

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.

January 27th London before London Jon Cotton

February 24th Christopher Marlowe Barbara Wooding
from the Marlowe Society

March 30th A G M (speaker to be confirmed)

VENUE CHANGE for AGM. Civic Suite, Lewisham Town Hall

The Rivers and People Project.

This project runs a great many exciting events. For more information and to join the mailing list email the project officer,

Chris.McGaw@Lewisham.gov.uk or phone 07850 713 974.

All events are free and most don't require booking.

Mansion Access. Sometimes the mansion cannot be accessed at short notice due to bad weather/maintenance/cafe closure etc, for indoor events, you may like to check with us on one of the links on page one. As many of you will remember the mansion was used last summer for filming scenes for a Tim Burton movie; in the week before Christmas the BBC used the Mansion for a some scenes in a Stephen Poliakoff film (You may remember his last play on television Shooting the Past 1999). The Visitor Centre could not open on Sunday 18th December due to preparation for filming, we hope nobody had a wasted journey (unlikely!), but we only found out days before.

More on Jubilee Trees of the Past.....

See: www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/jubilee-woods/about/Pages/royal-record.aspx.

This website displays a digitised book showing tree plantings celebrating George V's Jubilee and Beckenham Place is listed as is Blyth Hill and other sites. Only the species planted are recorded and we believe it is the avenue of oaks along the entrance drive which were planted.

There is reference to Black Walnut but no one seems to know of it, so presume it must have perished.

NEWSLETTER 62

Winter: January 1st - March 31st 2012

Wishing everyone Happy New Year



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

Wednesday 25th January WINTER WALK

Meet 1.30pm outside Mansion. A walk around the usual haunts, river, woods and fields.

Saturday 18th February BIRD WALK

Meet 9.30am on the mansion steps. This is a little later in the year than usual as it is the first available date for our walk leader, but will no doubt be just as enjoyable and interesting.

Saturday March 17th ALONG THE RAVENSBOURNE

Meet 10.00am at Crab Hill entrance, near Ravensbourne rail station. See page 2 for details

Saturday 21st April BLUEBELL WALK

Meet 11.00am meet on the Mansion steps. Come and join Nick on an informative trip through the bluebells in BPP's ancient woodland.

CONSERVATION WORKDAYS

Saturdays Jan 14th, Feb 11th and Mar 10th.

Meet on the mansion steps at 10.00am. There may be more work to do in the Sensory Garden. 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.

THE FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK, THE SECRETARY,
18 GREYCOT ROAD, BECKENHAM, KENT BR3 1TA. TEL: 020 8325 8781

E-MAIL: bpp.friends@ntlworld.com

Website: www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk

Along the Ravensbourne. Saturday 17th March. Approx 2 hours.

This walk is mainly outside the park and towards Bromley. We have made it circular, but there will be exit points to buses and trains for anyone wanting to leave en route. The walk will include Queensmead, Church House Gardens and the old millpond at Glassmill Lane. The return by a different route should incorporate Elstree Hill and Warren Avenue playing fields. Some of the route is along roads but there are several green spaces and some historical interest. Hope this is not too vague! Do come along and join us as we venture beyond Beckenham Place.

Sensory Garden Update.

Volunteer groups from the Buddhist group who meet in the park and the Friends have dug-over several beds in the sensory garden as preparation for planting. A water leak under one of the paths has finally been repaired allowing the contractors to complete work to pathways and edging around flower beds. The disability/wheelchair ramp is complete and plans are in hand for acquiring plants.

The intention is for the project to involve volunteers and groups. The Friends are initially adopting two 'quarters' of the flower bed area. The beds will generally be 'themed' to each sense: Scent, Touch, Sound, Sight, Taste., but there will be a certain amount of plants that have the attributes of several senses. The bird table has been put up and plants that are helpful to wildlife are also contenders for a place in the garden as well as features such as bird boxes and log piles for insects.

The park gardeners are of course involved and will be re-turfing the surrounds of the beds and planting up the central circular area.

A Volunteer Gardening Team from FBPP will need to be set up. We don't know yet exactly how much there will be to do. If you think you might like to regularly or occasionally join in, perhaps you would let us have your telephone number/email address so that we can set up a list of willing volunteers. This does not commit anyone to putting in hours of hard labour or pin them down to specific days, but some kind of organization will be needed to make this community project work.

Ancient Woodland.

In Beckenham Place Park the woodland is described as 'ancient woodland' this is land that has been continuously wooded since 1600AD (1750AD in Scotland). There are two types of ancient woodland: **ancient, semi-natural woodlands**, which are those areas that have a continuous cover of native trees and other plants. The second type is **plantation on ancient-woodland sites**, where the dominant tree species are non-native. The term 'semi-natural' acknowledges that these woods have been managed through their history and do not have a natural structure. It would seem our piece probably comes into the second category, but this is probably a topic to take up with our woodland expert **Nick on the Bluebell Walk, Saturday 21st April, 11.00am from the mansion.**

There are other woodland definitions, **Primary woodland** is considered 'primary' if it has existed continuously since before the original forests in that district were fragmented. **Secondary woodland** is considered secondary when it originated on unwooded land. **Recent woodland** is an area of land that has become wooded since 1600AD.

These definitions are quite specific and may seem unnecessarily complicated, but to preserve these dwindling areas from unsuitable development and encroachment, they need these 'labels' to safeguard them.

In BPP our own tiny precious space is at the moment falling prey to more and wider 'desire' lines. A desire line is a path created off a main path through the plants on the woodland floor. In the park they fragment the small area of woodland more and more and the bluebells won't grow through the compacted soil of these paths. It would be a shame to leave less and less bluebells and other plants for future generations to enjoy. Nature is having enough trouble adapting to climate change without assaults from careless use by humans.

Reference: British Wildlife. Vol. 23 Number 2 December 2011

Jubilee Woods. The Woodland Trust has an ambitious plan to plant a million garden trees nationwide to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee next year. You can be part of this by pledging to plant a tree. They will help you choose your tree and once it is planted you can add your story to their Royal Record. **Contact their woodland creation team on 0845 293 5689 or email jubilee-woods@woodlandtrust.org.uk**

Web: www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/jubilee-wood.

FBPP Recent Events Report.

Wednesday 26th October Up Spring and Down Woodland

The heavy morning rain stopped just before we set off in bright autumn sunshine ambling through BPP, then with more purpose through Downham Playing Fields. The 'up' spring hidden away but running parallel to Downham Way. Onwards and upwards to Durham Hill Fields with especially interesting (and totally unexpected) views across to Beckenham Place Park plus a full view of the Mansion.

Walking downward along the full length of the Downham Woodland Walk (another hidden gem) and back into BPP, the drizzle threatened to return. Back to the mansion via the railway bridge in time to see an old steam train puffing towards London. Our two and a half hour walk with sun, showers, rainbows and big light wide skies was quite magical. With good company and interesting conversation it was a very enjoyable afternoon.

Sunday 20th November History Walk

A well attended walk on a fairly dull day. We visited the site of Home Farm and looked at how the landscape might have appeared pre golf course and when the lake was still full. We also speculated on the development of the Mansion building as various features indicate substantial changes over time. Thank you to everyone for coming along on such a dismal day.

Wednesday 7th December Mince Pie Walk

This was a nice little walk, very cold and extremely windy, amazing what some people will put up with for a mince pie. On the walk we covered most of the park including the river, which for the time of year was very low on water. Braving the winter chill we sat and had our drinks and mince pies on the benches near the Squirrel statue. Thanks to everyone that came along to take part in such a bracing walk in BPP.

Conservation Workdays. Saturday 8th Oct, 12th Nov and 10th Dec

These have been very well attended and everyone has worked very hard. The October work was on the gorse patch taking out bramble. The November stint was in the Sensory Garden digging over the beds. The December meeting was another old favourite—digging up rhododendrons in the woodland. A pat on the back for all the workers, everyone really got stuck in and a great deal was achieved. Many thanks, but no time to rest on your laurels, see you next year, loppers and spades at the ready!

Beckenham Place Community Trust (BPCT) Mansion Lease.

The Council decision about tenders for the management of the Mansion and now the inclusion of the stable block into the process has been postponed until sometime in January. The Trust is still willing to take on the management of buildings and work toward acquiring funding for restoration, conservation and future use of the Mansion. The Trust has plans for creating new income streams and managing the buildings with some emphasis on community activities.

Recent work to the Mansion roof funded by Lewisham and English Heritage seems to be nearing completion.

The Composting Scheme.

Well, since it's suspension and promise that it will not return, some modest funding has been acquired to purchase saplings for planting up most of the area and recovering woodland. The park staff will retain a small area for processing leaves and prunings from within the park but that should only occupy less than a quarter of the site. There is a deadline to meet so far as using the funding is concerned but we have had constructive meetings with park managers, Lewisham nature conservation staff and Glendale staff about the recovery of the area. The footpath called Willow Carr way should also be reinstated to allow a separate route from the gardens area to the bridge over the railway.

BPP FRIEND'S MEMBERSHIP.

It's that time of year again, no change in cost of membership this time, but it may have to be a topic for the AGM as stamp prices rise constantly. Sending the newsletter by email to those who have it may be a future option, but it could also lead to a drop in revenue as people may unintentionally forget to pay their membership. A subject for discussion during the year. Many thanks to you all for keeping the Friends going.

Any new members joining between October 1st and 31st December are deemed paid up for 2012, if you inadvertently get a membership form just ignore it as sometimes the 'editor and staff' are less than perfect.

Cost of Living—Eighteenth Century & Early Twentieth Century.

At this point in time the cost of living seems to be a popular topic of conversation and having recently come across two books that give insights into such costs in two different centuries, the idea for this short article was seeded.

The first book, Dr Johnson's London by Liza Picard, looks at every facet of life in Georgian London between 1740 and 1770, a time when John Cator was preparing to build or renovate the Mansion in Beckenham Place Park. John Cator was a timber merchant and businessman with premises at Mould Strand Wharf, the site of the present Tate Modern, prior to that Bankside power station, and probably did most of his business deals in the coffee houses, taverns, clubs and chocolate houses of the time. These acted in rather the same way the internet does today. Conducting business could be expensive as often there was the need to dress to impress, at least now with the internet often meeting face to face can be dispensed with.

There were 20 shillings to the pound and 12 pennies (d) to the shilling pre-decimalisation to give some idea of the worth of the money in the eighteenth century. A mans suit could cost £8, but a suit in velvet with gold braid could cost £23! A prosperous tradesman with a family, it was estimated, would need an income of £350 to cover his annual living expenses. The cost of keeping a pauper for a week was 5d –10d probably in the Poor House / Work House. Annual pay for a ships boy was £2.10shillings (£2.50p) We all know about the boys (and girls being admirably puny) who were employed to clean chimneys, but are perhaps less aware that they were often sold into service by the poor as orphans or illegitimate for twenty or thirty shillings (£1—£1.50p) Their life expectancy was short, as soot is a carcinogen, apart from the other dangers, they were often sent up to put out chimney fires. Added to that the master chimney sweeps had little use for them in summer and would leave them to fend for themselves.

Food prices seem cheap, but the poorer workers weekly wages would have been reckoned in shillings and pennies and paid work could be irregular. Two pints (1 litre) of milk was 3½ d, a pound of cheese 4d-6d, a pound of butter 8d-10d, a pound of soles 1s6d, a whole pig for 2s6d, and 2d for enough gin to get dead drunk on, these are just a selection of food stuffs. Items would have been purchased in far smaller quantities by the poor if they could afford them at all, the gin must have seemed an attractive alternative to feeling hungry.

One item mentioned is the cost of dry cleaning a coat? This could cost 1s6d—2s6d; was this the cost of teleporting to the twentieth century! There are many references to various dentistry procedures, but £4.4s (four guineas) for the cost of dental care under annual contract could this be an early form of BUPA or Denplan!

There had apparently been a state lottery running since 1569 which continued until it was abolished by William Wilberforce in 1826. The funds it generated supported several worthy causes, such as building bridges on the Thames. When the numbers were publically drawn at the Guildhall, they were flown to outlying areas by carrier pigeon or by horseback at a fast gallop. In 1769 there were £20,000 prizes in two consecutive weeks, but the odds of winning were 35,000 to one. Ticket costs varied but in 1743 half a ticket could cost £2.10s (£2.50p) and a sixteenth for 6s 6d (33p).

To put prices and costs into perspective one item shows just how the other half lived in the eighteenth century. The cost of lace for the Queen's bed was a staggering £3,780.....

The other book Panoramas of Lost London compiled by Philip Davies is a fascinating book of photographs taken between 1870 – 1945. Many of the photos show shops advertising their produce. In Bishopsgate a made to measure suit costs 30 shillings (£1.50p) in 1909 and in Old Change, St Pauls, a shoe shop called Saxone sold all their shoes at one price 16s 6d (82p) in 1912. In Aldgate in 1909 you could have a meal of pork sausage with bread for 2d or chops, steaks or cutlets for 5d and fried onions for 1d. In Spitalfields a barber would cut your hair for 3d in 1909. Drink was still cheap with Bass bitter at 1½d for ½ a pint in 1913 at Seven Dials. One curiosity is 'Hire an Umbrella' 6d a day in Bartholomew Close in 1927, wonder if they got them back?

By this time tobacco products had got cheaper and there was no discouragement not to smoke on health grounds. A shop in Hackney was selling 10 cigarettes for 3d and 5 cigars for 1 shilling in 1906. In Borough High Street, 1903, a pint of tea, coffee or cocoa was offered at 1d for a pint or ½d for ½ pint.

This little glimpse of costs in the past shows most people have always had to juggle 'necessities' with 'luxuries' depending on circumstances.

REFERENCES: Dr Johnson's London by Lisa Picard publisher Phoenix Press. Paperback 2001 Price £9.99 (may be dearer now). Lost Panoramas of London compiled by Phil Davies. Pub. Trans Atlantic Press. 320 pages. Hardback 2011. £40 An English Heritage book. This is all extremely detailed photographs in a big format 15 inches x 11¾ inches with the exact location and date pictures were taken. Many very old buildings can be seen before war damage and the demolition for 'modernisation' in the 1960s and 70s swept it all away.