

The Railway Comes to Lewisham

The coming of the railways transformed many areas all over Britain, but the first railway in London was in Lewisham and strangely had little effect on the development of the area. This was the London and Greenwich Railway and started on 8th February 1836 as a link between Deptford and Spa Road in Bermondsey. The following December it was extended into a two platform station at London Bridge. In the other direction a temporary terminus was opened in Greenwich on 24th December 1838. Due to objections from the Admiralty and Greenwich Observatory the through route beyond Greenwich didn't open for another forty years.

The brick viaduct supporting the line from Deptford to London Bridge is still the worlds longest brick structure with its 878 arches and construction caused a widespread brick shortage. The rail company had originally hoped to make the arches into housing, but the scheme was doomed to failure due to the noise and smoke generated by the steam engines of the time making dwellings an unsuitable use. They also leaked.

In the 1830s and 40's areas such as Lewisham were still largely rural, mainly populated by farms and villages, but many large landowners were selling off fields for speculative building development. This housing would still have been for the comparatively wealthy, able to afford substantial villas with large gardens.

Before the railways there was a network of daily horse-drawn coaches taking commuters to and from the City. This service reached Blackheath in 1834 and Lewisham by 1837, but the attraction of a faster and more direct train service must have been hard to resist.

The line that runs through Beckenham Place Park was constructed at a much later date. In 1879 John Cator of Woodbatwick Hall, Norfolk (remember Beckenham Place had been let to various tenants since 1826 when the Cator family seat moved to Norfolk), Sir John Farnaby of Wickham Court and the London, Chatham and Dover Railway proposed building a railway along the Ravensbourne Valley to encourage lucrative housing construction near this new link. After a great deal of wrangling including a rejected parliamentary bill in 1884, finally in August 1889 construction was undertaken by 'Shortlands and Nunhead Railway Company', completed in 1892 and passenger services started in the July of that year.

References: Archive material from the late Eric Inman, www.kentrail.co.uk/catford.htm, and various other archive materials

NEWSLETTER 53

Autumn: October 1st - December 31st 2009

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



Sunday 11th October. Friend's AGM
Meet in the mansion at 2.00pm. The chairman will be able to tell us of the results and subsequent action of recent consultations carried out on behalf of Lewisham Council, the owners of the park and all it's buildings.

Wednesday 11th November. Trip to the Cator Family's Tomb.
Meet on the steps of the mansion 1.30pm. The tomb is in the graveyard of St George's church, Beckenham. The walk will be circular taking in a short stroll through the BPP woodland, but will involve some stretches of road walking. There are other interesting burials in the church yard worth a look.

Tuesday 1st December. Short Winter Walk
Meet at the mansion 1.30pm. Just a friendly walk around the park before winter arrives with no particular theme.

All through December there will be mince pies and light refreshments in the visitor centre for anyone who comes along to mark the festive season.

Conservation Workdays on Saturdays 10th Oct, 7th Nov and 12th Dec.
Meet on the mansion steps at 9.30am. Please try to be on time Only light work is carried out, no tree felling and we usually only work for a couple of hours. Gloves, 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. Dogs are welcome, if kept under control. 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.

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Website: www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk

A few reminiscences from a South London 'ex-pat'.

One of our long term 'Friends' moved to Norfolk a few years ago but still keeps in touch as a member and on the email.

She writes to tell us of another Tulip tree (*liriodendron tulipifera*), a large specimen at the corner of Madiera Road and Bromley Avenue. When she lived in Oaklands Road she found stag beetles every year and saw bats by the Ravensbourne river in the park and flying passed her flat windows!

Although it is not strictly our area this tale of Crystal Palace really sounds a great adventure. She says 'my parents had a dog when we moved to Anerley in 1947. We quickly got to know the area, especially the Crystal Palace grounds, which were overgrown and not open to the public. (By trespassing, we 'discovered' the prehistoric monsters completely overgrown by water plants and 'found' the deserted terraces with fallen statues, which had once been the glory of this historic place). I was a founder member of The Crystal Palace Society, but they discontinued my membership when I moved to Bromley! We also 'discovered' a length of the Croydon Canal, which is preserved for history and runs along the northern end of Betts Park (which is between Anerley Road and Croydon Road) and Seymour Villas. There is a plaque to mark this.'

Thanks Barb for these and the other memories.

Crystal Palace park has quite recently renovated the prehistoric dinosaur statues along with their lake setting. Although they are not now thought to be particularly accurate depictions of these creatures they are still very striking and well worth a visit.

Some More Memories...

This time it is a memory from a lady that lived at no 2 The Homesteads in the park, between 1947 and 1960. Her father was the Head Greenkeeper and she said one hot, dry summer, either 1947 or 1949, as the golfers still expected good greens, he resorted to using the Ancient pond for water. She says the petrol driven pump was thumping away for days or weeks and although the water level got lower and lower it didn't run dry. (We still don't know how deep it really is today)

She also remembers the mulberry tree which was about 12 foot high at the time annually bearing a tremendous amount of fruit enjoyed by the twelve children that lived in the Homesteads then.

Happy childhood memories, thank you very much ladies.

Recent Events Report

Litter Pick Walk. Thursday 9th July. This was a necessary job and a small band set out with gloves, litter pickers and black sacks. The weather was fine and although short on numbers, about sixteen large black bin liners of rubbish were recycled. Many thanks to all the volunteers.

Evening Stroll. Wednesday 12th August. This was a super evening not great weather as it was drizzly and humid, but we were a jolly little group wandering about the park chatting and hoping to see a few bats. It was quite dark by the end of the walk. After we had split up and said our goodbyes to everyone, on our way home trudging through Stumpshill Wood a lone bat did flit in and out of the woodland beside the golf course. These bats are just not reading the newsletter!

Green Chain walking Festival. Tuesday 15th September. Now let's be clear... we did not pick this day...we were asked to lead this walk for the festival. It was very wet and breezy though not particularly cold and surprisingly about sixty people turned up to avail themselves of a free Green Chain Walk hat and a choice of three walks. The walks offered were of varying lengths, long, medium and short. The Friends led a medium walk for about an hour and a half with a few stops to impart a bit of BPP history. There were about 20 people in our group and we needed reinforcements with Beryl's very able assistance as a back marker. Everyone seemed to ignore the inclement weather and said at the end how much they had enjoyed our walk.

Thanks to everyone who participated and to Margaret and Roger for opening the Visitor Centre all morning. Special thanks to Mark, Green Chain Walk Project Officer and Michael, a Bromley Healthy Walks leader, for organising this very successful and enjoyable event.

New Signage for the Park.

Just a quick update to say this is underway. It may be some weeks or months, but it is definitely going to happen.

Volunteer Help.

Jordon, the coordinator of the school visits to the park, has been arranging for large groups (adults) to tidy up various areas. The rockery at the end of formal gardens has been cleared already. There are plans to have a sensory garden, the site hasn't been settled yet but these volunteers will be doing the work and the Friends will be getting involved too. More details as they come to us.

Ladywell Fields, Past and Future.

Ladywell Fields is now a linear park following the Ravensbourne as it leaves Lewisham town centre. The land, about 19 hectares, (now 22 hectares), was bought in 1889 by the Lewisham Board of Works and the London County Council with a view to using it as a recreational area. Although in 1887 photos taken of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee show crowds lining the river banks and paddling in the water pools. It was then an area of water meadows taking up floodwaters when necessary. Instead of seeing this as a positive feature, the fields were drained, landscaped and the river channel straightened and enlarged. In a photograph of 1905 many sheep can be seen happily grazing on the short grass beside the 'tamed' Ravensbourne.

Ladywell Fields is now part of the Water Link Way which follows the river Ravensbourne from Beckenham Place Park to the Thames. Ladywell Fields is now to be enhanced in several ways. The river is to be broken out of its concrete straightjacket and a natural channel, with access to the waters edge, created. A large sunken lawn with tiered steps down to provide significant floodwater storage. Flowering meadow areas and an orchard with bulb planting is to be created. Board walks, wider paths to accommodate both cyclists and pedestrians, new bridges, new lighting and street furniture, a new children's playground, a new football pitch and upgraded tennis courts (hope they do a better job than the tennis courts in Beckenham Place!) are all highlighted as key improvements. Some tree and scrub removal will be necessary to enhance the riverside ecology and improve river views. However more trees will be planted than felled. The work is scheduled to begin in May 2010 and be completed in March 2011. To see the plans and illustrations go to www.lewisham.gov.uk/ladywellfields.

The clock seems to have gone full circle with many of these changes, more access to the water, using grassland for flood relief, ring any bells? Lets hope it is a worthwhile scheme and fulfils all its promises.

References:

Lewisham Life, September 2009. Free monthly magazine from Lewisham Council.

Nature Conservation in Lewisham, Ecology Handbook 30, by John Archer and Ian Yarham. (Still about the best book ever produced on Lewisham's nature, history and geology.)

Snake in the Park

This summer a snake was reported in the park. It was down on the football pitches on Summerhouse Field. Snakes will usually keep out of your way and will only bite if accidentally disturbed.

30 years ago in 1979

One of our sharp-eyed members spotted this item in Friday July 10th edition of the South London Press.

'Two amateur metal-detectorists were quids-in after unearthing buried cutlery in Beckenham Place Park. The two were told by the Southwark Coroner that they could keep the haul of Georgian silverware as a reward for handing it in. police said the booty was probably buried in the park by a burglar 150 years earlier.' Very interesting.

Motorbikes in the Park

The menace of the motorbikes seems to be reappearing (if it ever really went away). A park user has emailed us to report on their antics and we have passed it on to council officers and the police at Bellingham, so the Community Support Officer will have been alerted. The subject will be brought up at the next Working Party Meeting on 12th November. If you have anything you might like raised at the meeting do get in touch by letter, email, phone or carrier pigeon.

The 'Wonderful' Composting Scheme.

The rate of vehicles dumping waste from other parks in the middle of our lovely park has increased as this is the time of the year when there is much cutting down of shrubbery and collecting of leaves. Please take extra care, especially if you have a dog, on the paths used by Glendale's trucks as there are several bends along the route.

Farmers Markets in Lewisham.

There are several of these in Lewisham borough. They are held on specific days of the month.

1st Saturday Manor House Gardens

2nd Saturday Hilly Fields / Ladywell Fields / Forest Hill

3rd Saturday Telegraph Hill

Every Sunday Blackheath

There are **street markets** too selling a wide range of goods.

Lewisham every day for fruit, vegetables and general goods

Catford Broadway, Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday

Deptford market runs along the High Street selling a variety of goods on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. **Douglas Way**, off the High Street, is open the same days selling new and second-hand goods.

Excerpt from Consultation Appraisal of the Mansion, Beckenham Place

From a larger document for reference in the Visitor Centre or check on our website.

12. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 General Conclusions

The future of the Mansion and the securing of a potential partner are complex issues and evidence from elsewhere suggests that they may not be easily resolved. It is important that the Council develops a strategy that is firmly rooted in the reality of what the Mansion has to offer and the challenges it will need to meet in finding a partner who is prepared to invest substantial sums in the building on terms that are satisfactory to the Council. Any marketing exercise for the Mansion will need to be set in the following context.

The Mansion is a unique property which does not fit neatly into any specific market profile. It is extremely rare for such a property to be placed on the market and there are no useful recent precedents for the Council to follow in determining its market strategy.

The Mansion's uniqueness creates both strengths and weaknesses for any marketing strategy

In marketing the Mansion to external partners, the Council will have to make a number of decisions about the parameters it wishes to set for future use and associated decisions about the future design and use of the park

It is impossible to predict any specific market response and although the Council may wish to place constraints on any future offers, it also needs to make any marketing process as open as possible in order to attract a wide range of interest

Experience at park historic houses elsewhere and the advice of property consultants suggests that the Mansion will attract interest

Some offers may well be conditional upon the Council's response to a number of factors some of which are identified in Section 8 of the appraisal. The process of evaluation and selection may be lengthy and complex.

The Council's willingness to invest its own funds in the Mansion may be a key factor and would almost certainly widen the field of prospective partners and increase the Council's ability to impose conditions on any partnership agreement

The current market is difficult for a project that will rely on significant levels of investment. There may be an argument for a delay in any marketing exercise until the market has improved. However, at the same time there is an urgency for action to be taken and a danger that delay will see further increase in costs for remedial work.

Some short term progress may be made through reintroducing the upper ground floor rooms for hire and making some improvements to the cafe. The capacity for a short term solution will depend heavily on the anticipated time-span before a long term solution is found and the

Council's ability and willingness to make some short term investment.

12.2 Recommendations

In the context of the conclusions above it is recommended that the Council

Define a package of works to the house which will form the core of any proposal and whose cost will represent the minimum funding required for any future plan.

Respond, as far as it is able, to the necessary decisions in Section 10 of the appraisal and in doing so define the parameters and tolerances for any proposal for the Mansion

Carry out an initial testing of the market by inviting outline proposals on a basis which offers interested parties considerable scope to present a wide range of ideas

Analyse the results of the initial market testing before committing itself to any further course of action allowing the Council to keep its options open as long as possible

In effect the Council is advised to take a staged approach with the above representing Stage1 after which the Council will need to further review on the basis of what it has learned about the market before deciding on future stages.

13. NEXT STEPS

In order to progress the recommendations in Section 12 above, the following action will be required:-

1. Set a detailed timetable for the Stage 1 actions in Section '12 above and an outline timetable to finalise the process and appoint an external partner
2. Define the parameters within which offers will be invited
3. Create a brief for prospective partners
4. Develop a process for the launch and distribution of the brief, the receipt of offers and their evaluation in the market evaluation and the receipt and evaluation of offers. Currell's have suggested the following launch strategy:

Preparation of a two page colour brochure with photographs, plans and a templated website with up to 6 pages.

Mail out to the top 500 Commercial Agents and Chartered Surveyors in Central London for their retained clients

Quarter page advertisement in Country Life magazine

Half page advertisement in the Estate Gazette

Editorial where possible in local and national newspapers such as Bricks Mortar in the Times

5. Decide whether or not the Council wishes to manage the above marketing process itself or to engage outside agents. It is estimated that the costs of the actions in 4 above via external agents would be around £6,000.

AGM (Sunday 11th October 2.00pm in the mansion)

At the AGM a fuller report on this document will be given by the Chairman. There will be a chance to ask questions.