



The Dulwich Society

TO FOSTER AND SAFEGUARD THE AMENITIES OF DULWICH

Newsletter 42

October 1978

THE DULWICH SOCIETY: NEWSLETTER 42: OCTOBER 1978

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SOCIETY MEETINGS

Some changes have occurred during the Summer and we have had to re-arrange our programme in some respects, so here are the latest arrangements:

1978

- Thursday, 5th October In case this reaches you in time we would remind you that Councillor David Smith of the London Borough of Southwark will be giving an illustrated talk on a Day in the Life of a Ward.
8.00 p.m. in St Barnabas Hall
- Thursday, 2nd November This will be a meeting to encourage new members, or prospective new members, to come and hear something about the Society and to consider whether they would like to join. The main theme of the meeting will be the Lapse Wood situation and the threat to the woodland from the latest development plans now being considered by Southwark, but other Sub-Committees will also be explaining their work briefly and there will be displays of Sub-Committee activities in the Hall. In order to make this something of a social occasion and an opportunity for new members to meet existing members we shall be providing wine and cheese snacks for general circulation. We hope that as many of our existing members as can make it will come along to St Barnabas Hall at 8.00 p.m. to meet new recruits.
- Tuesday, 19th December To celebrate Christmas we have arranged to hire the Old Library in Dulwich College for an informal Christmas Party at 8.00 p.m. Unfortunately, the Dulwich Choral Society are not able to join us this year for the usual Carol Concert, but we hope to have alternative arrangements in the smaller setting of the Old Library. We shall provide drinks and light refreshments and hope that you will be able to come along with the family to drink a toast to Christmas, and maybe sing a carol or two.

1979

The programme for the first quarter of next year is unchanged as follows (but please note the date for the Society Dinner).

January	No Meeting
1st February	Trees: Mr Alan Mitchell will give an illustrated talk on Trees in Britain at 8.00 p.m. in St Barnabas Hall.
1st March	The Annual General Meeting 8.00 p.m. in St Barnabas Hall
5th April	Bill de Baerdemaeker's Historical talk on Old Dulwich 8.00 p.m. in St Barnabas Hall
20th April	The Society Dinner in the Dulwich College Dining Room. Full details in our December issue.

An Appeal from a Sister Society

On another page we reproduce an appeal from the Dulwich Decorative and Fine Arts Society which provides Dulwich with a series of very interesting lecturers and other activities.

The 1978-1979 programme includes the following talks:

1978

12th October	The History of Glass; Egyptian to Islamic by Margaret C. Frazer
9th November	An Introduction to Persian Miniatures by B. W. Robinson
14th December	Rugs from Persia and the Middle East by Sheelagh Lewis

1979

11th January	Silver of the Twentieth Century by Rosemary Ransome-Wallis
8th February	English Watercolours 1750-1850 by Patricia Jarrett
8th March	Furniture of the Reign of George III by Anthony Butt

If this interests you please write direct to Mrs Sandford.

PLANNING NOTES

Help! A plea answered

We are delighted to report that in an immediate response to our appeal in the last Newsletter for secretarial help for the Town Planning sub-Committee, Mr Brian Sweeney of 29 Giles Coppice and his wife have volunteered to provide much-needed support for the sub-Committee.

Lapse Wood

In Newsletter 41 we published a letter sent by the Society to local councillors and the Southwark Borough Development Department protesting at proposals to develop part of Lapse Wood for housing in a way that would effectively destroy it as a unique natural woodland. We regard our case as overwhelming and we hope also to have enlisted the interest of the Nature Conservancy; but Council officials have nevertheless been instructed by the relevant committee to proceed with feasibility studies for a development on the lines of that reported in the Newsletter. No commitment has of course been entered into yet, and we shall continue by all possible means to resist this insensitive, expensive and altogether unnecessary development. Meanwhile, if members of the Society who share the Society's views as expressed in our letter to the Council would express their feelings to their local Councillors, then this can of course do nothing but good to our cause.

Lapse Wood House

This is the site that gives its name to Lapse Wood although it is separated from what we know as Lapse Wood by "Beechgrove", a large nursing home which continues to exist on Sydenham Hill. The site of Lapse Wood House itself is at the top of Cox's Walk, which leads down from Sydenham Hill to the bridge over the old railway line and thence to the corner of Lordship Lane and Dulwich Common; and the Council now propose to develop this relatively small site with 15 houses. The site is of course zoned for housing and unlike Lapse Wood itself is suitable for that use, partly in our view because buildings at the top of Cox's Walk would discourage mattress-dumpers from using Cox's Walk as a way into the railway line site for use as a rubbish tip. This being so, the Society are not resisting this development, which is a fairly small and modest one and should not encroach on any part of the wood that could be used by the public if ever we were to succeed in getting the wood opened up for that purpose.

Gypsies

A great deal of local alarm has been caused by a letter from the Southwark Borough Planner to a number of local councillors about the updating of a survey of land "available for use as a permanent gypsy site within Southwark".

Members will recall that a year or two ago it was suggested that a permanent gypsy site might be constructed in Grange Lane on the site of the present allotments beyond the Golf Clubhouse and the Scout Camp known as "The Fort". We succeeded in scotching this proposition, but in order to sustain a case for exempting the London Borough of Southwark from the need, under the Caravan Sites Act of 1968, to provide permanent gypsy sites in the area, the Council have to be able to demonstrate to the Secretary of State for the Environment that they have considered all possible sites in all possible

parts of the borough including the south end. For this reason, they have suggested, with what appears to be tongue firmly wedged in cheek, that a gypsy site might be provided alongside Dulwich Common (the South Circular Road) on part of the Old Alleyns Sports Club. Although, as has been said, this proposal seems to have been put up as an Aunt Sally—and a pretty transparent one at that—the reactions of residents in the Council estate at the Lordship Lane end of Dulwich Common, and of residents in Frank Dixon Way and other residential roads in the area was predictable, and a furious public meeting was convened by some local councillors early in September.

We hope that this "proposal" will die the death; certainly, it richly deserves to do so. But in view of the very strong feelings expressed by residents and members our readers may care to know what the Society has said on the subject. We therefore reproduce below a copy of the letter sent to the Council about this subject on 21st August 1978.

"Dear Mr West

ENCAMPMENT FOR GYPSIES

Councillor Meakin has shown me a copy of your letter of 16 August about the suggestion that a site on the Old Alleyns Sports Club ground on Dulwich Common might be allocated for use as a permanent gypsy site; and although I have not yet had time to consult fully with my colleagues in the Dulwich Society, I am sure that you would wish to have our preliminary views straight away.

We are of course glad that the Council continues to seek designation under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and that, as stated in the second paragraph of your letter, it does not regard a permanent site in the borough as being any more of a possibility than it has ever been. Certainly, and while we are unable to comment on possible sites that have been identified outside the area with which the Society is concerned, we have already commented at some length about the site in Grange Lane, which was identified a year or two ago; and I hardly need say that the present site is even more totally unsuitable from almost every point of view. The Society would certainly have opposed even an "ordinary" application for housing development on Dulwich Common, which forms part of one of the few major areas of open space remaining in South London and which provides an amenity not only for the people of Dulwich but for people of South London as a whole. In addition to amenity considerations of this kind, the traffic hazard from a caravan site on this narrow, heavily trafficked and dangerous part of the South Circular road can hardly be exaggerated.

For these reasons—and I can enlarge on them if you wish—the Society would wish to enter the strongest possible objection to a permanent gypsy encampment on this site.

I am copying this letter to Councillor Meakin and to the Secretary to the Estates Governors.

Yours sincerely

I H LIGHTMAN, Chairman
Planning sub-Committee."

Mid-South Southwark District Plan

Some months ago we reported on the representations that the Society had made to the London Borough of Southwark as a part of the "consultations" on the preparation of a development plan for the mid-south area of the borough. We were disappointed at the time that our representations did not appear in further documents published by the Council, and we intend that our views should be firmly taken on board at further meetings (including public ones—e.g. at Kingswood House on 5th October) during the next month or so. The blatant disregard of our longheld and often-expressed views on Lapse Wood by Southwark Council makes it all the more important that local opinion should be vocal on matters that affect its interests; and this means not only that the Society must express views collectively but that individual members must make their feelings known to local councillors and to the authorities generally. We do hope that we shall have the support of our members in doing this.

THE OLD ALLEYNIAN FOOTBALL CLUB

We are pleased to report that, arising from a suggestion made by Mr. 'Bob' Lawrence, an Estates Governor, to our Chairman to consider the possible use of the Old Alleynian Club House facilities, a meeting recently took place between our Chairman and Mr D. G. E. White, Secretary of the Club. At this meeting it was agreed that the Dulwich Society should be offered an experimental block membership for one year for a nominal fee of £15.

It is felt that this generous offer to our Society gives our members a unique opportunity to make use of an informal meeting place which could be attractive for families or provide facilities for mild social drinking in congenial surroundings.

The Club House is situated in the heart of the Common, just off the South Circular, mid-way between the two sets of Dulwich Park gates in a very pleasant rural setting. The accommodation includes a club bar and a dining area which can seat up to 100 people, and the bar hours are as follows:

Wednesday and Friday	8.00 - 11.00 p.m.
Saturday	4.30 - 11.00 p.m. (Winter) 7.30 - 11.00 p.m. (Summer)
Sunday	11.00 a.m. - 2.00 p.m. 7.30 - 11.00 p.m. (Summer)

Summer is during the cricket season and Winter the rugger.

The Club House may be booked by arrangement with the Secretary on occasions when it is not otherwise in use for Society functions. In this case the bar facilities would be available, but the Society would be responsible for catering.

Society members who wish to use the facilities of the Club under the terms of our block membership must obviously have some means of identification for the benefit of the Club staff. If you would like to take advantage of this offer please apply to the Secretary (R.M.S. Maude, 19, Oakfield Gardens, Dulwich Wood Avenue, SE19) for a membership ticket.

WILD LIFE NOTES

Foxes in Dulwich

Foxes are no novelty in Dulwich. They were found and occasionally hunted in Dulwich Wood before the last World War. What has changed is the number, distribution and behaviour of foxes.

In the pre-war years these predators were regarded as shy of human habitation. They certainly fed to a large extent on rabbits, which were found on open ground in the area and along the railway cuttings and embankments. The early 1950's saw the advent of myxomatosis and the disappearance of South London rabbits. At the same time large houses and their even larger gardens were being demolished and large numbers of new houses and blocks of flats were built. The foxes had to change their feeding habits or perish.

The presence of so many foxes in the area reflects the ability of the species to adapt. Most of our foxes are now scavengers and many readers will have discovered upturned dustbins and polythene garbage bags ripped open with the bones from the Sunday joint scattered. Kitchen scraps have become a key item of food with occasionally small mammals and pigeons the exceptions in the diet. Although foxes survive on such food it does not provide them with the consistent source of vitamins that fresh meat would and some of the specimens seen in the area are rather mangy.

We know very little about how widely particular foxes range in their search for food. Each fox, vixens as well as dog foxes, will mark territory by laying a scent in their urine. Each fox seems to respect another's territory but overlaps are likely. A major problem arises as the cubs mature and leave the mother to establish their own hunting and feeding territory. Deaths occur, whether natural, or by poisoning or shooting or under the wheels of passing cars, and it seems that the overall numbers do not change very obviously.

Boys at Dulwich College maintain a record of sightings and would welcome information about the whereabouts and activities of foxes in Dulwich.* In particular news of where foxes are breeding would be very welcome and so would photographs of these often bold creatures.

* Information should be sent to Brian Jones, Dulwich College, London, SE21.

Wildlife in Dulwich - A General Survey

Dulwich is a most fortunate London suburb in so far that it has a large area of varied open spaces consisting of woodland, playing fields, allotments and parks. Apart from the Park, they are maintained by the Dulwich College Estates Governors, owners until recently of the leaseholds.

Like the rest of Britain, Dulwich has not escaped the breaking up of large estates and the division into smaller units, thus reducing suitable habitats and increasing the population, not only of people but also of dogs and cats. The latter must destroy considerable numbers of birds especially of young in the breeding season and also of mice which are the main food of owls, and this has led to the disappearance of the Barn and Little Owl over the last twenty years. A scheme just inaugurated encourages people to allow part of their garden to revert to nature for the benefit of wild life; while this is an excellent idea it might perhaps be more effective if we were first to try to persuade people to limit the feline population.

Another important factor in the reduction of small birds is the disappearance of the gamekeeper in Dulwich, who kept down the numbers of crows, pigeons and foxes. In the 1930's there were no magpies or grey squirrels, both of which have penetrated from outer London. At that time the cuckoo was extremely common in Dulwich and a red-backed shrike nested in the fields of Woodhall in 1948.

One of the most important sanctuaries now is the railway embankment where the lesser whitethroat sometimes finds a home having been driven out of the Kingswood estate. The disused line near Lapse Wood is a wonderful area both for flowers and birds; the willow tit probably bred recently and a grey wagtail wintered there. With natural regeneration and sunshine in the open glades there are more birds than in the woods.

In the past it was nice to see the uncut grass verges which gave a country air to College Road. The passion today for tidying up everywhere and the widespread use of pesticides has eliminated many flowers, butterflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers, frogs, all of which used to come to our gardens, but like the hedgehogs we used to feed, they have disappeared. The increase of traffic, the use of slug bait and the increase of the foxes are also responsible. Flowers have probably been the least affected and some gardens can boast of having over one hundred different species. Last year a patch of soapwort was found on Dulwich Common; it was recorded in 1763 as growing in Lordship Lane at the Green Man, now the Grove Tavern. At present we have well over 200 different flowers and grasses and 23 grasses growing wild all recorded in Dulwich and probably others to be noted. Have you something unusual in your garden?

The golf course, playing fields and allotments produce interesting records during seasonal bird migrations, for example, of wheatear, redstart, & whinchat. Some very good records kept by the boys of Alleyn's School in the 1950's have been very useful for comparison with those 20 years later in 1976/77 when the Dulwich Society first began to keep comprehensive records. Two years is not really sufficient to build up a true picture and so much depends on the number of recorders, the time spent in observing, the wind and general weather pattern. It seems, however, that the total number of different species has not changed and today it is quite common to see about 30 on a 4 mile walk. As well as the barn and little owl already mentioned however, we have also lost the sparrow hawk. Our real loss is in the numbers of breeding birds which are just a few now but 20 years ago 5 pairs of whitethroats, 15 willow warblers, 20 chiff chaffs, 5 bullfinches, 5 green woodpeckers & 10 nuthatches were recorded. We have gained the Canada goose, coot (to the detriment of the

little moorhen, which has decreased), the house martin and the swallow, all of them breeding. There is no doubt that with careful management we can retain the diversity of Dulwich wildlife and perhaps even increase it.

Bird Sightings in the Past Summer

Bird sightings during July and August have included several reports of nesting, hatching and the independent appearance of young—flycatchers, chaffinch, greenfinch and bullfinch have all reared their young in Dulwich this Summer. Most of our records are from the southern end of Dulwich—Sydenham Hill, Grange Lane and College Road. At the end of August and early in September flycatchers, bullfinches, the nuthatch and long-tailed tits were still about and the chiff chaff was heard calling near Lapse Wood. A willow warbler was seen there, and near St Barnabas at the other end of the village, possibly a garden warbler. The woods on Sydenham Hill shelter a Tawny Owl, heard calling "Kwick" through August evenings. A pair of kestrels has been seen over The Sydenham/Lapse Wood area, possibly those in residence at 'All Saints', Rosendale. The lesser-spotted woodpecker was seen in College Road and also in dead trees near Alleyn's School. Four Canada geese flew over the St Barnabas area early in August.

Other nature notes include several reports of dragonflies near garden ponds during August and of a number of butterflies—the common, skipper, large and small whites, holly blue, tortoiseshell and the speckled wood butterflies were all seen.

The Wildlife sub-Committee welcomes notes on birds or other wildlife seen in the Dulwich area for its records. Mr J. W. Toler, 127 Sydenham Hill, is our recorder, but any sub-Committee member will be glad to hear or receive your observations. We particularly need observations from the northern and eastern part of the area. Any Dulwich garden is likely to yield something of interest, but those fortunate enough to back on to one of our many parks and open spaces, or a railway embankment, will be able to see or hear some of the less common creatures.



DULWICH DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETY

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETIES

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE ARTS?

This Society provides monthly illustrated lectures and several study groups, all given by experts in their own field, as well as organised visits to Galleries, Museums and Country Houses. The Society is a member of the National Association of Decorative and Fine Art Societies, and through this its' members have access to private viewings of major Art Exhibitions and can take part in organised study tours at home and abroad.

In addition to this, work is carried out by volunteer members and at present includes preservation and cataloguing at the Horniman Museum and guiding at the Royal Academy.

This years programme includes talks on English Watercolours, Silver of the Twentieth Century, George the Fourth—Making of Regent Street and starts on the 12th October with a lecture on the History of Glass—Egyptian to Islamic by Margaret Fraser.

Lectures are always held on the second Thursday of the month at St. Barnabas Hall, Dulwich Village, S.E.21. at 8.0. p.m. Entrance free to members — 75p to non-members. Annual subscription rates: Single £3.75. Double £6.00. Family £7.00. Student £2.00.

If you wish to join the Society please complete this form in CAPITALS and send it to the Hon. Secretary together with the appropriate subscription (cheques should be payable to the Dulwich Decorative and Fine Arts Society) and a stamped addressed envelope at least 4" by 9" for membership card.

I wish to become a member of the Dulwich Decorative and Fine Arts Society.

Name..... Phone.....

Address.....

To:
Mrs Sandford,
31, Pickwick Road,
LONDON, S.E.21.