



## The Kew Society Newsletter • Summer 2020

### Welcome....

to our Summer newsletter. Perhaps not the kind of summer we have come to expect in Kew, but the lockdown has officially relaxed and it feels like we are just starting to return to some of our normal activities – for now at least. The Royal Botanical Gardens reopened its gates in June (though with a booking system to allow for social distancing), and it is reopening the glasshouses. Local shops and business are beginning to open, and there even seem to be more aeroplanes flying overhead (one of the good things about the last few months was the reduction in air traffic noise)! Sadly, many of the events we look forward to in the summer (including the Kew Midsummer Fete and our summer party) have had to be cancelled, but there is still much to look forward to as restrictions are relaxed and, of course, a raft of online activities for those at home including exercise classes and the now inevitable Zoom for work and social calls. We hope you are enjoying our emailed Kew Miscellany series covering an array of topics of local historic interest and that those are whetting your appetites for when our Events Team is able to resume organising tours to local sites of interest.

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### Gardening update

Our team of gardening volunteers has continued to keep everything going at the station, on Kew Plaza, at High Park Corner and, on Kew Green, at the war memorial and our St Anne's churchyard project. As lockdown eases, more of us have come to help whilst observing social distancing. We have added new plants in front of the Kew Greenhouse Café and at the war memorial, and the planting plan for St. Anne's is now being fully costed. COVID-19 permitting, we hope to be planting there this Autumn. Contact us if you would like to join the gardening team [[secretary@kewsociety.org](mailto:secretary@kewsociety.org)].

The Kew Horticultural Society regrettably confirms that its annual Show, due to be held on 29th August, has had to be cancelled. While this is very sad news for all exhibitors and visitors locally and across London, it is unavoidable this year. However, the team is already planning a wonderful show in a marquee on the Green for 2021.



High Park Corner



Kew Green Pond



The National Archives

## Step free access at Kew Gardens Station

Our Spring 2020 Newsletter reported how we had commissioned a feasibility study from TC Architects on providing step-free access to platforms at Kew Gardens Station. Currently, passengers with restricted mobility or buggies and young children must negotiate the steep steps of the tunnel or the footbridge to cross the line.

Wheelchairs must detour over the High Park Road railway bridge! Kew Society received TC-A's final report in June on our chosen option – a new footbridge with lifts, located towards the southern end of each platform. The architect's drawing (right) shows how it would look. The new bridge has been placed well back from the existing Grade II listed footbridge so as not to detract from it,



since it has historic importance as a very early example of a ferro-concrete bridge (see the article about the Hennebique Bridge on page 8). The Kew Society will be convening a new panel in the near future to plan our next steps towards getting the step-free access bridge built.

## New cycle lane in Kew Road

Richmond Council used emergency powers to introduce a 24-hour northbound segregated cycle lane on Kew Road on 29th May, as part of its Post-Covid Transport Action Plan. This was done primarily to prevent car parking outside the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG) on its reopening on 1st June, encouraging visitors to go there by sustainable transport. Local residents, the Kew Society and other stakeholders were not consulted in advance. We wrote to Cllr. Alex Ehmann (Chair, LBRuT Transport and Clean Air Committee) immediately to protest about the lack of consultation. We had had frequent contact with the Council over the previous two years about the dangerous situation caused by parked coaches on Kew Road and had been assured that we would be consulted about any changes proposed. Subsequently, we have had discussions or email correspondence with Cllr Ehmann, Mr Nick O'Donnell (Assistant Director Traffic and Engineering, LBRuT), Cllr. Lotte Campanale, the Director RBGK, Sarah Olney MP, and others, about the cycle way and problems associated with it. These are summarised on the Kew Society website, <https://www.kewsociety.org>



## How Kew traders are coping with the pandemic

In our last newsletter, we interviewed some local people to find out how they were coping with the newly-imposed lockdown. This time, as the lockdown eases, we sought out the views of some of our local traders to find out how they are dealing with the ongoing impact of the pandemic and what this has meant for their businesses.

### Satish Patel, Squires (interviewed on 19th June)

Can you tell me how the lockdown has impacted on your business?

I must admit that we have got busier. Also, there are things that I couldn't get hold of because suppliers themselves have had problems, so I'm having to spend more time going to wholesalers looking for different things. First of all, it was toilet rolls, then flour as people started baking (including making cakes for NHS staff), then yeast. But I've now been able to get hold of flour from different countries, such as Ukraine and Turkey.

We were very busy during the lockdown and fairly tired – one of our staff felt unable to come as he was travelling from a distance away and didn't feel safe. However, he's back now as he doesn't feel so unsafe given that the trains are less crowded.

We are still very busy – a lot of people are working from home now and so we did get a lot of new customers coming in. We were really busy at the start of the lockdown, and then we closed down for a month!

We know you had to close owing to the virus – what was your experience during that time?

We had to close because my brother had a temperature. We were all checking our thermometers – we were advised to close down as a precaution. We were going to close for a week but by then we were all a bit tired so we decided to close for a whole month and start afresh. Nobody else in the family had it as far as we know – my brother was quite unwell but we managed to keep apart from him and none of the rest of us caught it. He stayed in his room – we were all really careful.

What impact has the pandemic had on your business?

We had to close both the shop and my brother's off-licence in south-east London for a whole month, so had no income. Longer term, now that we have reopened, we are doing better than we were before as we have customers who had never previously noticed our shop – and they are coming back! We also realised that we don't need to open for as long as we used to – we could do a 9.00am to 7.00pm shift rather than 8.00am to 8.00pm, which would give us more of a life. People are staying locally rather than going to the main supermarkets, and there may also be less wastage in households as people just buy what they need.

How are you managing to comply with social distancing requirements?

We are trying to let only two customers in at a time – people queue up: sometimes people come in not realising there are already two people inside, but the shop is quite large so one can stay six feet away if there are only two people inside. People are good at queueing outside. We keep our mask and gloves on – but they are quite uncomfortable: it was all right when I first started, but now I have to keep it on when I go to the market in the early mornings and I do feel I'm not getting enough oxygen. We will have to get used to it though.



Can you tell our readers about the work you have done with Kew Neighbourhood Association to keep elderly and vulnerable residents supplied?

We normally do deliveries once a week anyway. Many of the volunteers come in to us as well so we have good contacts. We also have a WhatsApp group going: a lot of the elderly people were self-isolating, but we put a regular message on the WhatsApp group which has been very successful in finding out who needed deliveries. We also have another group of other people who are willing to help by doing deliveries.

What are your hopes for the future as we start to emerge from the pandemic?

My family has been here for nearly forty years now. One of my sons is helping me at the moment – he finished university last year and hasn't found a job yet so he comes to the market with me in the morning. I just hope we can continue as we are but with slightly reduced hours, and that we can get all the products we need from one place rather than having to go to so many different wholesalers to look for different products as we keep such a large range of products.

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**Alan Russell, Proprietor, The Greenhouse Cafe (interviewed on 17th June)**

How has the lockdown impacted your business?

In effect, it closed us down. We are allowed to do takeaways, but everything has to be wrapped in paper. The biggest problem we have is the lack of overseas visitors – there are none at the moment because of the quarantine. Many of the businesses in Kew rely on overseas tourists coming to Kew Gardens – around 75% of our customers are from overseas. My main business throughout the summer months is determined by the number of visitors to the Gardens and, at the moment, there are practically none as one has to book online even if one is a member, so people can't spontaneously go for a walk in the Gardens. We have lost 80 – 90% of our business.

Although we didn't do takeaways initially – it isn't what I own the cafe to do – last week I decided we couldn't go on like this, the staff are bored, so we have started doing takeaways: so far, not very successfully. We furloughed some staff; all my staff are longstanding and they have all had their full pay, but this will bankrupt me if it goes on much longer. I took over this business over 30 years ago – it's our 125th anniversary since the café was opened as a bakery and tearooms by Henry Lotz in 1895.

We reopened a week ago, so this is our second week. We are just doing a tiny fraction of what we usually do – we would normally be full up for breakfast in the morning, and full all afternoon, but these days we're doing just a few sandwiches and salad boxes. The takeaway coffee trade mainly goes to Starbucks: it isn't what we are here for, and it causes a lot of litter. There are a few locals who are still coming though, and I have put some tables outside.

What adjustments have you had to make since you have reopened?

I have a skeleton staff (we normally have eight or nine). I am rotating them to give them all some work – I have only two or so in and we don't really need them all. The reopening of Kew Gardens hasn't made that much difference, as although one can go in Victoria Gate, one has to exit from one of the



other gates, so people aren't going to bother walking all the way back here. The new cycle path in Kew Road may also have made a difference: Kew Gardens has advised people to try not to use public transport, but there is nowhere for them to park now given that most of it is for permit holders only. This has defeated the object of them reopening to some extent, particularly as the glasshouses aren't open.

Because of the social distancing regulations, we can't have anyone inside the café. We have only one cook here at the moment who is managing on her own, and the amount of cooking we are doing is very little so it is a bit of a futile exercise. This will apply to the whole of the catering industry, as people currently don't want to go and sit in a café. Once we are allowed to open the inside of cafés, we probably won't lose too many tables as we have quite a lot of space inside. But there will be a lot of cafés unable to open: many have gone into liquidation anyway. Otherwise, it's unlikely that we will be able to keep going in the long term as we still have overheads to pay. We are in a prime location, and if we're not getting business, it's going to be even more difficult for other businesses. So many of our local businesses rely on tourists – Kew could end up as a ghost village, certainly until the quarantine conditions end.

We are one of the oldest businesses in the village – time will tell. The tourist industry is a big industry in London – why would people come to spend a fortnight in quarantine?

**How did you spend your time during the lockdown?**

I was in the café all day and every day as there is a better view in here! I bought every daily newspaper and did all the crosswords and quizzes, even read the sports pages which I'm not interested in at all.

**Jonathan Glover, Director, Antony Roberts, Station Parade Office (interviewed on 19th June)**

**Can you tell our readers how the lockdown has impacted your business?**

We manage and administer a considerable portfolio of properties in this area and in truth, the impact of the lockdown period overall has yet to be truly assessed. We've assisted landlords and tenants in finding positive solutions to problems whenever they have arisen on either side and remain on hand as we are still in the early stages of restrictions being lifted.

The progress of our many agreed sales immediately stalled with lenders, solicitors and surveyors all effectively halting their efforts. 'Lockdown' was truly a most apt phrase. In this context it was vital that our senior sales directors were directly on hand and actively engaged with all our clients and buyers to advise, reassure and then facilitate/cajole associated parties wherever required to keep all on track. We are heartened by the proportion of those sales agreed prior to lockdown still going strong.

**How have things been since reopening after the lockdown?**

We've been incredibly busy with impressive enquiry levels across our portfolio of available properties, and this has been witnessed in our neighbouring offices too. Lettings was perhaps the faster sector out of the blocks but the sales market was swift to follow. It seems that the underlying demand to live in this area that we were seeing pre-lockdown very much remains.

In practical terms we are all conscious of social distancing, PPE and particular sensitivities where applicable to protect the health of our staff, clients and customers. After all, nothing is more important.

**What adjustments have you had to make to comply with the social distancing requirements, both in your offices and in arranging viewings?**

We anticipated that the property industry may be one of the first sectors to be allowed to reopen, so



acquired PPE in good time for our official reopening. We have masks, gloves, visors and sanitisers on hand for staff and to aid those attending viewings. As stated, we have been and remain naturally sensitive to all concerned; and where physical viewings have been deterred, we have embraced the use of technology to complement our marketing efforts.

**Are you finding any differences in what type of properties people are looking for as a result of the pandemic?**

As per widespread reports, the pandemic has triggered a lifestyle re-think undertaken by many, and this has naturally brought property requirements into focus as a consequence. We've received many enquiries from more centrally-based buyers and tenants looking to migrate to a perceived 'safer' area (less incidence of Covid-19 reported), with direct outside space and spatial provision to work from home as criteria increasingly prized.

We've seen families linked by social media through the lockdown actually embrace a move to bring loved ones physically closer, with a couple of tenancies very recently agreed to grandparents deciding to move to the borough (from Cardiff and Manhattan respectively) to be closer to their respective children and grandchildren. Video viewings and virtual tours were happily received and circulated amongst family members.

**What do you think are the long-term implications of the pandemic for the local property market?**

It is naturally too early to make firm predictions, but I am heartened by the immediate and sustained surge in enquiries from existing residents and those wishing to move to here. Kew remains a very distinct and desirable area in which to live. In this sense, I consider that whatever the reach and short-term impact of the pandemic, Kew's rightful longevity and robustness of appeal will remain undaunted and – perhaps as noticed already – perhaps even enhanced in the longer run.

**On a personal note, how did you spend your time during the lockdown?**

Nothing at all exciting to report I am afraid. I have been working throughout this most challenging period, so my baking, artwork and overall home-schooling skills remain rather untested!

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## Royal Parks Consultation

The Royal Parks ("TRP") has progressed its "Movement Strategy" covering all Royal Parks into seven strategic outcomes covering things ranging from visitor dispersal to promoting considerate cycling to reducing through traffic.

There is little that could be considered contentious, and The Kew Society endorses those principles.

However, it's the implementation of the outcomes that may create concerns and, in the context of Richmond Park, we highlighted that the Park provides key through routes for Kew's residents to reach both Kingston and Roehampton Hospitals. When used by emergency services, the Park roads offer significant time savings relative to the peripheral routes, with the potential for this difference to be life-changing for a Kew resident.

In developing the strategy, TRP has collected visitor arrivals data which shows nearly one in five come to Richmond Park by bicycle. It's not apparent that the raw survey data was adjusted, and the views of male cyclists completing timed circuits on Richmond Park's unique road configuration may therefore have been over-represented relative to other groups.

# Understanding Park Visitors' Views

The development of this strategy has been informed by extensive engagement with the public and key organisations.

The Royal Parks sought public input and feedback to help create this long-term strategy; almost 7,000 individual survey responses and numerous written submissions were received. The survey summary report and park specific reports are available at [royalpark.org.uk/movement](http://royalpark.org.uk/movement)



**85%**

supported the continued protection of the parks' special qualities

**79%**

supported the promotion of active and sustainable transport as the preferred mode of transport to arrive at our parks



**78%**

supported the reduction of private motor vehicles using the park roads as commuter routes



**73%**

supported a continued prioritising of walking as the preferred mode of transport within our parks



## Hennebique Bridge

Many people are astounded to learn that the railway bridge which crosses the line at Kew Gardens station is listed Grade II. How does such a structure that dates only to 1912 have such historic significance? The answer lies inside. In 1912, the system of reinforcing concrete with iron bars was still an exciting new construction technique in the UK but is one that changed building design and engineering forever.

The technique was developed in France, with M. François Hennebique (1842-1921) holding the most successful patent. He tends to be regarded as the father of reinforced concrete,

but his commercial success was achieved largely on the back of licensing the Hennebique system to agents around the world. The UK licence was held by Louis Mouchel, who championed the use of Hennebique's "ferro concrete" among the railway companies, but died in 1908 before the Kew bridge was built.

The Kew bridge was not therefore the first application of Hennebique's reinforced concrete in the UK, but it counts as one of the few surviving early examples that incorporated the benefits of using reinforced concrete into its design.

Look closely and ask why it has such high sides and curious protrusions over the rail tracks? They formed the designer's solution for protecting the crinolines of Edwardian ladies visiting Kew Gardens from the sooty smoke of the trains underneath. Each protrusion is a smoke deflector that would line up over the funnel of a stationary train. Look more closely at the walls and you can see the outlines of the wooden planks that formed the "shuttering" used to cast the concrete and give the bridge its shape. The designers chose not to hide these marks under render, perhaps for the sake of economy, or perhaps to show off the relative novelty of the construction. We don't know, but beauty is always in the eye of the beholder!

The bridge was listed in 2002 and The Kew Society led its renovation in 2004, securing funding from the National Lottery and Richmond Council. We are keen to promote awareness of this piece of history and perhaps get it formally named as "The Hennebique Bridge", with an information panel describing its significance. What do you think?



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