



# *The Dulwich Society*

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TO FOSTER AND SAFEGUARD THE AMENITIES OF DULWICH

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## *Newsletter 62*

October 1983

OCTOBER 1983

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The Editor wishes members to know that contribu-  
tions for the Newsletter are welcome and should,  
in the first instance, be sent to the Chairman  
of the appropriate Sub-Committee.

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LORD HINTON OF BANKSIDE OM, KBE, FRS

All members will have read with deepest sorrow of  
the death at the age of 82 of Lord Hinton of  
Bankside. He was a vice-president of the Dulwich  
Society and his lively presence at our meetings  
will be sorely missed.

Christopher Hinton was knighted in 1951, elected  
FRS in 1954 and appointed KBE in 1957. A life  
peerage followed in 1965 and the Order of Merit  
was bestowed in 1976.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Horticultural Sub-Committee

Thursday, 6th October, 8.00 pm. St. Barnabas  
Hall: For the Society's October lecture the  
Horticultural Sub-Committee have obtained a  
speaker from Thomas Rochford and Son, the  
largest supplier of house plants in the country,  
on the use and care of indoor plants. The talk  
will be illustrated with slides and with sample  
plants, which will be available for sale at the  
conclusion of the lecture. A plant has also  
been donated by Rochfords to be raffled at the  
meeting.

Users of the Lambeth Horticultural Society's 'hut'  
may like to be reminded that October is the month  
to apply autumn dressings to lawns and rose beds.  
If you require larger quantities than are normally  
kept in stock, you can ring the Society's trading  
officer, Roy Green who can be contacted by tele-  
phone on 670 1993 most evenings, and he will be  
happy to discuss your requirements with you.

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Thursday, 3rd November, 1983, 8.00pm.

The History Sub-Committee invite you to a talk  
on Dulwich history to be given by Bill de  
Baedemaecker at St. Barnabas Hall.

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Thursday, 2nd February, 1984, 8.00pm. Dulwich  
Trees Quiz.

The Trees Sub-Committee invite you to view slides  
of some of the many interesting trees in the  
Dulwich area. The presentation will be designed  
to test your knowledge of Dulwich and its trees;  
those members interested can compete for the title  
"Brain of Dulwich Trees - 1984" and the  
accompanying glittering prize.

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## BUTTERFLIES IN DULWICH

The later part of the summer has been, in my garden at least, the best season for Butterflies that we have had for very many years. Reports from Dorset confirm that it has been an exceptional year there too.

On 25th July in a very informal glade in my rock-garden surrounded by large trees, I recorded in the early afternoon eight different species of butterflies, approximately twenty in number, more or less continuously present over the space of an hour and a half. These included most of the species which I normally see here at this season, though of recent years usually only one or two at a time.

The 'glade' was warm, sheltered from wind, very quiet and still, with small areas of bright sunshine. The butterflies concentrated mostly at one end, where there was a large dark purple flowered Buddleia bush, with a dark pink hydrangea at its foot and a clump of cerise-crimson Agrostemma a few feet away, just across the entrance of a narrow path into a small copse. There was an assortment of less conspicuous flowers along the sunny side of the glade, but though the butterflies coursed it occasionally from end to end, and some went over the top of the surrounding trees and returned, they seemed to settle and feed on that bright group of flowers at the one end only.

They were intermittently very active, doing courting dances in pairs, or staging flights apparently to warn off others and establish their own territory, but most of these activities were soon abandoned as they settled back to feed. Many just remained steadily drinking nectar. I noticed that the group of peacocks periodically fanned their large wings up and down whilst feeding. Those bright flashes of colour may have advertised to other butterflies the good feeding place.

There were four or five 'peacocks' at one time, two 'commas' and a 'tortoiseshell' mostly on the Buddleia but some occasionally feeding on the hydrangea, which is listed as being useless to butterflies. They were joined by a pair of 'large whites', two pairs of 'speckled woods', and two or three 'meadow browns'. A pair of 'small whites' coursed the glade a few times. A 'skipper' inspected the Agrostemma and then was joined by a second one; they did a courting 'dance', then settled to feed on those flowers for some time.

A few days later we had some 'Holly blues' flying generally round the garden, also a 'wood white'. Earlier this year there were many 'green-veined Whites'. In other years we have had the occasional 'small heath', 'orange tip', 'brimstone' and 'fritillary'. Sometimes the 'Red Admiral' is seen, though this cannot be classed as a Dulwich native, since it probably does not overwinter in this country.

The recording on the 25th of July, though an exceptional concentration, was not isolated, as many butterflies were seen before and after that date. It is probable that a new batch of peacocks had just emerged locally as there were not more than two or three at a time seen here afterwards. The meadow browns were probably only emerging as there have been half a dozen or more continuously in the garden since. All those present this summer have been seen in Dulwich every year.

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I am often asked "what shall I grow to encourage butterflies in my garden and to get them to live and breed there?" There are a number of points to bear in mind:

- a) most butterflies only live in the final state for little more than three to four weeks, during which they feed, mate and the female lays its eggs. Many species have two broods a year and those species

that over-winter as butterflies, having fed briefly hibernate through autumn and winter, and only take up their real life as a butterfly in the following spring.

- b) butterflies have no mouth and so eat nothing. They can only drink with their elaborately coiled tongue water or nectar or sometimes juices from decaying fruit or other matter.
- c) the eggs are laid only on the plant appropriate to the species, which the caterpillars will eat when they hatch in due season. The flowers producing suitable nectar for the adult are rarely found on the food plant of the caterpillar.
- d) butterflies generally have preference for composite flowers, where they can cling and dip their tongues into one flower centre after another without having to move far. The centre of a suitable daisy is good, but a flower like the garden rose is of no use.
- e) they are said to prefer mauve or blue flowers, and to shun red ones, in fact some authorities suggest they are colour-blind to red. This was not borne out this year when so many varieties fed avidly from a group of flowers in my garden, all in the crimson colour range, ignoring others entirely.
- f) it appears that a generally bright flower border attracts butterflies, but they like a natural and informal garden and will only alight to feed on certain flowers. They like many wild flowers, but the best of these are unpopular with gardeners, such as dandelions, coltsfoot, rose bay willow herb, creeping buttercup and trefoil, ragwort and lawn daisies and such like.

They particularly like *Buddleia Davidii*, but this has a very short flowering season. It is reported they prefer the paler shades of this, but some observers report that though the 'tortoiseshell' and 'painted lady' do so, the peacock and red admiral select the darker one. Possibly, this may be because those butterflies are themselves so dark, and are less conspicuous while feeding.

They have been seen feeding on honesty and mauve sweet rocket, forgetmenots, primroses, polyanthus, sweet william, aubretia, scabious, *Sedum spectabile*, michelmas daisies and valerian.

Among wild flowers that are not too invasive 'jack in the hedge' or 'garlic mustard' is needed for the green veined white and orange tip for egg laying as well as for nectar. Holly and ivy that has been allowed to climb and grow flowering branches will serve the 'holly blue' for both spring and autumn broods. All of these lay their eggs in the flower cluster.

If you can form a fair sized nettlebed in an open, quiet sunny place without tree overhang, you may be lucky to find the showiest butterflies have laid eggs there. Peacock, tortoiseshell and comma all need nettles for their caterpillars. They may also attract foreign visitors such as Red Admiral and Painted Lady. My garden is so full of shade that my nettle beds have never attracted any butterfly caterpillars, in the many years that the nettles have been grown.

If you grow bulbs in your grass and leave large patches of hay until August, when the bulbs have quite died down, you may find that the various brown butterflies, whose food plants are mostly coarse grasses, may lay their eggs there. These eggs are mostly laid at the base of the grass, and they and the tiny night feeding caterpillars that

emerge, may well escape the blades of the mower when that is used again. This group includes 'Meadow Brown', 'Speckled Wood', 'Heath' and 'Skipper' butterflies. I think that this practice may be responsible for the generous visitation of the first two species in my garden, in the last few years.

The 'Large White' and 'Small White' butterflies enjoy cabbages and are the only species of butterfly gardeners should not welcome. If you see small white butterflies, however, do be sure that they are not 'Green veined' or 'female Orange Tips' before attacking them. This can only be seen when they are at rest, showing the underside of their wings. The female orange tip has no orange colouring.

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#### SUBSCRIPTION YEAR 1984

Your subscription (£2) falls due on the 1st January each year and should now be sent to the Treasurer at 38 Stonehills Court, SE21 as soon as possible.

In order to keep administrative work and costs to a minimum the Society recommends that you complete the attached Bankers Order and return it to the Treasurer.

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#### YOUR NEWSLETTER

Like any society, we need good communication with our members if we are to continue as a lively and useful part of the community. In our case, personal contact between members is obviously the most valuable - but after that comes this Newsletter. It is a vital source of information about what the Society is doing and, of course, about future events.

In order to work well it requires two things: that it should be efficiently edited and produced, and that it should be promptly distributed. Some of you may well have complaints or suggestions, particularly about distribution, so we are taking this opportunity to explain the system of production and distribution and also to mention some recent developments.

#### Form and Content

As you can see, your Newsletter is produced cheaply. We hope it is not so cheap as to be unattractive, but nonetheless we keep the price to a minimum. It is typed as neatly as possible, then printed directly from the typescript.

#### Distribution

Getting the Newsletter into some 1,200 homes is a difficult task for a volunteer force. There are late deliveries from time to time, and mistakes happen, but we are doing our best to distribute the Newsletter on time.

The whole area is divided into Zones, each with a Zone Distributor. He or she divides a bulk package of Newsletters into area allocations, and delivers these to an Area Representative, who then takes each Newsletter to each member's home. Information on changes of address, lapsed members, new members and so on, is passed to Zone Distributors via the Society's Secretary and the Chairman of the Membership and Publicity Sub-Committee.

Any help from volunteers for this important work would be much appreciated. The contact being Mr. Jeremy Webb, 107 Woodward Road, SE22, telephone 693 7297.

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#### TREES SUB-COMMITTEE

Sydenham Hill Wood - Nature Reserve

Chris Rose of the London Wildlife Trust, who

spoke to the Society in February 1983 on plans for Sydenham Wood, has given us permission to reprint the following very interesting article he has written that first appeared in the summer edition of "Wild London" the magazine of the London Wildlife Trust, the body which is managing the wood for the London Borough of Southwark.

The work on the wood is being done mainly by volunteers and if you would like to help please contact: Alexandra Rook, 11b Belvoir Road, SE22 telephone 693 0735. Working parties meet every second Sunday in the month.

If you would like further information about the London Wildlife Trust, contact can be made at: 1, Thorpe Close, London W10 5XL.

#### AN ANCIENT WOODLAND

LWT's Sydenham Hill Wood reserve is 23 acres of ancient woodland on the slopes of the Crystal Palace Ridge in south-east London.

#### The wood in winter

From the high ground of Sydenham Hill Wood, you can look down through the trees across London. Late one winter afternoon as I stood there looking through binoculars, the lowering sun caught the plumage of Black-headed Gulls flying up the Thames to roost on reservoirs at Barnes or beyond. In the wood, Tawny Owls began to call. The sound of hammering nails and sawing wood marked the final efforts of the Conservation Volunteers making a fence and stile by Cox's Walk. A few Great Tits quarrelled in the Sallows before moving off through the tree-tops into the main body of the wood, where Hazel, Hornbeam and then Cherry would soon be showing signs of life. But at that moment nothing much moved; the steep clay slopes held moisture to them in a clammy blanket, and of the rich flora there was no sign: fungi, seeds, shoots, winter-buds and even the mice took cover in the deep leaf litter.

#### Spring notes

At the end of April, the wood is a different place. In the course of their surveys, ecologists Steve McAndrews and John Tyler have already stumbled across mating Shield-bugs, watched Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers exploring dead oak for beetles, found a Garden Warbler, been escorted by Long-tailed Tits, Chiffchaff and early butterflies along the railside glades, and plotted Wood Anemones, Ramsons and Bluebells spreading their first leaves and flowering in the spring sunshine.

Near the centre of the wood, Steve has discovered a clump of Lesser Celandine - mentioned by the botanist Ted Lousley in the London Naturalist in 1959. To anyone used to the rapidly changing flora of a garden or the ephemeral vegetation of a plot of wasteland, that might seem remarkable. But in the ways of ancient woodland it is only to be expected. In fact under the heading "Further notes on the relics of Great North Wood" (Sydenham Hill Wood is a surviving remnant) Lousley notes that celandines were "rare in Peckarman's wood" but "locally abundant by the disused railway", and what was probably the same group had been "recorded from Dulwich by Carruthers 1882".

#### Value of ancient woodland

Of course Lesser Celandine is not a rare plant, although in much of lowland Britain hedgerow destruction, herbicides and mechanised "tidying up" are making it an unusual sight. But its persistence in Sydenham Hill Wood is typical of the way plants behave in ancient woodland, and the clue to why "ancient" and "primary" woods

are so highly valued. Such woods have never been deforested: they predate the first plantations (around 1600) and their presence can be authenticated, as at Sydenham Hill, both by reference to maps and other historical documents, and by the characteristic species and soils they contain.

#### Natural diversity

Not all of Sydenham Hill Wood is ancient woodland, but for a small wood its legacy of natural forest species is quite remarkable.

Forster's Woodrush, native Solomon's Seal, Butcher's Broom and Midland Hawthorn have all been recorded here, and the structure of the wood - Bramble, grassy glades and coppiced Hazel with Oak standards - attracts all three species of woodpecker, 18 species of butterflies and a host of other fauna.

Natural springs trickle down the slopes, and light and shade establish a ground plan of physical variation which acts as a template for natural diversity. On top of that there are the results of centuries of leaf-fall, rotting timber, growth of herbs and grasses, seeding and decay, each affecting the soil and its contents until today we are left with an irreplaceable natural asset: so complicated, and so self-contained that it would be impossible to recreate, and a crime to destroy. The Trust is therefore lucky to have Sydenham Hill Wood as a nature reserve. Nationally, since 1947, we have lost over 50% of our ancient woodlands.

#### Dead wood is good wood

Despite the prejudices of park-keepers, arboriculturalists and the dogma of conventional forestry and horticulture, total neglect does no real harm to a wood. Death, decay and renewal are utterly interwoven. Fungal filaments stretch out among the dead bodies of

woodland antecedents, not just producing toadstools and stink-horns, but liberating animals, stimulating seeds to germinate and roots to grow, ensnaring nematode worms, being grazed on by a host of beetles and minute soil animals, and living in co-operation with some plants such as orchids.

Terms like "over-mature trees" (as used by tree surgeons and open-space managers) should not be heard in a wood. Dead wood is good wood: Starlings and tits nest in old woodpecker holes, as do Nuthatches; woodpeckers feed on beetles that live in galleries under rotting bark and dead branches. The fall of a weakened forest tree lets light on to the woodland floor where it may not have been seen in more than dapples for hundreds of years. Flowers respond rapidly: woodedge species appear from dormant seeds; different bumble bees, extra butterflies and new birds come for a few years, until saplings crowd towards the light, and the "shade species" return.

Yet there is nowhere in Britain that woodland has been entirely neglected. Fortunately, practices such as coppicing (which has been used for over 4,000 years in Britain) are sympathetic to flora and fauna. Traditional management such as this is now being reinstated at Sydenham Hill Wood and in the future we can hope to see turnery, pea-stick growing, and a variety of other crafts and industries based on this and other London woods once more.

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#### HISTORY SUB-COMMITTEE

On July 14th over a hundred members of the Society visited Bell House in College Road for a meeting organised by our Sub-Committee

and had the opportunity, on a perfect Summer's evening, of learning about the history of the house and of its occupants, and of viewing the house and gardens. Because of the numbers attending, our three speakers (Messrs. Darby, Milne and Green) gave their talk twice, to 'capacity houses'. Our grateful thanks to Mr and Mrs Salter for making the occasion possible. At their request, the net proceeds of the collection made have been donated to Trinity Hospice, Clapham.

Patrick Darby is moving to Norbury, and has therefore decided not to continue as Chairman of the History Sub-Committee, although he hopes to continue participating in the Committee's work. The name of his successor will be announced in the next Newsletter.

With this issue appears the second in our History Supplements, which we hope you will find of interest. Any member of the Society who wishes to contribute ideas, research, or even finished articles for possible inclusion in future Supplements is invited to contact Bill de Baerdemaeker at 110 Woodwarde Road, SE22.

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#### DULWICH PICTURE GALLERY

There have been some interesting developments at the Picture Gallery in recent months. The highly successful summer fete, the first ever held by the Gallery, drew 2,000 visitors and made £3,000 profit. Almost all the exhibits at the accompanying 'Ceramics '83' exhibition were sold. Total sales amounted to over £2,500, of which one third went to the Gallery. On December 1st an exhibition of modern prints will open, mounted by the Greenwich Printmakers Association. Once again the works will be for sale. They will be reasonably priced and should prove ideal Christmas presents.

Visitors to the Gallery will have noticed that Rooms 7 and 8 have been closed to the public for security reasons. Following the theft of the Rembrandt, an extensive overhaul of security is now taking place. This will include the floodlighting of the building.

Interest in Soane's building has been increasing this year. A recent publication on Soane, which includes a thorough survey of the Gallery, is now on sale at the Entrance Desk. In October, BBC 'Omnibus' will be showing a programme on Soane, having visited the Gallery this summer to carry out filming.

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