

Diana Rimel BA (Hons)

When Diana left the Maritime Museum to work at Goldsmiths College in 1971 it was the start of a whole new life. Through the positive encouragement of two of her managers she returned to education as a mature student first studying for a diploma and later gaining a BA (Hons) degree in History. She repaid this vote of confidence in her by returning to Goldsmiths and setting up a programme of adult education classes in local history that ran from 1978 to 2003. During this time she organised about 100 terms worth of classes and short courses. She taught on these courses but she also kept them vibrant and lively by introducing a range of guest lecturers many of whom became friends. Across the Boroughs the subjects were extremely varied and Diana herself built up a portfolio of some 17 talks but gave many more on subjects as diverse as Sir Joseph Bazalgette, Old Markets and Fairs in Southwark, Parliament through the ages, Alcoholic Haunts of Greenwich and Southwark, London by Lantern Slide, Thomas Tilling 1825 – 1893 and Famous People of Lewisham.

Taking these classes to the community was an organisational feat and she had to research and find suitable venues, like the Creekside education centre, Lewisham Library, John Harvard library hall, Manor House, the Horniman Museum, Surrey Quays Area Office, National Maritime Museum, Birkbeck College, Mycenae House and Blackheath Concert Halls. As part of the courses she also researched and conducted guided walks. I've come across about 15 walks that she took but I suspect there were many more; walks to places like the Isle of Dogs, Bankside and Morden Wharf to Thames Barrier. Many were conducted as fund raisers for societies. A couple of these became trails; 'A Walk Around the Greenwich Peninsula' (with drawings by Peter Kent) and The Old Mortuary, Rotherhithe. One area of particular and personal interest, 'The Ashburnham Triangle', developed into a book which was revised in 2009.

One of the things she was most proud of was when the classes she created took on their own life after funding from Goldsmiths had finished. The Mycenae House Local History Group and The Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Local History Society are two such. As a mature student she never forgot the value and sheer pleasure of learning and she was constantly impressed by the dedication and enthusiasm of these groups as they were developed and taken forward.

Along with many hours spent at Lewisham Local History Library Diana's research material was eclectic and lateral and included beer mats, playing cards, post cards, slides, newspaper clippings, letters and period maps. Her last talk in 2017 was on 'The People's Palaces' to the Mycenae House group. It was a good one to finish on because it incorporated many of her life principles; that beautiful public buildings and gardens should be open and accessible to everyone and places where you can be educated, uplifted and inspired by the skill of previous generations. Diana did not stop there though. Although no longer actively participating in meetings and classes, via email she often pointed people to speakers of interest or material that could be useful; she was a great lateral thinker and skilled networker.

Diana was a hugely energetic person and when contacting local organisations about her funeral I contacted some 11 groups across Lewisham, Southwark, Greenwich, Woolwich, Blackheath and Charlton, of which she was variously chair, secretary, fund raiser and events organiser. She was also a very humble person and when I once said to her she might be eligible for some kind of civic award she instantly dismissed it saying 'but what would I do with it!' I think she would be amazed at how many people have sent tributes about her and of how highly she was regarded.