

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE



'John Burns addressing an open air audience' by H F Finberg

Centenary of John Burns' stand against the First World War

One hundred years ago, on 2 August 1914, John Burns, Battersea's labour MP, resigned from the Cabinet in protest at the pending declaration of war against Germany. Two days later the UK declared war.

In 1894, 120 years ago, John Burns set up Battersea Trades & Labour Council to cover the old borough of Battersea. Ten years later Wandsworth Trades & Labour Council was set up to cover the old borough of Wandsworth.

These anniversaries will be marked by Battersea & Wandsworth TUC in events taking place on Saturday 9 August 2014.

The two wings of the labour movement evolved through many permutations from 1894 until 1964/5 when the two boroughs merged to form the London Borough of Wandsworth. The two trades councils in Battersea and Wandsworth also merged to form Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council (BWTUC).

John Burns was born in 1858 in South Lambeth and moved to Battersea at about age nine. He started work aged 10. He was

apprenticed at Price's Candles aged 12, and later qualified as an engineer.

Burns was a superb public speaker at open air and indoor meetings. He played a leading role with Tom Mann in the successful London Dock Strike of 1889 and supported setting up new unions for gas and railway workers.

With the help of others he put together a Progressive Alliance in Battersea among trade unionists, socialists, liberals and radicals. This saw him elected to the London County Council at the end of 1888 and as MP for Battersea in 1892. In 1894 Battersea Trades & Labour Council was formed as a key member of the Alliance, which took control of Battersea Vestry in 1894 and then the newly formed Borough Council in 1900. The council stood for direct labour, fair wages, and the development of services for the working class: baths and leisure facilities, housing, and improved public health services.

The Liberal Prime Minister invited Burns to join the Cabinet in December

1905 as President of the Local Government Board. **His major lasting achievement was the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 which enabled councils to build houses for rent.**

John Burns attended the founding Conference of the Labour Party in 1900 but did not join. Like many other labour movement leaders he preferred to work in a broader alliance. John Burns was interviewed by the newly formed Battersea Labour Party and Trades Council to be its official candidate at the December 1918 General Election but declined to stand when it became clear he would have to accept the rules of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

That was the end of his political career. He died in 1943 and is buried in Battersea cemetery. His grave was restored by BWTUC in 2002 in a ceremony with the late former Labour MP Tony Benn.

• *More information on local history can be found at Trade Union History: www.unionhistory.info*

'Why four great powers should fight over Serbia no fellow can understand. This I know, there is one fellow who will have nothing to do with such a criminal folly, the effects of which will be appalling to the welter of nations who will be involved... My duty is clear and at all costs will be done.'

– John Burns, MP for Battersea and the first working-class Cabinet Minister, who left the government on 2 August 1914, in protest at Britain's entry into the First World War.

Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council invite you to join us to mark 120 years since our founding in 1894, to commemorate the life of our founder John Burns, and to mark the centenary of his resignation from the British Cabinet in opposition to the First World War

Inaugural John Burns walk

**Saturday 9 August 2014
1pm, St Mary's Cemetery,
Battersea Rise, Bolingbroke
Grove, SW11 1HE**

Afterwards join us at 4pm for a reception at the Bread and Roses, 68 Clapham Manor St, SW4 6DZ

**+ The Socialist Choir +
+ Drinks and refreshments +
+ ALL WELCOME +**

1. John Burns Grave, St Mary's Cemetery

John Burns died in 1943. The grave was restored by Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council in 2002, with a gathering addressed by Tony Benn. Burns's son Edgar is also buried here. He had enlisted in January 1916, was wounded in the Battle of the Somme, then served in North Africa. He suffered from shell shock and died in 1922, aged 26 – a terrible blow to Burns.

2. Salcott Road – Stephen Sanders Court

William Stephen Sanders was a key figure in the socialist movement in Battersea, helping Burns in several organising projects. He became MP for Battersea in 1929.

3. 7 Wakehurst Road

1880 home of Victor Delahaye, a French refugee who had taken part in the 1871 Paris Commune. He worked as an engineer with the young Burns, introduced him to radical writers and was a big influence on him becoming a socialist.

4. 49 Wakehurst Road

Birthplace of Edward Thomas, the poet, who said of Burns: 'John Burns was another glorious, great and good man. I honestly admired his look and voice, and was proud to shake hands with him and also to have my middle stump bowled clear out of the ground by him once on Clapham Common.'

5. 25 Northcote Road

Entrance to a yard behind 19–31, purchased in July 1895 by the Battersea Vestry (the parish-based local authority) for use as a local depot by its direct labour work force – a feature of the Burns municipal agenda.

6. 15–17 Northcote Road

Former site of Bolingbroke Hall in which the Battersea Parliament debating society met in the 1880s. Burns was a member.

7. Clapham Common

Burns was arrested for public speaking here in 1878. He liked to play cricket on the common.

8. 110 North Side, Clapham Common

Burns's home, 1914–43. After his resignation from the Cabinet, Burns spent the rest of his life devoted to his interests in books, London history and cricket. He regarded the Thames as 'liquid history'. An annuity of £1,000 from the Scottish millionaire and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie gave him financial independence.

9. 41 Sugden Road

Home of Joseph Hyder, Secretary of the Land Nationalisation Society, of which John Burns was a Vice-President when in the Cabinet.

10. 24 Sugden Road

Home of Fred Knee (1863–1914) of the Workmen's Housing Council, who worked with Burns to get the Latchmere Estate built. A Greater London Council plaque was unveiled in 1986 by the then Battersea Labour MP Alf Dubs. Knee helped to set up what is now the Greater London Labour Party and was founder and the first Secretary of the wartime London Labour Emergency Committee.

11. 177 Lavender Hill

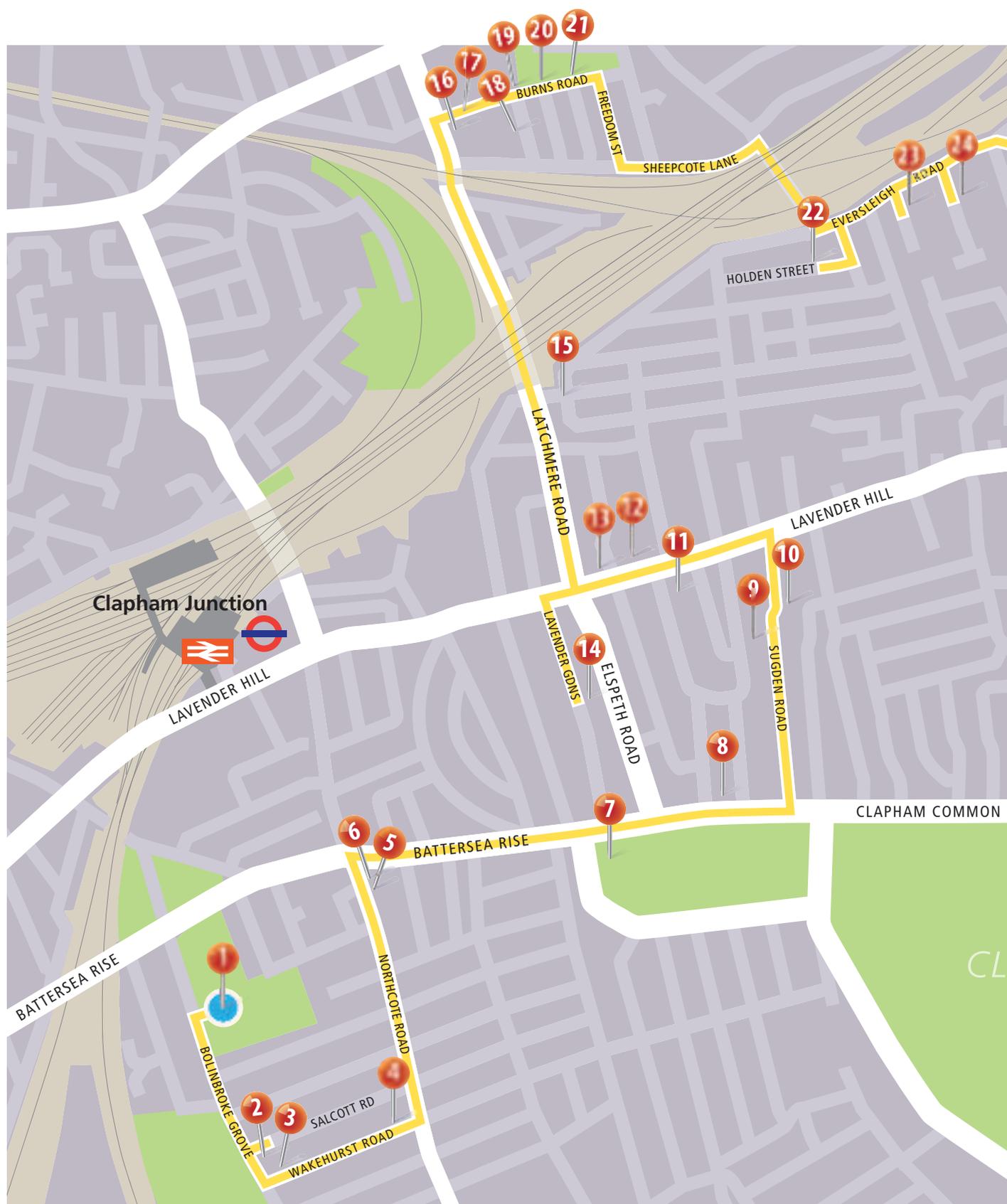
Premises of the modern Battersea Labour Party. Former offices of Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council and its Workers Beer Company. Further up the hill is the site of 108 Lavender Hill, where Burns lived from 1891 to 1907.

12. Battersea Municipal Buildings/Arts Centre

Scene of many of Burns's public meetings, and of election victory speeches with thousands standing outside in the street.

13. Shakespeare House, 168 Lavender Hill

Former site of the Shakespeare Theatre, in which



Burns held many indoor public meetings.

14. 37 Lavender Gardens

Burns's home from at least 1908 to 1914, when he was a Cabinet member.

15. Shaftesbury Park Estate

Entrance to estate built by the Artizans' & General Labourers' Dwellings Company, which built the estate on the principle, 'Healthy homes means healthy people.' Became staunch radical, Progressive and then Labour area.

16. Latchmere Leisure Centre

Former site of Latchmere Baths built 1888–9 and expanded by Burns's allies, in control of Battersea Vestry and Council from 1894.

17. Burns Road

Street named after Burns – though he preferred it to be associated with Robert Burns, the Scots poet.

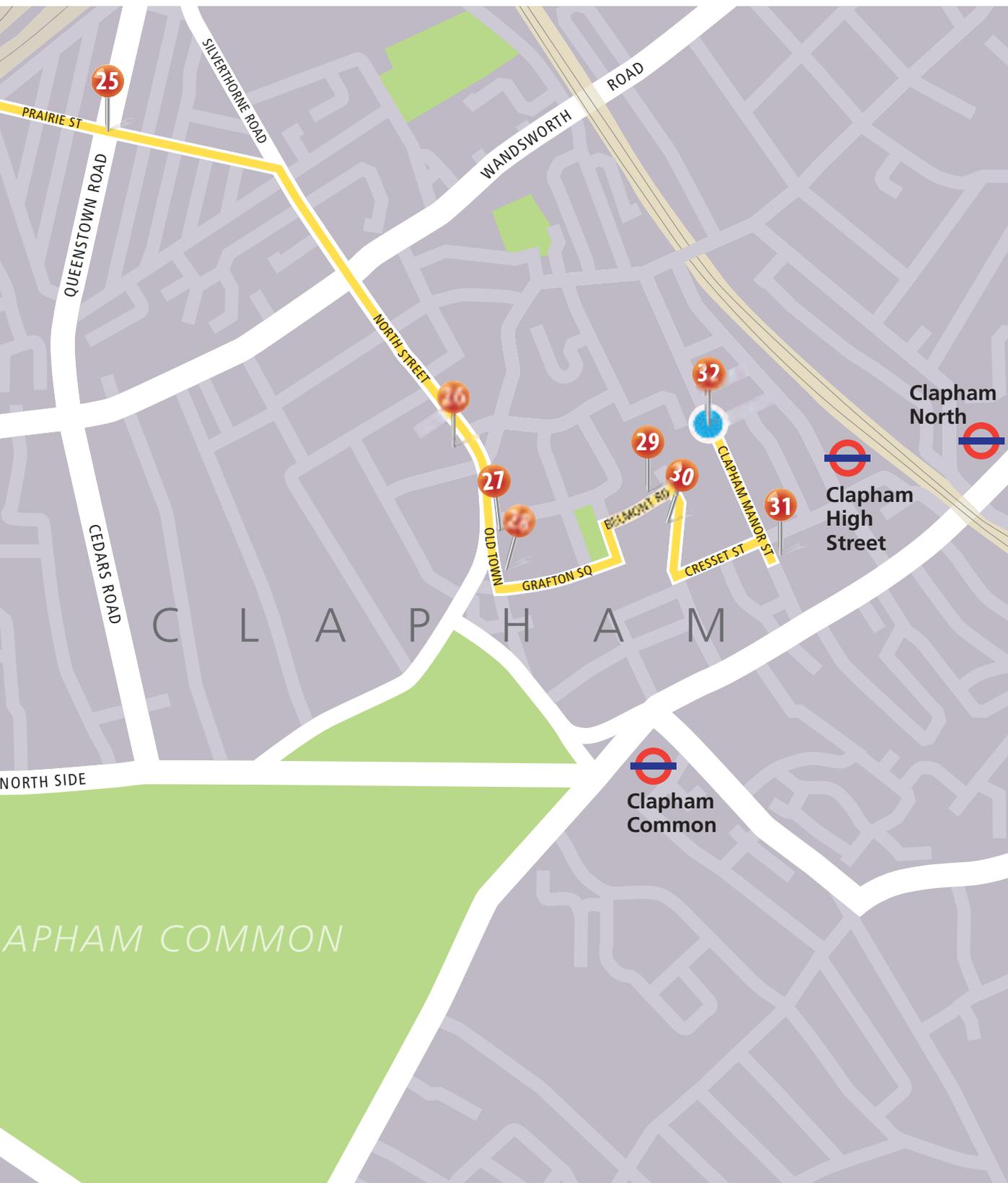
18. Latchmere Estate

Burns helped achieve changes in the law that enabled his allies controlling Battersea Council to build this estate. At its opening in August 1903 he said: 'The land

John Burns

A guided walk through o

' Battersea ur Trade Union heritage



has a communal origin, the streets bear democratic names; the whole plan, history and achievement is redolent of the common victory of the common people.' Male and female tenants were staunch supporters and activists of socialist movements and the Labour Party.

19. Matthews Street

Named after William Matthews, Burns's ally on Battersea Council and Chair of the Battersea Stop the War Committee.

20. Joubert Street

Named after Piet Joubert, a general fighting the British in the Boer War (1899–1902), who had died in 1900. Burns and his council allies opposed the war.

21. Odger Street

Named after George Odger (1813–77), a shoemaker, founder member of the London Trades Council in 1860 and its Secretary 1862–1872, supporter of the North in the American Civil War, President of the International Working Men's Association, supporter of campaigns to extend the vote, and Secretary to the TUC's Parliamentary Committee.

22. 8 Holden Street

Home of John Burns in 1885. He launched the Battersea Social Democratic Federation branch here. A School Board visitor wrote: 'John Burns has a good deal of influence and following on the estate, esp. among the younger men. They go to hear him down by the Park, not being irreligious or atheistical, but simply non-religious, using the only time available for purely political and social lectures.'

23. John Burns School

Named after Burns.

24. Wickersley Road

Street formerly part of a housing area owned by the Beaufoy family, vinegar manufacturers and philanthropists. Burns lived at 56 in the late 1880s when he became a London County Councillor. Two other families lived in the house as well.

25. Queen's (now Queenstown) Road

Local bakery workers' union club meeting in this street helped form the Battersea branch of new National Bakers' and Confectioners' union in 1889.

26. 11A North Street, Spiritualist Church

Former William Morris Hall. Meeting place of the Clapham Independent Labour Party in 1907. Speakers included Burns's Social Democratic Federation colleague William Sanders and the socialist, women's suffragist and Irish nationalist Charlotte Despard.

27. Maritime House, Grafton Square

Built 1939 as HQ of the National Union of Seamen. Owned by the RMT transport union as a block of flats and offices. The RMT was created by the merger of unions like the National Unions of Railwaymen and Seamen. The NUR itself was formed by merging the General Railway Workers' Union, which Burns helped to set up in 1889–92, and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.

28. Sun Inn, Old Town

Important trade union meeting place until at least the beginning of New Unionism in 1889.

29. Belmont Road

Site of Congregationalist Church hall used by the Independent Labour Party in 1907 for a concert and social.

30. Oddfellows Hall

Hall of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows, an important national friendly society providing financial support at times of difficulty to mainly working class members and later a partner in administering National Insurance from 1911, when Burns was in the Cabinet.

31. 161–167 Clapham Manor Street

HQ of West Indian Ex-Servicemen's and Women's Association. Modern organisation founded by soldiers and airmen who fought in the Second World War. In 1918 Burns's Battersea Progressive colleague John Archer argued that the support of Africans, West Indians and Indians in the First World War justified their better treatment in the colonies, leading to self-government. Burns met a group of Indian soldiers in 1919.

32. Bread and Roses pub, 68 Clapham Manor Street

A Grade II listed former manor house built by Thomas Cubitt in the early/mid nineteenth century. Now owned by Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council, which opened the pub in 1996. Takes its name from a poem associated with a 1912 US textile workers' strike and makes the point: 'Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!' The pub offers a variety of entertainment as well as meeting facilities, and hosts events supporting the labour movement and progressive causes. The John Burns Room pays tribute to our founder.

Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council

Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council (BWTUC), which was set up by John Burns 120 years ago in 1894, is the south west London arm of the international trade union movement that now has 168 million trades unionists in 155 countries.

BWTUC is one of the oldest continuously operating grass roots organisations based in the borough. It promotes trade unionism in Wandsworth. It is the focal point for organising support for workers in dispute, and it campaigns on issues of the day of concern to working people.

BWTUC and the trade union movement continue to stand for its founding principles of democracy, the rule of law and economic and social justice. This movement has a remarkable record of achievement in raising the living standards of ordinary workers across the world. In the USA for example trade unionists wear a T-shirt with the slogan 'Trade unionists, the folk that brought you the weekend.'

Every age brings fresh challenges to what is a living movement. Globalisation has ushered in an era of intense competition that has a huge impact on the London labour market where the individual trade unions that make up BWTUC operate. The current affiliates are: Unite, Unison, GMB, NUT, NASUWT, PCS, CWU, UCU, RMT, FBU, POA and the NUJ. For more information on these unions visit www.tuc.org.uk

BWTUC is run by a General Committee of elected delegates drawn from local branches of the affiliated unions. It meets monthly at the PCS building in Clapham Junction.

● For more information visit www.bwtuc.org.uk



In 2004 BWTUC Trading, as a stakeholder in the world famous Glastonbury Festival, commissioned for the festival site the beautiful Left Field Tower – now renamed the Tony Benn Tower.

Workers Beer Company

Festival goers at Glastonbury, Reading, Leeds and Latitude will be familiar with bars run by Workers Beer Company. This is the brand used for trading that is wholly owned by BWTUC (Trading) Ltd, which is the fundraising arm of BWTUC.

Workers Beer Company was set up in 1985 as a festival caterer. It has been in music promotion since 1990, when it co-promoted the Fleadh in Finsbury Park with Mean Fiddler.

It is now a multi-million pound business that has traded in three EU countries. It employs about 15 specialist staff in planning, staffing and accounting based in Clapham. They set up the sites for the managers and staff at events who run the bars.

The bars are staffed by volunteers working for grass roots server groups drawn from trade union and labour organisations, and campaign and community groups recognised by the labour movement. Their pay goes direct to these organisations. Over a typical year the number of volunteers can be counted in thou-



In 2007 BWTUC Trading helped towards the cost of the stone cladding for twelve lovely houses for permanent social renting, built on land in Pilton donated by Michael Eavis, which are named John Burns Cottages.

sands and the sums paid to grass roots campaigns nears £0.75m per annum in UK and Ireland. The Abortion Rights Campaign in Ireland is an example of a campaign that gets its core funding in this way. We would like to see more trades unionists from South West London coming forward to volunteer to work in our bars.

● For more information visit www.workersbeer.co.uk.

BWTUC (Trading) Ltd owns the Bread and Roses pub, and has a stake in Ethical Threads, which supplies garments made by suppliers who treat their workers fairly.

BWTUC (Trading) Ltd is run by an unpaid volunteer management committee that includes the senior lay officers of BWTUC. A founder member of Workers Beer Company was the then BWTUC delegate Melvin Benn. He is now managing director of Festival Republic – one of the top festival promoters in Europe – as well as being chair of Wembley Stadium.

BWTUC believes that all workers are better off in a union so that they can organise themselves and campaign for better pay, terms and working conditions.

If you would like to join a union or become more involved with your local Trades Union Council or the Workers Beer Company, please visit www.bwtuc.org.uk

Contact Carmel Pollen 07946 172 461
carmelpollen@bwtuc.org.uk



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Will Martindale, Labour's next MP for Battersea

John Burns worked his way from the slums of Battersea to the heart of the British government – his lifetime of service to Battersea is a lasting inspiration. I'm proud to follow in his footsteps.

I'm out and about every week and just like John Burns, often on my bike! If we haven't yet met, please email will@willtowin.org.uk or call into our office, which for the last 100 years has been at 177 Lavender Hill.

To read my full tribute to John Burns, go to: www.willtowin.org.uk.



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