

Eltham Society's Summer Walk
Saturday 7th July 2007 – Blackheath to the Isle of Dogs

A small group met our leader Neill Trueman promptly at 10 o'clock outside Blackheath Station to begin a leisurely five mile walk to the Isle of Dogs. The day was fine and we were expecting an interesting walk with Neill to guide us.

We set off through the back streets of Blackheath to go up to the heath (our only real ascent during the day). Walking across the heath we observed the fine views of All Saint's Church and towards Shooters Hill. After negotiating our way across the A2 (Dover Road) we came to the fine wall of Greenwich Park and one of the ponds – Folly Pond. This used to be a large boating lake but now tends to dry up in the summer (not this year as we had had so much rain).

We entered Greenwich Park – the oldest Royal Park, not by the main gate, but further west through the Chesterfield Gate to walk passed the Ranger's House, the Rose Garden and Macartney House – a part of the park that I only visit infrequently.



Macartney House, built at the end of the 17th century with additions by Sir John Soane (the architect of the Bank of England) 1802-06 and later. Major General James Wolfe lived in the house. The front of the house is on Chesterfield Road but is situated with a superb view of the park. In 1925, it was converted into flats and, if anyone is interested in renting a flat, they are currently about £1,850 per week!

Before descending the hill into Greenwich we came across some round burrows – a cluster of about 20 burial mounds that are probably the

remains of a 6th century Saxon cemetery. On the edge of this area there should have been a bronze cast of the Henry Moore sculpture – Standing Figure: Knife Edge – erected in 1979 but now gone missing.



Half way down the hill is Conduit House “Greenwich Hospital Standard Reservoir”, an early 18th century brick building by Nicholas Hawksmoor with a reservoir underneath, which was built as part of a water supply system for the Royal Naval Hospital.

As we left the park by St Mary's Gate is the grand statue of William IV statue in the green space. This is a large granite statue of him in admiral's uniform, sculpted in 1843 by Samuel Nixon. It was originally located in King William Street at the north end of London Bridge but was moved in 1936 to aid road widening.

We left Greenwich by the Foot Tunnel to Island Gardens in Cubitt Town. It is a quarter of a mile long and 60ft deep, opened in 1902 and when we were there no lifts were working so we had to climb down and up. The view from Island Gardens is one of the architectural “*set pieces*” of Britain

with the magnificent view of the Royal Naval College and Queens House with the Wolfe statue and Observatory on the top of the hill.



After admiring the view we set out northwards to quickly reach Mudchute Park and Farm, which was originally created when spoil from the construction of Millwall Dock was dumped along with accumulated silt. In 1974 the site was earmarked by the GLC for construction of a high-rise estate but the local campaign secured it as the people's park, which was created in the 1977. The park constitutes over fifty percent of the public open space on the Isle of Dogs and the farm has a wide variety of animals, a riding school, nature trail, allotments, shop, education centre and café. We all enjoyed the café where we had lunch.



We could see our destination from Mudchute, the close juxtaposition of urban farm and the modern city.



After lunch we continued our walk to Millwall Dock, which is surrounded by mainly modern buildings. Continuing on towards the entrance to South Dock we had views back across the river to the O2 (Millennium Dome) and Shooters Hill.





Looking the other way passed the locks into the dock and the remnants of cranes we saw that we were getting closer to Canary Wharf, which we had seen in the distance along most of the route from Greenwich Park to Mudchute. But before we went closer we went further north to go round Poplar Dock and Blackwall Basin.



At the northeast corner of Poplar Dock is the sculpture, "Figurehead for Docklands" by Anna Bisett. It is in the shape of a female similar to the solid wooden figureheads of the old sailing ships, but made of metal pieces.

Both the basin and the dock are now used to moor boats. We finally came to Canary Wharf and we all felt very small in the mass of tall buildings that have now gone up and are still being constructed. We did not go into any of the buildings but walked through, to cross the footbridge to West India Quay and the Museum in Docklands where we were refreshed.



After leaving the Museum, we walked the short distance to catch the DLR to Lewisham where we would disperse to our various parts of southeast London, having thanked Neill for a most interesting day walk from historic Blackheath and Greenwich to the brave new world of Canary Wharf.

Laurie Baker