

FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK



July 2021 – NEWSLETTER No. 91

With the arrival of the most welcome improvement in the weather and June sunshine came the inevitable minority of selfish people who litter and vandalise in the park. The biggest magnet for these people is the lake and PTP Coaching (Lewisham Council's lake operator) recently highlighted how this negatively impacts on their ability to provide a service.

The post on their Facebook page explains how the fence has been broken and litter left by those who have broken in to access the lake out of hours. As with many Facebook posts of this nature, this garnered over a hundred comments from disaffected people, many of which drifted from the focus of vandalism and litter into other grievances.

Some people made the existence of the fence the focus of their wrath rather than the vandalism and some of those people blamed PTP Coaching for the fencing. Whatever one's views about the lake, one can't help but have sympathy for PTP. They are trying to provide the best service they can under the conditions imposed on them by Lewisham Council, which includes the fence put in place by the council.

Other points were made that had nothing to do with the original post, the most common one being that use of the lake has turned into a facility for those that can afford the fees, contrary to the spirit and intent of the lottery funding. The second being that those of us that were told it would be a pleasant spot just to walk alongside and sit on benches to view the wildlife have also been let down. However, none of this is the fault of PTP. Finally, there have also been photos circulating of people inside the lake perimeter fencing, sun bathing, picnicking and using the lake out of hours. Some people on the PTP Facebook thread automatically assumed that the offenders were teenagers and whilst there were some, it should be noted that many others were older people and some had younger children. Teenagers, other than those that can afford lake fees and have (want) an accompanying adult are not well served in the park. This is an issue about which a Friends' committee member (Lewisham resident) has tried to engage with local councillors, without success. Where is the spirit and

intent of the lottery funding when it comes to getting the younger folk engaged in Beckenham Place Park?

Lake Update.(Information 'leaked' to the Friends).

Apparently four of the pumps/filters are no longer working with no prospect of repair. A Lewisham park employee admitted that the Council were unaware that a fence(round the lake) was required. As it is an artificial construction they are liable for health and safety! You couldn't make it up!

Friends Committee

The Friends committee is in desperate need of new members. Would any members of the Friends like to become committee members. It can involve any thing from organising activities to just having an input on the future of the Friends.

We really do need some new 'blood'.

There is a real danger that without new committee members the Friends will wither away.

Please email bpp.friends@hotmail.co.uk if you are interested.

Beckenham Place Park and the Dream of John Cator

John Cator,many years ago

Gazed at a tranquil scene,

Just fields,rough grass and ancient trees,

A landscape only seen

by shepherds,farmers and the like

Not London's fashion cream.

And in his mind he saw the house,

Emerging grey and square,

A statue here - a pillar there

A pediment so pleasing fair,

Rooms well-proportioned - windows tall,

Kitchen gardens - to feed them all.

Stables,lake,a small home farm -

A refuge from the city,a place of peace and calm.

Atop this future Mansion

His gaze lingered on a crest -

'Nihil sine labore'

Work hard to achieve your best. And he did.

(sent in by a Friend with an approximate translation of the latin)



Photograph of a Bee Swarm - courtesy of Glenys

(3)

Bluebell Walk Sunday 25 April 2020

This was led by Nick Bertrand of Creekside Conservation. We had a sunny day with a chill wind but twenty of us turned up. The bluebells were a bit late this year due to the weather. Nick told us that our native bluebells (not the ones in your garden) are a symbol of ancient woodland and thus decreasing.

We learnt about pollination in the trees and flowers we saw (did you know there are male and female flowers on oaks?) and some of the very many expressive and ancient names given over the centuries to our common plants.

We looked at some of the ancient oaks and a lime tree which fell in the great hurricane of 1987.

With only partial roots in soil and lying horizontal as a dead body and only partially touching the soil, the lime tree has three 'branches' which are now growing as trees up to an incredible height. One to watch!_

Tree Walk

We were incredibly fortunate to have a window of bright weather during a rainy day. Nick introduced about thirty of us to some of the park's trees. Many of the oaks are over 500 years old and hoping to live another 500 years! Just think what they have witnessed! The magnificent oak near the mansion on the open stretch of golf course is one of these.

Nick explained pollarding, cutting higher branches over the centuries for use (wood was needed for everything). New branches then grow high out of the reach of grazing cattle. We looked at a large dead oak and realised it is actually full of life - insects, birds and self seeded trees and shrubs around the base, including new oaks which have selected their own suitable spot. Beside us was a recently planted (by Lewisham council) former golf fairway of birches, hawthorns, etc. Nick explained the various types of grassland, this being acid, and the unsuitability of introducing trees into an established grassland ecosystem. This sort of intrusion is happening in various ways around the established ancient parkland. A thoroughly enjoyable couple of hours led by Nick, who works at Deptford Creek Conservation Area. You can look at their website for information on their events.

(4)



Nick explaining about one of the ancient trees.

(5)

The Sensory Wildlife Garden

As lockdown restrictions are relaxing slowly we have been carrying out some maintenance work in the garden following the enforced neglect of last year. We have some new volunteers as well as some regulars. Of course we understand that some volunteers may still be wary of associated risks of mixing in social groups and hopefully safety will improve as time goes by. Our most urgent tasks are controlling weeds mostly in the form of invasive grasses such as couch grass. Plants like cow parsley and teasel although regarded as weeds by many gardeners are seen as good food plants for pollinators (bees etc) as well as being quite attractive in their own right. We are trying to keep the paths clear of weeds and will be looking to add some plants in any bare spots. If anyone has plants that are surplus to requirements or got too large for anyone's smaller garden we could probably re-home any donations.

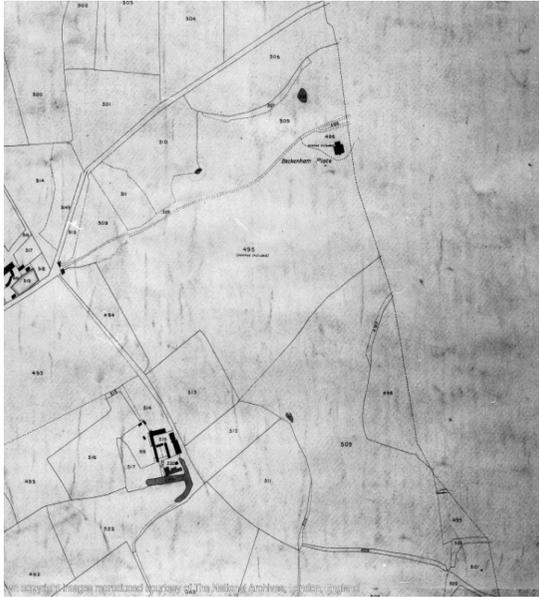
New volunteers are always welcome and if numbers got too large we would make some arrangements to insert extra workdays to accommodate people. Currently it hasn't been a problem as the team has hovered around the 'six persons' number.

Contact us via bpp.friends@hotmail.co.uk or bpp.friends@hotmail.com if you want to know more. (Mal Mitchell)

A Bit More History

As part of our history of Beckenham Place Park we included information about the series of tenants that leased the Mansion and grounds from the Cators from about 1820/40 right up to the time the London County Council purchased the park in 1927. It may have been assumed that all of the current park was part of those leases. But the Tithe Map and returns for 1838 gives us more insight into the park and Beckenham as a whole. Also, Tithes were taken for Bromley, Lewisham and elsewhere about the same time. I believe some Genealogy websites like Find My Past include Tithe maps but the returns can be found on Kent Archaeology website.

Part of the park and Foxgrove Farm was in the Parish of Lewisham. (6)



Foxgrove Farm bottom left, Mansion top middle(ish) Lewisham
Tithe map joins with slight rotation.

The returns tell us that the park was owned by John Barwell Cator (nephew of John Cator and son of his brother Joseph) and that the mansion and about 71 acres of grounds was leased to William Peters, a banker. For the sake of argument let's say he occupied the grounds around and near the mansion. The land along the Ravensbourne River was leased as part of Foxgrove Farm. Foxgrove Farm House was in the "U" of Foxgrove Road, Westgate Road and The Avenue. The farm was leased to William Gibbons consisting of 274 acres in all but a substantial part of that outside the park as far as Albemarle Road. At the time of the Tithe what we now call Summerhouse Wood was held 'in hand' by John Cator and maybe retained as a shoot for pheasants. At this time there was no railway through the park and the road through the park called 'Beckenham Place Park' had not been separated for building. Further details are on the Friends website either in the History of the Park or History of Beckenham' which we also publish there and which is updated regularly with new discoveries. (7)

Friends Visitor Centre

In March 2020 the Friends were evicted from our 'home'(for 20+ years) in the Mansion because RJK claimed they had new tenants waiting to rent our premises. Just over 6 months later someone kindly managed to take a photograph of our old room which showed that it was being used as a storage/dump space. It would appear that this is still the case. During the time that we were at the Mansion we entertained thousands of visitors and provided an insight into the Mansion & Park's history & geology. It may well be that RJK felt that we offered little to their goals and they may have been encouraged by some Lewisham employees who felt that we were 'negative' towards some their more hare-brained schemes-but we did make a visit to the Park a better experience for a lot of people. Lewisham have suggested that they will find a new 'home' for us but as the months pass ideas surface but nothing concrete materialises.

On a brighter note a 'joke' courtesy of The Oldie-

A man gets up from his hospital bed and walks out the hospital front door, pulling his drip along, still in his gown.

He walks into the pub opposite and says to the barman, "I'll have a double whisky please."

The barman gives it to him. The man knocks back the whisky in one go and says to the barman, "Of course, I shouldn't be having this with what I've got." "What have you got?" says the concerned barman." 10p."

Websites of Interest

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| <u>Friends of Beckenham Place Park</u> | www.beckenhamplacepark.org.uk |
| Lewisham Local History Society | www.lewishamhistory.org.uk |
| Bromley Local History | www.bblhs.org.uk |
| Ravensbourne Valley Preservation Soc. | www.rvpsbromley.org.uk |
| Deptford Creek | www.creeksidecentre.org.uk |
| Kent Archeology | www.kentarcheology.org.uk |

We recommend reading the history of the park on the Friends website (8)

