

"RARE DOINGS IN CAMBERWELL..."

Motto Of Camberwell Fair

CAMBERWELL GREEN

Demos, dissent, disorder C18-now

Once a traditional village green, it has always been a place for public meetings, protests & rowdiness:

• **Camberwell Fair 1279-1855**

Held every August from (at least) 1279 to 1855, originally for 3 weeks. By the 1800s Camberwell had become more urban and middle class and the rural functions of the fair had eroded. It was now only 3 days long, a feast of urban pleasures - and disorder. "For these three days the residents of Camberwell were compelled to witness disgusting & demoralising scenes which they were powerless to prevent". Finally in 1855 local wealthy residents bought the land, suppressed the fair and turned the Green into a park.

• **Chartists 1840s**

Chartism was the first mass organisation of the industrial working class. It campaigned for the vote for working men & parliamentary reforms; however many Chartists felt they would have to seize power by armed revolt. Chartist meetings were held in Camberwell in the 1840s. On 13 March 1848 a group of Chartists broke away from a mass meeting at Kennington Park, marching to Camberwell. There was a riot: 25 people were brought to trial, including two black men, David Anthony Duffy and Benjamin Prophet. 18 of them were sentenced for 7-14 years transportation and 3 to one year's imprisonment.

• **WWI anti-conscription 1914-1916**

Camberwell Trades Council campaigned against the First World War. Anti-conscription demos were held on the Green and a bakery set up to distribute bread to local people and provide jobs for conscientious objectors.

• **Unemployed activism 1920s/30s**

The Green was the starting point for National Unemployed Workers movement demonstrations against unemployment & opposing government measures like stopping milk for babies of the unemployed (1922) and the 'Not Genuinely Seeking Work Clause' benefit cuts (1927).

In the '30s Camberwell Workers Defence Movement agitated against harassment of the unemployed including mass marches, preventing evictions, supporting hunger marchers and passive resistance to public works not given to local unemployed.

• **Far right / Fascists 1980s**

The National Front held marches in 1980 and 1982 from Camberwell Green to Peckham.

• **Bonkersfest 2006**

A one day arts festival celebrating madness, creativity and eccentricity.

TRAM DEPOT (Now bus Depot)

• **General Strike 1926**

Called by the TUC in an unsuccessful attempt to force the government to act to prevent wage reduction and worsening conditions for coal miners. Lasted nine days, 3-12 May 1926. Crowds prevented trams being run from the tram depot opposite the Green. People arrested for putting sleepers across the tracks.

• **Squat 1998**

The depot, then a disused bus garage, was squatted for exhibitions and parties.

CRAWFORD STREET

• **Squatted social centre 2003**

The most recent squatted social centre in Camberwell. Run by Black Star collective, hosted gigs, the Lost Film Festival & a drop-in space.

MAUDSLEY HOSPITAL

• **Reclaim Bedlam 1997**

The Reclaim Bedlam campaign was set up in response to the Bethlehem ("Bedlam") & Maudsley NHS Trust announcing a "celebration" of 750 years of psychiatry. Many users felt that celebration was inappropriate so protests were held.

GROVE LANE

• **Housing activism 1971**

Southwark Council's Homeless Families Department occupied by Southwark Families Squatting Association (formed 1970) who had also occupied the Town Hall council chamber and the Walworth Rd Labour Party HQ. This led to a deal with the Council over shortlife housing and the setting up of Southwark Self Help Housing with 30 houses initially.

• **Camberwell Hall, 45 Grove Lane Meeting place 1748-?**

A venue for, among others, the Camberwell Working Men's Institute. Mentioned in Dickens in *Sketches by Boz*. 1865: John Ruskin spoke there, he lived close by. 1866: a meeting held here of the Freedman's Aid Society to hail the abolition of slavery in the US.

LOVE WALK

• **John Lawrence lived no 29 1962-2002**

John Lawrence (1915-2002) was an active trade unionist & sometime councillor, a driving force in the London May Day Committee which campaigned for demonstrations on Mayday itself (not, as usual then, the nearest weekend). In the 1970s he wrote for the anarchist journal *Freedom*. He lived in Love Walk from 1962 till his death in 2002.

CAMBERWELL GROVE

• *Squatting Community* 1980s

Many houses in a poor state of repair were squatted from 1983. The spiral staircases were listed so the Council couldn't knock them down. Some had no hot water: residents went to East Dulwich Baths. Some houses became part of a short life housing coop.

• *no 41: Trades Union Club* 1970s

Housed Southwark Trades Council, Young Socialists etc.

GROVE PARK 1991-1992

Former children's home squatted, renamed *Groove Park*; formed an arts co-op, café, gigs.

ST GILES CHURCHYARD

• *John Primero* 1625

John Primero, the first recorded black person in Southwark was baptised here in 1607 and buried in 1625.

CHURCH STREET

• *no 84: Labour Club squat* 1990

1990 squatted for gigs and a café. Labour Party tried unsuccessfully to get the police to evict the squatters. Later the squatters went away to a festival and came back to find the Labourites had retaken possession!

• *no. 18: League of Socialist Artists* 1971-1975

A sub-committee of the Artists' Union, they agitated for a socialist-realist Marxist-Leninist art: "*Our art must serve revolutionary politics. We place our art unreservedly at the service of the working class.*"

CAMBERWELL ART SCHOOL

1898- today

1920: occupied by the National Unemployed Workers Movement, in their campaign for free use of municipal property (now isn't that a good idea).

1999: occupied by students protesting at poor facilities and grants. Eight students taken to court.

SOUTHWARK TOWN HALL

• *Housing Peace Camp* 1984

October 8-12 1984 housing activists set up a housing peace camp on the lawn of the town hall. The main focus of the protest was against the council's introduction of PIOs (Protected Intending Occupier) against squatters to evict them without going to court.

WREN ROAD

• *Harold Moody* 1882-1947

Site of Camberwell Green Congregational Church and Dr Harold Moody's funeral. Moody was a Jamaican doctor, who lived in Peckham, a prominent civil liberties activist, who founded the League of Coloured Peoples in 1931 with the goal of racial equality around the world. Its primary focus was eliminating the colour bar at work, housing & social life. It was a powerful civil rights force until its dissolution in 1951.

BRUNSWICK PARK & VICARAGE GROVE

• *Squatting Community* 1980s-90s

Many empty houses squatted in the 1980s and set up a community centre and art gallery. Some flats got unofficial licences from the Council. Most evicted 1987 but some in Vicarage Grove not till 1990s.

• *Una Marson lived at 29 Brunswick Square (now Brunswick Park)* 1930s

Jamaican-born feminist, activist, poet/playwright. In Jamaica she worked with Norman Manley in the anti-colonial struggle. Emigrating to London in 1932, Una campaigned on issues such as discrimination in the nursing profession; she also worked with Haille Selassie after Italy invaded Ethiopia, & with Harold Moody in the League of Coloured People (see below). From 1939-1946, she was the BBC's first black female programme maker.

MAGISTRATES COURT

1979: The Secretary of Southwark Campaign against Racism & Fascism was prosecuted under the Representation of the People Act for a leaflet urging people not to vote for the NF in the general election.

1991: Valentine's Day "*Massacre the Poll Tax*" demo for people being taken to court for non-payment.

ELMINGTON ESTATE

• *Anti-fascism* 1990s

In 1991 the British National Party stood a candidate, in the Brunswick Ward council by-election. They were vigorously opposed by local people & Anti-Fascist Action but still managed a march through the estate. Far right and fascist groups have been active in Camberwell over the decades and have always been vigorously opposed - Oswald Mosley's blackshirts in the 1930s and again in 1957, the BNP in the 1960s and 1980s, the National Front in the 1970s.

CAMBERWELL, SOMEWHERE

• *Mary Hays* 1804-1843

Mary Hays (1760-1824) was an early feminist, writer & friend of Mary Wollstonecraft. Her books include *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), *Victim of Prejudice* (1799) and the ground-breaking 6-volume *Female Biography* (1803) with explicit feminist purpose: "*My pen has been taken up in the Cause, and for the benefit of my own sex*". She grew up in Southwark, moved to Camberwell about 1804 but we don't know where. She died in 1843 and was buried in Abney Park cemetery in Stoke Newington.

WANDERING THROUGH...

• *William Blake* Late C18

Artisan revolutionary, visionary poet & engraver, author of the lamentably misused utopian song '*Jerusalem*', Blake lived in Lambeth for many years, often walking through Camberwell. As a child (1767) he had his first vision of "*a tree full of angels*" on Peckham Rye.

More info at www.past-tense.org.uk