

Welcome to Wander About Wednesday: Beauty and the Borough - sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Wednesday 25 March 2020

The theme for today is Wander About Wednesday: Beauty and the Borough - where we can take you on more of a virtual 'moving' exploration of part of the borough - all safely from home. It might be historical, but it will be something you can enjoy and reminisce, or find out something new or see what might have changed – and what hasn't!

Some of you may already be familiar with this film, *Beauty and the Borough*, filmed in c.1959. Over its 20 minute or so duration, it takes in views of Muswell Hill and Crouch End when they belonged to the former Borough of Hornsey. This film has been part of the collections at Bruce Castle Museum and Archive for a many years, but it wasn't until the opportunity arose to digitise the film in 2010 (and onwards) with help from Film London that we could actually see what was on our original film reels.

Film London had successfully been awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (now known as the National Lottery Heritage Fund) to aid digitisation of films in London borough museum and archive collections. Thanks to this project grant and subsequent projects, the film reels in our collection – along with many others, including those that have since been given by members of the public – could at last be seen. The technology to digitise 16mm film is very specialist as you can imagine – which is why [Film London](#) and its [London Screen Archives team](#) stepped in with this initiative.

Some of you might recall a few years ago the innovative KinoVan that came to Bruce Castle and did a tour of various parks and other locations in the borough. For those of you who don't know, the KinoVan is a mobile cinema built to show films from collections from across London, and inspired by travelling cinema vans of the 1920s.



Some of you may also know that only a few short weeks ago in February 2020, Bruce Castle Museum and Archive was spotlighted as one of Film London's Lodestar Awards 2020 for engaging with its communities and promoting the film we are focussing on today - *'Beauty and the Borough'*.

In 2019, Film London had launched its inaugural Film London Lodestars scheme, a list honouring the bright futures of innovative filmmakers and craftspeople from across the capital (a lodestar is the star that guides the course of a ship). However, in 2020, for the first time, Film London broadened the scope to include a category for London's film archive community. And hence Bruce Castle Museum and Archives' contribution to the London Screen Archives Network being acknowledged. Film London considered the film *Beauty in the Borough* "*as a wonderful portrait of a place - and it is a film that's drawn more online views than any other clip on the London Screen Archives platform in the last year.*"

They wrote to us saying that "*We're thrilled to provide this platform to amplify the work you've done and your trajectory towards the future!*"

So – here is the link to the London Screen Archives (LSA) website and catalogue which hosts our award-winning film! Have fun viewing:

<https://www.londonsscreenarchives.org.uk/title/282/>

When viewing the film, as it is silent, you can even choose your own background music if you wish – LSA have offered a choice.

There is also an option to add your own comments about the film in the column provided by LSA. Please do so!



A still from the film

And below are some notes about why this title was chosen in c.1959:

Hornsey had suffered horrendously in the bombings of the Second World War, with many bombsites around the borough. In January 1947 Hornsey Borough Council Minutes reported that:

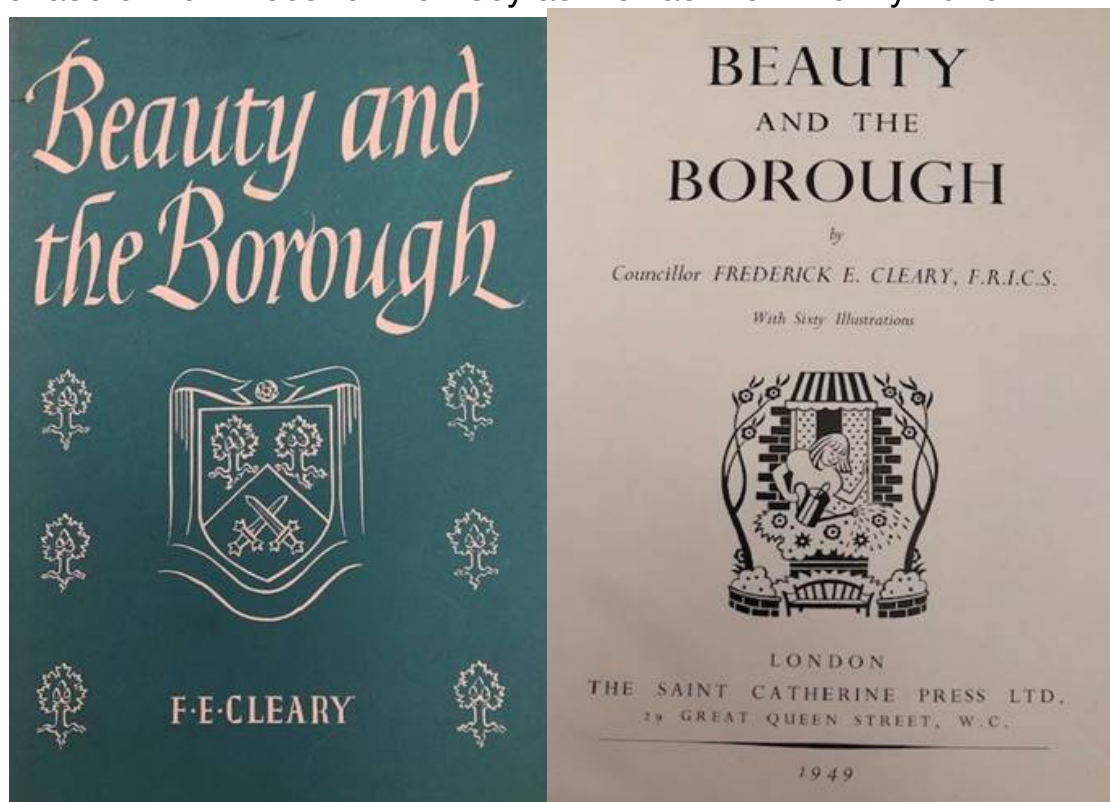
“The [Works and Estates] Committee had before them for information a report by the Borough Engineer and Surveyor upon the possibility of developing small open spaces as gardens”.

And so the idea was taken forward, spearheaded by Councillor Frederick E. Cleary, Chairman of the Plans and Town Planning Committee, for Hornsey to ‘beautify’ the borough. It was intended to turn the ‘*misfortune to advantage and to reconstruct in the days of peace*’.

A public amenity scheme was launched to encourage local residents to help in ‘*tidying up the borough by painting their houses, putting out window boxes, planting flowers, trees and shrubs, and getting rid of gradually of the scars of war and the neglected areas.*’ Gifts of land, seats, trees, shrubs and bulbs came flooding in from private citizens and local businesses. One person – Mrs Ada Cunningham – gifted two pieces of land beside Midhurst Avenue, Fortis Green, which in turn enriched Hornsey with two ornamental gardens, laid out by the council.

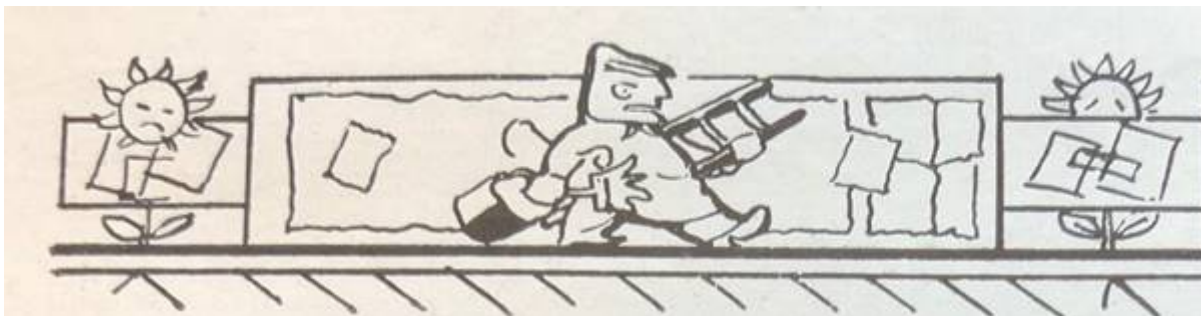
In 1949, Cleary and the council published the book ‘*Beauty and the Borough*’. To read the introduction to the book, see attached PDF.

Selling for six shillings, the profits from its sale went towards the Tree Fund for the purchase of new trees for Hornsey as well as the Amenity Fund.



It is a very stylish and beautifully-produced book, embellished with delightful and witty drawings by Frederick Mitchell A.R.C.A, of the Hornsey College of Art.





Included in the book are the 'before and after' photographs of bombsites being transformed into beautiful little areas for residents to enjoy. See the attached two PDFs as an example of what the council and its citizens were proud of.

Cleary's last words in the book read:

'If this modest book will encourage my fellow citizens to take an interest and pride in their surroundings, then it will not have been written in vain.'

The works continued, going on to improve amenities in the Borough of Hornsey for many years to come - well over a decade in fact. In 1959, the film '*Beauty and the Borough*' is a budding amateur-made film, made likely by the surveyors and engineers department and further testament of the vast improvements to the borough following the Second World War.

There are two other small film-clips that show these changes in Hornsey - and are likely to have been filmed about the same time period:

<https://www.londonsscreenarchives.org.uk/title/286/>

<https://www.londonsscreenarchives.org.uk/title/296/>

Perhaps you can help by adding extra notes in the comments section on the LSA website - maybe you know the location? Or make any other comment for improvement to help describe these two films - what is shown in it?

With thanks to Cleary for his grand vision for bringing people together after the Second World War. His name is memorialised elsewhere in the City with 'Cleary Gardens' - where his passion for gardens and his Chairmanship of the Metropolitan Parks and Gardens Association is remembered:

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/city-gardens/visitor-information/Pages/Cleary-Gardens.aspx>

Stay well and until tomorrow
best wishes

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