

NEWSLETTER 78

January 1st - March 31st 2016



Events. All events are free and open to members and non-members alike. Donations welcome.

Wednesday 27th January **WINTER WALK**

Meet 1.30pm on Mansion steps. Looking around the park to see how the, so far, mild winter is affecting the flora and fauna. Or just come along to enjoy a good walk in good company.

Sunday 28th February **HISTORY WALK**

Meet 1.30 at the mansion. A short talk will precede this walk looking at the history of the park, the mansion and its occupants.

Saturday 19th March **THREE PARKS WALK**

Meet 10.00am on the mansion steps. This walk is long and takes us far from the park. Walking to Kelsey Park and then to South Norwood Country Park. The route is as rural as possible avoiding too many stretches of pavement and is never too far from 54 (and others) bus route.

CONSERVATION & SENSORY GARDEN WORKDAYS

Saturdays 9th Jan, 13th Feb, 12th Mar (About 2 hour sessions)

Meet at the Mansion 10.am. Sensory Garden work will be less and the January and possibly February days will be work around the park. Tools and instruction provided.

About The Friends Events. All our events are free, but any donations to funds are much appreciated. Most last about 1-2 hours, but you can join in for as long or as little as you like. It is advisable to wear stout walking shoes, as the paths do get very muddy. Walkers are individually responsible for their own safety during our events. Minors are welcome, but must be accompanied by parent or guardian. Walk leaders always carry water and mobile phone.

CONTACTS. If anyone has any comments, ideas, articles etc. get in touch through any of the contact venues or in person at the Visitor Centre in the mansion.

Opening times:- Sundays 1.30pm-3.30pm.

THE FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK, THE SECRETARY,
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Recent Events Report

Photo Walk Sunday 18th October. A few people came along on this walk to improve photography skills. Our expert, John, helped several of the group with the complexities of modern cameras. It's not just 'point and shoot' to take really interesting pictures. Many thanks to all that came along.

Bird Migration Walk Sunday 24th October. This was a walk new to the Friends and it was possibly just going to be a walk without birds, but it was great. Our expert Dave pointed out many birds moving across the skies and those flitting about in the park. One big highlight was to see a skein of about seventeen Greylag geese flying across the south of the park. Thanks to Dave and all that came along.

Mince Pie Walk Thursday 10th December. Good timing for this walk as it coincided with a bright couple of hours in a dull wet day. The walk went as far as the river and we sat in the empty children's playground to eat our mince pies, fruit drink and matchmakers. It was a very pleasant walk with good company and plenty of chatter. Thanks to the 'munchers' that took up our offer of an early bit of Christmas cheer.

Friends Membership renewal

Happy New Year to our members. Membership forms are enclosed for 2016, if you joined after 1st Oct 2015 you have already paid for 2016. Provided we have your name with membership fee that should be enough. We can provide bank transfer details on request.

Sensory Garden. The mild weather so far has extended the growing season and now some bulbs are emerging almost giving the feeling that autumn will move straight into spring. As little work as necessary is being done in the garden for a couple of months. We have had one workday attacking bramble that grows among the gorse near Summerhouse Hill Wood. New volunteers are welcome and needed, just a couple of hours here and there go a long way to keeping the Friends group operational. These days when parks and open space is under various threats there is a need for a means of public representation.

Friend's Survey

The Survey was closed in early December as we needed to get results produced in time for a scheduled Lewisham Council meeting. However the decision meeting was postponed but our results have been forwarded to the Mayor of Lewisham, Sir Steve Bullock and some Lewisham officers.

We received 470 responses from park users. Surveys were distributed to Friends members by post and email. Our volunteers sought responses from visitors to the park and the form was on our website and at the visitor centre.

The significant responses were that removal of the golf course is strongly disapproved of as is restoration of the lake which involves changes to established habitat areas.

Most people want the buildings restored and some other aspects of the lottery scheme are approved. We will put fuller details on the website in a viewable and printable document and have them available for viewing in the visitor centre.

RSPB Garden Bird Watch on the weekend of 30th-31st Jan 2016.

Packs are available from
<https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdwatch> .

April Bluebell Walk

The annual Bluebell Walk has been scheduled for Sunday April 24th at 2pm. In partnership with the Creekside Education Trust and led by Nick Bertrand. Just keep an eye on the next newsletter or website in case any changes. The weather is doing its best to confuse plants and animals. The Parakeets seem to be nesting already and some leaves are showing through from bluebells.

National Parks Forum and Lewisham Parks Forum (LPF)

The forum continues to meet and communicate with park managers. Representatives from friends of Deptford Park have joined the forum. There is also a Bromley Parks forum representing Kelsey Park etc. To Bromley Council. The Lewisham Parks forum website is at <https://lewishamparksforum.wordpress.com>

Lewisham Local History Society.

Programme of talks for this quarter. Most meetings are held on **Fridays** at Methodist Church Hall, Albion Way, SE13. Starting at **7.45pm**. Visitors welcome. Full access for people with disabilities.

January 29th Severndroog Castle Margaret Taylor

February 26th Tolls, Trains and Canals

Malcolm Bacchus

March 18th AGM & the Museum Team

More information: www.lewishamhistory.org.uk

Bromley Borough Local History Society.

Most meetings start at **7.45pm** in the small hall at **Trinity United Reform Church** at the junction of Freelands Road and Upper Park Road, Bromley BR1 3QA. There are occasional meetings at other venues and visits to local places of interest.

The Hall has a small car park and free off-street parking. Buses 162, 269 and 314 pass nearby; nearest bus stops are Freelands Road and St Joseph's Church. Nearest stations Bromley North and Bromley South. **There are facilities for the disabled.**

Tea and coffee are usually available. Non-members are welcome. Meetings are **1st Tuesday of the month** unless otherwise stated.

January 5th In Dora's Footsteps

Armchair walk based on Chelsfield author Miss Read's books

Patrick Hellicar

February 2nd Beckenham Place and Park History

Mal Mitchell

March 1st The History of Forest Hill

Steve Grindley

More information: www.blhs.org.uk

Programme Co-ordinator Mike Marriott 07917 101 520

Tom Moulton has a nature walk which will be on **Sunday 10 January at 10.30 am**, meet outside **Ladywell station**. More details on the blog - <https://lewishamnaturewalks.wordpress.com/>.

Croydon Canal - well bits of it anyway

Well over a century ago a canal wound its ways through what is, now, Penge and Anerley. Penge was then a hamlet nesting in unspoiled countryside and at that time there was no such place as Anerley. When it was built the Canal passed within half a mile of the hamlet of Penge and after the passage of more than a hundred years it is hardly surprising that the local significance of the waterway is something which tends to be forgotten. Historically with the opening of the canal in 1809 the hamlet stirred and began to emerge as a place of some substance after nearly a thousand years of rustic obscurity.

The canal was being built when Nelson died at Trafalgar and had already been in business for six years when Napoleon was finally tamed at Waterloo. It is interesting to note that if the Napoleonic wars had not then ended the Croydon Canal might well have become an important part of a much larger project; a scheme to build a canal "cut off" right across the corner of south east England connecting London with Portsmouth. This was to provide an alternative to the long haul that British merchantmen had to make through the narrow Straits of Dover and up the Channel, a haul which had long been made hazardous by the depredations visited upon our shipping by the hostile French. Victory at Waterloo removed the strategic necessity for this costly venture and the canal never did progress beyond Croydon.

The canal was principally intended to carry coal from London to Croydon and from Croydon it would handle bulk consignments including lime, timber, chalk, clay, Fullers earth and agricultural produce. The Act also envisaged that the canal would supply such places as Sydenham, Norwood and Streatham with water but in the event it never did. The canal always had difficulty in maintaining its own water level, particularly in the higher reaches between Forest Hill and Croydon. The British Rail station at West Croydon is built on the site of the basin where barges once tied up at the end of their journey along the Croydon Canal. Norwood Lake, which survives today, was constructed as a reservoir for the Canal, which took eight years to build opening on the 22nd October, 1809.

Throughout most of its length of nine and half miles the canal passed through what was then open country including crossing Penge Common winding its way through Penge Forest. As the canal left Scott's Wharf, which was approximately where the trains now rumble across the top end of Penge High Street, the canal wound its way along the lower slopes of the Sydenham Heights on its way to London. At Sydenham the

existing road bridge over the railway is the old canal bridge, suitably widened. On its way from Sydenham to Forest Hill the canal was fed by another and larger reservoir, which, unlike Norwood Lake, has long since been filled in and is now a fully developed residential area.

From Forest Hill to New Cross the canal descended 150 feet in two and a half miles by means of 26 locks. The Brockley Jack public house is built on the site of a lock keeper's cottage. The necessity for these locks was of course obvious, although at one stage the canal proprietors had considered the use of inclined planes with an ingenious plan to draw the barges up the long grade by a series of stationary steam engines. The idea was dropped, probably on the grounds of expense, but even so the locks themselves involved the canal company in ongoing financial commitment because of wastage of water which could only be made good by the sustained use of pumping. Nearing the London end of its course the Croydon Canal passed through the grounds of Goldsmith's College, where its earthworks may still be seen, to pass underneath the main Dover Road (then a turnpike) and to join the Grand Surrey Canal at a point about half a mile beyond what is now New Cross Gate station. For many years a short stub of the Croydon Canal survived as a dock of the Grand Surrey Canal and was easily visible from the passing trains now long gone. The Grand Surrey was abandoned in the early 1970's and, like its long vanished offspring, is no more, but it had 150 years of useful life.

One stretch of waterway survived near Anerley Station until the eighteen sixties. It was the wooded backwater which was eventually developed to provide mainly working-class accommodation. On a course parallel to the present Minden Road (where there is a new Wickes DIY store) the waterway passed beneath a country lane. The original canal archway is still there, bricked up, dark and forgotten while unheeding thousands pass over it daily along busy Anerley Road. A close study of old maps of this area leaves no doubt that passengers using the subway connecting the platforms at Anerley are walking along the bed of the old Croydon Canal. There is a short length of the canal still surviving in Betts Park, Anerley and another in Dacres Wood Nature Reserve, Sydenham, both rare and valuable historical reminder of this waterway. Another allusion to the waterway is the Jolly Sailor public house in South Norwood High Street which was a canal-side inn.

This article was written using a very interesting booklet published by Kirkfield Press many moons ago about the canal and its effect on the areas it ran through. We have a few copies of the full booklet available in the Visitor Centre.

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Bid and Environment Agency Flood Control Scheme (EA) Progress Reports

Lottery Bid for Park

LBLewisham have put an updated 'masterplan' on their website. We have copied it onto a poster at the visitor centre. You can access it online at <https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/inmyarea/regeneration/improvements-to-parks/BeckenhamPlacePark/Pages/Masterplan.aspx> we are reproducing some material from that page here.

Environment Agency Flood Scheme

Our colleagues at the Save Beckenham 18 campaign have got information from the EA that the flood scheme is expected to be approved in the near future pending a formal decision at the EA.



Key to proposed works

1. Existing park entrances: retain existing sign boards and improve interpretation signage.
2. Existing path upgrades: upgrade paths to support shared use for cycling and walking and provide access for all where possible.
3. Additional parkland path network.
4. Parkland restoration and historic view management: native tree planting, restoration of 18th century parkland landscaping as setting to south of the Mansion House.
5. Beckenham Place Mansion: landscape setting to be restored with existing main car park returned to grass.
6. Proposed new car park: opposite the Homesteads buildings.
7. Southend Lodge and depot: likely to be conserved with depot to be upgraded.
8. Tennis court and kitchen/formal gardens: existing poor quality tennis courts removed and area restored to walled kitchen garden. Formal gardens restored.
9. The Homesteads: restore the stable block and 18th century courtyard, to create a new activity hub including café, toilets and an environmental education centre.
10. Restored pleasure grounds and with play facilities.
11. Restored 18th century lake and willow carr/wet woodland habitat with boardwalks.
12. Existing park storage/depot area: cleared and restored to parkland.
13. Ash plantation: extensive tree management with clearance and appropriate planting (species to be determined).
14. Possible BMX tracks.
15. Elements of adventure play: along areas of redirected river course.
16. Old Bromley Road playground: replace, relocate and enhance.
17. Skatepark – new provision to be confirmed.
18. Old Bromley Road car park: reduce footprint, improve surfacing and screen planting.
19. Old Bromley Road: new kiosk/WC block.

A: Environment Agency River Ravensbourne project: flood alleviation measures providing new landscaped protective earth banking, new paths, timber boardwalks and river crossings and a wetland reed bed area.

Tell LBLewisham your views by emailing bpp@lewisham.gov.uk

We are still concerned about the lack of consultation so far and the lack of an avenue of feedback for non internet users so we suggest writing to Gavin Plaskitt, Lewisham Council, Rushey Green, Catford SE6 and copying letters to the Mayor. This list above can be used as an outline to comments.