



NEWSLETTER ■ AUTUMN 2018

TREASURER BECOMES NEW SOCIETY CHAIR

The Society's new Chair, Paul Watts, is a long-time Blackheath resident who sees the role as one of evolution not revolution, but is aware of the need for the Society to attract a younger membership.

He is the first Chair for three decades to hold a full-time job while also running the Society. Paul, 55, who succeeds Dame Helen Reeves at the Management Committee's October meeting. He is a partner in RSM, a mid-tier firm of chartered accountants providing audit, tax and consultancy advice.

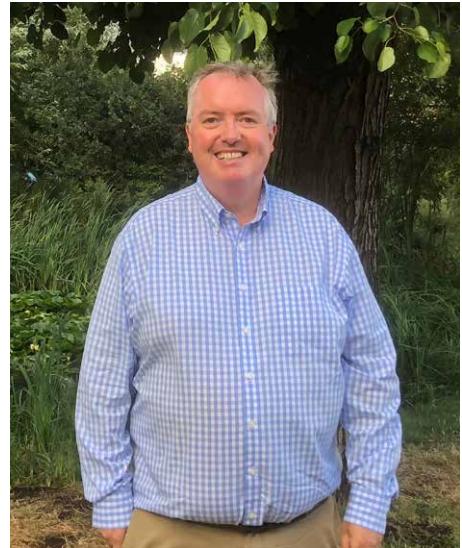
He joined the committee at the end of 2006 as Treasurer and thinks this is now a good time to change roles after 12 years. He told the *Newsletter*: "I think

the Society is in a strong position. We changed our image with a new corporate identity last year and we are on Twitter and Facebook. But we also need to communicate more with younger people and other Blackheath residents who are not yet members and try to change the way we are perceived."

Paul, the only committee member who has attended all four OnBlackheath music festivals, will be going again this September. He plans to set up a new committee sub-group to look at how we can attract younger members, and another to cover IT.

"We are now more pro-active and engaged with people, but we need to be perceived as more approachable by younger people, while still providing for the

important needs and interests of our 1,000 existing members."



The committee returns to its maximum strength of 15 this autumn with the recent addition of

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former Financial Times Managing Editor Diane Summers and John Schofield, an NHS senior consultant, and the return of Sarah Mansfield, a Unilever executive, from abroad.

Paul said he plans to work closely with committee members and volunteers and is confident that, with strong sub-committees

dealing with our core issues such as planning and events, things are working well.

"The Society is not just one person and, as well as committee members covering issues involving the Village and the Heath, we are fortunate to have a large group of dedicated volunteers."

He first visited Blackheath with friends while studying at the University of Kent at Canterbury in the mid-1980s and liked it so much that he moved here permanently on graduating 33 years ago.

"It's a wonderful place to live and we will do everything we can to keep it this way."

LIVELY AGM DEBATE ON EMPTY SHOPS, RUBBISH, STREETS

Empty shops, rubbish collection, parking and street cleaning in the Village were top issues for lively debate at the AGM in June, attended by a record 130 members.

An invited panel of people involved in local commerce, trade, politics and council services led the discussion, exchanged ideas and fielded some challenging questions from the audience.

The Society has now set up a working group on the future of the Village to drive forward the many constructive points made. This will take the lead in tackling issues raised, as well as setting out a vision for the future of the Village.

Preparatory research is under way and progress will be reported in future *Newsletters*. In the meantime, if any member has particular skills they would like to bring to the group, please contact us at office@blackheath.org.

Panel members at the AGM were: Kevin Bonavia, Blackheath Ward Councillor in Lewisham, Peter Hemmings, Managing Director of Selectric, John Payne of John Payne estate agents and Lewisham Council officers Kate Parkinson and Nigel Tyrell, whose responsibilities include refuse collection and street cleaning.

Kevin dealt with questions about the reasons behind the number of empty commercial properties in the Village and the proliferation of chain stores, issues that have concerned the Society and have been reported in past *Newsletters*.

He pointed to the role played by the combination of rents and business rates and the decline of the Blackheath Village Traders' Association. Lewisham Council would be reviewing its planning policy in the next year and looking at the balance between different business types and change of use applications.

Peter said his family business depended on the support of local customers to pay his rent and keep him going. An online presence helped increase footfall and he hoped the business would continue with his family.

John agreed there was an unprecedented number of empty commercial properties in the Village and that, increasingly, the only businesses that could keep up with rising rents and rates were the chain stores.

There was general agreement that a greater variety of shops should be encouraged. It was regrettable Costcutter had closed and had remained empty for 1-1/2 years.

He believed there were more than enough restaurants and hairdressers and even more wanted to come.

A representative of the Dyers' Company, which owns about 20 per cent of the commercial premises in the Village, said he would like to keep trying to attract the right tenants to maintain the Village's character.

Responding to questions from the audience about increasing rents and rates for small businesses, Kevin said business rates were set nationally and collected by the council. He agreed the current system was unfair and said he was prepared to lobby for reform.

Parking was also identified as an issue. There were calls for short periods of free parking to encourage people to use local shops, as well as more imaginative use of existing parking, for example at the station.

Rubbish collection and street cleaning were other major topics. Nigel said improvements had been made in services, despite substantial cuts in budgets. Attempts had also been made to restrict bins on the pavements, but there continued to be an issue with traders arranging with other contractors to collect rubbish and their collection times varying (see *Letters to the Editor* on page 11).

Some business owners said Lewisham's own collections were often not made on time and the result had been piles of bags on the pavements near cafes where people were sitting eating.

It was agreed the whole appearance of the Village would be improved if business owners followed the example of those who kept their own frontages swept and litter-free.

PACKED LIST OF SOCIETY AUTUMN WALKS, TALKS & EVENTS

On the weekend of 22 and 23 September our President, Neil Rhind, will lead two walks around Blackheath's Cator Estate, starting at 11am each day from the Princess of Wales pub. They will last around 90 minutes, viewing properties from the early Victorian period to 1930s suburban, post-war municipal and ultra modern houses. Please apply to the office for tickets, limited to 30 each day.

27 SEPTEMBER: MEET AND EAT

The Events Committee is organising an informal *Meet and Eat* event at 7pm on Thursday 27 September at the Hare and Billet pub on the Heath. We hope you will join us for a relaxing evening of chatting and eating and getting to know your fellow Society members.

Please book by emailing the office. A £10 deposit is required a week beforehand and you can pay for food and drink on the night. As it is a group booking, food will need to be pre-ordered and we will send you the menu after your booking.

3 OCTOBER: WALK AND TALK

On Wednesday 3 October Society member John Causer will head a *Walk and Talk* entitled *Lewisham by the Hudson*. He plans to discuss the passing of the slums, regular flooding, organised animal cruelty and much more. We will meet at Blackheath station at 10am, but numbers will be limited, so please inform the office if you plan to attend. As usual we have a suggested donation of £5 towards the Society on joining the walk.

9 OCTOBER: LECTURE

Our autumn lecture on Tuesday 9 October entitled *How Mass Observation began in Blackheath; Taking the pulse of the Nation* starts at 7 for 7.30pm at St Mary's Halls, Cresswell Park and full details are in the separate story on the following page.



20 OCTOBER: HEATH CLEAN UP DAY

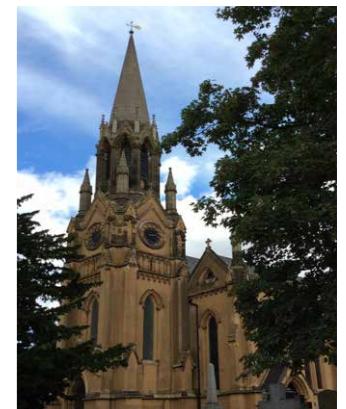
Heath Clean Up Day takes place on Saturday 20 October when our gallant team of volunteers will gather at 2pm in the car park of Talbot Place for the annual Clean Up. Do come and join in, bring your own gloves and please wear suitable clothing.

30 OCTOBER: MEET AND EAT

Another *Meet and Eat* evening will be held on Tuesday 30 October when we will gather for a social evening at the Italian restaurant in the old NatWest Bank in the Village, now called Bianco's, at 7pm. If you plan to come the arrangements will be similar to those above.

12 NOVEMBER: WALK AND TALK

We hope to hold a second *Walk and Talk* on Monday 12 November, meeting at St Margaret's Church, Belmont Hill, Lee, at 10am. Cilla Bartlett, a member of the church and the Society, plans to guide us round the beautiful, Victorian Pre-Raphaelite building. We will discuss the visit afterwards as we walk to Manor Park for coffee. There is a £5 donation as a contribution towards the church and Society.



1 DECEMBER: VILLAGE DAY

Village Day is on Saturday 1 December. Do come and join the festivities as we celebrate switching on the Christmas Lights

Music is planned at the Crown pub and in the

Village from lunchtime onwards. Age Exchange and the Blackheath Concert Halls will be holding full Christmas festivities.

The mystery guest who will switch on the lights has yet to be confirmed - details will appear later on our website. If you would like to take part in any aspect of the day please contact the office, as it takes the help of many members to make the day go with a swing.

If you would like to join members organising events, or have suggestions for future dates, you are welcome to join our next event meeting which will be held on Thursday 11 October. Ring the office for details.



BLACKHEATH MASS OBSERVATION TALK IN OCTOBER

In the 1930s Blackheath was involved in the first steps towards Mass Observation, which was based at Grotes Buildings and led by the film maker Humphrey Jennings and his friend Charles Madge, a poet, journalist and professor of sociology.

They recruited hundreds of volunteers to write accounts of their daily experiences. The first event was on 12 May 1937, George VI's Coronation Day, when they aimed to take the pulse of the nation.

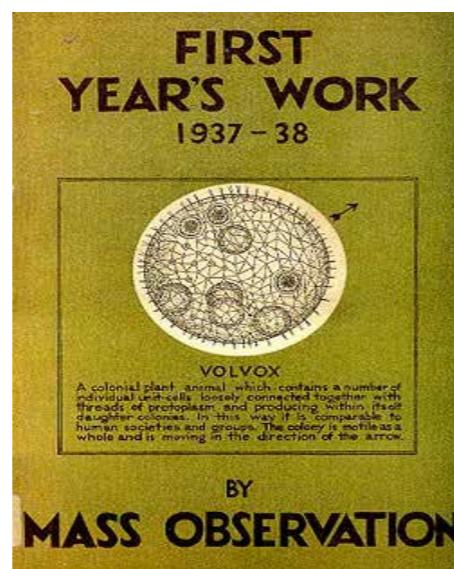
They wished to counter inaccurate representations of the nation in the press and by politicians of that time and they gathered information on a diverse range of subjects, from pub culture to shopping habits.

On Tuesday 9 October Kirsty Pattrick, from the Sussex University Mass Observation Archives Department, will speak about the origins of the project, show how the information is used and relate it to today's writers.

The talk will be at 7 for 7.30pm at St Mary's Church Hall in Cresswell Park. You will have the opportunity to join an informal observation of the audience's activities for Kirsty to illustrate how the process works.

Tickets at £10 are available from www.eventbrite.com and you should search 'How Mass Observation began in Blackheath', or email office@blackheath.org to say you plan to attend and pay at the door.

The University of Sussex now holds the archives for Mass Observation and they make an annual call for diaries on 12 May each year.



Members, and schools led by their teachers, can all take part by going to the website at <http://www.massobs.org.uk/write-for-us/12th-may>.

GREENWICH HERITAGE CENTRE CLOSURE "APPALLING"

Our President Neil Rhind writes: Your Society, along with other local history groups, was knocked sideways early in July to learn that the Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust intended to close its Royal Heritage Centre at Woolwich.

Staff departed, online catalogues were removed and the priceless stock boxed up by volunteers and stored with little, or seriously limited, future public access.

This is an appalling action and the Society, represented by me and our images guardian Allan Griffin, have joined an informal group of representatives of local people, such as the Greenwich Historical Society and leading Greenwich historian John Bold, to question this and see if it can be reversed, even if only in part.

The details are complex and curious. At a meeting with Tracy Stringfellow, the Trust's CEO, the decision was vigorously questioned and not all her answers stood up to scrutiny. The chairman is Len Duvall, a former leader of Greenwich Council and now a member of the London Assembly, and a meeting with him is being arranged.

The Trust claims there is nowhere for the archive to go where full public access can be swiftly organised, that the space it occupied is needed and the adjacent empty Firepower premises is required for a dance company.

The eventual aim is to raise a large sum - a "creative fund" of over £31million - largely through the National Lottery, and to create a purpose-designed centre in Woolwich to house the archives and other activities, such as exhibitions and entertainments. All this will take at least two years, depending on fundraising.

Meanwhile, there are empty spaces in Greenwich which could permanently and adequately house the archives almost at once, and should have been fitted out in advance of the closure, including Charlton House and the Greenwich Borough Hall.

Instead, a place has been found at Anchorage Wharf, a long way off the beaten track and below the water line of the Thames. Current indications are that access will be by telephone appointment, restricted to one day a week, and the staff are unlikely to be qualified.

The Trust's proposal is outrageous and indicates quite clearly that it has no interest in, or knowledge of, the Borough's outstanding historical archive and one of the finest local history collections in London.

It is not just a Greenwich gathering of bits and pieces but an outstanding collection of national importance.

At the time of printing this *Newsletter* your Society intends to keep fighting.

BLACKHEATH SIGNAL SYSTEM ISSUES

A complete new signalling and cables system is being installed at Blackheath station in the autumn as part of a network-wide upgrade and the work, which runs from mid-August to Christmas, has raised serious concerns about its size and the planning process.

At an information meeting for local residents in late July, Network Rail claimed weekday train services would not be affected, although they expected bus replacements during some weekends.

The new cable will be built under platform 1 and the cabling work will affect the whole line as far as the Pond Road interchange where the high voltage power source is located. A new signal exchange will be installed in the sidings beside Platform 1 and current plans show a box made of the usual dark grey composite on a concrete base which begins 12.5 metres from the station building.

The base will measure 15 by 6 metres. The box on top will be a little smaller than that and three metres high, or about two metres higher than the platform. This will necessitate the removal of more or less all of the vegetation along that stretch and, as well as looking dreadful, will cut right through the Society's proposal to install a wildlife garden there.

Clearly the work is essential, as the current signalling was installed in the 1960s. Service efficiency and improved reliability are promised. But we believe Network Rail may not have properly considered the visual impact, including the need to deter litter and graffiti. We are sure the work will arouse strong views among members, for and against (see *Letter page 11*).

We have suggested it be installed closer to the far end of the platform, which would be less intrusive.

Network Rail arranged a site meeting with the Society and Southeastern to discuss this in early August but the results were rather depressing. The 90 square metres to be cleared has already been marked out more or less beside the middle of platform 1.

We were told the exact position could change slightly, depending on a survey of what track, and possibly cabling, is located below the surface.

The Network Rail spokesman said there always have been live cables or tracks there but, given that volunteers planted the area in 1980 and maintained it for 25 years, we find that difficult to accept.

There was an attempt to claim the Conservation Area stopped at the Village but we were able to refute that, and we know planning consent was sought for the three covered seats placed on the platform earlier this year. However, rail structures such as signal boxes seem to be permitted development under the planning

rules, even in Conservation Areas.

There is some uncertainty regarding whether the station's Grade 2 listing extends to the platform and sidings. We have been advised that the whole curtilage of a listed building would be covered by the listing and, in this case, that it could extend to the whole enclosed area of the station but the Lewisham planning team does not agree.

The project leader assured us that all the appropriate permits had been secured and no further applications would be needed.

We were also told that this massive box could have been positioned anywhere between Lewisham and Pond Road, and that the best site for technical purposes would have been Pond Road, but there was not enough room.

So we may end up with it placed in the middle of Blackheath station simply because there is room there. It has to be in the middle of platform 1, the most intrusive position, because this provides access for the pre-fabricated box to be lifted in from the Blackheath Hospital car park.

There has been no consultation with local residents and the situation was evolving as the *Newsletter* went to press. We seem to have been presented with a fait accompli because the rail authorities anticipated objections.

The only silver lining is that they do seem willing to discuss cosmetic options by way of compensation. There will be a green fence around the grey box and a mural and plant troughs on the platform have also been suggested.

The Society will continue to pursue these issues vigorously with the rail authorities.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

NOVEL MATCH - SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 11 OCTOBER 1834

The following singular match has been made to come off in a week, for a considerable sum. A gentleman weighing ten stone has engaged to drive his dog (a large Newfoundland) in a light cart made for the purpose, a distance of seven miles, against a pony 13 hands high, to be driven by its owner in a cart. The match, from its novelty, excites considerable interest. The dog is at present in training at the Sun in the Sands, Shooters-hill-road, in the neighbourhood of which the wager is expected to be decided.

PLANNING ISSUES KEEP SOCIETY BUSY

The Society is extremely fortunate. As stalwart long-term volunteers have moved on in the last year we have benefitted from the contribution of a new team of dedicated and competent members, to whom we are extremely grateful.

Among the continuing load of applications the team has dealt with, some of the highlights are:

BLACKHEATH BOWLING CLUB

The Club is at the centre of two related major applications, with which it hopes to ensure and improve its long-term viability. Working with developers, it submitted a plan to relocate to the site of the old tennis club at the end of Blackheath Park. Separately, to fund and facilitate this move, the Club submitted plans for redevelopment of its current site in Brooklands Park (an earlier plan to upgrade the site was refused in 2014).

The Society supports its vision: we are keen to see the Club, the last remaining of a number of sports clubs in the area, prosper. We supported the plans for the Blackheath Park site, offering a chance to open up a derelict and wasted area in a tasteful manner.

The plans for the old site are more contentious, since they involve "Community Open Space" (COS) land. After extensive discussion we found them appropriate to the location, our only objection being that the Club should provide a more thorough documented justification for the loss of COS.

In the event, Greenwich Council chose to take an unexpectedly hard line on the COS issue and rejected the plan for the Brooklands Park site, which implicitly leaves the approved plans for the new site in limbo. We understand the refusal will now be subject to appeal.

8 THE GLEBE

The Public Inquiry into plans for *8 The Glebe*. As covered in earlier *Newsletters*, this has been the subject of controversy for some years, with local residents and the Society contesting strongly what we believe has been wilful neglect of the site, including the inappropriate removal of trees (*see photo above*), plans for town houses and other issues affecting this distinctive 1840s villa site in its arcadian setting.

The developer's plans were rejected by Lewisham, resulting in an appeal by the developer and the public inquiry. The inquiry took place over seven days in June, with strong attendance and good contributions by the Council, residents and the Society. The Inspector will have to assess whether she supports our collective contention that the proposals are inappropriate for this distinctive site in our Conservation Area,. The outcome is expected shortly.



KIDBROOKE VILLAGE

On the plans for the area of *Kidbrooke Village*, we are dealing with two major issues: revised firm plans for the area of Kidbrooke Village West (east of Moorhead Way and next to the earlier controversial Huntsman site) and the pre-application stage for revised plans for Kidbrooke Station Square, which is land north of and across the road from Kidbrooke Station, owned by TfL.

Geographically, these areas are on the margins of the Society's core interest, but the plans have the potential to impact significantly on Blackheath, apart from their effect on those already resident in Kidbrooke Village, so they warrant very careful scrutiny.

The firm plans submitted for Kidbrooke West now envisage a 46% increase in the number of units relative to earlier plans, with six-storey blocks (previously four and five) overlooking the Huntsman site, and much reduced landscaping, gardens and play area.

The plans submitted for consultation for Kidbrooke Station Square involve a significant area (1.7 hectares), bounded by transport arteries but with poor access. They show an increase of over 50% in the number of units proposed relative to earlier proposals, including two towers at 22 and 24 storeys.

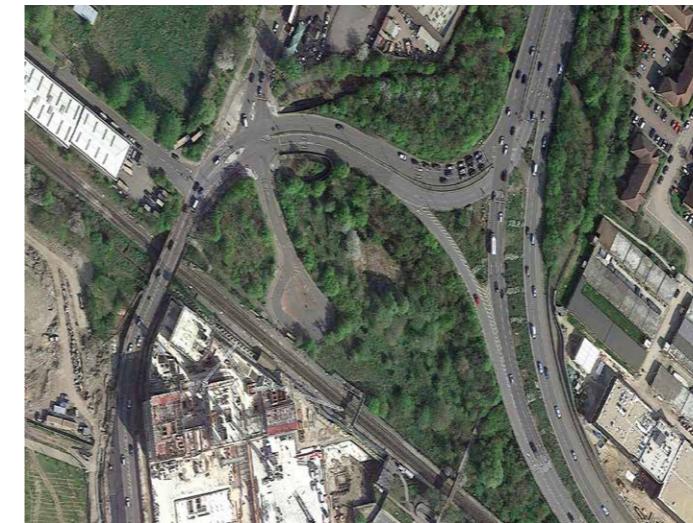
In combination with revised plans for the adjacent Kidbrooke Hub, currently under construction, the whole area would have more than three times the number of units envisaged in the original Kidbrooke plans.

Given the nature of the site, *seen in the photograph on the next page*, there will be serious issues regarding safe and convenient access, and pollution – not to mention the impact on views from the Heath.

When the vision for Kidbrooke was agreed in 2009 it was welcomed as offering a modestly scaled urban village, with attractive landscaping and facilities. These two revised developments, along with other changes approved for Kidbrooke Village, will result in

an aggressively scaled urban quarter, overlooking neighbouring areas and the Heath, and a total and dramatic overturning of the earlier approved vision.

We are objecting strongly to both proposals and we will keep members informed of possibilities to contribute to the Station Square development. Given the scale of this project, we welcome as much member participation as possible and we are working with residents and neighbouring groups.



TESCO CAR PARK, CONNINGTON ROAD

We reported extensively in the last *Newsletter* on several plans for the future of Lewisham Town Centre. Those for the site of Tesco's car park, including a 34-storey tower, are a major component. Lewisham Council, reflecting significant concerns of residents and the Society, rejected the scheme last December and we understand this decision is now subject to appeal.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

Planning legislation envisages a significant role for the CIL, a levy imposed on developers as part of planning approvals for major schemes, creating funds for local improvements. At least 15% is intended to be used in the neighbourhood where development takes place.

Stemming from our involvement in the major developments in Lewisham Town centre, we believe there is a need for more transparency and discussion on the significantly increasing scale and uses of these funds. We have written to the Mayor of Lewisham and it appears that Lewisham may be engaging in a consultation exercise on this, but with a much more limited scope than we request.

CHARACTERISATION STUDY

Members may also be interested in a submission by the Society to Lewisham Council of a comprehensive "*Characterisation Study*". This is an effort to document, as a background to planning efforts, the distinctive and important aspects of Blackheath. A copy is accessible via the Society website.

AGE EXCHANGE MERGES WITH CARE PROVIDER

Age Exchange has merged with a national social care provider, ensuring its long-term sustainability and allowing its future expansion.

The Village-based charity is continuing all its current activities unchanged and kept its name and staff after it became a wholly-owned subsidiary in July of the Widnes-based *Community Integrated Care*, which runs 23 homes from the tip of Scotland to Portsmouth.

Chief Executive Rebecca Packwood told the *Newsletter*: "We set out to find a national partner that provided the infrastructure we needed to grow and synergy in terms of values and ambition, and CIC was the perfect candidate."

"This partnership will allow us to replicate the work we do in our Blackheath centre across the UK, dramatically increasing the number of beneficiaries we are able to reach."

"CIC will benefit from our expertise in reminiscence arts, allowing it to develop its award-winning dementia services using Age Exchange's strategies. These are the blueprint for the ambitious plans for this partnership."



CIC was established in 1988 and its 6,000 staff support over 3,500 people with a range of care needs.

In the past year Age Exchange, *seen above*, provided over 8,000 hours of support for carers and people with dementia and more than 700 hours of activity classes, while an estimated 180,000 people visited its building.

It hopes to start Age Exchange branches in the Liverpool area and Scotland in the next few years following the merger.

GREENWICH REGAIN GOLDEN ELEPHANT

If anyone thinks cricket is boring they should have been in Greenwich Park in early June when the annual match with the Greenwich Society drew to a close and Blackheath needed just eight runs to win in the last over.

Spectators and players were on their feet cheering your side to victory. Our two batsmen did their best, but they could add only a further three runs. Greenwich were the victors on a very close-fought day and carried home the Golden Elephant trophy, *seen below*.



On a good batting surface Blackheath Society scored 131 for 3 wickets in the allotted 20 overs, just behind the Greenwich score of 135 for 4. It was a great day's play, and enjoyable entertainment for those who came to support their side. The overall score now stands at 10 wins for Blackheath and four for Greenwich.

Thanks to the players on both teams, to the two umpires including Blackheath's John Bartram, and to our scorer Tony Othen. Additional thanks go to Olly Taylor, Darrell Ryan and Richard Dinkeldein who helped to organise the team and the day. *Blackheath's team is pictured below leaving the field after bowling 20 overs.*



Last year the match was cancelled due to the weather. This had not happened since the first two fixtures were rained off in 2002 and 2003, so we have had a run of very good luck. But this year the weather could not have been better and we played under clear skies.

LEWISHAM STATION TRIALS

In early July, a small number of discreet posters were spotted by regulars at Lewisham station announcing a new one-way system during peak hours, but they gave little information and referred users to station staff for details.

The Lewisham Station Users Group (LSUG), whose members include Society Committee member Nick Patton and Blackheath Ward councilor Kevin Bonavia, arranged a meeting with Southeastern's Lewisham Area Manager, Dan Morrison.

He said the plans were in response to overcrowding at Lewisham and hoped they would alleviate this.

LSUG has been highlighting overcrowding for some time and it welcomed the acknowledgement of this increasing problem, while expressing concerns about this scheme.

People entering the station in peak hours would be not be able to use the overburdened electronic gates near the ticket office and DLR steps or near the lift on platform 1. These gates would only be available for users leaving the station.

Customers entering would have to use the main gates outside the original station entrance which has spare capacity, and the same system would operate morning and evening.

LSUG raised a number of objections about the scheme, its timing and communication to those likely to be affected.

As a result, the start date was postponed from late July to the August bank holiday Monday on a one-day trial, and it will now be on trial on a rolling 4-week basis from October, rather than a permanent change.

The scheme will be fully and transparently evaluated, comparing pre and in-trial baseline figures for subway and gate usage and will be abandoned if it causes more problems than it solves, or if there are safety concerns.

Customers with special needs or disabilities requiring more direct access to platforms via lifts can identify themselves to station staff and then use the normal routes, even during peak hours.

The trial will mainly impact the 11 million people who enter and leave the station annually during peak weekday hours, but also the four million users who change trains at Lewisham at peak times, because it will affect routes and movements through the subways and along platforms.

LSUG is talking to Southeastern about the scheme and has also briefed local councilors, MPs and Lewisham's new Mayor. There will be further updates as details become clearer.

HALLS RUN NAME A SEAT CAMPAIGN

With its major £3.5 million restoration work near completion, Blackheath Halls are running a *Name a Seat* campaign for the first time in their 120 year history.

By pledging a donation £650 or more, your chosen inscription will be engraved on a brass plaque on a seat in the new raked section in the main hall and the donation will be recognised on the supporters' board and the Halls' website. Great Hall Patrons can also name a pair of prime seats from £5,000.



Development Manager Isobel Turner told the *Newsletter*: "This campaign has proved very popular and we've had some wonderful dedications to loved ones so far. It will ensure the venue remains worthy of the creative talents it hosts for many years to come."

"I want to make sure that Blackheath Society members know about the campaign as the Halls are such a part of the community and this is a wonderful way of being part of the building."

"GREENWICH PERFORMS" - FESTIVAL REVIVED

Tim Barnes writes - Many members of the Blackheath Society will recall the old Greenwich Festival. Sadly this disappeared about 20 years ago and was replaced by the Greenwich and Docklands International Festival which embraces the Royal Borough and Tower Hamlets.

For some time there has been discussion about whether it might be possible to revive the old festival with its emphasis on SE10 and this year, with the help of funding from the Peter Harris Trust, we have moved away from simply talking and into the realm of action.

The two-week festival called *Greenwich Performs* starts on 30 September with a performance of Handel's Esther at St Alfege Church with a firework display and songs from the Rock Choir at The Point at 9pm. The fireworks are from the same company which organises the annual Blackheath firework display.



Work underway in the Great Hall earlier this year

The works, which mean the Halls are closed from April until the autumn this year, include refurbishing the Great Hall, redesigning the foyer and bar areas and upgrading the backstage facilities.

The stage will have been levelled and lowered, retractable raked seating installed at the back of the main hall, the acoustics improved and new curtains, screens, stage equipment and lighting installed.

Seating, a new colour design and music-inspired tiles have been provided in the foyer and the bar redesigned to create more space and an informal performance area. The backstage now has one large dressing room, a second for the conductor or principal artist and a green room for artists to relax after the performance.

With gift aid, the Halls can claim an additional 25% of your donation. To take a seat or to learn more, email I.Turner@trinitylaban.ac.uk or call 020 8305 3894.

We are determined to keep ticket costs as low as possible and none will cost more than £18.50. The Festival is supported by the Council, Visit Greenwich, Trinity Laban and the National Maritime Museum.

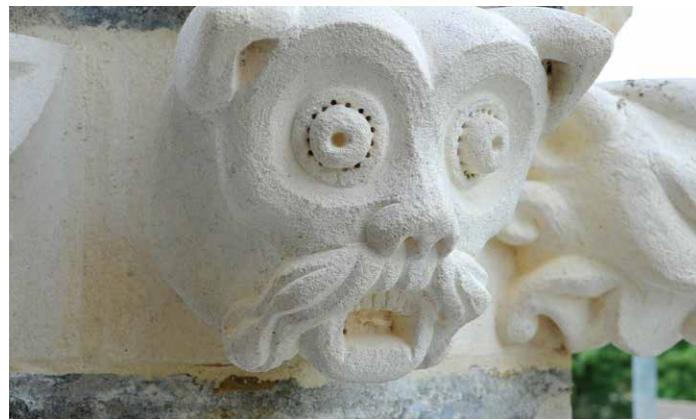
The full programme includes classical and early music concerts, children's events, talks and plays. There will also be the Open House Studios, organised walks in Greenwich and Greenwich Park, free recitals at the Chapel of the Old Royal Naval College and St Alfege church and tours of the historic houses of Greenwich. So there should be something for everyone.

Tickets and a full programme of events are available now through Visit Greenwich, the Tourist Office, the box office at Greenwich Theatre or St Alfege church.

Go to www.visitgreenwich.org.uk/greenwichperforms for full details of all the events.

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH COMPLETES £1 MILLION PROJECT

St Michael's in Blackheath Park has completed a major building project costing over £1 million - called PRISM - to Preserve, Restore, and Improve St Michael's. *Vicar Sandy Christie writes.*



The photographs show one of the new gargoyles on the church and the refurbished interior

The work was vitally needed because of the serious deterioration to the external stone work, including the famous spire known as the Needle of Kent, so something needed to be done to preserve this Grade 2* landmark Georgian building.

It also provided an opportunity to bring the interior up to date with state of the art lighting, a new underfloor heating system, better disabled access, new glass doors and other improvements to produce a flexible and modern building fit for the 21st century.

This creates a combination of old and new and it will be available to a wide range of local community groups

for concerts, lectures, classes, and anything consistent with the building's character and fundamental purpose.

The task of raising so much money seemed daunting, if not impossible, but the congregation set to work with a range of events.

These included a summer dance, a masquerade ball, concerts, quizzes, discos, poetry evenings, sales of food and clothing, an auction of promises, the Fitzrovia Radio Review, wine tasting, two art exhibitions and sponsored runs and swims.

The congregation also gave generously and provided most of the money, but significant amounts came from other local residents and grant-giving bodies. Enough was raised, including interest free loans, to also allow us to completely redecorate the inside of the church.

This preserves the spectacular Georgian building that safeguards the best of the past and creates a modern flexible space with high-quality sound, visual and lighting systems and a large seating capacity.



FROM THE ARCHIVE NARROW ESCAPE FROM DROWNING LONDON DAILY NEWS, THURSDAY 6 JAN 1859

On Tuesday night police-constable Kendall, 318R, was crossing Blackheath, and when near the Hare and Billet public-house heard the sound of what he considered to be a dog swimming in a pond opposite the above house.

He had not proceeded many steps when he became convinced that the sounds were occasioned by some one struggling in the water, but the weather being very thick no object was discernible. On stooping, however, at the edge of the pond, the first thing that attracted his attention was the bonnet of a female floating on the surface of the water, and without stopping to divest himself of his heavy clothing he immediately succeeded in getting to the spot where the bonnet was and laid hold of a female as she was about sinking. With some difficulty he conveyed her into the Hare and Billet public house, and on recovering her consciousness it was ascertained that she was the wife of a journeyman baker, named Reay, living in the neighbourhood, and that owing to the darkness of the night and the unprotected state of the pond, she had mistaken her way, and which would have cost her life but for the timely assistance rendered her by the constable.

Village Cinema coming

Discussions have progressed well with Blackheath Halls to establish a community cinema and we plan to launch this in January 2019, initially with a programme of monthly mid-week films.

The Halls are due to re-open in the autumn after the refurbishment of the Great Hall, cafe and box office. The aim is for the Village Cinema to cater for all sections of our local community, showing films on a regular and frequent basis. More details will follow in the Society's Winter Newsletter. *Lucy Chaple*

The gallery is now the only one in Blackheath, as the picture framers has also closed. It was conceived as a facility for the community offering a hire-charge-free exhibiting space to a range of committed artists.

It opened in June 2017, so we have already completed our first year, and to judge by local comments and generous entries in our visitors book, it has become a valued and exciting point of interest for the local community. Our bookings of artists now go up to February 2020, so we believe that it also provides a valued outlet for exposure for the artists.

Graham High

White Box art gallery

Having read your feature on Village shop closures in the Society's Spring Newsletter, which included the Blackheath Gallery (now Waterstones), I thought I'd draw your attention to the little gallery run by me and my wife Frances.

It is called White Box Gallery at 5 Hare and Billet Road, overlooking the Hare and Billet Pond and three doors away from the pub. The space, which is very small, has been used as an art gallery before, about 18 years ago, since when it has been mainly an office space.

It has now re-established itself as a non-profit-making community gallery, showing contemporary art by serious artists, often working in the local area. Our website at www.gallerywhitebox.com gives more details of our aims and style and we can be contacted by email on whiteboxblackheath@gmail.com.

Cafes and restaurants, and perhaps others, seem to dump leaking bags of dirty waste on the footpath. They need to pay for cleaning it up, be threatened with fines if this continues and ordered to ensure their bags are securely watertight.

It would be useful if the Society could approach those with premises fronting Tranquil Vale or seek Council enforcement action. Whether on grounds of breaching Waste Duty of Care Regulations 1991 and subsequent revisions, or any other provisions, I do not know, but a lawyer or Council officer should.

Malcolm Levitt

Blackheath Station

I travel frequently from Blackheath and had already noted with alarm and anger the total and wilful destruction of a wildlife reserve. Many trees and shrubs have already been destroyed but work should stop now while a full investigation and consultation takes place. The rural look of our station will be blighted forever if such a construction is placed here - another blow for Blackheath Village and its declining fortunes. I cannot believe Blackheath is the only station possible for this project in the whole of the southeast rail network. Stop this work now.

Helga Greenbank

Editor's note: The Society has been pressing Lewisham and Greenwich Councils for a long while about the state of the pavements in the Village and the rubbish left outside shops. This issue affects not just Tranquil Vale but the whole Village.

Shopkeepers are clear the problem arises from the councils' decision to use bags, not bins, and then not collecting them at agreed times. There is illegal dumping and some traders do not pay for collections.

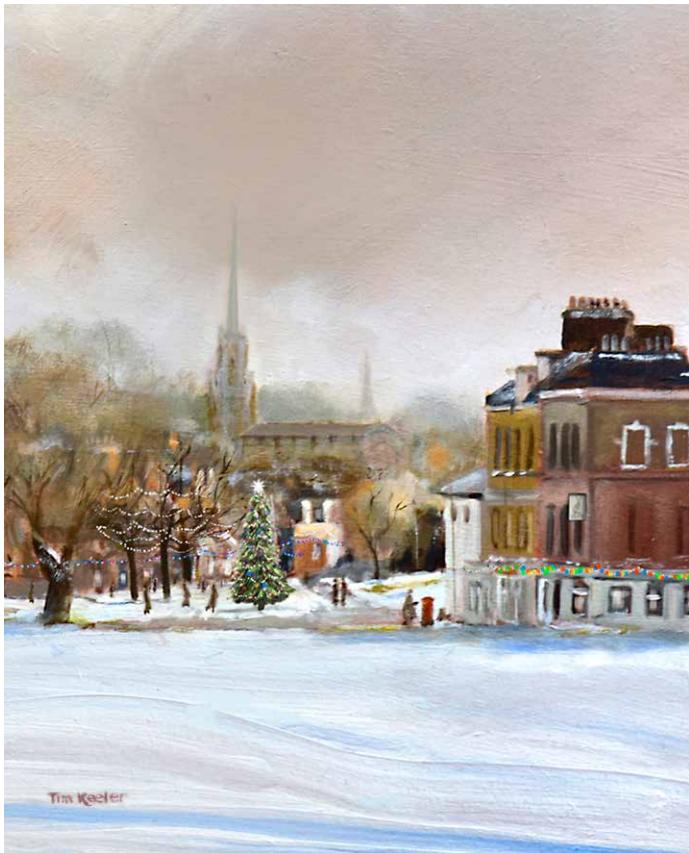
We have been discussing this with Lewisham Council for over a year and have met three times. The pavements have been washed more this year, but unfortunately new black stains show up more than before on the light-coloured paving stones. We invited two senior council officers and a councillor to speak at our AGM in June (see story on page 2) and we are continuing our efforts to solve these problems.

IMPORTANT MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL INFORMATION

May we remind members that from January 2018 we increased the annual subscription payment to a minimum of £20. We would be very grateful if you would change your existing standing orders to the new amount. This can usually be adjusted quite simply with a telephone call to your bank or with online banking.

Many thanks if you have already done this.

CHRISTMAS CARD



This year's Christmas card is taken from an oil painting by our member Tim Keeler entitled *A Festive Blackheath*. It will be available from the Society's office from 1 November priced at £5 for a pack of 10.

DIARY OF EVENTS

Weekend 22 and 23 September. Neil Rhind leads two Village walks at 9.30am

Thursday 27 September informal Meet and Eat event 7pm at Hare and Billet pub

Wednesday 3 October John Causer leads walk titled *Lewisham by the Hudson*

Tuesday 9 October autumn lecture *How Mass Observation began in Blackheath: Taking the pulse of the Nation* at 7pm in St Mary's Halls, Cresswell Park

Saturday 20 October Heath Clean Up Day. Meet 2pm Talbot Place car park

Tuesday 30 October Meet and Eat event 7pm Bianco's Village restaurant

Monday 12 November Walk and Talk from St Margaret's Church, Lee, 10am

Saturday 1 December Village Day

FULL DETAILS OF EVENTS ON PAGES 3 & 4

WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Michael Bell

Rev Anne Bennett, Church

of the Ascension

David Browne

Lee Covington, Village

House Shoe Repairs

Raff Gallo

Kay Hart

Peter Higgs

Josephine Jenkinson

Robert & Elaine Johnson

Matthew Lyons

Rob McIvor

Maurice Nicholson

John O'Donohue

Gill Rose

Peter and Judy Smith

Ruth Steven

Matthew Taylor

Fiona Thompson

Frances Tilston

Isobel Turner

Joy Vyas

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COMMITTEE: John Bartram, Allan Griffin, Nick Patton, Nicola Peers, Helen Reeves, John Schofield, Alex Schweitzer, Howard Shields, Diane Summers, David Walker, Paul Watts, Liz Wright, Helma Zebregs

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