I first came across the remains of a memorial to Margaret Mary Damer Dawson on the Chelsea Embankment near Cheyne Walk several years ago. More accurately, I had read about the memorial and went searching for it. In its neglected state it hardly merited attention and even the metal rod on top of the base had disappeared in later years. When I visited last year I could find scant traces.

The restored memorial is to be welcomed not least because it could have totally disappeared. The helpful council officer who replied to my initial query was not even aware of the former bird bath when responding to my enquiries about

*The original bird bath on Chelsea Embankment.*
its loss. Sadly, this would not have been the first memorial to be 'lost' in London: the theft of Diane Gorvin's *Dr Salter's Dream* from Bermondsey's Cherry Garden Pier being perhaps the most famous recent example.

Who was Margaret Mary Damer Dawson?

If Damer Dawson is known today it is likely to be for her controversial work founding the Women's Police Service during the First World War. As archivist David Doughan has explained in his contribution to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Damer Dawson had been keen to form this police service to protect women (and children) from sexual exploitation. It was initially supported by many feminists who had been active in the militant suffrage movement. However, some of their first actions, at the request of the army, were to control women 'of bad character'. Damer Dawson and most of her supporters complied with this, 'on the grounds that to prove their willingness to accept police discipline, no order, however distasteful, could be shirked'. She would later give evidence to the Post - First World War Committee discussing the recruitment of women police officers before her untimely death from a heart attack in 1920 while still in her forties.

However, this summary does not cover another important aspect of her public life to which the memorial refers. As the Chelsea Society *Annual Report* for 1932 notes, the bird bath memorial was erected by Damer Dawson's friend Miss St John Partridge and designed and created by the sculptor Charles Pibworth, a
member of the Art Workers' Guild and a Fellow of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, who, like Margaret, lived nearby. Around the side of the circular basin were the words taken from Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 'He prayeth best who lovest best all things great and small'.

Why was a memorial in the form of a bird bath erected to her?

The form of memorial – and the wording – was not accidental. Margaret Damer Dawson had been an executive member of the progressive Humanitarian League, the manifesto of which included the sentiment 'it is iniquitous to inflict suffering, directly or indirectly, on any sentient being, except when self defence or absolute necessity can be justly pleaded.' She had been a leading member and one time organising secretary of the animal campaigning organisation the Animal Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society where she played a leading role alongside Louise Lind af Hageby and Nina, Duchess of Hamilton and Brandon. Apart from opposing vivisection, the Society campaigned against circuses and performing animals and for reforms in the way that animals were slaughtered for food. She was one of the organisers of the important international animal congress held in London in July 1909 managing to gain the support in Britain alone of many organisations including the Humanitarian League, the RSPB, the National Anti-Vivisection Society and Our Dumb Friends' League (now Blue Cross). During the 1914-18 War the Society supported the work of the Purple Cross concerned both with human suffering – and the plight of horses on the battlefields of France.

As her obituary explained, Margaret opposed all cruelty to animals including the exploitation of animals for fashion: 'a woman at once tender and gallant and absolutely without thought of the consequences to herself of an onslaught on the citadel of cruelty and selfishness.'

And why here in Chelsea?

Aside from living nearby, Damer Dawson's activities in the Animal Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society had a local connection. The organisation had been prominent in the erection of an anti-vivisection memorial to 'the old brown dog' just over the river in the Latchmere Estate recreation ground. (A new and
different version is now in the path adjacent to the old English garden in Battersea Park.) Damer Dawson was also to be found driving the ADAVS anti-vivisection van during the election campaign against the Liberal candidate – and vivisector – Sir Victor Horsley for the University of London seat in 1910. (He lost.)

The ADAVS was also supportive locally of the Battersea Anti-Vivisection Hospital that stood on the junction of Albert Bridge Road and Surrey Lane. With an outpatient service for the 'suffering poor', beds for cancer patients and a policy of 'No vivisectors on its staff' and 'No experiments on its patients' it was popular locally though seen as controversial by the medical establishment.

The form of a bird bath as a fitting memorial to an animal campaigner is not unique. (St John's Wood church gardens contains a similar memorial to a fellow member (and treasurer) of the Humanitarian League, Alice Drakoules.) This form of commemoration complements the plaque in 10 Cheyne Row and gives a different slant on the life and works of Margaret Damer Dawson.

Author's Note: Dr Hilda Kean FRHistS is a public and cultural historian. She is the former Dean of Ruskin College, Oxford, where she taught history for many years. Hilda has published widely on animal-human history, public history and London and runs walks with an animal theme. For more information see her website http://hildakean.com/