

FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK



January 2021 – NEWSLETTER No. 90

From the Chair

In the January edition of our Friends newsletter, I would normally be telling you about all the exciting events we have planned for the year. But of course, everything is so far from normal at the moment.

This has been a very difficult time for everyone, and the Friends are no exception.

The year got off to a horrible start with our being evicted from the Visitor Centre in the Mansion. We only just managed to move the collection into safe storage before the first lockdown.

We were told to move because RJK wanted to use the Visitor Centre room as a downstairs office. Eleven months on, the VC room remains unused.

Promises were made that alternative premises within in the park would be explored by the Council. Eleven months on, nothing has happened.

We haven't given up, and when a degree of normality returns to life in this country, this will be pursued with vigour.

The Friends of Beckenham Place Park will continue to exist and to maintain its aims of protecting the park and its wildlife. As soon as allowed we will resume our regular programme of guided walks.

Please stay safe, remain healthy and be kind to each other.

And of course, continue to enjoy our wonderful park as much as possible.

Until we meet again in 2021.

Contact details:

Email: bpp.friends@hotmail.co.uk

Website: www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk

AGM

As stated previously the AGM has been suspended for this year, in view of Covid-19 restrictions. Year end accounts for the Friends are published on the last page of this newsletter. Membership will continue to be free this year.

Events programme All events are suspended for the time being.

VISITOR CENTRE NEWS

Visitor Centre Still closed - no news yet from Lewisham council re. a replacement site.

WILDLIFE NEWS

Lockdown observations of a Friend

The park and woodland have certainly been enhancing peoples' lives during Lockdown and many of the woodland walks have been edged by fallen branches to discourage bikes and footfall leaving the pathways. The parks staff and volunteers have continually cared for the pretty gardens, as have the Friends in the sensory garden, and it has been pleasant to sit with a drink or pizza from the Homestead. A small orchard with wattle fence has sprung up near the gardens.

Wildfowl have settled into the lake and raised families and the reed beds have flourished, now giving cover to many of the ducks, who seem to successfully survive amongst the human swimmers. We have had the thrill of a family of hobbies, now hopefully well settled back in Africa for our winter.

Lewisham Council now charge £2 an hour for parking, which is a travesty. Consequently surrounding roads have felt the blow of cars and yellow lines.

After Consultations, they are preparing designs for the east side of the park, although many members of the public enjoy the change to open scenery the other side of the railway line.

Periods of heavy rain have caused the lake to overflow into the wetland and from the runnel across the old golf course, which has been flooded after attempts to contain any water in underground piping, which was supposed to prevent 'polluted' water entering the lake.

This area quickly becomes swampland, beloved of dogs and children, as it is fed by underground springs. It reminds me of King Canute - Nature rules!

It is unfortunate that all Friends Events have had to be cancelled this year due to the virus but there are plenty of opportunities for all visitors to explore and discover for themselves.

Ancient Pond update

As the newsletter goes to press in late December, we are very close to finishing the Ancient Pond regeneration project. The signboards have been put up (one on interpretation, and another with safety information), and the litter bin has been delivered and is about to be installed by the Southend Lodge parks team. When that is done, we will whizz round and photograph everything, submit the pictures to Veolia and they (so they tell us) will confirm the project is complete!

The azolla infestation mentioned in the last newsletter is still of some concern, but the situation is far better than it was in the summer, and it is fair to say those weevils have done a sterling job of chomping through what at one point looked like a completely solid carpet of weeds. However, we have been told that ongoing attention may be needed, so it will be important to work with LB Lewisham to make sure it doesn't get out of control in the future.

Overall it is very gratifying when visiting the park to see how many people are now enjoying the pond and all the different ways they do so. There are individuals in quiet contemplation on the path-side benches, or seated on the ground even in winter; friends meeting for coffee or a picnic lunch; parents pointing out features in the water or on the banks to their children; and even fitness instructors getting their clients to do bunny-hops on the backless benches or leg raises against the rope barrier! The only difficulty is resisting the urge to rush forward and ask people not to throw sticks in... but I guess you can't have everything.

We are also very much looking forward to seeing all the vegetation planted last summer take hold and give us a really good display in the spring, as well as providing an increasingly rich habitat for wildlife, as the pond generally settles into this new phase of its long life. Perhaps we should begin some kind of multi-year species survey, taking 2021 as a baseline?

SENSORY GARDEN

The Sensory Wildlife Garden was established circa 2011 with funding from The Big Lottery and Groundwork Trust attracted through the Friends of Beckenham Place Park in partnership with Lewisham Council. The old rose garden was identified as the most suitable place as that garden had become overgrown and the lavender and rose bushes were past their best.

Over the years we have had both some regular volunteers and some 'turnover' of volunteers who have put in sterling work maintaining the garden.

The recent Covid restrictions have prevented some maintenance work but we have been able to resume workdays for the past few months observing the various precautions. The suspension of workdays for the spring and summer

months allowed some plants to become a bit overgrown but visitors to the garden still complement the volunteers on the appearance of the garden. It is gradually being brought back under control and some plants will need a severe haircut.

The aim is for there to be something to look at all times of the year whether the plants are in flower or gone to seed or just a foliage feature.

New volunteers are welcome and can contact us via bpp.friends@hotmail.com we mostly organise workdays via email but can phone contact volunteers if we have their number. No experience is necessary and full guidance can be given along with tools and equipment supplied for use in the garden. We started with beds designated for the senses touch, smell, sight and sound but as plants often appeal to more than one sense the theme is loosely adhered to.

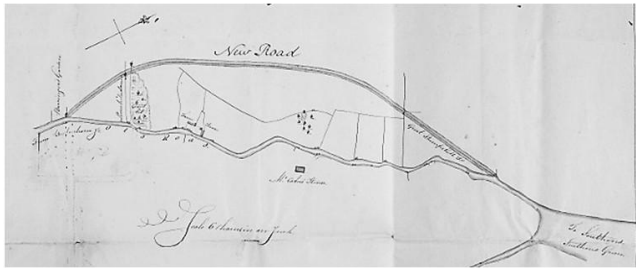
Plants that appeal to pollinating insects are chosen and we have frogs, bank voles and wood mice living in the garden. Birds get food from some of the plants that go to seed or find grubs and insects and find nesting material. Log piles and bug hotels encourage invertebrates as both pollinators and food for birds, frogs and small mammals.

The Ancient Pond (history)

Park visitors who have seen the ancient pond about 50 metres or so away from the front of the mansion and read the new signage may be intrigued by the image of the old map. We have unravelled the creation of Beckenham Place Park from the earliest times through many remaining records and the accounts of various historians and put it on the Friends website. Along the way some errors, corrections and additions to the record have been found.

There are several questions remaining which arise due to the absence of records and the presence of before and after situations. One such situation is the existence of a farm which was centred on buildings very close to the gates at the southern end of the driveway through the park, probably on the site of the house which until recently was called Tudor Manor but is now demolished and replaced by a few new houses.

The park driveway was of course the old main road between Beckenham and Southend which Cator diverted in 1785 to the new route of Southend Road/Beckenham Hill Road although it was then called Great Stumpshill Road or turnpike.



Map courtesy of Kent Archive, Maidstone.

The farm buildings existed when John Cator acquired the property and the maps of Foxgrove Manor from 1766 and Beckenham Manor 1768 appear to show a gap between those two manors similar to the footprint of the farm. The farm is most clearly shown on the road diversion plan of 1785 consisting of buildings, a few fields on the west side of the old road and the pond. The boundary of Beckenham Manor followed the edge of the woodland on Stumps Hill. These three extracts from the maps and plans hopefully illustrate the extent of the two manors and the interposed farm.



image from the British Library.

Some aerial photos reveal the remains of field boundary ditches but some of those are now obscured by the spreading of spoil from the car park excavation over the surface of Stumps Hill. The gravel pit shown on the map can be traced as a few houses in a site sunken along the private road. The park mansion is by the 'k' in Beckenham. And the farm is the two ranges of buildings left of the 'B'

We do have some un-reconciled references regarding Stumps Hill but can't be certain that they refer to the farm. An early reference in Lewisham Parish records a benefit to the church related to property on Stumps Hill which seems to cease when the landowner changed.

Cator is recorded as acquiring land at Southend and Stumps Hill in 1757 but the description is vague and the landowner selling to Cator was Valentine who had the Green Man at Southend and other property. The 1759 Private Act of Parliament which Cator, Burrell and Raymond petitioned to allow some exchanges of property might mention the 'messuage' or farm but again we cannot be certain. The Act states that "John Cator acquires Lower field, Middle, Upper and Pond field, Barne Field and Orchard field let to Thomas Watford". It is possible to apply those names to the field pattern shown on the 1785 road diversion plan. Some records in Bromley archives relate to Watford occupying land which belongs to the Pugh family in the early 18th C. (1721/1746) and it's possible that either Burrell or Raymond acquired that land from Pugh and exchanged it with Cator.



A modern aerial view

The jury is still out but suffice it to say the farm is one of Beckenham's unsolved mysteries. It is usual for local historians to mention Foxgrove

Farm, Langley Farm and a few others but the number of farms and farmsteads which were often parts of estates leased out to tenants is so far not fully ascertained and was a substantial number probably because it depended upon how much land a family could easily cultivate or how much livestock they could manage. Although no records have come to light, Cator probably had tenants or staff managing his growing estate which we now know began at Stumps Hill in 1760 and grew by degrees right up to 1793 and his land holdings generally increased right up to his death in 1806. In his will he mentions land at Addington ‘recently purchased’.

With thanks to Mal Mitchell.

For those Friends who are also members of BBLHS Mal will be giving a talk on The Manor of Foxgrove and Beckenham ,via Zoom, on 5th January 2021.

Thoughts of a Park lover

It is the view of many people that the amount of money spent on the artificial lake, fenced off and guarded, for a small niche audience of outdoor swimmers, could have been better spent on quality landscaping e.g. the existing ornamental garden was not transformed into the much trumpeted 18th Century themed pleasure ground (I’m pretty certain they did not have crazy paving in the 18th Century). More importantly, a network of good quality new paths could have been provided, instead of the quickly degraded, rutted ones with which we have ended up. Pre-existing paths, neglected, crumbling and degraded for decades, could have been repaired – but continue to crack and crumble even more. However, Ivory Towers knew best.

It remains to be seen how the operation of the fake lake turns out long term, especially when the infrastructure of pumps, filters, liner etc starts to break down. The ropes to the jetty have already had to be replaced. The cheapest option and/or cutting corners was counter-productive.

F of BPP

Balance Sheet at Close 31/3/2020

	2018/2019	2019/2020
Opening balances		
bank	£12,287.25	£11,720.69
cash	£56.08	£176.14
Total	£12,343.33	£11,896.83
Credits		
Membership Subscriptions	£0.00	£0.00
Donations	£255.19	£225.62
Sales	£0.00	
Grants (Ancient pond)	£0.00	£34,775.00
bank interest	£6.04	£6.48
sub total credits	£261.23	£35,007.10
Debits		
Insurance & Membership of T.C.V.	£111.72	£111.72
Equipment and materials & web host	£70.75	£209.98
Newsletters/stationery	£273.26	£20.29
Grants (Ancient pond)		£32,901.60
Sensory Garden(paid from Grant monies)	£89.00	£624.27
Donations & A.G.M.	£163.00	£175.00
sub total debits	£707.73	£34,042.86
Closing balances	£11,896.83	£12,861.07
Bank accounts	£11,720.69	£12,802.58
Cash	£176.14	£96.37
Total	£11,896.83	£12,898.95
net income(credits-debits)	-£446.50	£986.34
Liabilities		
of which related to sensory garden	-£3,897.44	-£2,987.70
Veolia Trust (Ancient pond)	£0.00	-£1,873.40
Reserves	£7,999.39	£8,038.55

Websites of Interest

Lewisham Local History Society www.lewishamhistory.org.uk

Bromley Local History www.bblhs.org.uk

Ravensbourne Valley Preservation Society www.rvpsbromley.org

We recommend reading the history of the park on the Friends website