



NEWSLETTER ■ AUTUMN 2023

TALBOT PLACE PLAY AREA OPENS FOR FUN

The children's play area on the Heath is now largely built and is open for business. Our first small customers explored the space as soon as the fencing around the site came down at the beginning of August.

The formal opening of the play area, which is situated in Talbot Place, is likely to be in September, once the schools have returned and some important additional elements have been completed, most notably the installation of toilets.

The project in its current incarnation has been driven by volunteers and supported by the Blackheath Society over the past two years, but efforts to get a children's play space on the Heath go back more than 10 years, with the need for play facilities and toilets consistently coming top in public consultations on the area.

The site is in front of abandoned sports changing rooms owned by Lewisham Council. The building contains asbestos and is unsafe for public use. Plans over recent years for its redevelopment have stalled and it is unlikely that they will be reactivated in the medium term.

The strip of land that now forms the play area had been derelict. It contained an area of unsafe broken paving and was partly fenced off to discourage its use as a toilet. Spotting the potential of the land, the Friends of Blackheath Play Area, made up of local parents and

grandparents, won a £60,000 grant from Lewisham Council in January 2021.

The grant was awarded through the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) scheme, funded by developers in the borough. The group's finances received an extra boost with an £8,500 donation from the Balcombe Charitable Trust and the toilets are being provided separately by Lewisham Council.

The play space will remain very natural-looking, in keeping with the Heath which it adjoins. There are logs



for balancing on and a large tree trunk for climbing, which was donated by Greenwich Park and removed during works for the Greenwich Park Revealed project.

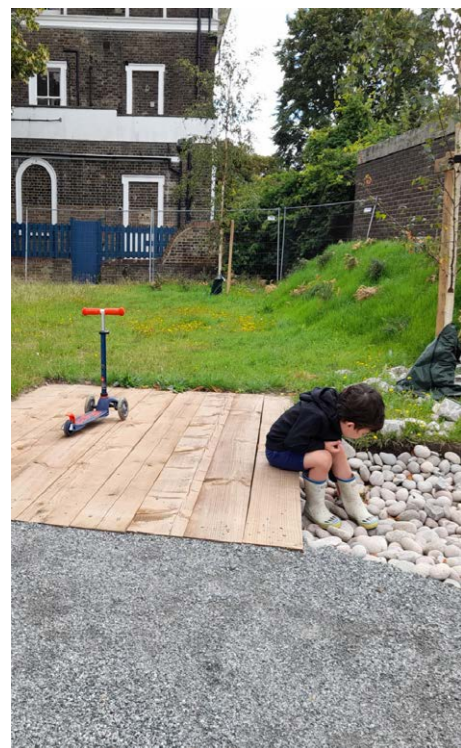
An outdoor percussion instrument was an immediate hit with the children and a sit-on wooden sheep is currently on order. There is seating on wooden benches and big boulders and a dry river bed of cobbles winds its way through the site. The back wall has distorting sheet metal mirrors which reflect the trees and the sky.

Two new birch trees have been planted and there will be further wildflower sowing in the coming months. Additional features will be added as and when more money can be raised.

It had been hoped to close off the road in front of the play area to cars, leaving cycles free to use the route, but the plan has hit an unexpected bureaucratic hurdle which, it seems, will take some months and a hefty charge to resolve. Until then Lewisham is supplying a traffic sign, warning road users to take care.

The design of the play area was constrained by it being on the edge of the Heath, needing planning permission and central government approval, leading to construction delays of many months and cost increases. The site is fully wheelchair accessible.

Even though its scale is relatively modest, the play space is likely to become a welcome destination for small children and their carers. Until now, the only playground provision has been elsewhere for older children and adults and it is a long and hilly walk, especially with small children and buggies, to the nearest playgrounds at the bottom of Greenwich Park or at Manor House Gardens.



The photographs above show two young children enjoying the new play area and heavy boulders being delivered

Lewisham Council's agreement to provide toilets will also be a bonus for children playing sport at the weekends as well as the play area users. The toilets will be a portable-type but permanently plumbed in through the wall of the disused changing rooms.

Currently, temporary toilets have had to be provided for events, for example for the Blackheath Society's Kite Day. The plan is to site them along the west return wall, off the play area site itself, facing onto the car park. It is likely that they will be closed at night.

As the space matures, and new features are added, it is envisaged that the new play area could host, for example, story-telling sessions and educational events on the flora and fauna of the Heath, as well as workshops on willow-weaving and making musical instrument from natural materials.

Seeds from wild flowers and grasses will be collected by volunteers from the bunds around the Heath - the raised edges which are allowed to grow wild to encourage bees and other wildlife - and sown among the long grasses of the play area.

An announcement of the formal opening date will be made as soon as it has been fixed. Society members will be invited to come and celebrate this valuable new facility on the Heath.

The works were carried out by Glendale, Lewisham's contractors for the Heath, and EPD Landscape Architects. Pro bono design work was by Ian Chalk Architects (Ian is a Blackheath Society member). The Friends of Blackheath Play Area can be contacted by emailing DianeBlackheath@Outlook.com.

MEMBERS RAISE VILLAGE CONCERNS AT OUR AGM

The Society's first AGM in its new Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status, chaired by our president Neil Rhind, was held on June 30 at St Mary's Church Hall in Cresswell Park and was attended by over 60 members.

The formal business, including approval of the 2022 accounts, reappointment of the independent accounts examiner and the election of trustees retiring by rotation was introduced by the chair Paul Watts and all resolutions were passed on a show of hands.

Nicola Peers, a trustee, gave a presentation on potential Blackheath Village improvements. We then asked members at the meeting to complete a short questionnaire to help the trustees prioritise key projects for the next year and this was also circulated online after the meeting.

We received a total of 164 responses and the top three are: stop HGVs from cutting through the Village and

prevent rubbish bags from filling the streets in joint first place, while cleaner pavements free from litter, weeds and spillages came in third. We are discussing these requirements with Lewisham Council.

The subsequent issues raised in order were: more street trees and planters, more pedestrian crossings, rationalize traffic signage, more traffic calming measures, improve seating, rationalise pavement posts and provide more bike racks.

There was a general Q&A at the end of the AGM giving members a chance to ask questions and raise issues of concern. A wide variety of subjects were raised, a number of which are covered in this *Newsletter*.

The issues included police vans parked by the station, defibrillator provision (*see article below*), the current status of the Blackheath Joint Working Party and use of the Heath (*see page 14*), Village begging and drug dealing and latest news on the condition of the station and Southeastern trains timetables (*see page 13*).

DEFIBRILLATORS IN THE VILLAGE

Public access to defibrillators in the Village was one of the issues members raised at the Society's AGM, but many people do not know where they can be found locally.

They are at the station ticket office, the Hare and Billet and the Princess of Wales pubs, at Brooklands School and St Michael's Church, both on the Cator Estate, although none are available 24/7.

The British Heart Foundation is building a useful website and database called Defib Finder that you can access at www.defibfinder.uk. You enter your postcode and it lists the registered defibrillators nearest to you and their availability.

It encourages all owners to register defibrillators, as ambulance crews sometimes need this information. If you cannot remember the web address in an emergency, you should Google "defibrillator near me" and you will see the finder option if Google knows your location. Or you can dial 999, as call handlers have access to the database.

Defibrillators are expensive at around £1,000 each, and they need maintenance. Their £198 battery needs replacing every four years and the pads every three years costing £57 each.

If they are placed in a vulnerable location, protection against vandals is needed which can cost £500 to £700. Defibrillators are easy to use and clear

instructions are given. One tip though - if the patient has a hairy chest, he (or she) will need a quick shave before fixing the pads and a razor is provided.

As a rule of thumb, GP surgeries, hospitals and dentists usually have a defibrillator and the government is encouraging firms to have one for their employees - there is already one at Tesco in Lewisham.

THE BLACKHEATH SOCIETY
EST. 1918
BLACKHEATH KITE DAY
Sunday, 8th October 2023



Display by
The Kent Kite Flyers

12:00 – 3:00pm

near All Saints' Church on the Heath

Join us for music, food and help with flying your kite. There will be kites for sale or bring your own along. Badges for all kite flyers. Try the new play area at Talbot Place.

The children of Grinling Gibbons Primary School will be coming with their steel pan band at about 2pm.

Jimmy Botton will hold his Family Fun Fair on Royal Parade all weekend.

Botton's
FAMILY FUN FAIRS

TALES FROM ST MARGARET'S OLD CHURCHYARD

Members will be familiar with the splendid Victorian St Margaret's Church in Lee Terrace. Many will know the old churchyard across the road in which an estimated 5,000 people may have been interred over 700 years.

Blackheath Society member Paul Wright has researched some of the more remarkable residents of this ancient churchyard and he will tell their stories at the new church at 7.00pm on Tuesday October 3.

He will discuss some of the famous inhabitants, such as the fabulously wealthy Samuel Fludyer and his niece Lady Dacre who both occupied Dacre House, a once prominent Lee residence with extensive grounds.

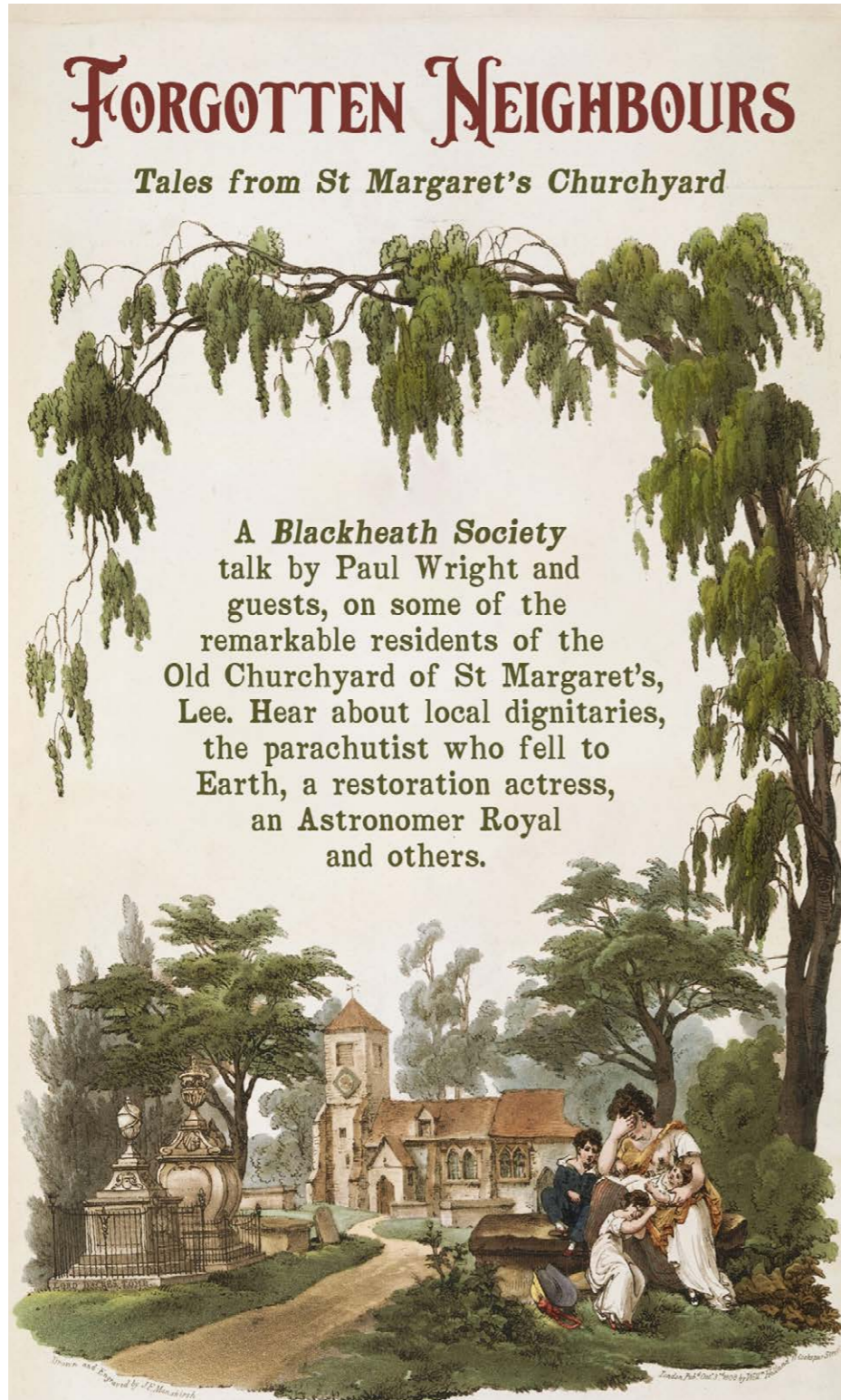
Another is Edmund Halley, after whom the comet is named, who had a long and remarkable life including a spectacular falling out with the first Astronomer Royal John Flamsteed.

And Robert Cocking, who tragically fell to earth when his prototype parachute failed as it descended over Greenwich, will also feature.

Paul will also discuss some less well-known residents, such as William Chivers who was murdered by his gardener, Margaret Hughes who is reputed to have been the first professional actress on the Restoration stage, Daniel Bacheler, a lutenist and courtier to Queen Anne at Greenwich Palace, and James Annesley whose spectacular kidnapping on the orders of his wicked uncle became an 18th century legal cause celebre.

The talk will be richly illustrated and Paul will be joined by guests in what promises to be a lively and illuminating evening.

There will also be an opportunity to hear about Lewisham Council's plans for some restoration of the churchyard.



FORGOTTEN NEIGHBOURS
Tales from St Margaret's Churchyard

A Blackheath Society talk by Paul Wright and guests, on some of the remarkable residents of the Old Churchyard of St Margaret's, Lee. Hear about local dignitaries, the parachutist who fell to Earth, a restoration actress, an Astronomer Royal and others.

TUESDAY 3RD OCTOBER 2023
7:00 for 7:30 at St Margaret's Church, Lee SE13 5DL
Tickets and further details from www.blackheath.org

THREE FAMOUS BLACKHEATH WOMEN REMEMBERED

Neil Rhind writes: It would not be right for the Society to ignore the recent deaths of three internationally famous people with Blackheath connections. We feel members would wish their names to be recorded.

Two were Dames of the British Empire. One was notorious as a teenager but so widely respected as an author of detective stories and thrillers set in Victorian times that she was also rewarded with an extensive obituary in The Times and most other newspapers.

Firstly we refer, of course, to Dame Mary Quant CH, probably one of the most influential designers of the last century, the pioneer of the miniskirt and other fashionable apparel in the 1960s and 1970s.



She was born in Blackheath and educated at the High School for girls in Wemyss Road. Although not then a Blackheath resident, the connection held and the school mounted a special evening to pay tribute to its old girl in 2019.

Dozens of Blackheath and Greenwich women turned up wearing Mary Quant designs, some of which still fitted and which most had bought at Bazaar, her shop in the King's Road.

No one who bumped into her in local supermarkets could fail to recognise the familiar face of Dame Glenda Jackson.

She achieved international distinction in her field as a stage and screen actress and even changed profession when she was elected as Labour MP for Hampstead & Highgate in 1992. Nevertheless, Blackheath remained her home and in more recent years she lived in the granny flat in her son's house in Aberdeen Terrace.



We must also remember Anne Perry (*below*), a detective story writer who produced many volumes, mostly set in Victorian times, some in Blackheath and never out of print

But Anne (nee Juliet Hulme) had a dreadful past. She was born in Blackheath when her father, a nuclear physicist who worked at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park, took a position in New Zealand. When he divorced her mother it was decided that Juliet would go with her to South Africa.



But she was in an obsessional relationship with a friend, Pauline Parker, whose mother refused to let her daughter join Juliet in South Africa. The girls were appalled at the prospect of separation and events darkened when they

murdered Mrs Parker. Because of their age the sentence was relatively short and Anne eventually returned to the UK, changed her name and started her hugely successful writing career. The story had made her famous but in a unique way.

Members may possess some of her paperbacks including the best-seller *Death on Blackheath*. A feature film was made about her early unhappy years with the actress Kate Winslet playing the role of Juliet Hume.

We would also like to note the passing of Sir Robin Bailey, a distinguished civil servant who lived in Greenwich and supported the Greenwich Society with enthusiasm. He served as Chairman as he did for the Friends of Greenwich Park.

John Gunn, a Blackheath resident of many years and another distinguished civil servant, has died at the great age of 89. He was a long-time member of this Society but also served a considerable spell on the Committee of the Friends of Greenwich Park, holding the office of Chairman from 1995 to 1997.

We should also remember a much-respected Greenwich resident, Ewan Hooper, who died in May aged 86, for his pioneering work in the revival of Greenwich Theatre. It was run down and due for demolition and he worked tirelessly to save it, building a large following.

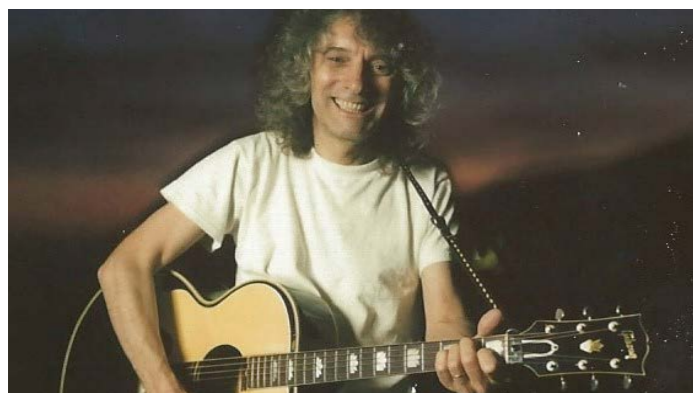
He was overseen by a committee led by Blackheath resident Robin Harland and the first Friends of the incipient playhouse, who helped convince the local authorities to save the venue.

It worked and there followed a golden age with distinguished playwrights, directors, actors and actresses eager to support the newly reconstructed theatre, skilfully designed in the round by Blackheath architect Brian Meeking. It opened in October 1969 and has flourished, despite some difficulties, ever since - all thanks to Ewan.

PERFORMERS REMINISCE FOR THE SOCIETY ARCHIVES

Members will recall last year's very successful talk Rock Around Blackheath at which presenters Paul Wright and Maureen Corcoran discussed the many popular musicians who either came from the Blackheath area or made their homes here.

Three performers with close links to the area have since agreed to record video interviews for the Society's archive in which they reminisce about their early days.



Albert Lee (*seen above*), a Grammy-winning legend of country rock who worked with Emmylou Harris, Eric Clapton, the Everly Brothers and Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings, spoke engagingly about his childhood in Greenwich and Kidbrooke Park Road.

He initially had to borrow a guitar from a friend to practise with another aspiring musician living in the prefabs in St German's Place. He took a guitar to John Roan school one day, only to be told 'you won't get far with that, Lee' (shades of John Lennon's aunt Mimi).

Like many aspiring musicians in the late 1950s, he started out in a skiffle group called the Dewdrops who performed locally before joining the early 1960s rock scene. In the interview Albert said he had wondered for decades what the Blackheath Society did after walking past the notice board in the station on his way to various day jobs.

Years later he found an old platform sign from Blackheath station in a junk shop in Canada which brought back memories. It now adorns a wall of his home in California, and is pictured below.



Marty Wilde (*below*) was born in Blackheath. He went to Halstow Road Primary School and then Charlton Central secondary modern. As a teenager he was discovered by song writer Lionel Bart and quickly signed up by the legendary Larry Parnes under whose management he had a string of chart hits from 1958 onwards.

Marty showed us a notebook that he had kept from the late 1950s when he was starting out with his first band called Reg Smith and the Hound Dogs, giving details of local gigs, payments received and reminders of musical instructions to other members of the very young band.

A teenage Albert Lee called on the by then chart-topping Marty, who lived nearby, to ask if he had any advice for someone starting in the music business. When, several decades later, Albert reminded him of this, Marty said he couldn't bring the conversation to mind but, he asked, "was I nice...?" and was told "yes, very". He also recalled the concert at the legendary Lewisham Odeon in 1974 at which he introduced his now equally famous daughter Kim.



Chris Difford (*top right on the following page*) spent his early years in King George Street in Greenwich before moving to Combe Avenue. By his own admission he was a bit of a tearaway, and he placed a rather misleading advert in a newsagent's window in Blackheath for musicians to join his then non-existent band.

This was answered by a young Glen Tilbrook or, more accurately, on Glen's behalf by his girlfriend Maxine, (the daughter of local historian Felix Barker, co-author of the Society's history *Guardians of the Heath*). A meeting in Blackheath at the Three Tuns pub, now called O'Neill's, followed, as did another with a young pianist then called Julian (later Jools) Holland - and the legendary band Squeeze was formed.

Chris speaks entertainingly in the interview about the band's early days in various uncomfortable practice rooms, including one in Greenwich Baths in Trafalgar Road, before they moved their gear down to the Bricklayer's Arms (the Brick, now Hardy's) to perform their early gigs.

Both Chris and Glen kept close links with the area after Squeeze achieved great fame. Chris lived in Bennett Park and Lee Terrace and Glen had a studio for many years in Royal Parade.

All three spoke engagingly and with real affection of their association with the Blackheath area. The interviews, of which these are just highlights, will be valuable historical documents.

They will shortly be lodged in our archive where they can be accessed by anyone with an interest in the fascinating stories of these key local figures.



ELTHAM COLLEGE AND BLACKHEATH PREP MERGE

Eltham College and Blackheath Prep merged at the start of September "to become one family of schools in southeast London."

This will cement their close ties through a more formal partnership, bringing new opportunities for pupils to share facilities and expertise, and for staff to develop their careers within a wider pool of professionals.

The merged schools will be led by Guy Sanderson, who will continue as Headmaster of the College. He will be supported by Alex Matthews and Vikki Meier who remain Heads of Blackheath Prep and Eltham Junior School.

Both schools are in good financial health. Planned capital investment projects will go ahead, including the refurbishment and expansion of the College science and technology building, a new library and classrooms for Eltham Junior School and the rebuilding of the Jubilee block and sports pavilion at Blackheath Prep.

Guy Sanderson said: "This is a wonderful opportunity for two already successful schools to build on a shared educational vision, ethos and values to the benefit of both communities."

Alex Matthews added: "Pupils are at the heart of our decision to merge and they will continue to enjoy exceptional teaching, outstanding pastoral care and fantastic facilities."



Blackheath Prep School is above and Eltham College below

ANOTHER PACKED PROGRAMME OF SOCIETY EVENTS AWAITS

All events and updates are listed on our website at www.blackheath.org where you can reserve your place. Our website provides a direct link to Eventbrite which administers the ticketing.

WEDNESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER AT 5.30PM. Cricket Match in Greenwich Park. Our annual match against the Greenwich Society, on the pitch just inside the Blackheath gates of Greenwich Park, was postponed in June due to bad weather. Please come in September and support our team to retain the famous Golden Elephant trophy.



THURSDAY 7 SEPTEMBER AT 7 PM. All the Fun of the Fair at the Trafalgar Tavern, Greenwich. A Talk by Horatio Blood. Greenwich Fair was held twice a year at Easter and Whitsun when hordes of pleasure seekers descended on Greenwich by road, river and rail for three days of rumbustious revelry. The glorious heyday of the fair was the 1830s when the favourite fixtures of Richardson's Theatre and the Crown and Anchor Dancing Booth held court. The unrivalled attractions included menageries, swing boats, the first roundabout in England, Punch and Judy, waxworks, gingerbread, tumbling, roley poley, drink and debauchery.



Drawing on a wealth of literary material and pictorial imagery, Horatio will evoke all the fun of Greenwich Fair from its obscure origins to its eventual suppression in 1857. This was a tale of pleasure for people suppressed by the snobbery, bigotry, religiosity, hypocrisy and the respectability of the establishment. False noses and silly hats are encouraged, so do come on time. Admission is free but please register to reserve your place via the link on our website.

Horatio Blood is the Secretary of the Greenwich Historical Society and Neil Rhind Vice President. As a gesture of thanks for all of Neil's support and endeavours for GHS over the years there is no charge for this event.

SATURDAY 16 SEPTEMBER Open House Festival: Modern Architecture on the Cator Estate. TICKETS SOLD OUT.

Ana Sutherland, local architect and Society committee member, will lead walking tours as part of the Open House Festival. Most of the buildings on the walk faced major opposition when first built. Today, as modern architecture is celebrated and more widely recognised, they form a unique group of treasures that contribute to the rich historic fabric of this area of Blackheath.



The walk features buildings from the mid-1950s to the 1980s, by architects including four who were particularly prolific locally: Eric Lyons, Patrick Gwynne, Peter Moro and Walter Greaves. We will cover developer-led housing on the Span estates, like the one above in Foxes Dale, and bespoke houses and public building, such as St Michael's Church Hall.

Members will be able to visit the inside of two or three Span houses during the walk. Ana's book, *Tradition of Modern Buildings in Blackheath and Greenwich 1950-2000* will be published later in 2023.

WEDNESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER AT 12.30 - 1.30. Meet & Eat at the Princess of Wales, Blackheath. Join other members for a drink or lunch at our informal meeting. No need to book, just come.

TUESDAY 3 OCTOBER AT 7 FOR 7.30PM. Forgotten Neighbours; Tales from the Old Churchyard. Paul Wright, Blackheath Society member, and guests give a talk on some of the famous (and not so famous) residents of the churchyard of the old St Margaret's Church, Lee (*see full story on page 4*). Tickets at £15 include wine. All are welcome.

You will learn about a Restoration actress, the lutenist at the Court of Queen Anne of Denmark, the parachutist who fell to earth, the claimant in an infamous 18thC aristocratic dispute, Edmund Halley and the local dignitaries after whom Dacre Park and Fludyer Street were named. The talk will be richly illustrated and has a musical interlude. Tickets at £15 include wine. Please book via our website.

SUNDAY 8 OCTOBER AT 12.00 - 3.00PM. Kite Day on the Heath behind All Saints Church. Bring your kite and enjoy a day out. Kent Kite Flyers will bring their big, spectacular kites to fly in the arena and will be on hand to give help and advice. The steel band from Grinling Gibbons school, Deptford, will accompany proceedings. Delicious food and non-alcoholic drinks are also planned. Come and join us for a great afternoon out.

WEDNESDAY, 18 OCTOBER, 10.30 - 12.30PM. Walk & Talk: Covent Garden. Jonathan Causer, society member, will lead a walk in a very compact area near the



Piazza, covering the area's history, nuns, prostitutes, one murder, two actors, two painters two poets, too



many policemen and more. Inspiration, aspiration, desperation and perspiration. Starting under the portico of St Paul's Church (*above*), finishing at Russell Street and stopping for coffee on the way. Please reserve your place via the website.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 28 AT 2PM. Annual Heath cleanup. Details to follow.

THURSDAY 9 NOVEMBER AT 10.00 - 12.30PM. Walk & Talk: Maidenstone Hill Revealed.

David Whittaker, society member and long-time resident of Maidenstone Hill, will repeat his walk, although shorter, which is full of surprises. The Hill is a well-known topographical feature north of Blackheath Hill, but it exists now only as a road name. Over the years the area has seen many changes and has been an important source for building materials, some of which had unfortunate results. The area housed the pest house, workhouse and a plague pit. We will locate the homes of interesting past residents and businesses and there are some tragic stories to be told. Meet at 10.00 at the Banana Tree cafe (formerly Cafe Rouge) Stockwell Street, Greenwich for coffee and please book your place via the website.

THURSDAY 23 NOVEMBER AT 12.30 - 1.30PM. Meet & Eat: The Princess of Wales pub. Join other members for a drink or lunch at our informal meeting. There is no need to book.

Blackheath Village switches on the Christmas Lights, Saturday 2 December at 4.30pm. Join the Christmas celebration at The Crown, Blackheath Village.

The Architecture Group will hold more events this year which will be advertised on the website and in regular news emails to members when they are arranged.

LEEGATE REDEVELOPMENT APPROVED AFTER 10-YEAR WAIT

The main highlight in terms of planning decisions has been the approval, after some 10 years of discussions, of the latest plan for Leegate. This is peripheral to our core area, but important to members nearby for its indirect impact on Blackheath and as a test of the new protocols for planning in Lewisham.

The Lewisham Strategic Planning Committee approved Galliard Homes' scheme for 562 new homes, of which 36% would be affordable with 30% intermediate ownership and 70% social rents.

Most controversially, it will include a 15-storey tower at the Tigers Head junction (*seen in a design plan*) plus four of 10 to 12 storeys, against eight or fewer now.



Everyone is keen to see this dilapidated site regenerated, and we welcomed the principles behind the scheme. But the strong objections from local residents were principally its height, and the huge increase in density and massing, without the need for the developer to provide the financial viability evidence to justify this.

The height of the main tower is in direct contravention of Lewisham's own recently issued policy, still in draft in the new Local Plan, on the maximum heights in areas designated for tall buildings. For Lee Green, the maximum is to be 12 storeys.

But the Committee was advised by its officers that these limits, being still in draft, carried "no weight". And, in accordance with the new protocols for planning committees, objectors including the Society were only allowed a derisory and strictly applied five minutes to speak on such a major issue.

We were very fortunate that two local councillors, James Rathbone of Lee and our Luke Warner of Blackheath, added weight to the objectors' case in their very powerful objections. But sadly, and most disappointingly, the overall committee challenge to officers on the proposal was minimal. This compounds the concerns about the new procedures.

The new protocols were approved in March and their unobjectionable objective is to streamline the planning approval process. This is achieved mainly by increasing the threshold number of objections required for an application to be decided by committee from five to 10, and by limiting the right of amenity societies to trigger a committee review.

Amenity societies in Lewisham are unhappy with the content and, more importantly, with the manner in which the change was and is being implemented, and the draft proposals that would make formal recognition of amenity groups more difficult. A large well-established society like ours will continue to hold the council to account, but the change seems to cast doubt on the chance of smaller and newer groups in less well represented areas of Lewisham to be effective.

We reported last time on the very controversial scheme by Greenwich Builds for housing on the green space in Richmond Gardens, off Brooklands Park. Thanks to efforts by ourselves and some very energetic residents, the scheme received a record of over 100 objections.

We were able to submit an opinion from a barrister, kindly provided pro bono, challenging the legal basis of the scheme. Residents provided an examination by Historic England and the relevant ministry for listing the unique mural by William Mitchell in the community centre on the site (*seen below*), which is scheduled for demolition in the scheme. The outcome is awaited, as is news of Greenwich Council's next steps in this. Once again, we are grateful for the support of local councillor Christine St Matthew-Daniel in our efforts.



In other highlights, the scheme for redevelopment of the Blackheath Village Post Office has been resubmitted. We welcome this in general, but continue to have concerns about the lack of detailed plans to deal with its traffic implications, including its new nursery, and the fate of the adjacent vintage telephone boxes.

Members will have seen the ongoing developments at Blackheath Halls, as they proceed with their scheme to improve the frontage. We welcomed the scheme when it was proposed in 2021, but have articulated a number of concerns about the treatment of the trees and landscaping.

The Halls management has acknowledged these and their comments are included on page 12.

We referred last time to the issue by Greenwich Council of a draft Supplementary Planning Document on Urban Design and we expended considerable effort in offering comments on this.

We found it to be a very welcome and well prepared document, offering a very comprehensive and detailed set of guidelines including, for example, those on shop fronts. Our comments included ideas for effective implementation of the guidelines and the opportunity to strengthen the proposals on heritage assets and the protection of trees.

VILLAGE SHOPS CLOSE BUT HOPES RISE FOR THE AUTUMN

Unfortunately a number of shops and businesses in the Village have closed recently, and we no longer have a bank following the departures of both Lloyds and Barclays.

Bianco and Artis restaurants have closed, as have Pares shoes, the CBD store and most recently, Hand Made Foods which opened in the Village around 30 years ago.

The shop (*seen on the right on the day before it closed*) still operates a business on-line but it had to shut its Blackheath shop in August due to rent increases.

However, some sites are currently being renovated so there should be some new openings in the Village this autumn.

Nick Ellis, who took over John Charles butchers last year, has given his shop a major revamp. Its oak wall divider has been preserved, and moved back to create a larger selling space.

The oldest single use shop in the Village, dating from 1924, it is now open again and will therefore celebrate its centenary next year.



DERBY MERCURY

17 July 1768

Morning at Two o'clock two daring Foot-pads, who have for a long Time infested Black-Heath, Shooters-Hill, &c. and robbed divers Persons in the Night-Time, were brought to Sir John Fielding's, by a private Patrole, who had (from the Necessity of the Case) been fixed on that Road for about a Week: Upon their being attacked, one of them presented a Pistol to one of the Pursuers, which providentially flashed in the Pan, and was so near, that the Powder scorched his Face; upon this, the Person who had also a Pocket Pistol in his Hand, shot at the Robber, and took away Part of his left Ear, after which they were both secured without further Damage: The second had a loaded Pistol, which went off, on being taken from him, and fired into the Air. A Gold Watch, of which a Gentleman was robbed on Blackheath, in March last, was found on one of them. These Offenders were committed; the one to New Prison, Clerkenwell, and the other to Clerkenwell Bridewell.

IMPROVEMENTS CONTINUE AT BLACKHEATH HALLS

Blackheath Halls Director Gemma Okell writes: Planned landscaping work to improve the area at the front of the Halls started in late May and is due for completion in September.

To date, brickwork on the façade and front wall has been cleaned and repaired, excavations have removed the existing surfacing and ramp to the building and new granite paving is being laid.

Forthcoming work by contractors Arien and Carrick Landscaping includes rebuilding the ramp and steps and installing benches, signage, lighting, and bollards to prevent unauthorised vehicle access. The garden area at the front of the building will also be replanted.

The project, which is being supported by the Hearn Foundation, has been planned to improve the outside of the building.

This follows major internal refurbishment in 2018, including the installation of raked theatre seating and levelling the surface of the Great Hall stage.

The plans will open up the frontage of Blackheath Halls, which is a registered charity, making it feel more welcoming and inviting. The intention is to encourage new people to come and visit the venue, and hopefully attend a performance or take part in a community engagement activity for the first time.

The outdoor space will also be more pleasant for existing audiences, students, hirers, artists and other visitors to the building.

The venue remains open while the works are taking place and tickets can be booked for autumn season events, including the 2023 community opera production of Handel's *Semele* at the end of September.

Other improvements over the summer have included the installation of a stage lift, so wheelchair and other users and with limited mobility can perform on stage in the Great Hall and pianos can now be lifted on and off stage.

An exhibition of photographs of performers past and present at the Halls, including some from the Society's archive, can now be seen in the venue.

The editor adds: The Society wishes the best for the Halls and its campaign for improvements. We had some reservations in the planning stage concerning the replanting of trees as a matter of public interest and the Halls have acknowledged our concerns.

We asked the Greenwich tree officer to ensure any chosen trees would be of suitable quality and stature to front such an iconic and historic building, which marks the start of the Village and is the focal point for its new public space.

The tree canopy outside the Halls has been significantly reduced recently with the removal of the ash from the Hall's front border and of the large horse chestnut tree opposite the Halls.

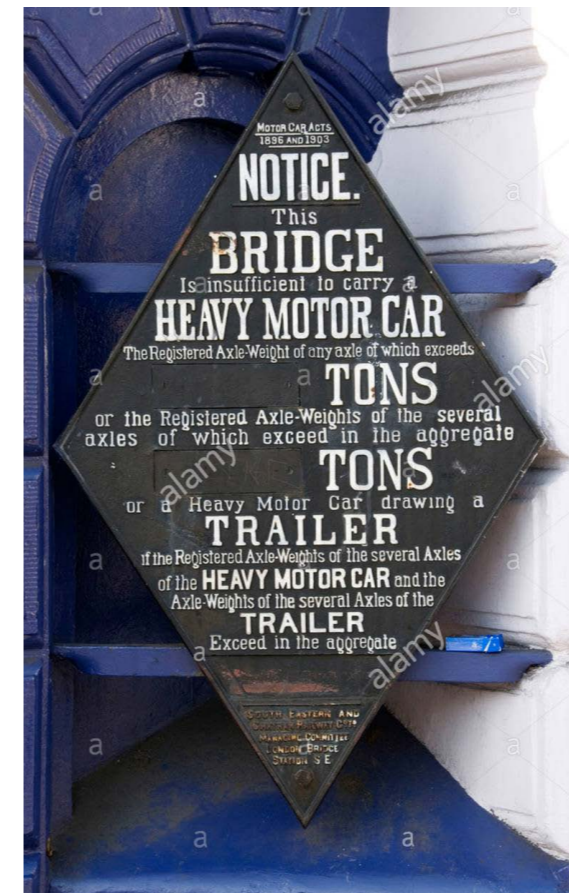
We asked the Council officers to ensure there would be a maintenance plan for the tree, which will require looking after for a minimum of five years from planting, and that there should be an integrated rainwater collection or irrigation system to water the new beds. We also said it was essential that re-planting should be done in the autumn.

Greenwich Council approved the application and its planning officer felt it was procedurally inappropriate to make the further changes we had suggested, despite some concerns voiced by its tree officer.



The two photographs were taken at different times in August and show work underway at the Halls

BLACKHEATH STATION RENOVATION IN 2024



We have contacted Network Rail, Southeastern Trains and the Railway Heritage Trust regarding the repairs and decoration of our grade 2 listed station in the Village.

The good news is that Blackheath station is now on their radar for funding, and the station renovation should take place in 2024. In preparation the repair of the valences on the platforms should start this autumn

We are delighted to report that the weight sign (*seen above*), which was stolen a few years ago, was found last Easter in a local antiques shop whose owners said they had acquired it from some "local scrappers". It is being safeguarded by the Society.

Once the station has been re-decorated the sign will be reinstated and it will also be made a Designated Railway Item by the Science Museum in recognition of its importance as a heritage asset. The Society would like to thank local resident Richard Swann for alerting us regarding the whereabouts of the sign.

SECOND OFF PEAK SERVICE TO CHARING CROSS NEEDED

The restoration of one additional off peak direct train service per hour to Charing Cross and Waterloo in the May timetable was a step forward, but a second service in between would be a significant additional step that would restore two direct services an hour in the off peak period.

This would provide a very significant improvement over the present service which has four Cannon Street trains each hour but only a single hourly direct service to Charing Cross and Waterloo.

The Society believes there are two highly relevant issues in relation to increasing the number of direct services to Charing Cross and Waterloo.

Together with the Victoria service, the Bexleyheath line currently has five off peak London services per hour which would become six with an additional service to Charing Cross and Waterloo.

Six off peak London services per hour is far fewer than the off peak services provided to suburban residential areas by the Underground, the Overground, the Elizabeth Line and other rail services north of the river.

A cursory review of timetables for these services to north London zone 5 stations (to compare with Bexleyheath) shows far higher levels of service than we receive, ranging from 8 to 19 an hour. The exceptions are that three out of the 15 zone 5 stations have fewer than the five trains an hour that we receive.

South London may have much better bus services than north of the river but these are used mainly for local travel and are not comparable for travel into and out of central London, particularly for our Zone 5 communities.

Our second issue is the refusal by the Department for Transport to increase the level of support to Southeastern, despite the generation of substantial benefits to rail travelers by restoring a second off peak direct service to Charing Cross and Waterloo.

Our estimate of these benefits is some £3 million a year, far greater than the annual £1 million we understand it will cost to provide the service.

To obtain this estimate we have used the DfT value of time which is its standard method for calculating the benefits of transport projects.

This £3 million is unfortunately not additional revenue for Southeastern but a valuation of the benefits to Bexleyheath line travelers by providing an additional off peak direct service to Charing Cross and Waterloo.

We hope that the Department will consider the benefits to Southeastern's users. The whole purpose of our rail services is to serve its users, not to generate profits for the Government.

COMPLAINTS OVER JULY WEEKEND HEATH MUSIC FESTIVALS

Three new music festivals have been granted licences on the Heath this year. The first two ran back to back on the same weekend in July and the third will be held at the end of September on Circus Field, the area of the Heath more often associated with funfairs.

The July festivals were organised by the company responsible for the radio station KISS FM. The Saturday festival KISSTORY was aimed at adult pop music fans with the average ages of ticket holders between 25 and 40. The Sunday UPTOWN Festival catered for all age groups including children.

Unfortunately, there were many complaints about the volume of the music on both days and the inadequate provision of litter bins and toilet facilities. The problems appear to have been exacerbated by the absence of local consultation or prior information, such as road closures and the re-routing of the 380 bus.

We were told that 13,000 information leaflets were distributed to neighbours a month in advance but when we heard a number of very near neighbours had not received their copy, the company arranged for 7,000 more to be delivered. Copies were also emailed to Blackheath Society members.

Events like this would normally be discussed in detail in advance by the Blackheath Joint Working Party (BJWP) but, for reasons set out below, no meetings were held in the months before the events

As a result, agreements reached and lessons learned from previous festivals, such as the position and directions of the stage, did not appear to have been shared with the new contractors. We have asked for a post-event consultative meeting for residents affected to communicate their experiences directly to the organisers.

The third music festival, Groovefest, will take place on Saturday 30 September. This has been discussed with the organisers at the BJWP and concerns have been noted about possible traffic and parking provisions. The festival will involve DJs playing recorded music and the officially approved sound levels will be a little lower than for the July events. Local residents will be provided with further information by the organisers prior to the event.

The BJWP coordinates the management of the Heath between the councils of Lewisham (south of the A2) and Greenwich (north of the A2). The Blackheath Society and our colleagues in the Greenwich and Westcombe Societies are voting BJWP members.

In March last year its chair and management passed from Lewisham to Greenwich as a matter of routine. Unfortunately, Greenwich Council made no budget provisions for the hosting or management of its four annual meetings or for the annual public meeting, all of which would normally be held in Blackheath.

As a result, from March 2022 to July 2023 there were no BJWP meetings in person and only one electronic meeting in November 2022. Arrangements have now been made for meetings to be held in the Greenwich Council offices in Woolwich, the first of which has already taken place.

We are grateful to the Westcombe Society, which has agreed to take minutes, and the Blackheath Society will continue to host the BJWP email address for correspondence and to manage the small charitable Community Fund for projects to benefit the Heath.

TERRY WAITE HONOURED BY KING CHARLES



Society member Terry Waite, who was held hostage in Beirut for five years, has been appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG) in King Charles III's birthday honours list.

Sir Terry, a special envoy of the Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie, was detained for 1,460 days from 1987 to 1991 after being captured as he attempted to negotiate the release of hostages held in Lebanon.

After his own release he founded Hostage UK, a charity that supports the families of captured people, and he published several books, including his autobiography Taken in Trust, which he said he wrote in his head while in his prison cell. His publisher said: "The book reveals the inner strength that helped him endure the savage treatment he received."

Sir Terry is seen above in 2016 at his Bury St Edmunds home in Suffolk where he has lived for 26 years, but he returned from captivity to Blackheath.

In 2004 he went back to Beirut for the first time since his release when he told the BBC: "If you are bitter, it will eat you up and do more damage to you than to the people who have hurt you."

THAMES WATER PLANS MAJOR HEATH BUILDING PROJECT

In June the Blackheath Society was approached by Thames Water to discuss a major project involving significant work on the Heath and surrounding areas for a new pipeline.

The wider project to expand its network will involve the boroughs of Lewisham, Greenwich and Bexley where 73,560 new dwellings are planned between now and 2050. It is estimated that the need for water will be doubled at peak periods and this demand is way beyond the capacity of the current network.



The pipework needed between Lewisham town centre and Blackheath Standard will require trenches two metres across. Working areas wide enough to accommodate these, and equipment needed for digging and transporting materials, will be fenced off in successive sections approximately 100 metres long. The work across around the Heath is estimated to take approximately two years and is due to start around autumn 2025.

The exact route is not yet finally decided and it has changed considerably since the first plans were shown to us in June. At that time, it ran across the north of the Village, from Mounts Pond Road along Hare and Billet

Road, Royal Parade and Prince of Wales Road. The current planned route over the Heath is shown by the green line in the Google aerial photograph on the left.

Any route will cause disruption and inconvenience but that would have affected access to and from the whole Village.

The current plan enters the Heath from Wat Tyler Road, turns east then north around Holly Hedge House. It goes north to the A2 and then crosses over (or under) the A2 just past Duke Humphrey Road to run beside Charlton Way towards the Standard.

The contractors assure us that they are committed to causing as little disruption as possible and that they will try to work around the many events and activities which take place on the Heath. They say they also have a commitment to biodiversity net gain and aim to improve the existing environment.

The second consultation with Thames Water and its contractors took place at a recent Blackheath Joint Working Party meeting, the ideal forum as it involves people from both councils and all the key groups with an interest in the life and wellbeing of the Heath.

News about this major pipeline project will be shared with members as the plans evolve.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Lynne Baker	Jane Burton	Phineas Harper	Alexandra Lenzan	Jennifer Smith
John Biggins	Simon Carpenter	Karianne Johnsen	Sally Macdowall	Nisha Stevens
Eleanor Boddington	Jayne Clementson	Nadine Khawaja	Emma Marlow	Andrew Stevenson
Jennifer Bradshaw	Julia Copus	Julia Larsson	Chris Melville	Jane Webber
David Brilliant	Kevin Fewster	Claudette Lawrence	Veronica Pederzini	Peter White

BOWLS CLUB MAKES FRESH APPLICATION ON SITE MOVE

After many years of negotiation with Greenwich Council planners, the Blackheath & Greenwich Bowls Club is submitting a fresh planning application to relocate from its current site in Brooklands Park to a new home on nearby derelict former tennis courts in Blackheath Park.

The club said it has finally found acceptable middle ground with the planners and has minimised the residential development on its existing site, needed to pay for the provision of the new bowls club. The move would secure the future of the club and other community groups that use it, such as the Bridge Club.

On its website the club said club members had spent considerable time and energy exploring how it could secure its future and return to its former premier status. The physical constraints of the current site and the age of its facilities made it impossible for it to successfully address the issues threatening its survival if it remained there.

It therefore felt it had to relocate to a more suitable site (*seen here in an artist's impression*) with accessibility for people with disabilities and younger school-age players, off-street parking, a larger sustainable clubhouse and a new county standard green.

The club said it was very grateful for the continuing support of local people and the new application will probably be considered by the Greenwich planning committee in the autumn. "We hope that you can join us then to impress councillors with the weight of numbers from our brilliant Blackheath supporters."



LEAH LODGE AND RECTORY COURT CARE HOMES

These two Blackheath care homes in Blessington Road and The Glebe are running a free legal clinic, a dog show and daily coffee and cake mornings this autumn.

The legal clinic is organized by Isabel Elliott from Judge & Priestley, is held every other Thursday from 10.30 to 12.30am and places need to be booked. Isabel has experience in wills, estate administration,

trusts, powers of attorney and Court of Protection work. She said she aims to break down the legal jargon, enabling clients to understand their options and feel comfortable with what might otherwise be overwhelming.

The daily coffee mornings from 11.00 to 15.00, also held at Leah Lodge, provide a chance for those caring for people with dementia to get out of the house for half an hour, the care homes admissions

adviser Jessica Tetley told the *Newsletter*.

Rectory Court's annual dog show will be held on Saturday 16 September at 2pm with free entry and eight different categories, including loveliest fella/lady, dog our residents would love to keep as a pet and awesome eyes.

For more information on all these events contact Jessica on 020 3582 8603 or email leahlodge.enquiries@cinamoncc.com.

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PRESIDENT: Neil Rhind CHAIR: Paul Watts VICE CHAIR: Helen Reeves TREASURER: Andrew Westbrook
SECRETARY: Sacha Bright EDITOR: John Bartram DESIGNER: Pippa Stanton

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: John Bartram, Allan Griffin, Sarah Mansfield, Nick Patton, Nicola Peers, Helen Reeves, John Schofield, Howard Shields, Diane Summers, Ana Sutherland, David Walker, Paul Watts, Andrew Westbrook, Liz Wright

The Old Bakehouse
11 Blackheath Village
London, SE3 9LA

THE
BLACKHEATH
SOCIETY

020 8297 1937
office@blackheath.org
www.blackheath.org