



The

Blackheath Society

Newsletter
Winter 2016

Silence reigns on Post Office raid

The surprise raid on Blackheath Post Office in September by WH Smith enraged many members, with garish hoardings covering the windows, the old wooden doors disappearing and the installation of a new shop with far fewer counters.

Strong protests from the Society and many members about the changes, and the lack of planning permission, led to the quick removal of the hoardings, but the original oak doors have disappeared. We await explanations as to why this happened.

WH Smith responded quickly at the time, saying it had spoken to the shop fitters and was contacting the architects and liaising with the authorities, but it subsequently failed to reply to Society enquiries as to why this had happened. The Post Office has also so far failed to respond to our questions.

We contacted Lewisham councillors in September, saying it was extraordinary there was no prior consultation, the external appearance of the building was causing considerable shock and concern, and having fewer Post Office counters in the back of the building was likely to inconvenience everyone.

By mid-November we had heard nothing from the Council. We emailed Emma Talbot, Lewisham's Head of Planning, to discover whether the Post Office intended to apply for permission to reinstate the hoardings, if the original oak doors had been preserved and could be replaced, and whether there

were any plans for the future of this important and much loved locally-listed building.

We had received no response by the time the *Newsletter* went to press.

Comments from Society members registered alarm, shock, disbelief and bafflement. One said: "We need a proper Post Office, not a shop with a couple of counters, and we have already a very good Ryman's. This is a busy post office all the year round. Heaven knows what it will be like at Christmas." (See page 11).



Work underway to remove the hoardings

The Post Office is on Lewisham's register of locally-listed buildings and is recognised by the Council as a building of character in the Blackheath Conservation Area.

The three telephone kiosks outside are also on the statutory register held by Historic England. Many members felt that the works not only damaged the building's character and appearance, but also had a detrimental effect on the setting of these two Grade II listed heritage assets.

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Society to celebrate President's 80th birthday

On Tuesday 17 January the Society will be honouring its President Neil Rhind, FSA MBE, with a reception in the Blackheath Halls' Recital Room to celebrate his 80th birthday.

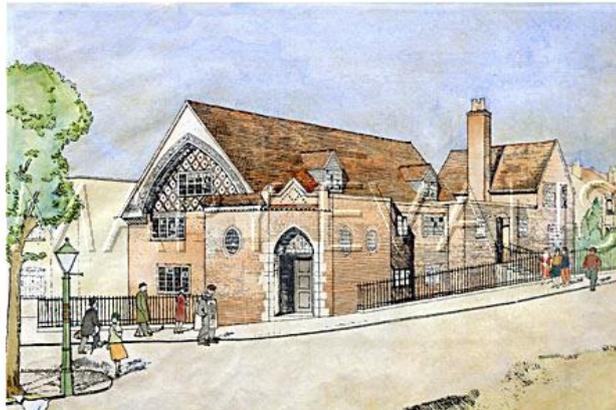
Appropriately, our event is taking place the day before the 80th anniversary of a meeting in the former All Saints' Parish Hall (now the Mary Evans Picture Library) which led to the founding of the Blackheath Society.

Neil was born in Greenwich and for most of his life has been involved in preserving Blackheath. He is a prolific author on local history and many of you will have his books on your bookshelves.

The celebration is for Neil's family and friends and for the many people with whom he has cooperated over the years to preserve Blackheath's built environment. We would like to thank the Halls for covering the cost of the Recital room for this event.

Next summer all members will have an opportunity

to attend further events to celebrate the 80th birthdays of two great Blackheath institutions - Neil Rhind and the Blackheath Society. Full details of these will be provided in our Spring *Newsletter*.



Mary Evans Picture Library, built in 1928, in a watercolour and pen drawing by W J Durnford

The public meeting on 18 January 1937 was called by Douglas Percy Bliss, who was aghast at some recent Village developments, particularly the building of Selwyn Court.

A Council was formed at a private meeting held at 2 Blackheath Park the following month, and the inaugural public meeting took place in

the Blackheath Concert Hall in March that year. Full details of these events are in the Society's publication *Guardians of the Heath*.

Neil, we do wish you a very happy 80th birthday on 9 January and we are looking forward to your next Blackheath publications. Neil outlines his thoughts about these in our interview on the following page.

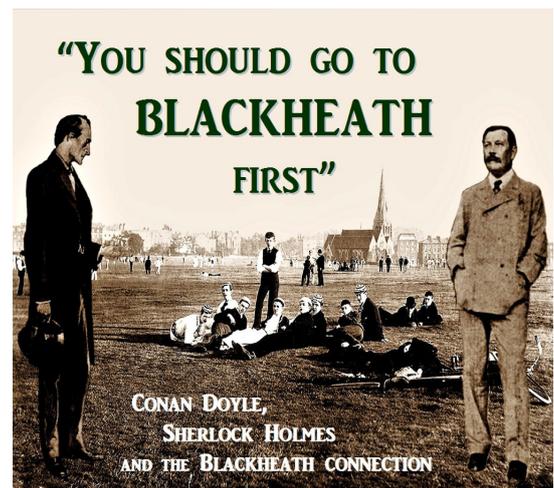
Conan's Doyle's Blackheath connections revealed

Roger Johnson, editor of The Sherlock Holmes Journal, fascinated a lively audience of 70 Society members in November by revealing details of Arthur Conan Doyle's connections with Blackheath.

He tailored his talk, titled "*You should go to Blackheath first*", with great care and thoughtfulness, presenting his slides with a truly Victorian pin board effect. To add to their charm, Roger wore his Sherlockian watch chain and his wife Jean carried her special Sherlockian stick.

Conan Doyle was a keen sportsman and knew Blackheath from playing golf, cricket and rugby in the environs. He got to know many of the residents, their houses and the wide area described as Blackheath. He also became familiar with the train services to London Bridge, and Roger illustrated how Conan Doyle wove all these elements into the Sherlock Holmes stories.

It was interesting to hear about his large family and their relatives, and his second wife Jean came from Blackheath. Doyle was devoted to them all and uncritical of Jean's treatment of other women, including his first family, and his choice of names for his children was very much of the times - Dodo, Billie and Dimples. The talk led to a lively discussion, which included the collar that possibly belonged to The Hound of The Baskervilles, Houdini, Spiritualism and a scandal of the time about fairies.



Mr Blackheath turns 80 and has plans for the future

The Society's President, Neil Rhind, known to some as Mr Blackheath, turns 80 in January and is surprised that the landmark has come so quickly, but he has no intention of slowing down.

"I am now the longest living man on both sides of my family for the last 200 years, and my ambition is to be 110 and finish all the things I want to do," he told the *Newsletter*.

He is currently working, with Roger Marshall, on an updated version of the *Blackheath Village Trail* (*Walking the Village* to match *Walking the Heath* of 2013). Future plans include publishing volume III of his *Blackheath Village & Environs* early next year.

This would be 34 years after volume II appeared, but in the intervening years he has written many other books about Blackheath and its buildings.

He would also like to re-publish some revised parts of volume II in separate sections, those covering the Cator Estate, Kidbrooke, Westcombe Park and the Angerstein encroachment on the Heath, as he thinks they would be easier to market.

He is very happy with the many successes achieved by the Society since he started work as its press officer in 1968, and by the Blackheath Preservation Trust (BPT) which he also led for many years.

Recent successes include the preservation of Blackheath Halls, with Trinity Laban taking it over, and of the Westcombe Woodlands. "It is also important that, despite the increasing number of restaurants we now have in the Village it has remained a village with individual shops and the Society has continued to flourish."

One of his rare failures came in 1982 when the Society was unable to prevent a Hyde Housing "second rate" development on the former St John's Hospital site that sloped down from the south-western side of the Heath to Lewisham Road.

Neil also objected when, after the demise of the Greater London Council in 1986, the Secretary of

State for Transport Nicholas Ridley made what Neil calls "an appalling decision" to split control of the Heath between Greenwich and Lewisham councils.

"It should have been kept entire and put under the auspices of the City of London which would have taken it on, as it did with Hampstead Heath."

He was disappointed that the BPT has sold off the freehold of its properties since he left in 2002, and is now being wound up, as he felt there was further work that it could have carried out, despite a change in the law obliging it to sell some properties.

Another unfavourable outcome in his view was when the Society lost its court action in 2011 on behalf of residents objecting to Lewisham granting a licence for OnBlackheath to hold an annual pop concert in perpetuity on the Heath.

Neil moved away from the Cator Estate four years ago

after living there for nearly 52 years, and is now in St John's Park, near where his mother used to live, and not far from the Greenwich Union Infirmary where he was born nine days before the meeting that led to the Blackheath Society's formation in 1937.

Bobby Furber, the Society's former long-serving Chairman, died in June. "We lived opposite each other for many years in Pond Road and he was my best friend, I miss him a lot."

For Neil the attraction of Blackheath remains strong: "I don't know what it is about the place, and it's not just that it has remained since the 1690s as a haven of substance for everyone - residents, tourists and visitors - as a green and pleasant land that is architecturally interesting."

"I am also very pleased with the growing interest now being shown in the ecological aspects of the area, in maintaining Vanbrugh and Eliot Pits and in the possibility of a children's play area at the back of Talbot Place."

But he still dislikes the Tea Hut on the Heath and wishes the Society had been able to remove it.



Greenwich planning - Lingfield appeal allowed

Lingfield, 37 Kidbrooke Grove – In October the Planning Inspector allowed an appeal on the damaging proposal to add extensions to the side and rear of this distinctive detached property.

This came as disappointing news to the many local residents who had joined the Society in challenging the application. The property is now on the market and it will be interesting to see whether any potential buyer intends to proceed with the approved alteration works, or perhaps reconsider a revised approach better suited to their needs.

In the Autumn *Newsletter* we commented on delays by the Council in deciding on planning applications. The proposal to erect a two-storey new build in the rear garden of *67a Shooters Hill Road*, with a frontage on to Langton Way close to its junction with Vicarage Avenue, was approved at an Area Planning Committee meeting in November.



Another proposal is to build a three-storey infill house in the rear garden of *76 Vanbrugh Park* on previously undeveloped land, with a frontage on to Heathway (*seen above in an architect's illustration*). This was to have been heard at the same meeting, but the Committee considered a site inspection was required.

This application was validated as far back as 26 February and it is surprising that the applicant has not followed the Lingfield approach by appealing on the grounds of non-determination.

On the *Cator Estate*, the Society, the Blackheath Park Conservation Group and Blackheath Cator Estate Residents Ltd are currently responding to a series of applications affecting properties in Morden Road, Foxes Dale and Parkgate, where owners are seeking to extend their homes through a mix of loft extensions, side and rear extensions and, in one case, a basement excavation.

Many aspects might be considered acceptable when considered individually, but overall the outward appearance of the properties will be compromised and original features obscured or even lost. We will be raising an objection to all three applications.

Esso Petrol Station, *37a Shooters Hill Road* - the Society has recently been alerted to a planning application submitted for the operators of the forecourt services here to vary the hours from the current 7 am to 11 pm to 24-hour opening every day of the week.

The same operator has submitted a licensing application to sell late night refreshments from 11 pm to 5 am and alcohol between 6 am and midnight for consumption off the premises.

We will be supporting local residents by objecting to both applications on the grounds that the changed circumstances will have the potential for damaging the quality of life for people in the Shooters Hill Road and Langton Way areas.

We will question the need for such an escalation of use, given the established provision for food and alcohol nearby.

Kidbrooke - London Mayor Sadiq Khan announced in August that a Transport for London site to the north of Kidbrooke Station is to be one of the first in its surplus land portfolio to be released for development.

Initial plans are to build up to 400 new homes on a relatively small three hectare plot in blocks which could rise to 20 storeys. The site is next to the Berkeley Homes Kidbrooke Village Centre development on the south side of the railway line.

The 2008 Kidbrooke Development Area masterplan allocates this site for housing and it will be interesting to see whether TfL, and its yet to be announced preferred developer consortium, will follow the example set by Berkeley Homes in using the site's London Plan designation to maximise the development.

This plan would represent an increase of over 20% in Kidbrooke Village and the initial intention is that half the homes will be affordable, to rent or to buy.

This could be the first site in London where the Mayor attempts to meet his manifesto promise to unlock unused TfL land and develop sites to build thousands of new homes for Londoners.

Village Day posts another great success

In a splendid start to the Festive Season, the Village was full of people having a good time celebrating Village Day on the first Saturday in December.

It was kicked off by The King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery from Woolwich with their fine parade through the village. Montpelier Green was a hive of activity, the slip road was closed and a magnificent display of classic cars attracted many enthusiasts.

The Green was very lively with stalls from local traders and information about the many organisations operating in the Community. A wide range of performers on the stage entertained us all day with excellent singing and dancing, culminating in a performance by Mancie, the singer daughter of local celebrity Danny Baker, who stayed on to support Father Christmas turning on the lights.

The Halls offered a warm, festive welcome with food, drinks and singing. The Conservatoire and Age Exchange housed people busy making lanterns, playing games and visiting Santa. The Samaritan Choir and the Tunnel Chops Brass Band played at the station, the Salvation Army brought their usual cheer to the centre of the Village, and Botton's Funfair entertained everyone on Royal Parade.

OnBlackheath and Lewisham's Blackheath Assembly both helped the day go with a swing by providing



some funding, and a quiz night at the Clarendon Hotel raised more money.

Thank you to the numerous organisations who made the day such a success, and particularly: Lewisham's Blackheath Assembly, OnBlackheath, our Society volunteers, the Metropolitan Police, Skanska, Glendale, the Guide Resident, Locale, JLL, the Blackheath Hospital and Payden's Pharmacy, Blackheath traders and all the performers and volunteers who gave up their time to make the day possible - and now we are ready for a very Merry Christmas in Blackheath. *Some of our Village Day photographs taken by Warren King appear below:*



Lewisham Gateway - Do very tall buildings matter to Blackheath?

As covered earlier, consultation is under way on a significant change to the master plan for the huge development at Lewisham Gateway. Ultimately this will involve a new road scheme plus a group of tall buildings, including a hotel, a range of retail and leisure amenities and 800 new housing units.

At present this is governed by a master plan approved in 2009 when there were considerable objections to a number of aspects, including limited public space and the complete absence of social housing.

Two towers have since been completed and two more are under construction to complete Phase 1.

The latest proposal for Phase 2, where the roundabout used to be, is an improvement in some respects since there is a slightly better layout and there is now no provision for cars. Total floor space will not change, but there will be more homes (up to 950) and less retail and leisure.

However, proposed changes raise many questions. In particular, they include one to raise the height of three of the four towers in Phase 2 to 32 storeys, which is 35% taller than the present plan, than the



Gateway towers seen from the Tea Hut on the Heath

new tower next to the station and any current tower.

This will definitely intrude on the Lewisham skyline and will significantly affect the view from the Heath and the other local Conservation Areas, including Blackheath, Belmont and St Stephen's.

It could also set a precedent for more such tall towers in future in other developments, such as the Tesco and Carpetright sites next to the station for which proposals are currently being submitted.

At present, our engagement with the council and developers concerns that fact they have not (in their 800 page submission) presented to residents a clear picture of what is intended and how it compares with the current approved plans, either in respect of the views or of the supporting clear information that is required. A lot of other information is missing.

Earlier consultation on this proposal was very poor. A further meeting for residents was arranged by the council on November 15 in response to many objections received (*Letters to the Editor on page 11*).

It was very well attended but unfortunately there was an extremely poor presentation by the developers which did nothing to allay, or even acknowledge, the many concerns expressed. We believe it is unacceptable for a scheme of this magnitude to pass with so little acknowledgement of residents' queries and concerns.

Fortunately, the council assures us the consultation process will continue and our requests for information will be dealt with. It may be that Lewisham and Blackheath residents would welcome the sight of bristling towers on the skyline, but we would like to be able to share with you a clear picture of what to expect, and we do not have it. We would welcome further opinions on the issue.

Society and residents object to 8 The Glebe development

The Society has opposed two planning applications for development at 8 The Glebe, which currently consists of a fine Victorian house and extensive grounds that have been subject to wilful neglect in recent years.

A year ago, the Society supported local residents in a successful application for a tree preservation order to prevent further insensitive removal of trees from the site, and we also applied unsuccessfully for statutory listing of the house.

One application would involve a block of nine flats facing onto the Glebe and the other would involve two houses in pastiche Victorian style. There is also a proposal to renovate the existing house and excavate a basement beneath it. Both proposals would significantly obscure the view of the house from the street.

The Society has supported local residents in objecting to both schemes. Lewisham Council has indicated in the past that it does not see the site having development potential. We are urging them to hold to that view.

Greenwich Park plans large development appeal

The Royal Parks are launching Greenwich Park Revealed, a multi-million pound project to bring its history to life, uncover some of the hidden gems and improve its world-famous features for the 4.8 million people who visit each year.

In a statement the Park said it would apply for funding from The Heritage Lottery Fund's Parks for People facility and hoped to repeat the success

On improving information, he said: "How many visitors go away, knowing there was a Roman temple here for 400 years, or that the second largest Anglo-Saxon cemetery in the country is on Crooms Hill?"

So the project will focus on telling the story of the Park through better viewing points providing more information and by installing storyboards to explain its historical features.



Greenwich Park in its autumn glory photographed in late November by Society member Norman Ellis

it achieved for its ongoing Brompton Cemetery Conservation project, where it secured £4.5 million.

Park manager Graham Dear, writing his column in the *Greenwich Visitor*, said it wanted to introduce a mobility scheme to help visitors who needed it get up the hill, and to refurbish the playground and repair the leaking boating lake.

It also aims to improve the existing buildings, including the food and drink areas, and protect natural features such as flowerbeds and trees, and it will make the Park more sustainable by using borehole water and planting disease-resistant trees.

Greenwich Park was enclosed by Henry V's brother, the Duke of Gloucester, in 1433.

Renovation of the existing house would, of course, be welcome but would need to be undertaken to a high standard and any consideration of a basement should take place only in the context of a comprehensive impact survey. Lewisham was expected to consider the applications in early December.

Further Lewisham planning developments:

The Society has also been alert to a number of recent developments which appear to have circumvented conventional planning procedures, either through the submission of retrospective applications, or through legal devices such as Permitted Development use, which allows minor developments to proceed without planning permission.

We are in dialogue with local councillors and the Lewisham Planning Department to ensure that such devices are not being used to allow developments to go ahead with insufficient scrutiny.

Morden College supporting older people for over 300 years

David Rutherford-Jones, Chief Executive of Morden College, reports on its future plans and explains the ethos of the College:

Morden College is not, as one resident of Blackheath once remarked, 'a home for retired stockbrokers'. On the contrary, we are a Charity whose sole purpose is to support older people and accept them into the College and our Care Home from every walk of life and background.

Looking to the future, our vision is a world in which our older people are able always to live their lives to the full, both cared for and safe. We aspire for Morden College to be recognised and admired amongst the finest providers of older peoples' accommodation and care in the country. Our standards are high, underwritten by a strong ethos in care, and bags of love.

This inspiring and very tactile space will become a destination for older people to meet and socialise.

It will include a craft workshop, art spaces, a café and dining area, hair and nail bar, a courtyard garden extending from the café and a small shop. There will also be a hall for events and dancing and a medical centre with a GP, a physiotherapist and possibly other medical specialists.

To make it a success, we are very keen that not only will our staff be engaged in its various aspects, but we hope to recruit a number of local residents to volunteer over time in befriending people, helping to run our shop and organising events.

We intend to hold an Open Day at the College in the summer of 2017 when we will explain what the Centre is about and how the local community can be involved and help make it a success.



The main quadrangle at Morden College

And we are modernising. For example, we have recently opened a sensory garden (*seen on the next page*) as a part of our Care Home and we aspire to build a new day facility, the John Morden Centre, which will become the social and cultural heart of College life, with a range of facilities and activities which our residents either need or will enjoy.

The John Morden Centre will significantly enhance our residents' quality of life and we intend to build it within three years.

We consulted our neighbours adjacent to the site where it will be built, and the Blackheath Society and the local planning authority, and planning permission has now been applied for.

We are proud to be located in Blackheath and Beckenham and wish to be a good neighbour and support the communities we live in. Always private, our grounds and buildings are the homes of those who live there and we ask people to respect this.

We also look to dispel the myths about who we are and what we do, and to gradually engage more with a local community that I think we have hidden from a bit over the years.

Daniel Defoe wrote in 1724: "Morden College is the noblest foundation and most considerable single piece of charity that has been erected in England since Sutton's Hospital in London". Defoe's words reflect the generosity of the successful merchant

Sir John Morden, who founded the College in 1695 and later endowed it. The endowment is classified as permanent, as he wished his College to survive in perpetuity. Our challenge now is to strike the right balance between support for our beneficiaries today, while ensuring that the long term future of the Charity is secure.

need and, during their working life, have held a position of responsibility in a profession, commerce, trade or vocation.

We accept men, women and couples from any background, of any faith or of none, and the charity is underwritten by a strong Christian ethos. We are



The principal purpose is to provide older people with accommodation and, over the centuries, the provision of physical, as well as pastoral and social care, and this has grown in tandem with the expansion of our accommodation.

Today we have well over 250 accommodation units for independent and supported living on three sites, two in Blackheath and one in Beckenham. And we have a 60-bed residential Care Home with nursing.

To qualify to live with us, individuals must receive a UK state pension, not be working, be in financial

able to make allowance for a very small number of wealthier individuals, especially those who find themselves in lonely, isolated circumstances.

Our Care Home is primarily a facility for our beneficiaries who live in our independent and supported-living accommodation, but we also accept private placements, principally from within London and the south east.

Our Care Home has been consistently well reported on by the Care Quality Commission and local authorities.

Three more fascinating Society walks planned in the New Year

On Monday 6 February the Walk and Talk team will meet at Temple Underground at 10.30 am for what promises to be a fascinating walk around the Inns of Court accompanied by our member Jonathan Causer, an authority on the area who has many anecdotes to spice up the walk. More details will be circulated nearer the time. Registration is not necessary but a £5 donation to the Society on joining the walk would be appreciated.

We are off to the Greenwich Peninsula on Wednesday 22 March to explore its changing landscape. Farmopolis (*seen on the right on the far shore*), the Ecology Centre and the Angerstein wharf are among the treats in store, and we meet at WH Smith at the North Greenwich tube station at 10.30 am.

On Monday 19 June we have a private booking with the Creekside Education Trust in Deptford for one of their special Low Tide Walks, when we will have the opportunity to explore the river with an expert guide. Waterproofs and waders are provided and the cost will be £10 payable to the Society in advance. Numbers are limited, so please contact the office in order to join us.



Sergison Cottage basement

Many thanks for another excellent *Newsletter* in the autumn. I note with interest the article on page seven about Greenwich's Supplementary Planning Document review, especially as it relates to Basement Extensions.

Do you know whether Lewisham has undertaken such a review of their policies? I ask because Lewisham has granted planning permission for an extensive basement addition at Sergison Cottage.

The foundations of this basement are only meters away from the quarry wall that overlooks my children's primary school (All Saints). I am utterly baffled that such a decision could be made, as such an undertaking seriously threatens the safety and well-being of more than 200 children and adults.

I understand that the Society originally objected to the demolition of the cottage, but was overruled. It does not seem that there have been many victories against undesirable planning permissions lately. *Name and address supplied*

The Society's Vice-Chair Howard Shields replies:

We have certainly discussed with Lewisham planning officers and councillors the general issue of the need for a policy on basements analogous to that in Greenwich (something we lobbied for there) and other boroughs. We are cautiously optimistic they do accept the point and will respond in time, but unfortunately that will not influence the Sergison outcome.

We objected, unsuccessfully, to the original proposal for the replacement of Sergison Cottage and to the basement proposal. We argued strongly in the Planning Committee that, in the absence of a policy on basements, there would have to be a very thorough check on the detail of the basement plans, not least because of the extreme sensitivity of the site.

It was at least reassuring to see that the Planning Committee, in a good discussion, did pick up this point and, although they approved the basement proposal, this was subject to the relevant detail coming back to the Committee for further approval.

At the time the *Newsletter* went to press the information had just been submitted. We will insist that Lewisham vet this according to best available practice, employing the necessary engineering expertise.

Boating on Prince of Wales Pond

Lewisham Council has not made the right decision to change the Prince of Wales Pond from a model boating lake to a half-hearted attempt at a wetland experience.

It now has the look of a neglected pond complete with rubbish, wire cages and slime, and all it needs is the odd supermarket trolley to completed the picture.

When I moved to Blackheath in 1974, children were sailing model boats there they had often designed and made. They were experimenting with winds and the laws of physics and were outdoors. Once a year there was a powered boat event, which was unique and intriguing.

There is a tradition of model boat sailing in Britain, and developments such as self-steering gear, hull design and terylene sails were trialed on model boating ponds.

Some local authorities creted purpose-built ponds and the best known is at Eaton Park in Norwich where model yacht racing takes place.

There are many other sites on Blackheath for water plants and I would like the Blackheath Society to lobby Lewisham Council to restore this important children's asset. *Ed Hall*

Editor's note: We are sorry to hear you do not like the pond (seen below). The works were carried out after a decision by the Blackheath Joint Working Party with representation from both councils, environmental experts and the three local amenity societies. It was thought the pond was rarely used by boats and the islands were positioned so that boating events could take place when required.



Lewisham Gateway building criticised

You asked for views from members on the Lewisham Gateway latest proposal. Although, as members, we now live towards the Hither Green end of Lewisham, we have noticed how the current phase of rebuilding of the town centre nearest the station has had such a major impact on the surrounding area.

One of the most worrying impacts at a distance is views of the new tall buildings from the area around Greenwich Park (presumably the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site) and from the adjacent Heath and the top of Lewisham Road.

The tallest of the new tower blocks now loom large in views towards the town centre in what was previously a largely unblemished skyline. I am not sure the Royal Parks and the Society would have been aware of this when the masterplan was originally produced.

These particular tall blocks are even more unsightly and out of scale when seen from the other side of the railway line in the vicinity of Tesco's car park, where the scale of the existing townscape drops dramatically, and this is mainly still surviving small-scale residential development.

The area around St Stephen's Church, next to the police station, which is mainly residential, is also being overshadowed and severely compromised, as there is little regard for the transition from old to new and smaller to larger scale.

There seems to have been little attempt to sympathetically integrate the two, with buildings of any age or historic merit being swept away for redevelopment wherever possible. This has just happened again in Loampit Vale adjacent to the railway line. Open space and the presence of the river seems to be reduced wherever possible and new retail seems virtually non-existent so far.

While all this is going on, the old town centre seems to remain unloved and unimproved in terms of investment in its townscape and heritage.

In brief conclusion, if further buildings of greater scale and height are added to the area under review this harmful impact on the surrounding area will only increase and make Lewisham town centre an even more unpleasant place in terms of failed townscape and over-development.

Nicolette Duckham

Editor's note: see our story/photograph on page 6.

Post Office changes anger Society members

Here are some extracts from a few of the many letters we received complaining about the changes to Blackheath's Post Office, which are covered in our story on the front page. Some were written before the hoardings were removed but they do reflect the strong feelings on the issue:

Several years ago, the Post Office in the Village was under threat, but there was a successful campaign to keep it. This time there has been no advance publicity and there has simply been a take-over by the back-door. Shocking.

I imagine most residents were pretty amazed, put out and upset about this via-the-back-door change to the Post Office. The notice by the front door merely said "Improving your postal service" with no mention of a complete change into a shop with a small post office facility.

We do not need WH Smith in the Village - we have Rymans - but we do need our proper Post Office which was always busy. How on earth is it going to cope, having gone from six counters to two?

The Post Office in Lewisham (WH Smith) is far too small and there are always lengthy queues. I am outraged.
Helga Greenbank

I really find it quite shocking that they seem to have consulted nobody regarding this "makeover" plan. I completely understand the concerns of fellow local residents as it was really an eyesore.

It just seems so inappropriate to do this to such a lovely old building. The old doors have also been replaced, such a shame. I kept my curtains drawn to avoid the giant Haribo and pencils lurking outside, until they were removed.

I am also baffled that no information about these plans was put up on the building prior to the work being carried out, in order to allow local residents to give feedback in time.
Sarah Prisley

My particular worry is the possibly illegal destruction of the original wooden doors and windows. I'm not aware of any planning consent for these changes to a key public building in a conservation area.
Rob Newsam

Editor's correction: Raffles Clothing Shop, mentioned on page 6 of the Autumn issue, is at 49 Montpelier Vale and not in Tranquil Vale.

Diary events

7 February at 7.30 pm:

Blackheath Assembly

Society Walks (see page 9)

6 February: Inns of Court

22 March: Greenwich

Peninsula landscape

19 June: Low Tide Walk

along Deptford Creek

Welcome to our new members

Mr & Mrs William & Colette Carter

Dr David Howie

Mr Robert Macdonald

Mr Michael O'Byrne & Ms Anna Johnstone

Ms Angelika Simpson

Ms Nicole Webb

Ms Valerie Williams

Blackheath Halls win £2 million donation

Blackheath Halls have won a £2 million donation from The Hearn Foundation to enable an extensive programme of capital works that will be rolled out over the next two to three years.

The owners, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance, said they wanted to transform the Halls into a flexible and creative performance venue, serving the needs of artists, audiences and the local community.



This complements an earlier award from the Arts Council of £499,999 for improvements focused on the Great Hall and a grant from Viridor Credits of £234,832 to renovate the main roof.

General manager Keith Murray will retire at the end of this year after 11 years

service, during which he oversaw several successful funding projects to develop the Halls and implemented its five-year business plan.

Trinity said: "Keith has brought a high degree of professionalism and extensive experience of arts and venue management to the Halls and to its development as a leading arts venue. His contribution both personally and professionally to the success of the Halls is outstanding."

Tranquil Vale telephone box and Village rubbish eyesores

Blackheath Village resident and Society member Nicola Peers believes the disused phone box in Tranquil Vale has been an eyesore for many years, so she decided to take matters into her own hands.

After several calls, she believes she has now persuaded the phone company to disconnect it and to take the phone box away soon.

"It's a disgrace. It is filthy and the floor has a thick layer of mud and grime which spreads over the pavement. This is slippery with all the grease and grime and the council needs to clean it up soon,"

she told the *Newsletter*.

Deborah Spicer, manager of the Pares Shoes next to the phone box (*pictured on the right with Nicola*), said "I am delighted that it is finally being removed from right outside my shop. I have complained to the council many times and nothing has happened. Many thanks to Nicola for finally sorting this out."

The Society is also contacting Lewisham Council about the rubbish left all day in pink bags throughout the Village, making it look very grubby (*seen on the*



right of this picture), as this has become a concern to several of our members and local residents. We have asked what arrangements exist with its contractors, and to improve the service they provide.

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