



ANNUAL REPORT

2022 / 2023



WHAT DOES THE BLACKHEATH SOCIETY DO?

The Society can claim many achievements since its foundation in 1937. We work with local councils, residents, amenity groups, traders, police and national bodies - with everyone who can contribute to the enhancement of Blackheath

We aim to preserve and enhance for the benefit of the public the features of Blackheath of particular beauty or historical

and architectural interest; to protect its open spaces from disfigurement or encroachment, particularly the Heath; to encourage high standards of planning and architecture in its new buildings; to promote improvements to the amenities of the area and to encourage appreciation of its character and history.

BLACKHEATH VILLAGE

We work with other community organisations and local traders to enhance the Village and organise and support local events, such as talks and visits to places of local interest.

THE HEATH

We work to preserve the health and enjoyment of the Heath and oppose commercial exploitation and damage from overuse.

TRAFFIC AND TRAVEL

We monitor major developments that have an effect on the traffic in Blackheath. We campaign for better railway and bus services and for station improvements.

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION

We encourage good modern design, while preserving our existing heritage. We scrutinise planning proposals, advise local councils and appear at public inquiries.

HISTORY AND EDUCATION / EVENTS

We maintain a unique archive of more than 20,000 images of Blackheath. We sponsor talks, exhibitions and publications about the history of the area, organise local walks and publish guides.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

JOIN THE SOCIETY

Keep up to date with local news and have a voice in future developments..

JOIN OUR ACTIVITIES

Whether you have expertise in our areas of interest or time to give practical help, along with other people involved in Village life.

For general information and advice on matters concerning the activities and work of The Society apply to:

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- 🐦 [@BlackheathSoc](https://twitter.com/BlackheathSoc)



ANNUAL REPORT

2022 / 2023

3
Chair's Introduction

4
Transport

5
Events and Talks

6
Jubilee, Kite Day & Tree planting

7
Planning

8
The Village

9
Archive

10 - 12
Treasurer's Report and Financial Statements

13
Architecture Group

14
Society Management and Photo Credits

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION



Society Chair Paul Watts

I am pleased to present the first annual report of our new Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) structure. Last year was the 85th anniversary of the formation of the Society in 1937 and I very much hope that our founders and original trustees would look favourably on the continued activities of the Society in what has been another very active year.

As you will read later in this annual report, our events team produced a full programme of walks and talks and we welcomed the architecture group, whose events are a great addition to our range of activities. We lit a beacon on the Heath to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June and held our second Kite Day there in October, when we also planted our Queen Elizabeth II Oak in memory of Her Majesty.

In the Village, we saw several changes to local businesses with some closing, including our last bank, Barclays, and we welcomed new enterprises. We ran a successful fund-raising campaign to pay for new Christmas lights for the Village and are grateful for the support of many local businesses.

The planning group, with ten volunteers who examine issues of planning policy and scrutinise all applications in our area, continued its important work. There were 668 applications in 2022 (350 in Greenwich and 318 in Lewisham). All were looked at and 85 examined in detail

A major campaign was launched in the autumn when we learnt of Southeastern's changes to its rail timetable, with all off-peak services at Blackheath terminated at Cannon Street, rather than Charing Cross. The Blackheath Joint Working Party had a quieter year, as its former chair stood down. We are actively encouraging Greenwich and Lewisham Councils to reinstate regular meetings of this important group. Our archive team was busy, digitising much material and it benefited from the donation of further collections during the year.

We welcomed 95 new members, some as a result of the rail campaign. We held several new members' evenings, and there are always opportunities for both new and existing members to assist the society in its activities. I would like to conclude with my sincere thanks to our volunteers, to my fellow trustees, and especially to our secretary Sacha Bright for her enthusiasm and dedication to the Society during the year.

TRANSPORT

By far the greatest transport issue in the last year has been, and still is, the loss of our off-peak direct train services to Charing Cross and Waterloo which was brought in with no consultation in Southeastern Railways' December timetable.

This is the most detrimental action imposed by any of the train operating companies over the past 150 years, but no reason for the lack of consultation was given and the Department for Transport considered this to be a minor adjustment to the timetable. The Society immediately mounted a campaign.

We leafleted at stations and on trains on the Bexleyheath line and the Charlton section of the North Kent line, alerting travelers who may not be aware of the imminent changes, and urging them to email the Managing Director of Southeastern Railways, Steve White, to object vigorously.

We challenged Southeastern on the absence of the required Equalities Impact Assessment before the change was announced and assessed the legal possibilities of redress given the absence of consultation and of the timely publication of the EIA.

We then alerted Blackheath Hospital and the Halls, the Clarendon Hotel, schools and Village shops to the changes to warn them how they might affect their users and staff in travelling to and from Waterloo and Charing Cross. We also alerted Society members and the general public through our website and social media, urging them to object.

During a Westminster Hall parliamentary debate in December all MPs in the affected constituencies spoke forcefully against the changes, as the loss of the off-peak direct services on the Bexleyheath line was only one of a range of detrimental impacts.

The minister promised to visit one or more stations to hear firsthand the public

response, and he also promised a full consultation with Southeastern during the development of the May timetable. Neither of these two promises has been fulfilled. Southeastern has claimed that delays at the crossover at Lewisham station (*below*) was behind the changes.



Shortly before the May timetable was announced Southeastern said that, in response to the very high level of objections from Bexleyheath line users, one direct service per hour to Charing Cross and Waterloo would be reintroduced off peak. This is a welcome first step but we will continue to press for the full restoration of all off-peak direct services to Charing Cross and Waterloo.

There is another piece of good news. Network Rail has completed work on the Kidbrooke railway bridge. It therefore no longer needs a weight restriction to protect the bridge and Lewisham council has reacted very positively to this development.

The council officer leading this issue said: "This is something the Council strongly supports and has been actively encouraging Transport for London to do. I have recently chased them on this matter to seek a decision and will continue to do so until the matter is resolved". (*See the Village story on page 8*).

EVENTS AND TALKS

We held many successful and enjoyable events this year of local and broader interest. Many members attended and they provided a good opportunity to meet friends and make new ones.

The regular Meet and Eat sessions continued at a local pub, The Princess of Wales, and we varied the days on which they were held so that members with regular commitments had an opportunity to come. The gatherings are very informal and we are always delighted to see whoever comes along.



We visited Blackheath Golf Club, which was a treat in a beautiful building at Eltham Lodge with a lovely setting and interesting history (*seen above*). The Let's Go Down the Strand walk reminded us of the many hidden jewels that form the history of that part of London.

And the walk round Waterloo and Lambeth illustrated vividly how this area of London has changed over the last 200 years, and continues to be vibrant. We also visited the ancient establishment of Charterhouse in the City, which is both surprising and an excellent example of how institutions adapt to change and survive.



Our Zoom series of talks included the History of Morden College, which prompted recollections from many members about former visits and the many changes that have taken place there. A fascinatingly detailed account of plumbing in the Victorian House proved to be an eye opener, particularly for members who live in such historic dwellings.

It was unfortunate that the Zoom talk on the local area in literature was spoilt by poor WiFi reception that evening, but we plan to reschedule this.

The talk on The History of The Mary Evans Picture Library (*see picture above*) gave us another opportunity for the Society to hold a joint event in Blackheath High School. It was remarkable to hear how the enthusiasm of Mary and Hilary Evans has created a truly eclectic and international collection.

As the annual report went to press, more walks and visits were planned for the summer and these are listed on the website. Thank you to all who contribute their time and energy to making the Society's events so enjoyable, interesting and varied. Your support is fully appreciated.

JUBILEE, KITE DAY & TREE PLANTING

It was a bumper year for large events led by the Society on the Heath, with an estimated 2,000 people celebrating the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June, followed by as many people enjoying our Kite Day in October.

A Jubilee concert was organised jointly by the Society and Blackheath Halls on a beautiful evening when seven local choirs of children and adults performed music representing the decades of the Queen's reign, ranging from classical and opera to musical theatre and gospel.

A dramatic two-metre high beacon was lit by the Young Mayor of Lewisham, representing a new generation engaging in public service.

Earlier in the day, local actor Nick Day took on the role of town crier, announcing the event with a tour around the village, shouting the official "Oyez, oyez" and ringing a dinner bell borrowed from a local school.

The Kite Day in October, now re-established by the Society as an annual event after a break of more than 12 years, enjoyed perfect weather with enough wind to launch some spectacular demonstration kites brought to the Heath by the Kent Kite Flyers, an enthusiasts' group from the coast.

The public were also encouraged to bring their own kites to fly and we saw some terrific examples, including homemade ones.

The talented children of Grinling Gibbons Primary School, Deptford, again entertained the crowds with their steelpan band (*see right*) and the Caribbean theme was picked up by the on-site caterers.

There was a special addition to the day, also organised by the Society, with the ceremonial planting of an oak tree at the eastern end of Royal Parade. The Queen Elizabeth II Oak commemorated the sad loss of Her Majesty in September and will be a permanent memorial to her long and dedicated reign.



PLANNING

Thanks to our dedicated team of volunteers and our secretary Sacha's work in the office, we were able to scan well over 600 planning applications last year, including those for tree work. They covered Lewisham and Greenwich and around 90 applications were subsequently examined in detail.

In addition to this regular effort, considerable time was spent examining and responding to consultations by both councils on major policy issues. In Lewisham we looked in detail at the new draft Local Plan. Our detailed response included a Vision for Blackheath and putting protected views from the Heath into the plan.

A separate and controversial consultation on Lewisham's new Statement of Community Involvement began in early 2023 and will be reported on next year. In Greenwich we responded in detail to its draft Urban Design Guide.

Our work on planning applications is in three main categories: applications for building in the local conservation areas, trees, and work on major projects proposed for the periphery of Blackheath.

We can be pleased with the outcome on the first category as both councils by and large supported our comments by refusing inappropriate applications or obtaining amendments and conditions.

These included an insensitive proposal for an important modern property at 2 Foxes Dale, also known as The House of Ideas; plans for inappropriate siting of very obtrusive phone masts; and approval for rebuilding the Tea Hut on the Heath.

We have also been involved in preliminary consultation for potential projects in the Village at the station car park and the sorting office behind the Post Office (*seen above*).



We objected strongly to consultation on a very inappropriate scheme to develop the pleasant green at Richmond Gardens for affordable housing. This has now materialised in a formal application which we are strongly resisting.

In terms of applications for work on trees, for which the policy and legal regime is much less helpful, we can be pleased that our efforts, particularly to object to felling of mature specimens, are successful - for example in The Plantation.

The main peripheral large proposed development in 2022 was at Leegate, where a formal application for a major complex including a 15-storey tower is being contested. This is currently in abeyance following new guidelines emanating from the Grenfell fire.

A significant newly controversial area is the 'retrofit' agenda. There is an urgent need to update planning guidelines and guidance on alterations permitted in conservation areas for improving household energy efficiency, and we are lobbying for early action on this.

The guidelines will have to be more pragmatic than those currently in force if the climate agenda is to be progressed.

THE VILLAGE

Despite recession fears and closures in UK high streets, Blackheath is a thriving place to eat, drink and shop. We may no longer have a bank, leaving two empty sites which are difficult to fill, but there have been plenty of newcomers.

We welcomed the following companies to the Village in the past year: Buddha Taste in Royal Parade; On the Heath, Pets Corner, Blackheath Creatives, Rockpool Fishmongers in Montpelier Vale; and 15 Grams Cafe and Jimmy Fairly Opticians in Tranquil Vale.

Nick Ellis (*seen below serving in the shop*) also became the new owner of John Charles Butchers next to the station.

This year we finally managed to buy new Christmas lights for the Village thanks to kind donations from local businesses. These are stored away and should last many years.



We have been working to try to reduce the amount of traffic moving through the Village and are pleased to report that the bridge works on the A212 in Kidbrooke Gardens have now been completed.

This means the 7.5 tonne weight restriction signs at the 3-way junction near Kidbrooke station can be removed, allowing heavy traffic to use the A road. These signs currently force HGVs to come through the B

road in the Village instead. We will be putting pressure on TfL to remove them and will report on this more fully in our next *Newsletter*.



We are pleased to announce that the missing weight sign from the entrance to the station (*seen below in an earlier photo*) has been traced and recovered, and we are working with the Network Rail to establish how it can be more securely fixed to the wall. We are urging the company to repair and repaint the front of the station and we will also report on these efforts in the next *Newsletter*.



A major step for the archive in the past year has been the acquisition of a new scanner which has enabled us to scan images previously too big for our A4 flatbed machine.

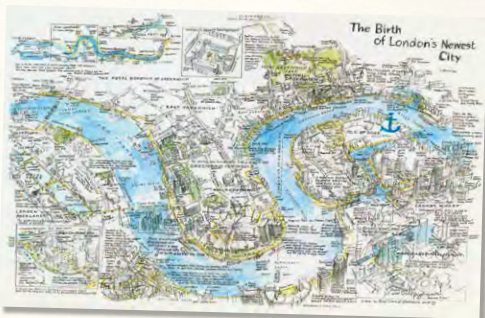
This is a top-down document and book scanner, capable of A3 scans, and so we have been able to add unconventionally sized copies of the *Blackheath Reporter* from the 1960s. There are now 2,973 pages on the website, published from 1959 to 1966 and 1986 to 1989. It has also given us the ability to scan the past 45 years of the Westcombe News, dating from the 1970s.



Records of the Friends of Greenwich Park have also been added to the website.

In addition to local publications, such as the one seen above, we have been able to scan two important new acquisitions for the Society - the Marten family album and the first minute book of the Westcombe Park Estate Co Ltd, covering 1877 to 1886, which Neil Rhind obtained earlier in the year.

Work has also begun on scanning the voluminous work of Peter Kent, the well-known local artist and documentarian of all riverside activity. He has contributed to local publications for the past 50 years.



Many of his drawings, with interesting commentaries, can be seen in the Blackheath local guides on our website. One of them, *The Birth of London's Newest City*, is above. His other work is being catalogued on our file maker database and so far we have scanned about 230 of his drawings.

Work continues on films of the history of the Society since it began in 1937, drawing on images from the archive for each decade to highlight pressing issues of the day. The first four decades are completed and work continues on the more recent past. These will shortly be added to the website, after some small edits suggested by a review group.

As has often been reported, the process of cataloguing, scanning and digitising is a slow one but we are happy that the results continue to be increasingly accessible on www.blackheatharchive.org, the sister website to the Society's www.blackheath.org. Over the past year, we are happy to say we have been able to add many more pages.

As reported last year, we know that the search facility for individual images on the site can be difficult to use and we are continuing to look for easier solutions.

TREASURER'S REPORT

YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

This year is our first as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and the statement of financial activities shows the transfer of assets from the old Blackheath Society charity. The result on unrestricted funds includes £599,864 of assets transferred into the CIO on 1 January 2022.

After removing this transfer, unrestricted funds for the Society showed income and endowments of £62,437 and expenditure of £59,062, giving a net surplus on unrestricted funds of £3,375 for the year.

The gains/losses on revaluation of fixed assets relate to the movement in the Charifund investment (loss of £9,913) and the revaluation of Tranquil Hall (gain of £20,000).

Restricted funds for the year are substantially composed of the transfer of Blackheath Joint Working Party money of £22,405 and £8,500 for Talbot Place. During the current year the Society successfully raised money for the Village Christmas Lights campaign, £20,900 was donated by local businesses and the Society contributed £5,000.

The Society's annual income, mainly from membership fees and investment income, covers routine office and other overheads. Expenditure on additional projects and activities is generally funded by reserves, donations or specific gifts for projects.

Membership saw an increase to 889 households (855 in 2021) and this increased again to 935 in May 2023. The membership fee remained at £20 per year for 2022, unchanged since 2018.

The Society continued much of its work to provide in person 'Walk and Talks' and virtual events to members. All money received to support these projects and the relevant expenditure is shown under our unrestricted funds in the accounts.

This year our activities were further enhanced with the introduction of the Architecture Group, who joined us from the Blackheath Halls and hosted a number of well-attended and well-received events.

The Equities Investment Fund for Charities (Charifund) Investments, included in fixed assets, was held at £168,055 (£177,968 in 2021). It generated income for the year of £9,492 (£8,469 in 2021).

We continued to hold a property investment asset, the freehold of Tranquil Hall in Blackheath Village, which was revalued in 2022 and is now held at £410,000 (£390,000 in 2021) in the accounts. The property is rented to Heath House, a local preparatory school.

The Society's total funds were £644,730 at 31 December 2022 (£631,463 in 2021) and we remain in a strong financial position.

The Society's Trustees regularly review our requirements for reserves in the light of the main risks to the organisation. Our annual income is derived from members' subscriptions, donations, investment income and rental income received on Tranquil Hall.

They aim to ensure annual running costs are controlled carefully and are met from annual income, and that budgets are set accordingly. For special projects, external grants and donations are sought and raised wherever possible, but always in conjunction with the use of the Society's own designated funds.

It is considered vital to hold sufficient unrestricted financial reserves to protect the Society from the risk of insolvency and from serious disruption to its work, and to enable it to mount any major campaign thought appropriate. The Trustees therefore consider that the reserves held were at an appropriate level at 31 December 2022.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

FOR THE PERIOD FROM 27 OCTOBER 2021 TO 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2022 £	Comparatives From Predecessor Charity Total 2021 £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:				
Donations and legacies	12,871	30,900	43,771	38,732
Charitable activities	8,921	-	8,921	8,830
Investment income	39,525	-	39,525	28,469
Donation from predecessor Charity	599,864	31,599	631,463	-
Fees and supplies	1,120	-	1,120	1,600
Total income	662,301	62,499	724,800	77,631
EXPENDITURE ON:				
Charitable activities	(59,062)	(31,095)	(90,157)	(61,080)
Total expenditure	(59,062)	(31,095)	(90,157)	(61,080)
Gains/losses on revaluation of fixed assets for charity's own use	(9,913)	-	(9,913)	21,000
Gains/losses on investment assets	20,000	-	20,000	-
Net income	613,326	31,404	644,730	37,551
Gross transfers between funds	(5,000)	5,000	-	-
Net movement in funds	608,326	36,404	644,730	37,551
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Total funds brought forward	-	-	-	593,912
Total funds carried forward	608,326	36,404	644,730	631,463

BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

Registration number 1196292

	2022 (£)	Comparatives from predecessor Charity 2021 (£)
FIXED ASSETS		
Investments	578,055	567,968
CURRENT ASSETS		
Stocks	8,328	6,972
Debtors	9,935	8,881
Cash at bank and in hand	70,441	59,952
	88,704	75,805
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(21,112)	(11,360)
Net current assets	67,592	64,445
Total assets less current liabilities	625,647	632,413
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	(917)	(950)
Net assets	644,730	631,463
THE FUNDS OF THE CHARITY:		
Restricted income funds		
Restricted funds	36,404	31,599
Unrestricted income funds		
Unrestricted funds	608,326	599,864
TOTAL FUNDS	644,730	631,463

ARCHITECTURE GROUP

At the start of last year the Blackheath Society took over the activities of the former architecture group of Blackheath Halls, founded in 1989.

In the first full year of our events with the Society we organised five guided tours to buildings and a talk at St Michael's Church.

Our visit to the Isokon building in Belsize Park on a sunny day in July was led by Magnus Englund, author and director of the Isokon Gallery.

We then visited the local Alms Gate development in Lee Road (*below*), led by the developer. It was excellent to be able to see how an historic set of buildings was refurbished, while retaining the quality of the original place.



Moving back into town, we went to the Tree House pavilion in Elephant and Castle, a new community cafe in the center of a

major redevelopment, and were lucky to have the architect Hari Phillips and the developer taking us through the process of delivering this extraordinary pavilion and its wider masterplan.

In March we visited Lambeth Palace Library, (*seen below*) a unique building by Wright and Wright architects.



The same month we went to the Aga Khan Center in Kings Cross, another unique and fascinating building, with many internal gardens, set in the Kings Cross regeneration.

Our talk was given by Tim Bell, of Bell Phillips architects, who focused on working with communities and councils to deliver social housing, including recent infill sites in Greenwich.



This photograph of the Prince of Wales Pond was taken by Tim Keeler

SOCIETY MANAGEMENT

PRESIDENT

Neil Rhind MBE

TRUSTEES

CHAIR

Paul Watts

John Bartram

Allan Griffin

Sarah Mansfield

VICE-CHAIR

Dame Helen Reeves

Nick Patton

Nicola Peers

John Schofield

Howard Shields

TREASURER

Andrew Westbrook FCA

Diane Summers

Ana Sutherland

David Walker

Liz Wright

SECRETARY

Sacha Bright

The Blackheath Society. A Charitable Incorporated Organisation.
Registered Charity number 1196292.

PHOTO CREDITS

The Society would like to thank Society member Tim Keeler for his photograph of wild flowers on the Heath, which appears on the cover of the annual report this year, and for his page 13 photograph of the Prince of Wales pond.

All other photographs were taken by members of the committee or come from the Society's archive.

This report was produced by John Bartram and designed by Pippa Stanton.



Blackheath Hill in 1906

