

# NEWSLETTER 74

Winter: January 1st - March 31st 2015



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

**Wednesday January 21st Short Winter Walk**

**Meet on mansion steps at 1.00pm.** Just a stroll around the park while the flora rests, before bursting into life in the spring....we hope it will anyway.

**Saturday February 21st Bird Walk**

**Meet at mansion 9.30am** for a walk around the park looking for and listening to our feathered friends with whom we share the park. Dave, our walk leader, will be on hand to help in identification.

**Sunday March 22nd Early Spring Walk**

**Meet at the mansion 1.30pm.** Walkabout looking for signs of spring in and around the park.

**CONSERVATION & SENSORY GARDEN WORKDAYS**

**Saturday 10th Jan, 14th Feb and Mar 14th** (About 2 hour sessions)

**Meet at the Mansion 10.am.** The January meet will probably be tidying the patch of gorse, freeing it from encroaching bramble. Feb & Mar are more likely to be in the Sensory Garden, but with a high enough attendance, several sites could be worked on. No experience needed. There will be work to suit everyone. Tools, gloves and guidance 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. 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](http://www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk)

**Update on the Prefab Museum.**

Due to a fire at the end of October the museum had to be temporarily closed. Unfortunately and with great regret a decision has now been made not to reopen in the future. All who visited seemed to have enjoyed the experience. The curator, Elisabeth Blanchett, would like to thank everyone for their interest and support. (more information on the website: [www.prefabmuseum.uk](http://www.prefabmuseum.uk))

If the gentleman who came into the Beckenham Place Park Visitor Centre saying that he had an original copy of the plans for the Excalibur Estate and was willing to donate them to Elisabeth, would like to bring them to the Visitor Centre, Elisabeth would welcome them.  
Thanks, Beryl.

**Winter Visitors—the feathered variety.**

It depends on the weather, who in the bird world, you are likely to see in and around the park this winter. Last Christmas morning (2013), I was lucky enough to have a very wet and very 'lost' Merlin (right) in my garden near the park, blown in by the violent wet and windy weather. It wasn't his day as three jays flew in and chased him off!



**Waxwings** (left) and **snipe** (right) can be seen in the park when we get very cold snaps. Snipe will be near the river.



**Sparrowhawks** (below right) are seen more frequently in local gardens these days and rough weather will probably increase their visits.



Do look out for different birds and let the Friends know what you've seen.

**Sensory Garden.**

Work has continued well this year and the garden is starting to shape up to our very rough plans. We have had a kind donation of old Welsh roof slates, which we hope to use in the bed under the trees bordering the access slope. The soil here is not good so we plan to terrace the area to improve the structure and look, well that's the idea. Watch this space this summer. The team has worked so well over the year and can feel very proud of our achievements. The pond continues to test us and so far it's pond ten and us nil! The bird table has attracted quite a few birds, the usual suspects, but also two nuthatches. Hope everyone is enjoying our less than perfect garden and the park gardeners neater formal gardens above it.

### **National Parks Forum and Lewisham Parks Forum (LPF)**

During 2014 a group representing the Friends groups for Lewisham Parks has met and is operating under the name of LPF. Within a climate of Council cost cutting, the concerns are related to the maintenance and security of parks borough wide. All councils are targeting parks as candidates for cost cutting. Another group you may be interested in is London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network <http://www.lfgn.net/> who meet at City Hall regularly.

LPF have met with Cllr. Rachel Onikosi who is Lewishams councillor with responsibility for environmental issues and ways are being sought of LPF being involved in discussions with Lewisham Green Scene who manage parks. One issue seems to be that Lewisham want to cut more than £300k from park budgets in the next financial year. Already there have been cuts to park keeping staff and we understand cuts and savings have been made at managerial level within Green Scene.

### **Making a Bee Line for London.**

A new coalition of nine organisations, the *Making a B-Line for London* partnership, is planning an initiative across London which aims to deliver key recommendations within the new national strategy for pollinators.

A London *B-Line* has been identified, running roughly north to south from Enfield to Croydon. This is based on existing pollinator hotspots and aims to create new habitats which will link and support the existing hotspots. Within defined target areas along the *London B-Line*, the partnership will work with the managers and owners of parks, gardens, allotments and green spaces to change the way land is designed and managed to improve or create flower-rich areas, connecting existing good quality pollinator habitat.

The partnership has agreed a five year plan to start, grow and establish the project. Monitoring is a crucial part of the delivery. It will be checking diversity and abundance of pollinating insects along the *B-Line*, in order to determine the most effective and efficient ways of achieving an increase in pollinating insects.

This line, luckily, will included nearly the whole of Beckenham Place Park. We have a couple of maps in the Visitor Centre, but this scheme is just starting and when further information comes in we will pass it on. There is information on various websites.

### **Recent Events Report**

#### **Saturday 11th October**

#### **Fungi Walk**

This was a very popular walk and as usual our expert, Mark Spencer, didn't disappoint, finding so many interesting fungi most of us wouldn't even notice. One tiny fungi had a clever spore dispersal mechanism. When a raindrop (or in this demonstration a gentle tap by Mark) lands on it a little plume of fine spores, looking like smoke, puffs out the top. Although our star rare fungi, zonal rosette, found several years ago had died, because its host tree had died, Mark found another specimen near to the Westgate entrance.

It was a lovely walk that everyone enjoyed, even though the heavens opened towards the end! Many thanks to Mark and all that came along.

#### **Wednesday 5th November**

#### **Silent Walk** (starting at 1pm)

After a short chat about our listening walk, 'don't talk and walk in single file' was the only requirement! The small group set off to listen to the sounds around us. We walked at a steady pace in fair weather, if a bit damp under foot. Our route was past the ancient pond, down through Stumps Hill wood to the main driveway entrance on Beckenham Hill Road, over the railway bridge and back into the park, then heading to the river Ravensbourne. Then retracing our steps via footpath to the Sensory Garden and mansion. We discussed what we heard during our hour of silence. It was agreed the one constant sound was the ring necked parakeets squawking all through the park. The many different sounds of rustling leaves, on the ground, on trees and even when they were falling and even different trees made different sounds. Bird wings flapping and moving. The sound of traffic rising and diminishing, bird chirps, aircraft, trains, workmen, road crossing beeping. Strangely, no fireworks, (well it was Guy Fawkes night) and no golfers. We said our goodbyes after a pleasant, and soundwise, interesting walk. Thanks to the 'silent' majority for joining in.

#### **Thursday 11th December**

#### **Mince Pie Walk**

So what's wrong with our mince pies? Only a couple of people came along for this short stroll. The weather wasn't too windy and it didn't rain so we ate our pies in the children's playground by the river. Afterwards we walked along the river and a kingfisher put in two appearances, just a flash of bright blue flying over the water, but good to see. Anyway it was a nice walk enjoyed by all of us.

## **Lottery Bid and Flood Control Scheme Lottery Bid**

### **Progress Reports**

#### **Lottery Bid for Park**

Lewisham Council officers are preparing tenders for the planning stage of the bid. Stage 1 money from the Lottery covers cost of preparing the Stage 2 bid. We are told by Lewisham Council officer in charge of the bid that the process will take at least 12 months. We aim to address matters we think are unsuitable or not sufficiently evaluated in the initial bid i.e. reinstating the lake on its original footprint would require removal of significant areas of established woodland. The bid is intended to restore heritage landscape. However, the original landscape had significantly more woodland, did not have a railway bisecting it and was also a private estate without public access. Nor did it have large housing areas surrounding it.

Although English Heritage require that the house (not included in this funding bid) should not stand in a golf course environment, we still believe the golf course provides regular use of the park, and the course usually has people on it which provides a degree of security in the park which might otherwise be almost deserted on occasions.

It was revealed that the decision for this option among the scenarios presented to a limited audience was decided upon the feedback from 180 people mostly whom the Council targeted for their consultation.

A bid for the conservation of the mansion would not be made for at least a year. We feel that the house and other buildings are more in need of immediate attention rather than the park which is generally enjoyed as it is. Many visitors to the Visitor Centre ask why the council want to make these changes to what is an enjoyable rural environment.

#### **Flood Control Scheme**

We had a constructive meeting with four representatives of the Environment Agency on site at the park and posed several questions relating to the proposed scheme. It must be borne in mind that the process is still at the early planning stages, and financing of the scheme from government and the local authority is not yet approved.

The intended bunds/embankments for the capture of flood water would encircle the Ravensbourne flood plain and be, to my

mind, acceptably away from the rear of housing in Brangbourne Road.

The old changing rooms and nursery building adjacent to Old Bromley Road would need to be demolished, both currently not in use. The children's play area would be rebuilt.

A short stretch of river near to where a main sewer runs under the river would need to be rerouted. The plan also intends to reroute a bit of river on what is the old Goan Playing Field, which due to neglect for at least ten years has turned into a good area for wildlife.

Apparently landowner permission is needed from both the owners of Millwall Practice Ground which belongs to Oxford University (I didn't know that), and the owner of the Goan ground who cannot, so far, be contacted.

The bunds would be at their highest 4m or so near Brangbourne Road and diminish in height toward Ravensbourne Avenue. The intention is to acquire the material for the bunds from the excavation of the flat area which we call the Common, which used to be 10 or more football pitches. In the past, before WWII this was a marshy area of reed beds which some called the Thousand Islands.

A combination of the lowering of the land and the bunds would allow flash flood waters to be stored for short periods to save Catford and Lewisham from flooding.

We are concerned about the loss of woodland and mature habitat and natural areas as this degree of ground works would require some years to regenerate. Although there are indications of new tree planting etc it would still take some time to recover.

We appreciate that some improvements are possible within the scheme and are suggesting that a lake, rather than restoration of the old lake now in woodland, could be constructed on the common which is largely a grassed over area. This area would be excavated anyway and be cheaper, and more environmentally friendly than having to remove established trees.

#### **Both Schemes**

In any case we will be attempting to get what we call improvements to the intentions of both schemes and both are subject to further public consultation which we will ensure get wide publicity.

The Friends of Beckenham Place Park

## PLANTS—A FEW INTERESTING THINGS

This is the 25th year of a conservation group called Plantlife that specialise in plant and habitat protection and management. They published a few interesting facts in the birthday edition of their magazine. A selection of which appear below.

**Ice cream.** In Turkey between 40 and 50 million orchid tubers are dug up to provide *salep* a starchy flour used as a thickening for drinks and ice cream.

**Wild Plants.** These days two thirds of our native wild flora are found on roadside verges.

**Moss.** Mosses can hold up to ten times their weight in water.

**Quorn.** Quorn, used as an alternative protein replacement for meat, is made from a fungus called *Fusarium venenatum*. For commercial purposes it is called mycoprotein, as referring to it as 'fungus' was thought to be too off-putting to consumers!

**Carbon.** Grasslands store approximately 34% of the global stock of carbon in land ecosystems. Forests store approximately 39%, so it is important to preserve both.

**Apples.** If you ate an apple every day, it would take you six years, one week and three days to chomp your way through every variety grown at the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale, Kent! So why is there such an impoverished selection of English apples in our shops?

**Dutch Elm Disease.** This disease has wiped out more than 25 million trees in Britain since it arrived in an imported consignment of logs in the 1960s.

**Word Power.** A search on Google returns 476 million hits for the word 'flower', 66.2 million for 'plant' and 40.2 million for 'botany'. So hopefully there are a few plant-lovers out there!

**Stealing.** Annual legal plant trade is valued at £9 billion, but there is a huge illegal international trade in stolen plants, estimated to be in the hundreds of millions. Also diseased and/or invasive plants can be passed around the world without the usual scrutiny and surveillance.

In the Sensory Garden we suffer occasionally from thefts, which although small scale, is very annoying.

**Tree of Heaven.** This tree so called as it supposedly keeps bugs at bay, has increased in the wild in Britain by 115% since 2000. In Europe it is often referred to as the '**Tree of Hell**' as they suffer it's invasion too.

## Lewisham Local History Society.

Programme of talks for this quarter. Most meetings are held on **Fridays** at Methodist Church Hall, Albion Way, SE13. Starting at **7.45pm**. Visitors welcome. Full access for people with disabilities.

**30th January**      **The Mid Kent line and Railway  
Development in S E London**      **Peter Leigh**

**27th February**      **George England, Robert Farlie  
and the Hatcham Iron Works.**  
**Douglas Hill & Grahame Hood**

**27th March**      **AGM and Members 'Show & Tell'**  
**Members have a chance to speak on their pet topics for a few mins.**

**More information: [www.lewishamhistory.org.uk](http://www.lewishamhistory.org.uk)**

## Bromley Borough Local History Society.

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

**6th January**      **The 1000th House –  
Orpington's amazing record on the post-war housing front**  
**Patrick Hellicar**

**3rd February**      **The History of Kemnal Manor**  
**Tony Allen**

**3rd March**      **The Story of George Allen -  
Ruskin's publisher on our doorstep**  
**Paul Dawson**

**7th April**      **The Elephant & Castle -  
The rise & fall of S London's premier shopping & entertainment  
venue.**  
**Steven Humphrey**

**More information: [www.blhs.org.uk](http://www.blhs.org.uk)**