

FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK SUMMER 2023 – NEWSLETTER No. 98



From the Editor - The Friends

It is with sadness that we bring you this our 98th and final newsletter. As mentioned in our last letter the Friends have too few committee members to continue to function – especially in light of the latest resignation. We did get 3 offers to help-including one for financial assistance- (for which we are grateful) but it is not enough for us to continue. We detail at the end of this newsletter how the Friends of Beckenham Place Park are to be ‘wound-up’.

The ‘Friends’ were originally founded over 25 years ago after the campaign against Lewisham council’s plans for parcelling off a large section of the park and mansion and transferring it to a private sports club (removing a large section of the park from public access). We, with other groups, managed to get these plans defeated and we also campaigned successfully against other attempts to use part of the park for a conference centre and an hotel. We have always tried to keep the park as a ‘country’ park - part wild with ancient woodland and part easily accessible pleasant grassland and shrubbery. Lewisham council seem to prefer it to be more of an ‘urban’ park with hard surface bicycle tracks, BMX cycle trails and a man made pond. The park now has ‘live’ events, all-day opening and limited expensive parking. This has led to an increase in crime and at times problems with local car parking and noise disturbance to local residents.

Lewisham council also seem to believe that one tree is as good as another – sometimes cutting down mature trees and replacing them elsewhere with inappropriate saplings.

Despite the above moaning Lewisham council have also achieved a lot of good work/conservation in the park. The advantages of a Friends group facilitated the ancient pond renovation through fundraising and in setting up and maintaining the much admired sensory garden. A bit more co-operation from LBL may have allowed this mutual working to continue.

From the committee

It will be a sad day when the Friends close - after around thirty years of caring for and fighting for the park.

I give heartfelt thanks to Mal Mitchell, who has been a mainstay throughout these years, with his knowledge of the park history. Plus he and his wife Margaret who with a team of volunteers have been maintaining the sensory garden for over ten years since it’s inception from the old rose garden. Margaret also diligently ran the popular Visitor Centre in the Mansion alongside Margaret(F) and Beryl every Sunday, come rain or shine.

Roger Thomas has been beavering away behind the scenes since well before Covid, dealing with many enquiries via our website, producing the Newsletter and all the duties of Membership and Treasurer. Juliet has also done a splendid job organising fundraising and the revitalisation of the ancient deep pond. The evidence is now before our eyes with the construction of decking and seating for enjoyment of the tranquillity and the waterfowl are beginning to return.

Of course there have been many members and helpers over the years giving their time and energy to care for our lovely parkland and we must be thankful for their efforts. I have been with the committee but a short time and I love the park and all the wildlife which calls it home.

I must mention the delight to the eye of the absolutely astounding plants and flowers now tended by the Lewisham gardeners. It is likely that events such as Walks will still take place but they will be under the umbrella of Lewisham. Look out for news of them and all other events in their regular monthly email bulletins which you can subscribe to receive at: www.beckenhamplacepark.com.

You may have to scroll down the page to find the box to enter your details.
Glenys



2 of Glenys Crane's paintings of the park.

The Ancient Pond

This was an unloved area fenced in and infested with midges and mosquitos until our renovations began (with the help of a grant from Veolia).

The old fencing was removed, the pond was dredged for the removal of the customary rubbish & supermarket trolleys then new decking and seating was installed.

It is now a pleasant area where one can rest and enjoy the views.

We are providing Lewisham with over £3000 (earmarked for the Ancient pond) for future maintenance (some duckweed/algae clearance is occasionally necessary).

A boat also has to be employed on odd occasions to remove items thrown into the pond by inconsiderate park visitors.

With thanks to Juliet for her hard work in organising the fundraising and cooperation with the Council in all of this.



The Sensory Garden

This was created when Jordan, a Lewisham Council officer, identified a funding source for a Sensory Garden and the Friends cooperated in applying for funding under our umbrella. A band of volunteers along with committee members Mal & his wife Margaret converted the old rose garden into a wonderful sensory paradise for all to enjoy.

However, recent events have in our opinion stretched the liability of the Friends to an unacceptable point therefore giving Mal & Margaret no option other than to resign advising the remaining committee, the volunteers and Lewisham Council that in their view the insurance situation was questionable as the Friends have found it difficult to function due to lack of committee and officer volunteers..

The community gardeners are now going to take over the maintenance of the sensory garden and we are transferring over £2900 to Lewisham for them to

ensure that the garden provides pleasure and peace to hundreds(perhaps thousands) of people over the coming years.

With thanks to Mal & 'Mags' for coordinating the volunteers and to the volunteers for cooperating in the management of the garden.

The Visitor Centres

I say Centres because the first centre was created in 1997 in a cottage which is now part of the Homestead Cafe. Having been vacated circa 1992 to facilitate vacant possession for the Tennis/Golf company the cottages were left to decay. Friends volunteers repaired broken windows, painted and mended where necessary and filled the cottage with information on the Park's Past, Present and possible future. The centre opened on Sunday afternoons, the busiest time for visitors. In 2000 the park manager who had been awarded a short term contract for management of the golf course etc. invited the Friends to have the Visitor Centre in the mansion and it operated there until RJK properties acquired the lease and required the Friends to vacate the room. However this coincided with Covid lockdown so perhaps the time had come.. But for nearly 25 years the Friends Visitor Centre was the only information and interpretation source regarding the park. The newsletter and various articles submitted by our members and the editor informed members of events. Many members were recruited from their visits to the centre and many of them made return visits browsing through the ever growing range of material.

History of the Park & Beckenham

Although the Friends group is winding up, we will maintain the website for a few years as it has become a virtual visitor centre and history resource. The history pages will relate the history of the park and the history of the wider Beckenham and environs as parts of Lewisham, Beckenham and Bromley were enveloped by the Cator estate.

As Cator and other landlords engaged in several complex land exchanges and earlier than that the local manors and estates were intricately interwoven then the fuller history may be of interest to some.

Research which has reviewed earlier histories has come up with several corrections to earlier accounts, some of which took even earlier histories as sacrosanct thereby perpetuating some errors. Although some writers took information in good faith it had become necessary to look back at some source material.

A really comprehensive history could fill several books and perhaps to a level of detail which would only appeal to a very small audience.

Anyway, our history takes the form of a timeline putting events in chronological sequence so that the relationship between the several manors and estates may be more easily understood. Also summaries of the individual manors and estates are included. Searching the pages for keywords is possible through web browsers.

As the website will be maintained we will also maintain an email address that will be available for questions or suggestions about the history pages. The email address (bpp.friends@hotmail.com) will be available on the website.

We are prepared to substantiate our account citing several source materials but admit that we may have missed some evidence or created some of our own errors.

Although research has been relatively thorough it hasn't been exhaustive as we know of several sources of documents which haven't been fully investigated but we think they will not substantially change our account.

With thanks to Mal

Replies to our last Newsletter and email.

Of the replies that we received to our Newsletter and email requests (for new committee members) all expressed sadness that the Friends could no longer function.

Over 90% were in favour of our proposals of how we were to wind up the Friends (in the event that we did not receive sufficient offers of committee membership) and under 5% were opposed to those proposals.

The remainder made no comment either way.

Some more definitions from the Uxbridge dictionary

Incarnation	generic name for old Peruvian people.
Irate	how laser eye surgeons get paid.
Lute	a stolen musical instrument.
Fiddly	like a violin.
Turpentine	Newcastle highwayman.
Meditate	hospital art gallery.
Propaganda	have a good look at something.
Relief	what trees do in the spring.
Commandeer	a vulgar ruminant.
Rubicon	a fake gemstone
Universe	higher education poetry.
Template	tardy agency staff.
Outpatient	person in hospital who has fainted.

(With fond memories of ‘I’m sorry I haven’t a clue’)..

Websites of Interest

The Friends website (www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk) will only be updated with information about the history of the park. If a new ‘Friends’ group emerges in any form a link to it will be created.

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

Details of ‘winding-up’ of Friends of Beckenham Place Park

The Ancient pond grant money (£3085.00 in total) has been transferred to Lewisham for specific use on the ancient pond.

The Sensory Garden grant money (£2912.00 in total) has been transferred to Lewisham for specific use on the sensory garden. Our garden tools and tool

storage unit have also been donated to the community gardeners.

Small donations from our funds have been made to Creekside Educational Trust, Gorne wood (Fourth Reserve) .and Cancer Research.

Our website will be maintained(but not updated after this newsletter) for 4 years.

All records relating to the Friends of Beckenham Place Park will be kept for 5 years and a closing statement will be sent to HMRC if required by them.

Our email account bpp.friends@hotmail.com will be maintained for use with our website. All other email addresses will be closed.

The final balance of our funds(after settling any final debts) will be transferred to Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership to be used for local nature conservation projects.(this amount will be in excess of £5400.00) – our bank account will then be closed.

Last thoughts

Perhaps if public access to the park & mansion comes under threat again a new ‘Friends’ group will emerge -phoenix like – to take on the challenge.

We have enjoyed producing the newsletter over the past 25 years and hope you have had equal enjoyment from reading it.

With thanks to everyone who has served on the committee over the years and all those who have helped with our walks and events.

With fond memories and best wishes to all the ‘Friends’.

Goodbye from,
Mal, Glenys, Juliet & Roger

Appendix 1

The Friends Achievements

Our first committee and members emerged out of the Save Beckenham Place Park Campaign. If other groups and ourselves hadn't objected then an indoor tennis centre and more golf course and driving range would have dominated the park and would have removed public access to most of the mansion and a large swathe of parkland..

The BPP Working Party, created by Councillor John Rudd to discuss the future of the park.

The Friends became one of the most regular attendees of the meetings. The working party has since been disbanded by LBL.

Creation of Visitor Centre attracting thousands of visitors over the years – see above article.

Publication of quarterly newsletter with a history of the parks creation it's geology, its wildlife, future events and commentary on park matters as well as a well researched historical piece.

Program of Walks led by various experts.

Woodland work with volunteers and school groups.

Giving Talks about the Park to various interest groups.

Supporting other conservation groups via the Lewisham Open Space Forum

Promoting the adoption of meadow management regime for grassed areas.

Carrying out various conservation tasks when such work rarely undertaken otherwise.

Suggesting options for managing the park(although rarely listened to).

Offering support to a Community Trust to bid for management of the park (rejected by the Council).

Offering to participate in the Design Team which determined the Lottery bid outcomes (rejected by LBL - maybe we'd have seen some of the shortcomings which have had to be rectified by unenvisaged works)

Supporting the Save the Golf Course campaign in line with one of our initial aims. The historic 110 year old course which was one of the busiest and oldest public courses in England(as well as being incredibly profitable) was finally closed by LBL after many years of mismanagement.

Supporting the assessment of interpretation resources for the park under the Lottery Grant process. (all contributions to this by us and other parties have been ignored or rejected by LBL apart from a few signs interpretation.

Creation & installation of bird ID board by the lake.

Appendix 2

Lewisham – Future plans for 'The Friends' activities

It is very much our intention to facilitate continued volunteering work parties in the sensory garden and to maintain the original plan for it.

In the immediate short term (at least until the end of August) we will extend the interim agreement put in place last month to allow volunteering to take place when there are Lewisham staff on site. In practical terms this means one Saturday a month (usually the last Saturday) and on Thursday mornings. Hand tools only no using power tools unless overseen by staff directly.

This does mean that there will be a session this Saturday the 29th at 10am (apologies for the short notice), where I am looking forward to catching up in person with those of you who are available. The following Saturday session will need to be confirmed as I won't be available on the bank holiday weekend.

Going forward with the sensory garden volunteers I need to compile a definitive list of people who want to stay on my contacts list after today. (this forward will probably be the last email sent out from this account) to that end, if you do wish to remain an active volunteer please email james.allen@lewisham.gov.uk and confirm your wishes. I will then use the emails gathered over the next week to invite those to a meeting to discuss options past the interim agreement.

If you don't want to continue volunteering but would still like to be kept informed about events and such in the park you can always sign up to the newsletter on our website at www.beckenhamplacepark.com <<http://www.beckenhamplacepark.com>> (if the pop up box doesn't come up then scroll to the bottom to find the sign up form)

Guided walks etc.

As guided walks and the like will no longer be covered under the Friends agreement and therefore insurance, it is important that they are always now cleared through myself or other Lewisham officer before taking place.

I have been given contact details for a couple of the regulars and I am keen to organise some guided walks to continue as I think they're a great asset to the park programme. They'll just be advertised as park events rather than Friends events. I currently have contacts for bird, bluebells and fungi walks, with a view to adding in history and bat walks, but if anyone knows of others who would give interesting talks I'm open to suggestions.

Stumps Hill Pond (the ancient pond)

I know the Friends have had involvement with this in the past, I personally have worked on ponds a fair bit over the years and have some ideas to improve it, but if anyone has a particular interest in getting involved then please let me know, there will be some pond specific volunteer sessions coming up in the late summer/autumn.

Hope that all makes sense,

Best wishes,

James

James Allen

Lead Ranger

Beckenham Place Park

Twitter.com/BppRanger <Twitter.com/BppRanger>

Beckenhamplacepark.com