**Greenwith Park & Blackheath February 2024**

A good turnout of members (11), plus the weather turned a fearsome forecast into a fortunate foray. Meeting just inside the park gates we headed up the hill taking advantage of the facilities *en route.* Cutting across the grass towards the Ranger’s House, we could not go into the rose garden, where they are clearly remoulding the layout. So we skirted around to Queen Charlotte’s former bathhouse and thence out of the park onto the heath. After crossing the road we made our way to the Hare & Billet pond, where the group thought I was tantalisingly teasing them with a preview of the pub.

The row of elegant houses facing the heath were built between 1795 & 1802. The central house, No.6 is perhaps the most handsome. It became the home and observatory of amateur astronomer, Stehen Groombridge. The last house, No.2 was the home of polar explorer, Sir James Clark Ross (Ross Island). Down the hill into Eliot Vale then up the other side to look again across the heath to the Ranger’s House and next to it, Montagu House. When George IV’s wife, Caroline was living there, she was a regular user of Pagoda house and rumoured to have her affairs there, but probably just set up her little nursery. We turned into Pagoda Gardens to see the house.

Back in Eliot Vale we plunged down Heath Lane and then struggled up the other side to meet Lee Terrace, opposite St.Margaret’s church. In the graveyard of the former church is buried the astronomer, Edmond Halley. Along Lee Terrace to the top end of Blackheath high street with its elegant shops, cafes, etc. Crossing in front of the Conservatoire & Concert Halls to enter the exclusive Cator Estate. This is an interesting mixture of 19th Century and modern architecture. St.Michael & All Angels church is allegedly known as the “needle of the heath” in light of its very narrow, tall spire. Further on there is a house bearing a plaque to the French composer, Charles Gounod, who stayed here briefly. Despite the darkening sky, we undertook the detour around Morden College, set in immaculate grounds. This now functions as a retirement home.

Back at Morden Road, we swam past the 2nd pond and swept past the gloriously, but immodestly named The Paragon. This is composed of 7 blocks linked by colonnades. Damaged in WW2, it was restored and is now 100 flats. We had to avoid the temptation of a different hostelry, The Prince of Wales, which has great rugby connections. From there we traversed that section of the heath past another church and out to our lunch venue. Some of us walked back through the park after lunch.