1908 when the All England Club was located in Worple Road. 2012 will therefore see the first ever Olympic lawn tennis played at the current ground. The sport did not feature in the 1948 London Olympics but back in 1908 it had been a fixture since the revival of the modern Games in 1896. Britons dominated in those days and the overall British medals tally in the 1908 Olympics included many won on the tennis courts, indoors as well as outdoors.

The men’s outdoors singles gold medallist was M.J.G Ritchie who narrowly beat the German O. Froitzheim (pictured left) to secure the British dominance among the nine competing nations. A contemporary report had said of Froitzheim: ‘Everything the German did he did easily…..the absence of the over-anxiety and impetuosity usually so characteristic of the Continental player stamped him as much above the ordinary….he was not in the least disturbed by the passing trains.’

Shown above: Mrs Lambert Chambers beats fellow British player Miss D Boothby for the gold in the ladies’ outdoors singles finals.

See the 2010 AGM Report on Page 2

www.wimbledonsociety.org.uk or www.wimbledonmuseum.org.uk
Annual General Meeting 2010

The 106th Annual General Meeting of the Wimbledon Society was held at the Village Hall on 15 May 2010. Norman Plastow, President, opened the meeting and 50 members were present.

Chairman Iain Simpson paid tribute to the work of volunteers during the past year. He said the Executive Committee had been considering future strategy and asking what should be done better. Public ignorance about it had been shown as far back as the Society’s centenary in 2003. The Executive Committee was concerned how to raise the profile. In the next few weeks a questionnaire would be sent to members asking for other areas of possible focus for greater influence.

The Society’s logo had become outdated and been replaced, with the new oak tree logo on display. Wimbledon symbols such as the Windmill and Tennis were used by other bodies but the oak represented conservation, stability and strength - all appropriate for the Society. The Society had also joined the new national organisation, Civic Voice, created to replace the defunct Civic Trust.

Linda Defriez was standing down as Hon Treasurer after ten years. He paid tribute to her guardianship of the Society’s finances and was pleased to say she would continue to be involved with membership, activities and events. Her nominated successor was Corinna Edge, recently a councillor in Merton, and a qualified accountant.

Mark Leclercq was also standing down as chairman of the Planning Committee but would remain an active committee member. Volunteers were now needed for chairman and secretary of the Planning Committee and, in the Museum, curators of Portraits and Prints and Drawings. Likely candidates were invited to contact the Society’s Chairman.

Introducing The Trustees’ Annual Report and Accounts, Linda Defriez said income from dividends and interest had fallen in the past year following the economic downturn. However, the Executive Committee had alleviated the worst effect by moving investments into deposits with the Bank of Scotland and Standard Life.

Members approved re-election of Norman Plastow as President, Iain Simpson as Chairman and David Butler as Hon Secretary, and approved the appointment of Corinna Edge as Hon Treasurer. Executive Committee members approved were Marsha Beresford, Linda Defriez, Monica Ellison, Marie Fitzgerald, Martyn Harman, Janet Koss, Mark LeClercq, Pat Keith, Andrew Simon, John Rowcliffe, Cassandra Taylor, Asif Malik and David Woodcock. Hartley Fowler Chartered Accountants were approved as Independent Examiners.

Discussing the Society’s activities, some members
Olympic focus puts local businesses on the map

Diana Sterck, Chief Executive of Merton Chamber of Commerce, was guest speaker at this year’s AGM, talking about Going for Gold - a campaign to maximise benefits from the 2012 Olympics for businesses in Wimbledon.

Launched in March last year, the campaign is jointly funded by Merton Council and local business. The idea is to increase wider awareness of Wimbledon as a centre for leisure, shopping and entertainment in the years running up to the Games.

The Chamber runs Wimbledon Town Centre Management as a public-private partnership and has suggested closer links with residents’ associations, encouraging membership applications through leaflets. The society might also concern itself with traffic matters, an increasingly hot topic. The Chairman confirmed that this was on the Executive Committee’s agenda. He said members of residents associations often had a specific purpose in joining those, usually to oppose a controversial development application in their area. The Wimbledon Society had a broader canvas. Traffic was covered by the Wimbledon Union of Residents Associations (WURA).

Some members commented on the Society’s age profile, asking about plans to recruit younger people. Others thought the Society suited the needs of older residents. Younger people might have neither the time nor inclination to become involved. The Chairman confirmed that the Executive Committee had concluded that a recruitment drive to enlarge the membership greatly would not be cost-effective.

A member asked about the Society’s appeal for contributed photographs of residential roads to ensure future historical records. For the Museum, Alan Elliot stressed that those interested should contact Simon Joseph, curator of Photographs.

Linda Defriez confirmed that coach trips continued to be popular among a core membership and one of this year’s excursions was fully subscribed with a waiting list.

The meeting was closed after formal thanks to the President, Officers and Executive Committee for their work in the past year.
In summer 1940 I had just joined the battalion among those reinforcements needed to bring it up to strength. The battalion remained in the area for the next 12 months, taking over various large houses left unoccupied. Battalion Headquarters took over Inner Park House off Parkside; Headquarters Company was ensconced in Gifford House, Roehampton. There was a company in East Hill House, Church Road opposite Belvedere Avenue. These three houses have long since been demolished. Number 4 Company was in a corner house in Calonne Road. The Bren Gun Carrier, Mortar and Anti-tank Platoons were in Exeter House, Roehampton. The Signal Platoon in the All England Tennis Courts.

My own Prince of Wales Company was billeted along Westside with Platoons 1 and 2 and Company Headquarters in Westside House (below) and Platoons 3 and 4, plus the NAAFI (in the basement), in Stamford House. The buildings adjoining Westside House were used as the Guardroom and Cookhouse. The Mess room was a marque in front of the house. Company and Battalion parades were held across the road on the Common.

Time was spent getting used to life in a service battalion. For the Prince of Wales Company the garden of Westside House - where now are Chester and Sycamore Roads - was used for training in the use of weapons and other pursuits when confronting the enemy. And there were weekly route marches. A 20-mile slog with full kit up to say, Victoria Park in the East End and back, alternating with a 10-mile non-stopper. Toward the end of our sojourn in the area I was sent on a course to learn how to drive a Bren Gun Carrier, a 4-ton armoured and tracked vehicle which became my means of transport for the rest of the war.

In due course, after about 12 months (not before various liaisons had been entered into with local ladies) the battalion left Wimbledon, marching down the hill with drummers drumming and rifles at the slope, to the railway goods platform that used to be at the rear of Hughes Ironmongers. We boarded a train en route to the West Country. The Welsh Guards were followed in Wimbledon by a battalion of the Royal Norfolks.

For the next three years we moved around the country, continuously modifying our training methods in order to keep up with innovations in modern warfare and wondering why we were not called upon to take part in the fighting that was going on elsewhere. In June 1944 we found out why.

Of the British War Grave Cemeteries in Normandy there are three, at Bayeux, Banneville-la-Campagne and St Charles-de-Percy, which between them contain the graves of 100 of those 1st Battalion Welsh Guardsmen of all ranks who were in the Wimbledon area in 1940-41. Following on from those desperate days a further 40 or more are buried in cemeteries up to the Rhineland in Germany.

Situated on the Common at a point between the Thatched Cottage and Caesar’s Well is a memorial to the King’s Royal Rifles who trained on Wimbledon Common in preparation for their part in what we used to know as the Great War or ‘The War to End All Wars’. Unfortunately this was a misnomer and Wimbledon Common again became a training ground for soldiers. I feel, therefore that something to indicate this would not be out of place. Perhaps a plaque to mark the event placed on the wall of Westside House would be in order.
Mrs John Murray sent us photocopies of a large number of newspaper reports of the funeral of John Murray III following our excellent visit to 50 Albemarle Street in February. We are delighted to have these cuttings, as they clearly demonstrate the importance of the great old man of the publishing world and of his personal attachment to Wimbledon.

It was this John Murray who built the 20-room villa Newstead where he died on 2 April 1892. The events of over 100 years ago can be reconstructed from the descriptions of the sombre mourners assembling outside the Church of St James, in Piccadilly, to await the arrival of the funeral cortege from Albemarle Street.

The reporter from the *Scottish Leader* spoke to Mr Louis Jennings MP from whom he learnt that the octogenarian had taken to his bed on return from a visit to the Riviera. It was the last journey for the publisher whose Murray Handbooks had encouraged so many of his compatriots to travel abroad.

Meanwhile an even closer and more distinguished friend, the statesman Mr William Gladstone, almost escaped notice as he slipped into the church to be shown to a pew behind the ladies of the family. Mr Gladstone's first and most famous work on Church and State had been published by Mr Murray, though ‘the parting of their ways in politics had not interfered with the intimate, almost affectionate relations, between the two old men’.

The *Daily Telegraph's* lengthy column names the great and the good from the Dean of Westminster, lords and knights of the realm, to Mr W. H. E. Lecky the historian and other ‘distinguished men of letters, scientists, geographers, editors and members of most if not all of the leading London firms of publishers - Longmans, Spottiswode, Macmillan - besides working engravers and others who for many years had faithfully served John Murray’.

The oak coffin with its cross of terracotta azaleas was borne into the church, followed by Mr. John Murray (IV), his brother Hallam and the many Murray nephews and cousins. Led by Mr. Mills, the butler, the housekeeper, family retainers, along with staff and clerks made up the rear of the procession. The traditional service was conducted by the Rector the Rev. J.E. Kempe and the Rev Cannon, Canon of St Paul's Cathedral. A traffic jam built up in Piccadilly for half and hour, as the glass-sided hearse and many carriages were positioned for the drive to Wimbledon for the burial, a journey which took just under two hours.

There, local friends and neighbours attended the service at the graveside in ‘the pretty church-yard of St. Mary's, where from the Murray tomb on the west side of the tranquil cemetery (below left), the roof of Newstead was clearly visible’. This service was conducted by the Bishop of Rochester and Revd Canon Haygarth, Vicar of Wimbledon.

Familiar names in attendance and on wreaths are those of The Countess of Kerry, the Hon Charles Gore, Dowager Lady Aldington, Sir Henry Peek, the Eastlakes, Lady Frere, and Mr Otto Goldschmidt. Though the Murray tomb lies flat in the grass and is difficult to picture, the inscription can be clearly read even today: ‘Keep innocency and take heed unto the thing that is right. For that shall bring a man peace at the last.’ Ps. Xxvii.

Monica Ellison
Group Notes

When Waitrose brought the novelty of self-service to Wimbledon Village

Following the discovery of an early Marks & Spencer shop in Wimbledon Broadway, a Waitrose has been unearthed in the Village.

In 1953 Waitrose opened a self-service store at 78 High Street (now Question Air). A new concept, it was thought necessary to explain that you collected a wire basket, selected your goods from the shelves, and took them to a cashier.

The shop closed in 1960. Waitrose was then opening large supermarkets and closing small shops. Time for 78 High Street to go. We now wait to find out whether the store will return on a larger scale to Wimbledon and if so, where.

More Grosvenor revelations

The last two Newsletters have mentioned Grosvenor House in the Ridgway beside the Museum. We now have a picture of it as a draper’s shop in the 1890s and have also found that the first four houses on that side from the corner of Homefield Road, now numbered 2, 4, 6, and 8 Ridgway, were once 1 to 4 Grosvenor Villas.

Queen Victoria’s dentist

Which of Queen Victoria’s dentists lived in Wimbledon? During her long life she had several and most found her a very difficult patient.

One John Tracy lived at Merton Cottage in Church Path but had no royal appointment. The only local man appointed ‘Surgeon Dentist to the Queen and the Prince Consort’ was Sir Edwin Saunders of Fairlawn, Parkside (just inside Putney) from around 1890. He died in 1901, weeks after his illustrious patient. His equipment has recently gone to a US museum of dentistry.

Spotting a familiar local landmark in its original location

The historic photograph opposite of a drinking fountain and horse trough in the Strand in 1906 has been given to the Museum. The street fixtures were removed from near the church of St Mary-le-Strand to make room for increasing traffic and were installed in Parkside.

Both are still here in Wimbledon today and the trough is inscribed ‘The gift of Robert Hanbury MP’. However, they didn’t actually arrive until several years after his death.

Robert Hanbury (1845-1903) was MP for Tamworth and later for Preston, 1885-1903. In the 1890s he lived at Sidney Lodge, Parkside – now No 53 and called Westfield. He and his wife resided there in some state. They had no children but were looked after by nine servants, including a butler and a footman.

Charles Toase
Cannizaro, the full story published and now on sale

This month sees the launch of Cannizaro beyond the Gates, Tony Matthews’ new book telling the complete story of Cannizaro Park and its history over 300 years. Published by Wimbledon Society Museum Press with funding from the Friends of Cannizaro Park, it goes much further than any previous work on the subject, with detailed chapters on the historical residents, how it became a public park, the hotel, festivals, art events, and recent efforts to maintain it as one of London’s finest gardens.

Work on the book, which contains full colour plates and many other illustrations, started more than two years ago. It also includes contemporary press reports and family details about the Duke and Duchess of Cannizaro unearthed by Museum Committee chairman Charles Toase over many years. Other colourful residents and the fire that destroyed Cannizaro House in 1900 are covered in detail. The story also traces the links between Cannizaro and the arts, from 18th century classical sculptures to exhibitions by modern artists, and music, from performances for royalty and high society in the early 19th century to the modern festival in the park welcoming everyone.

How Cannizaro changed from an exclusive private estate with a treasured horticultural collection to the park we know today is also told. Listed by English Heritage as a superior historic garden, it was once one of Merton’s flagship parks but has suffered from declining investment in maintenance since the 1980s. The book explains how local residents have worked to reverse the decline and considers the future of this most special of Wimbledon’s parks in an era of uncertainty.

Copies at £7.99 each are available from the Museum at 22 Ridgway (open weekends), via the Museum website www.wimbledonmuseum.org.uk, directly from the publishers at wsmp@apap.com, from local shops, or from the Friends of Cannizaro Park.

Where is this strange place called Wombledon?

If you asked today ‘Where is Wombledon?’, you might be told it was the home of the Wombles on the Common. But 50 years before Elizabeth Beresford created the Wombles in 1968, Walter Johnson wrote a book about Wimbledon Common. In it he tells us that there used to be an inscription on a mounting block there saying:

‘From London Town to Portsea Down
They say ’tis miles three score.’

He says this jingle may or may not be true but goes on: ‘What shall we say of the alliterative doggerel which I have heard from old folk:
‘From Wimbledon to Wombledon is 19 miles’

Johnson asks: ‘Is it mere nonsense like “Go to Putney on a pig” or does it hand down some forgotten fact?’ The full rhyme goes:

‘From Wimbledon to Wombledon is 14 miles, And from Wombledon to Wimbledon is 14 miles.
From Wimbledon to Wombledon, And from Wombledon to Wimbledon, And Wimbledon to Wombledon is 14 miles.’

In 1973 this appeared in a letter published in The Sunday Telegraph. The writer said his father had used it and as a boy he had found Wimbledon in a school atlas and drawn a circle with a 14-mile radius around it. But he failed to find Wombledon.

This provoked further letters to the newspaper; consensus was that the distance between the two places was 14 miles but there was no explanation for the rhyme. Perhaps it arose because Wimbledon is a rather funny sort of word – to a child. And that may be the answer. It appears in the Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book, although as ‘From Wibbleton to Wobbleton’.

Charles Toase
Civic Voice replaces the Civic Trust

Civic Voice was formally launched in April as a new organisation to replace the Civic Trust which collapsed in 2009 after 52 years due to financial difficulties.

Established in 1957, the Trust was a major player as awareness of urban environmental issues developed in the 1960s-70s. Early achievements included moves to brighten up historic town centres such as Norwich. That was soon followed by the Wimbledon Village improvement scheme, designed in 1964 by local architects Alan and Sylvia Blanc and Gerald Davis.

Civic Trust Awards were also important in the new climate. Our scheme received one in 1967, as recorded on the plaque on the wall of the Old Fire Station in the High Street. The awards continued until the Trust’s demise and the scheme is now being carried forward by English Heritage.

In addition to running its own initiatives and campaigning, the Civic Trust provided advice and help to civic societies including the Wimbledon Society. This was particularly valuable in helping frame our policy on redevelopment of the town centre in the 1980s - even though Merton Council eventually over-rode our opposition to the scheme that became Centre Court Shopping Centre.

The Trust grew in size but also became more remote from the groups it advised. A move into semi-commercial work ultimately led to its downfall as it lost valuable contracts and had no way of replacing the lost income.

Civic Voice promises to be a very different body. Developed with extensive input from civic societies themselves, its new arrangements are designed to ensure that they play a major role in determining its operations. A majority of the trustees are active within civic societies and the direction of policy will be determined by an Annual Convention where all member societies will have an opportunity to vote on resolutions. These will be brought forward either by the trustees or by individual societies.

To ensure its independence, Civic Voice will be financed entirely by members’ subscriptions. The absence of any commercial income means higher subscriptions are necessary than were paid to the old Civic Trust but this is offset by the exclusive control of activities by members.

The Wimbledon Society has become a founder member of Civic Voice following careful consideration by the Executive Committee. It was decided that a national body entirely devoted to supporting and representing civic societies and able to lobby government on issues of importance to us fully justified the increased subscription. Civic Voice will also have a useful public profile with broadcaster Griff Rhys Jones as its President.

Society Chairman Iain Simpson attended the official launch and described it as a stimulating experience with an excellent turnout of delegates, a well organised agenda and good speakers. He said Griff Rhys Jones, understood to be an active member of the Camden Society, had an obvious passion for his involvement. The Wimbledon Society should be a proactive member, supporting Civic Voice in its first year, he added.

Membership of Civic Voice also gives Wimbledon Society members access to certain benefits from partner organisations, including the National Trust, Co-operative Bank, and Bluefin Insurance. Details of these can be found by visiting the website www.civicvoice.org.uk/about/partners.

The new body’s partnership with the National Trust is strong, with a shared passion for conservation and improvement. For our first year of membership - up to March 2011 - our members can receive a free day access pass to any National Trust property during normal opening hours (joint/family members can receive two passes). Passes are transferable and can be given to friends or family if you are already a National Trust member.

Download passes at www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrust/civicvoiceoffer. If you have no Internet access, you can send a stamped addressed envelope to Civic Voice, Unit 101, 82 Wood Street, The Tea Factory, Liverpool L1 4DQ, requesting a free day pass. In addition to your own contact details, mention your membership of The Wimbledon Society.

What next for Atkinson Morley site?

When the Atkinson Morley Hospital closed in 2003, Merton produced a planning brief, based on one the Society had previously produced to guide developers. Since then, two schemes have been submitted for planning approval, but neither has been progressed.

The site has now been purchased by Berkeley Homes and the Society has suggested to the Council that its original planning brief should be updated to take account of current circumstances. There were formerly significant differences of view between the applicants and local interests. We await the next chapter in this long story.

Tony Michael
Power has switched again in Merton Council. Promises to watch out for:

Merton candidates made many undertakings before the elections when responding to a broad questionnaire of all the parties produced by the Society’s Planning Committee. Leaders of the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green parties all replied in detail by the given deadline. Here is a summary of what they promised. The Society will be watching closely to see what happens next in a Council with no overall control and an unexpected return to power by Labour as the largest party by a single councillor.

On protection of all open spaces and green areas in the borough, Labour feels that most back gardens are not amenable to developments due to size limits and will introduce planning policies to stop inappropriate developments. Selling off parks to commercial interests will be resisted. The Conservatives also opposed back garden development and wanted to expand green space by adopting non-Council owned land, increase investment in parks, and gain finance for the Wandle Valley Regional Park. The Liberal Democrats wanted to change the law to control back garden developments. Labour promises management plans for all conservation areas and will control inappropriate development by enhancing the Council’s Conservation and Design Advisory Panel. Article 4 areas may be introduced and all the Council’s own works will have to reflect the conservation area character. Priority will be given to the two conservation areas classed at risk by English Heritage, Leopold Road and Merton Hall Road.

On public involvement in major applications, Labour wants to see residents engaged in pre-application discussions with developers. Conservatives wished to strengthen development control policies and crack down on developers who broke the rules.

On natural resources, Labour wants a Combined Heat and Power plant for Merton and supports the Merton Rule for new development to 20% generated energy. The Conservatives wanted to see recycling increase from 33% to 45% by 2014; improved energy efficiency of Council vehicles; and a loans scheme to help residents improve energy efficiency.

The Liberal Democrats also wanted to encourage renewable energy and green transport but only the Greens proposed free home insulation, feed-in tariffs and solar roofs, a green energy bond, and smart meters.

On environmental quality Labour will extend cycling facilities including contraflows in one-way systems and better parking, widen pavements beside new developments, increase street sweeping, remove many guardrails in Wimbledon town centre, and redirect some traffic away from the town. The Conservatives support the ‘Wimbledon Way’ route between the station and the All England Tennis ground. They would have introduced more 20mph zones and street trees where residents wanted them; had 24-hour weekend cleaning in the town centre; improved the station forecourt and tightened restrictions on road works, improved the pedestrian/traffic balance in the Broadway; and better enforced speed limits and street scene enhancements.

The Liberal Democrats wanted more detailed commitments to improved traffic flow, speeding up of bus journeys, phasing of traffic lights, monitoring of air quality and encouragement of public reporting of street litter.

On control of development, Labour wants to see clearer planning policies and to concentrate resources on enforcement. The Conservatives wished to strengthen development control policies and crack down on developers who broke the rules.

On community, cultural and leisure facilities, Labour supports provision of a combined cultural and community space in a Civic Hall for Wimbledon, and will allow local groups to take control of community assets such as community centres. The Conservatives envisaged the Council-owned site beside the theatre as a multi-purpose community space for the visual and performing arts when the economic climate allowed. They backed a tourist information centre via a Business Improvement District in the town centre.

The future of a small shop

Late last year a small shop at 36 Ridgway became vacant following the closure of Ricci’s. The new owner had no specific plans so he posted a notice in the window asking for suggestions.

We welcome his initiative. How about a new stationers, bakery or top-class ice-cream parlour? Email your suggestions to rowcliffe@f2s.com Let’s act now to save the loss of this Village shop.
Interesting times from a planning perspective. Applications and building work are much reduced by recession and mortgage market collapse, yet astounding planning decisions are also taking place amid a plethora of activity. You wonder what would have happened without the recession.

It’s not all bad news. The neighbour of a small house in St Mary’s Road has purchased it in order to demolish it and enlarge the garden. But Merton isn’t happy. This is not a trend it wants to encourage. Our Planning Committee has begun to be more proactive, identifying sites likely to be developed and making our views known before detailed planning applications are made. There have been some successes with applications for demolition rejected, for example in the Bathgate and Wool Road conservation areas. But we have no illusions about the battles ahead.

Consider some recent planning decisions. First, the King of Denmark pub on Ridgway. The latest application was for a larger building than the one already refused by the Council but approved by the Inspectorate on appeal. This time, instead of first floor offices with four flats above, applicant Andrew Pinchin, a local architect, applied for nine flats above a re-modelled pub. We said the building would be out of scale and involve worse living conditions both for residents of the new flats themselves and the beleaguered neighbours in Corbiere Court.

After a street demonstration by residents with full turnout at the planning applications committee and a heated discussion, the committee was split four in favour and four against. Despite everything, the vote was carried by the chairman, Cllr John Bowcott. His unedited explanation appears on Page 11. Make of it what you will.

Other astounding planning decisions have included Lloyds Bank at 85-86 High Street, Wimbledon Village, approved for demolition and replacement by a four-storey building. Ten houses have been agreed for the Marie Reparatrice Convent site on the corner of Edge Hill and Ridgway, including a house in the back garden. The infamous Thames Water site at Raynes Park will see not just the Waitrose many hoped for but a monolithic structure that has suddenly appeared, dwarfing neighbouring properties. This will have nearly 100 single-aspect flats, facing the railway line and a 50-metre long permanently lit corridor.

In Home Park Road, now a conservation area, we see a remarkable new edifice opposite the entrance to Wimbledon Park. It is a prefabricated building of the upmarket German kind, strange in urban design terms, closely resembling a barn and much larger than its neighbours. A nearby hoarding hides the site of another house due to be replaced by three new ones. In Dora Road three small houses have been demolished to make way for six semi-detached ones. In Lake Road on the corner of St Aubyn’s Avenue a house on a small site has been demolished and replaced by two others. In St Mary’s Road the replacement for No 23 is two large houses that bear no resemblance at all in urban design terms to their neighbours. This is doubly unfortunate as they are so close to both of them.

In Highbury Road, an inventive builder has built houses in neo-Georgian style featuring Doric columns around the front doors and elaborate dormers.

Conservation area….what’s that? You may well ask.

Britain’s population is rising and councils have been instructed to increase school places for additional children. Recent applications by several schools to erect pre-fabricated classrooms have been approved and there is more pressure on playing fields. The sale of a lease on the Oberon Playing Fields off Copse Hill to raise finance for a reinstated sports ground elsewhere is worth noting, even though Oberon will remain as formal open space under the deal.

Finally to last year’s changes in Permitted Development Rights which allow householders greater freedom to develop with less red tape. The long-term effects remain to be seen but the photo above of a roof extension in Cambridge Road shows what is possible without planning permission. Is this really progress?

Our letters are available on the Society’s website, showing where we stand in each case.

Mark Leclercq
Sad fate of the King of Denmark pub

John Bowcott, Chairman, of Merton Planning Applications Committee writes:

‘For several years the Council had resisted un-neighbourly applications at the site. Eventually a planning inspector granted permission on appeal. He accepted the scale of the building and the use of the courtyard and dismissed concerns about traffic.

‘This ruling, which would have allowed the applicant to proceed, became a material planning fact when the Committee heard a modified application in March. Like nearly everyone at the meeting I disliked the application but recognised that no planning case was made that outweighed the significance of the appeal decision.

‘By voting to approve the application with a condition limiting the use of the courtyard, I believed that we might mitigate the worst aspects of the application. The inspector’s decision had changed the ground rules and this did seem the best protection that the planning process could offer to local residents.’

New face for town centre

Merton Council, Transport for London, Network Rail and South West Trains have committed some £2.5 million to a facelift for the public realm around Wimbledon Station. They aim to improve the function and appearance of the station forecourt, taxi way, Wimbledon Bridge and Hartfield Road intersection, Alexandra Road junction, and Wimbledon Hill Road up to Alwyne Road.

The forecourt would become a pedestrian-only space, with alternative drop-off space for cars. Pavements would be widened with a new crossing to the station. Pedestrians would be able to cross the Alexandra Road intersection diagonally, with re-paving of the first part of the proposed Wimbledon Way (which is to run between the station and the tennis ground), removing some existing barriers and railings.

Results from the public consultation are due this month (June), with works due to begin early in 2011 and completion at the end of next year.

The Society's Planning Committee response is on our web site. Tony Michael

Regional park plan for the Wandle Valley

Hopes of developing a Wandle Valley Regional Park came a little closer in April when representatives of over 100 community groups met to discuss the river’s future and how aspirations for the shaded area shown above can be realised.

Various regeneration projects to revitalise the Wandle and surrounding areas over the last decade have not included a vision for the river’s entire length. When the potential new regional park was identified in the 2004 London Plan, it did provide such a framework, committing the Greater London Authority and borough councils to working with local partners on delivery.

The Wandle Valley Regional Park is now included in strategic plans and funding programmes of all four boroughs affected – Croydon, Sutton and Wandsworth as well as Merton. Community organisations participate through the Wandle Valley Forum while businesses and the statutory bodies also assist in setting out a broad vision for the area. But there is currently no budget for the regional park and it is up to each player to find funding for its own projects.

The Wandle is of historic significance, given the range of industrial uses it was put to in Victorian times and the location of Merton Abbey, a site of national importance. It also provides the east of Wimbledon with opportunities for walking, cycling and enjoying nature. However, parts of it within Wimbledon Park and Trinity wards are unattractive and inaccessible.

The Society hopes to contribute to a well considered improvement plan that will maximise the benefits of the river and its vicinity for the long term. Joyce Pountain
Around and about

Obituary: Sir James Watt

A memorial service for Surgeon Vice-Admiral Sir James Watt was held in Winchester Cathedral on 23 April. Age 95, he died in December at Otterbourne, Hants, after leaving Wimbledon and finally settling there.

Sir James (above right) was medical director general of the Navy and President of the Royal Society of Medicine. In retirement he was greatly in demand as a lecturer and members will doubtless remember his remarkable talk in Trafalgar bicentenary year 2005, when he spoke to us about surgery aboard Nelson's fighting ships.

He had once arrived for a US lecture tour with hundreds of slides only to find that they would not fit the only available thin-slot carousels. Undaunted, he purchased thin mounts and using his surgical skills and stamina, spent most of the night remounting the slides. Small wonder then that on the occasion when he spoke to us, my offer of help with his slides was met with a quizzical smile and polite reassurance that he thought he could manage.

Monica Ellison

New volunteering opportunities with the Society

A number of vacancies have arisen for posts with the Wimbledon Society. Some of these require experience in the Society’s long tradition of providing professional advice. Others need mainly just time and dedication. If you would like to contribute directly to any of the following areas of activity we would really like to hear from you. Alternatively, if you can think of someone you know who would fit the bill please ask them to contact us.

Current vacancies are as follows:

- Chairman (Planning Committee)
- Secretary (Planning Committee)
- Curator of Prints, Watercolours & Drawings (Museum)
- Curator of Portraits (Museum)
- Assistant organiser of Books (Museum)
- Assistants for Exhibitions (Museum)
- Marketing/sales expert for Visitors Group (Museum)
- Events Planners (Activities)

Some expertise in fine art would obviously be helpful for either of the first two posts. The other vacancies would appeal to anyone with organisational skills. Contact Alan Elliot on 8946 6059 or email wimbledonmuseum@yahoo.co.uk.

- The Museum is now stocking the newly published 1894 edition of the Ordnance Survey map of Wimbledon.
- Filling the gap between the existing maps of Putney Vale and South Wimbledon and Merton Park, this is a beautiful map with very clear details. It is for sale in the Museum at £2.50.

Liz Courtney

It’s 1894 at last

The Museum and Bookshop (020 8296 9914), 22 Ridgway, near Lingfield Road, are open from 2.30 to 5.00pm Saturday and Sunday. Admission free.