



New Lammas Lands Defence Committee

www.lammaslands.org.uk

c/o **Hornbeam Environmental Centre, 458 Hoe Street, Leyton Green, London E17 9AH**

Chairman: *Mr. Joseph Ward* **Co-Chair and Planning Liaison Officer:** *Ms. Katy Andrews*

Vice-chair: *Mr. Laurie Wortley* **Co-vice-chair and Membership Secretary:** *Ms. Cath Rasbash*

Hon. Secretary: *Mr. Chris Hill* **Treasurer:** *Mr. John Gilbert*

REPORT TO RAMSAR SECRETARIAT

21st March 2011

New Lammas Lands Defence Committee Winter Walk

Sunday 6th February 2011 World Wetlands Day (2nd February 2011)

A well-attended “Winter Walk” took place on the afternoon of Sunday 6th February from Knotts Green across the Leyton Flats - also known locally as the Hollow Ponds (constructed as a work project for the unemployed in the 1920s-30s) - along the historical Walthamstow Slip. This was part of the New Lammas Lands Defence Committee’s fourth local celebration of the United Nations’ international World Wetlands Day, which marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands in Ramsar, Iran.

2011 has been designated by the United Nations as the international year of forests, so the UN’s chosen theme for this year’s walk was “Forests for Water and Wetlands”. This posed a problem, as NLLDC’s walks usually take place on the Leyton and Walthamstow Marshes - which are good for water and wetness at this time of year, but rather sparse when it comes to forests!

After some discussion about visiting Springfield Park again (as on the Autumn Walk in October when the late leaf-fall obscured the view of the marshes, but was great for autumn colours!), or going to Millfields, Wick Woodland or Hackney Marshes in the Borough of Hackney - also former Lammas Lands in the Lower Lea Valley but where there are interesting trees - it was decided to take this year’s World Wetlands Day Walk through the Walthamstow Slip in the borough of Waltham Forest to the Epping Forest end of the Slip on the border with the borough of Redbridge.

Until the late 19th century the Walthamstow Slip was a 3-mile long, narrow strip of land that was part of the Parish of Walthamstow but within the Parish of Leyton. It runs from the old River Lea up to Snaresbrook (with some historical evidence of a continuation through the former Lammas Lands of Mill Fields on the western side of the Lea in the borough of Hackney) and may well have been used to drive cattle from the Lammas grazing meadows to Epping Forest for summer pasturage. It was abolished when parish boundaries were regularised so that clean drinking water supplies could be more easily provided following a major cholera outbreak in London and surrounding villages.

This turned out to be a good choice and everyone enjoyed a truly fascinating historical outing, led by the very knowledgeable Ron Wortley-Millek who has lived in Leyton and Leytonstone all his life. The rather short walk took us past the architecturally interesting Whipps Cross Hospital (originally built as a sanatorium for inmates of the East Ham Union workhouse and the birthplace of pop singer David Essex) and Snaresbrook County Court, and there were many interesting interjections and reminiscences from other walkers.

The expedition ended at the Birch Well, a natural spring and an ancient watering place for cattle grazing in the forest, where two Victorian boundary markers on either side still mark the end of the former Walthamstow Slip. Here the Slip merges seamlessly into Eagle Pond, a wonderful haven for waterfowl of all sorts - particularly a flock of rather aggressive seagulls, which prompted several comments about a certain movie directed by local lad Sir Alfred Hitchcock!

The weather was unusually dry and warm for the time of year and a thoroughly enjoyable time was had by all. Many of us repaired to the Eagle pub at Snaresbrook afterwards for an excellent Sunday carvery meal.

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NOTES

Knotts Green

Knotts Green is technically part of Epping Forest and is the easternmost part of Leyton Green, just east of the Bakers' Arms crossroads. This open space probably derives its name from the Danish personal name Knut (Canute), as Essex was once part of Denmark - with the River Lea as the international boundary between it and the Kingdom of Wessex in the time of Good King Athelstan and King Alfred the Great. The humorous local story goes that Knotts Green is so called because being surrounded by the villages of Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone on its three sides it is said to be "Knott" in Walthamstow, "Knott" in Leyton and "Knott" in Leytonstone either.

Beating the Bounds of the Walthamstow Slip

Waltham Forest was created on 1st January 1965 when the former Essex Councils of Leyton, Walthamstow and Chingford were amalgamated to form the new London Borough of Waltham Forest within the newly-expanded Greater London Council area.

The Walthamstow Historical Association has published a tantalisingly brief account of a perambulation - over two days and starting at 7am! from Whippys Cross - of the Walthamstow Slip (through Leyton Parish) in the 19th Century. Katy says: "I have a recollection that when I first moved to Waltham Forest in the early 1980s there was still an annual Beating the Bounds ceremony led by the Mayor of Waltham Forest along, though not around, the former Slip - I could be completely wrong about this, but I remember seeing something in the Waltham Forest Guardian [local newspaper] about it. I also think I've seen something from the 1960s made by Acorn Films newsreel [of Chingford] about Beating the Bounds of Walthamstow Parish which presumably would have included the Slip."

The New Lammas Lands Defence Committee's next public walk will be the annual Beating the Bounds ceremony, on Rogation Sunday, 29th May 2011, starting with the Election of Thegns at 2.15 p.m. from the car park at the Lee Valley Ice Centre, Lea Bridge Road, Leyton E.5. (near the Lea Bridge over the River Lee Navigation).
