

NEWSLETTER 83

Spring 1st April - 30th June 2017



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

Sunday April 30th BLUEBELL WALK

Meet in the Mansion car park 2.00pm. Timing is everything for this walk so with a bit of luck bluebells will still be blooming, but they could be going over. Anyway, Nick Bertrand will be leading and bluebells or not it will be an interesting and informative walk.

Sunday May 14th BEATING THE BOUNDS

Meet in the Mansion car park 1.30pm. This was an old tradition to establish parish boundaries which in the past often involved young boys being beaten and thrown in rivers! There will be none of that on our sedate walk around the perimeters of the park.

Wednesday June 21st 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 other) bus route.

SENSORY GARDEN (about 2 hours)

Dates 2nd Saturday of the month, April 8th, May 13th, June 10th.

Meet 10.00am in the Sensory Garden. There will be work to suit everyone., novice or experienced. Tools, gloves and instruction

About The Friends Events. 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 a 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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Spring into Summer

As the seasons move on there are few things to look out for. The park has a fine display of bluebells, patches of wood anemones, a small pocket of ramsons (wild garlic), celandine and many lesser plants that spring up to play their part in the natural life of the park.

Probably many of you know that this area is a hot spot for stag beetles. These fascinating creatures spend about seven years as a big fat whitish grub feeding on dead wood and then emerge as an adult. They then spent a few short weeks, without feeding, mating and then dying.

The swifts return in April and stay until August and can be heard screaming across the sky, high and low, catching flying insects and airborne spiders.

SENSORY GARDEN.

Our small team has been working well this winter, we did have to abandon one session due to wind, sleet and low temperature. Some work on the fringe of Stumps Hill wood has been done by a couple of the team, just taking down some small leylandi (with full permission of LBL). Several new people have come along to join us which has been very nice. Even coming to an odd workday as and when time allows does mean much more can be achieved, so newcomers are very welcome.

The lavender in the circular bed in the centre of the garden seems to be rotting off from the base of the plants. The bark chippings that are around them did have a lot of fungi growing on it, but whatever the cause it is looking decidedly distressed. So we intend to replant two sections with a low box edging and possibly a rosemary bush (to be kept reasonably low) up at the pointed end. Hopefully the plants won't all be stolen and we can do the other two sections as well later. The bees and other insects love this bed when it flowers so the sooner the work is done the better. We intend to put broken slate chippings on the pathways through this bed as this should enhance the greys and greens of the plants, all very relaxing.

Some of the paths through the other beds need some alteration in places as shrubs have matured and now bar access. We hope our ideas meet with everyone's approval.

History Revisited—Park Origins

Back in the 1990's when we first started producing this newsletter one of our members was the local historian Eric Inman. He kindly produced a series of articles cataloguing the history of Beckenham Place based on known material and his own research. Sadly Eric died several years ago and bits and pieces of history got added or questioned. It had always been accepted that the park was created and house built in 1773 as recorded in Hasted's History and Topography of Kent produced in 1797 and then repeated by several authors of local history. 1773 was the year John Cator bought the Manor of Beckenham and rights of the Lord of the Manor from the 2nd Viscount (Lord) Bolingbroke. However, the story began earlier and is more complicated.

Under the current Heritage Lottery Fund changes an 'Interpretation Strategy' is being developed so we thought some updates to the accepted view of things is timely.

A copy of a map of the Manor of Foxgrove was found in Bromley Library which had some plots of land annotated as belonging to Cator in 1766. The writings of Cator's father-in-law, Peter Collinson were found to record "Sept. 17, 1762, went, for the first time, to visit my son-in-law, John Cator (who married my daughter), at his new-built house, now finished, at Stump's Hill, half way (on the south side of the road) between Southend and Beckenham, in Kent, began in the spring 1760, on a pretty wooded estate which he had then purchased. The plantations about it, all of his own doing, I found in a very thriving condition, and when grown up will adorn so stately a house, in so delectable a situation, and make it a Paradise. In his woods grows the native English Chesnut spontaneously. P. Collinson, F.R.S."

This latter information was found because the book had been published on the internet after being in such places as the Linnaean Society and Bodleian Library for many years. Hence we re-dated the mansion or its first incarnation to 1762 though we know later alterations or rebuilding took place.

Eric had recorded that most of the land constituting the public park was originally in the Foxgrove Manor and that Cator had some land in 1766 but he had no knowledge of Collinson's comment about the house. We recently conducted on-line research into several archives including Kent Archives (KA) and the British Library (BL). In the BL we found the original Foxgrove Manor 1766 estate plan and a plan for the Beckenham Manor 1768 and by luck when the documents were shown to us the folio included a 1776 updated Foxgrove plan and other plans relating to it.

We deduced from the plans and Collinson's remarks that Cator had some land around and near the mansion by 1766 but most of the park land in Foxgrove was owned by Jones Raymond and some by Lord Bolingbroke. The latter also owned Beckenham Manor. Another plan in the folio of land belonging to Mrs Amy Burrell and Foxgrove Farm of 1777 shows she owned fields called Pill Crofts and Hop Ground which are adjacent to the mansion and which would not have been part of a park in 1773 /77 but probably were by 1785 when Cator moved the road to the route of the current Beckenham Hill Road/Southend Road and was able to put gatehouses at either end of the 'Old' Road.

We are recording all these findings and others in our website history, which we hope will enlighten others and maybe bring forth more information.

The map below is part of the 1776 Foxgrove plan showing the area of the park. This part is essentially the same as the 1766 plan but easier to read. The "Road from Beckenham to Lewisham" is the road through the modern day park. The mansion is on the other side of the road from the "L" in LEWISHAM.

Land is encircled in yellow on the original showing it belongs to the Raymond/Burrells. Mr Cator has plots either side of Pill Crofts and we know that the lower areas next to Morrisswood East are divided by a strip owned by Bolingbroke though leased to someone else. At this time Cator may have owned Morrisswood East and West but not confirmed by records—yet.

The land marked Earl of Rockingham may have come into Cator's possession later in 1788 by a purchase document seen by Pat Manning at the Kent archive. She also recorded a 1795 purchase from the Forsters of Southend mentioning land adjoining "Morrices Wood". Pat is another local historian. She wrote The Cators of Beckenham and Wricklemarsh which we recommend for reading. Parts of the mansion have revealed alterations of unknown or questionable date. But now we are reasonably sure that the Cator may not have acquired all the park until between 1777 and 1788 and some parts perhaps as late as 1795, but had started to acquire land as early as 1757.



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Report on Recent Events

January 28th

BIRD WALK.

A good sized group of 13 assembled and Dave da Silva led us to all the varying habitats for birds in park. The weather was good with clear blue sunny skies, a dry light but fresh wind and a reasonable temperature of 9 degrees centigrade. Nothing outstanding, like a Golden Eagle! I wish, but nice to see the usual residents and visitors still here. Below a list of those seen and/or heard.

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Mallard | Great cormorant | Jay |
| Kestrel | Moorhen | Starling |
| Black headed gull | Common gull | Jackdaw |
| Herring gull | Rock dove | Magpie |
| Stock dove | Wood pigeon | Chaffinch |
| Collared dove | Rose-ringed parakeet | Nuthatch |
| Green woodpecker | Great spotted woodpecker | Goldfinch |
| Grey wagtail | Wren | Great tit |
| Dunnock | Robin | Blue tit |
| Blackbird | Song thrush | Coal tit |
| Redwing | Mistle thrush | Treecreeper |
| Goldcrest | Long-tailed tit | House sparrow |
| Greenfinch | Carrion crow | |

February 15th

ST GEORGE'S CHURCHYARD, BECKENHAM

This was a very interesting walk finding the Cator tombs and those of several of the tenants of Beckenham Place. There were surprisingly several graves for faithful servants. One for Joseph Cator's gardener William Arlott, for thirty years service. Most of his work would have been at Clockhouse, Josephs house, between Beckenham and Penge. It hadn't been intended but as the church is always open, another interesting hour was spent looking at the memorials inside. We do this walk every so often so if you are interested look out for next one or just go and wander around on your own.

March 19th

KNOW YOUR PARK WALK

Mal Mitchell led this walk to inform people of some of the history, flora and fauna. of the park. It was enjoyed by those that came along, with one accolade to the walk leader by one of the walkers who said if it had been boring he would have switched on his reggae music!.....He didn't.

Lewisham Local History Society.

Programme of talks for this quarter. Meetings are held on **Fridays** at Methodist Church Hall, Albion Way, SE13. Starting at **7.45pm.** Visitors welcome. Full access for people with disabilities. Light refreshments and time for questions.

April 28th

All about "The Lieutenancy"

Colonel Jane Davis OBE QVRM TD DL RGN

May 26th

The Crofton Park Story

Carol Harris

June 30th

Gaseous Goings On

Dr Mary Mills

More information: www.lewishamhistory.org.uk

Bromley Borough Local History Society.

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 for a nominal charge of £1.

Meetings are **1st Tuesday of the month** unless otherwise stated.

April 4th AGM & Not Forgotten: V2 attack on Crooked Billet, Bickley
Jennie Randall

May 2nd A Golfer & an Artist: Origins of Queens Hospital, Sidcup
Dr Adrian Thomas

June 6th Recent Work at Knole House
Nathan Cohen

July 4th Mr Guy's Hospital and the Carribean
Jane Bowden-Dan

August No Meeting

More information: www.blhs.org.uk

**This article from Alison Taylor—Lewisham’s Project Manager
Tree planting**

The GLA awarded us some funding for us to get ahead with tree planting and plant new areas of woodland this year. 11,000 new whips (small woodland trees) have been planted in the park, creating ~2.8 hectares of new woodland! All species planted are native and include oak, sweet chestnut, field maple, rowan, small leaved lime, hazel, and hawthorn. Woodlands are home to more wildlife than any other habitat in Britain. Large numbers of new trees also help to combat air pollution in London, which is why the GLA were keen to fund this planting.

Thanks so much to all the volunteers who turned up to plant trees too. We held 3 very successful tree planting mornings, in which we planted 1500 trees. What a team!

Most of the new trees in the park have been planted in straight lines. Although at this stage this does not look so natural, planting in straight lines makes the future management of a woodland much more efficient, and gives all the trees the best possible chance of survival. Planted trees need aftercare to establish successfully. One important job is controlling plants around them to reduce competition. Gaps of a regular size between trees make mowing around them easier. Then, when it is time to thin out some of the trees, to allow the strongest to thrive and reach maturity, the gaps allow larger machinery space to get into the woodland.

Equal spacing also means every tree has equal access to light, nutrients and water. This is vital in balancing competition between trees, achieving good survival and success across the plantation.

This design may look unnatural to start with, but as the trees develop and some are removed to allow others to thrive, the lines get less obvious.

Project progress

You may also be aware that studies have been carried out on the eastern side of the park by the Environment Agency to inform the technical design of the flood alleviation scheme which will prevent Catford and Lewisham town centres from flooding in the future. This scheme enables flood waters to be held in Beckenham Place Park in very high water conditions for a few days, before being released

downstream. It is envisaged that the flood gates on the river, causing water to back up in the park, will only closed around once or twice a decade.

The design team of heritage and landscape architects to work on the project from this point forwards are currently being appointed. Alison is also working closely with the Environment Agency to progress more detailed designs for the eastern side of the park in conjunction with the flood storage scheme.

Your involvement

Do come and enjoy the park as the weather warms up. The daffodils are in full bloom and the bluebells will soon create a woodland carpet in parts of summerhouse hill wood. Why not get your wellies on and have a paddle in the Ravensbourne too? (though not in the rain as the water can rise quickly – stick to puddles if it’s wet!)

We have plans with the mansion house for a summer programme of community events for you to enjoy. Watch this space.

We’re also developing a volunteer programme for you to get stuck into over the coming months. We’ll publicise these things on social media, through the Friends newsletter and on park notice boards. Hope you can join us.

Mansion open day 29th April - Sydney is planning free taster sessions in yoga/pilates, sewing and art workshops, a vintage market, a food and produce market, open art studios plus soul supper and dance night in the evening. Contact (Sydney) directly either on 07791 609 971 or sydney@beckenhamplace.org

A LOCAL ODDITY. Tucked away in a leafy 1960s housing estate in Sydenham, the spire of St Antholin's Church, a Wren church originally in Watling St, in London, pokes through the rooftops. A curious local landmark it was rescued by Robert Harrild who was rich enough to afford to buy it for £5 and convinced contractors to both dismantle the spire piece by piece and relocate it to his garden in Round Hill in 1829. Though Harrild's garden is now long gone, the spire remains.

More: www.informationssociety.co.uk and other sites

