HISTORY of the BLACKHEATH SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY, by *Richard Buchanan* 19 Jan 2012

SETTING THE SCENE

Nowadays city dwellers are insulated from the countryside by large suburban areas, and from farming by supermarkets. In the mid-19C meat came into London on the hoof, milk came from local cows, fruit from orchards, and water was less safe than beer. No one was that far from nature, and virtually all townsfolk would have country cousins.

Science and Engineering were in the ascendant, and part of the inclusive range of interests of any educated person.

Roads were getting better and railway development was in full swing, bringing Greenwich & Blackheath into the ambit of London. Greenwich had the Deptford dockyard, various marine industries and the Royal Observatory; the open spaces of Blackheath, then being developed for upper class housing, attracted many eminent residents.

Linnaeus published his Species Plantorum in 1753, which laid out the first satisfactory system for classification of plants (flora), not only for those he had classified himself, but with plants from across the world. He also proposed a similar, and similarly successful, scheme for animals (fauna). It rapidly gained acceptance, and in 1788 the Linnaean Society of London was established. By the mid 19C the Linnaean classification was widely known and understood. Instead of just having a local dialect name for a plant or animal, one could have a universally recognised Latin name – so comparisons could be studied throughout the country, Europe, or the world. Natural History became *the* science of the time.

FOUNDER MEMBERS – their professional standing in 1850

Three of the four principal founder members of what became the West Kent Scientific Society were Fellows of the Royal Society in 1850, and the fourth, John Penn, was elected to it in 1859.

George Busk, FRS (1807–1886) After studies at St Thomas' and St Bartholomew's hospitals, he was appointed in 1832 as assistant surgeon on the seamen's hospital ship "Grampus" at Greenwich. When this was replaced by the "Dreadnought" in 1837 he transferred to it and became a full surgeon. (Charles Dickens was among a group of journalists who visited the Dreadnought when it first opened. He described it as follows: "The main deck is used as a chapel, with cabins for the surgeons, and hammocks for the convalescents, the middle deck is the surgical ward, the lower the medical deck." The Dreadnought could house some 400 patients.)

While serving on these ships he worked out the pathology of cholera, and made important discoveries on scurvy. This work involved the use of microscopes, and led to his interest in the related field of the classification of plants.

1842 Joined the Microscopical Society (of London)
1846 Fellow of the **Linnean Society of London**
1850 Elected **Fellow of the Royal Society**
*1852 Founder President of the **Greenwich Natural History Society***

Frederick Currey (1819 -1881) FRS was also in the Linnaean Society, and became its secretary. His chief interest was in mycology (fungi).

*1852 Founder Secretary of the **Greenwich Natural History Society***

James Glaisher (1809-1903), FRS was born to a watchmaker in Rotherhithe, the family soon moving to Greenwich. As a young man he became interested in the work of the Royal Observatory becoming a friend of William Richardson.

1829/30 Worked on the principal triangulation for the Ordnance Survey in County Galway, Ireland.
1832 Became assistant to Professor George Airy at the Cambridge University Observatory on the recommendation of Mr Wm Richardson of the Greenwich Observatory.

While there he organised a voluntary service of 60 men, mostly doctors and clergymen, in different parts of the country to take precise observations on standardised instruments; so it can be claimed

that Glaisher established meteorology as a science. In 1850 he became General Secretary of the British Meteorological Society at its inception.

1835 Airy appointed Astronomer Royal at Greenwich, bringing Glaisher as his assistant.

1840 (to 1874) Glaisher in charge of the new **Magnetic & Meteorological Department.** He made observations every two hours, day and night, to provide the basis for his tables of Corrections to Meteorological Observations for the Diurnal Range published in 1848. As scientific meteorology was in its infancy his first tasks were to standardise the instruments and systematise the collection of observations.

1848 28th November elected **Fellow of the Royal Society**, based on published papers.

1850 Became General Secretary of the **British** (later **Royal**) **Meteorological Society** from its foundation in 1850 (until 1872, broken only by a term as President in 1867-8).

*1857 Founder President of the **Blackheath Photographic Society**.*

1866 Founder member of the **Aeronautical Society of Great Britain**.

John Penn (1805-1878), Engineer.

1843-75 He took over "**John Penn & Son**" on the death of his father, its founder, and continued to successfully run the business. The firm described themselves as "Engineers" but came to specialise in the marine industry, making steam engines for ships built on the Thames and worldwide. Their engine works were at the bottom of Blackheath Hill, all their specialised machine tools being made in-house (including a 12ft cylinder boring machine), and the various buildings linked by horse tramways. Their boiler works were at Deptford. Several important developments were made by John Penn, and he perfected a compact oscillating engine – doubling the power available from previous engines of the same size, making Penn's a serious rival to Maudslay and Bolton & Watt.

c1870 One interesting job of local scientific interest was to build a **wind tunnel** for the Royal Aeronautical Society of Great Britain, then at Maidenstone Hill – probably commissioned by James Glaisher. John Penn lived at the Cedars, Belmont Hill, Lee, whence he had a telegraph installed to both his works. He retired in 1875.

The Cedars had extensive grounds, and a later member of the Society, Mr J F Green read more than one paper on its flora and fauna. Belmont Hill ran between a fine avenue of elms, threatened by road widening – where it passed the Cedars, John Penn incorporated it into his grounds diverting the road to the south, at his own expense.

John Penn had a substantial local standing and when the **West Kent Microscopical Society** was formed he agreed to become its first President. With his engineering background he would have appreciated the instruments. His value to the society seems to have been to endow it with the outward looking character that enabled it to succeed. The minutes of the time barely hint at this, and do not even refer to him by name – there is no record of his attendance at Council meetings while he was President, and only once thereafter.

1821 Joined Institution of Civil Engineers

1848 Joined Institution of Mechanical Engineers; President 1858-9, 1866-8.

1859 Elected **Fellow of the Royal Society**, for advances to the design of steam engines.

*1859 Founder President of the **West Kent Microscopical Society***

1860 Founder member of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects

GREENWICH NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The first of three societies that eventually became the Blackheath Scientific Society was the Greenwich Natural History Society, founded in **1852** with George Busk, President, and Frederick Currey, Hon Secretary.

The next year they renamed themselves the GREENWICH NATURAL HISTORY CLUB. However, the earliest extant constitution of the Club was drawn up in 1857.

They realised that they lived in an area of Kentish countryside whose natural history had not been studied, and set out to do so - in an area bordered by the **Thames, Darent & Cray rivers, Keston Common** & the **Ravensbourne**.

As was to be expected with a group of enthusiastic naturalists, much of the Society's activity was out-of-doors. Field days were arranged regularly in the spring, summer and autumn, and the Society undertook systematic natural history "inquiries". Walks in Greenwich Park, Charlton, Woolwich Common, Bostall Woods, Abbey Wood, Lesnes, Lee, Eltham and Chislehurst yielded abundant rewards for the collector. The new railway system was convenient for the further places.

In 1856 the notice convening a Field Day directed members to Erith, and then "to proceed along the road towards Bexley to a small wood on the right through which to proceed to Lessness Heath to the Rendezvous, Mr Bull's "The Leather Bottle" near Chalk Stile Farm, from half past twelve o'clock to two o'clock; afterwards ramble through Abbey Wood to a locality on Bostal heath for Desmidieae; from thence proceed through Old Park Wood on Plumstead Common, to the second Rendezvous, Mr Amon's "The Woodman" from half past four to five pm and return by the agglomerated pebble beds to Woolwich..."

In 1859 Frederick Currey led a Field Day, the principal object of which was the Cryptogamic Botany of the neighbourhood. The route was from Southborough Road Station to Chislehurst, St Paul's Cray Common, Petts Wood and back to Chislehurst. The minutes list nearly forty species of fungi noted in Petts Wood on that occasion.

They planned to publish their findings, and published two reports in 1859:
"The Fauna of Blackheath and its vicinity, Part 1 – Vertebrate Animals" by Dr Cuthbert Collingwood, embodied the work of the Zoological Committee of the Club. It catalogues 39 mammals, 156 birds, 10 reptiles and 31 fishes, with notes on their frequency of appearance. The porpoise is described as "by far the commonest Cetacean we can include. A season seldom passes without their appearance at Greenwich and Deptford". There is an account of a 14½ foot Rorqual whale being killed opposite Deptford Creek in 1842; squirrels occur in Greenwich Park, moles are abundant, hedgehogs common. Sparrow hawks are "not uncommon", a golden Oriole was shot at Eltham in 1853, sedge warblers were noted "in a lane between Charlton and the river", and sand martins were generally to be seen on Blackheath. Quail occurred between Morden College and Eltham and were seen in the open square of Greenwich Hospital [Old Naval College]. The changes which the century had brought to the district are illustrated by the record of a fox in Peckham.

The second report, "On the Botany of the district lying between the rivers Cray, Ravensbourne and Thames"., was prepared by Currey on behalf of the Club's Botanical Committee. It lists 364 genera and 810 species. Unfortunately it gives no localities; these appear to have been noted on a map which has disappeared. The report itself is, in fact, rare.

Publishing the two reports badly hit the Club's finances. This was probably the main cause of the eventual amalgamation with the other two societies.

BLACKHEATH PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

The Blackheath Photographic Society came next, founded in **1857** with James Glaisher as its first President. He worked at the Royal Observatory which was already using photographic techniques.

By then photographs were being taken by the collodion process on glass plates – using silver nitrate, but the sensitive coating on the plate was wet from the darkroom and needed to be developed immediately after the exposure. Several companies made photographic equipment in a small way, and chemists were stocking the necessary chemicals. Several members made their own lenses and cameras.

Much photography tied in with natural history, and several members were in both societies.

The Photographic Society met at the Blackheath Golf Club House on Blackheath Hill; they presented a medal to the Golf Club in 1860 as an expression of gratitude (the medal is still held at Eltham). The minutes of the Society constitute an important record of the development of the art and science of photography in its young days.

WEST KENT MICROSCOPICAL SOCIETY

The third of the original societies was the West Kent Microscopical Society, founded in **1859** under John Penn. Members bought their own microscopes, and would bring them to meetings to show slides they had prepared themselves. Some were of considerable benefit to natural history, and again there was a membership overlap with the other societies.

The Amalgamation:

WEST KENT NATURAL HISTORY & MICROSCOPICAL SOCIETY

The Microscopical Society flourished under John Penn's presidency; and in **1861** amalgamated with Greenwich Natural History Club by then in financial difficulties. Both former societies had their own secretary on the new Council.

WEST KENT NATURAL HISTORY, MICROSCOPICAL & PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Abbreviated to "The WEST KENT"

In **1863** the Photographic Society was also absorbed. The combined Society had a secretary dealing with general matters, though the naturalists continued to have their own secretary.

FINANCE

To be viable an annual subscription of half a guinea was found necessary [at least £80 now]. The Greenwich Natural History Club had found a quarter of a guinea to be inadequate.

The major costs for a 19C society were hire of a meeting room, and printing – the only means of producing multiple copies.

Various glimpses of the costs are:	1854	1862	1874	1904
- Hire of a meeting room		£5/5/-	£5/5/-	
- Servants		10/6	£1/1/-	
- Tea			£2/-/-	
- Printing the programme and notices	£3/7/6			£7/4/-
- Postage	£2/-/-			10/7

The £1/1/- for Servants in 1874 comes with statement that the Attendant was threatening to resign if his pay of 3/6 was not raised to 5/- the next year:
£1/1/- would have paid one Attendant 3/6 for six meetings. His pay was not raised.

Despite a moderate drop in the value of money the "West Kent" subscription remained unchanged until well into the 20C. This was aided by the development of duplicating machines which meant that ordinary notices no longer had to be expensively printed.

FIELD DAYS

The West Kent Society continued to arrange regular Field days in the spring, summer and autumn.

Walks in Greenwich Park, Charlton, Woolwich Common, Bostall Woods, Abbey Wood, Lesnes, Lee, Eltham and Chislehurst yielded abundant rewards for the collector.

Especially interesting are the two reports published in 1859. Whatever changes they illustrate, there is one familiar note: financial difficulties delayed their publication for over a year.

"The Fauna of Blackheath and its vicinity, Part 1 – Vertebrate Animals" by Dr Cuthbert Collingwood, embodying the work of the Zoological Committee of the Club, catalogues 39 mammals, 156 birds, 10 reptiles and 31 fishes, with notes on their frequency of appearance. The changes which the century has brought to the district are illustrated by the record of a fox in Peckham. The porpoise is described as "by far the commonest Cetacean we can include. A season seldom passes without their appearance at Greenwich and Deptford". There is an account of the killing of a 14½ foot rorqual whale opposite Deptford Creek in 1842; squirrels occur in Greenwich Park, moles are abundant, hedgehogs common. Sparrow hawks are "not uncommon", a golden Oriole was shot at Eltham in 1853, sedge warblers were noted "in a lane between Charlton and the river", and sand martins were generally to be seen on Blackheath. Quail occurred between Morden College and Eltham and were observed in the open square of Greenwich Hospital.

The second report, "On the Botany of the district lying between the rivers Cray, Ravensbourne and Thames", was prepared by Currey on behalf of the Club's Botanical Committee. It lists 364 genera and 810 species. Unfortunately it gives no localities; these appear to have been noted on a map which has disappeared. The report itself is, in fact, rare.

Regular Cryptogamic Field Days, led by Currey and Flaxman Spurrell were held in October from the 1870s to 1900s.

Ladies had attended Field Days from quite early on, and although they were not accepted as members until 1906, annual Ladies Field Days were instituted, the first in 1889 to Aylesford and Maidstone. The 1890s saw a significant emphasis on Field Days, which were also organised for Photography and for Botany & Entomology.

LIBRARY

The Library was kept in a bookcase in the School for the Sons & Orphans of Missionaries, where the Society held its meetings, and could be visited at any time by arrangement with the Headmaster. Usage averaged 30 borrowings per annum from 1860 to 1880, but then declined. In 1910 the School moved to Eltham.

In 1912 the meeting place moved to Blackheath Chambers (the old Proprietary School) and the Bookcase was taken there, but borrowing had practically ceased. It was a sad day in 1916 when the Bookcase was moved into the corridor to make space for the Army Paysheet Department.

Thereafter the library fades from view.

JOINING THE SOCIETY

A potential newcomer to the Society might be asked if he wanted to join by an existing Member, or seek out an existing Member to Propose him (or her, from 1906). The existing Member would, as Proposer, bring the Name of the person to the attention of the Secretary. The Secretary would put this to Council, who would arrange for the Name to be put on the Notice for the next Meeting. The person would be proposed and seconded at that meeting. At the next meeting the Name would again be put up, this time for ballot. If successful (it invariably was) the Society had a new member.

First Lady Member: the name of Miss Lindley at 74 Shooters Hill Road was read at the meeting on 28th March 1906. She was elected to membership on 25th April 1906.

At a Council meeting on Tuesday 21st May 1912, Mrs Bagnold of Warren Wood, Shooters Hill, Kent, was proposed for membership by Mr C E S Phillips, the then President, and seconded by Mr W Fawcett and Mr Stanley Edwards.

This process continued into the 1960s, but has since withered.

MEETINGS

In 19C and early 20C most meetings were run as 'conversazione'. Dress was formal. Members would bring items of interest, describe them and discuss them amongst themselves, or one of them would present a short paper.

Topics of the 19C and beginning of 20C are varied but with Natural History obviously to the fore. It is not now possible to distinguish between 'items of interest' and 'short papers', apart from the odd paper listed as such, as for example in the:

1909 MEETINGS PROGRAMME

January	Moths Ammonite Fossils	the Moon
February AGM	The colour of Birds' Eggs (*two members of the Linnaean Society at this meeting*)	
March	Butterflies from Africa & S America,	Transmutation of Elements
April	Moths Orchids	
May SOIRÉE	Illustrations of Protective Resemblance in Butterflies & Moths, Jupiter's Family of Moons,	Some Physical Properties of Sand
May	Iron Pyrites from Folkstone, Watch with Radium derived Fluorescent Marking, Moths	Fossils from Dene Holes at Abbey Wood Tomato Plants
October	Moths Flint enclosing a small starfish Microscope & Slides	Halley's Comet
November	Japanese Insects Capuchin Monkey Skull	Spoonbill & Virginian Eagle Owl Skulls *Paper on* Anatomy of a Cockroach
December	Hawk Moth from N Borneo Gold Particles in S African Rock (*the President of the British Astronomical Association attended*)	Flint with enclosed Fossil *Paper on* Comets

The Soirée in May would have had much more going on, the listing here only being of the "lecturettes given by members".

Some meetings were given over to a single paper, often by an invited speaker, many open to the public – a suitable hall being hired for the occasion.

SOIRÉES

Soirées became a regular feature in the Society's programme. They were held in the Blackheath Congregational Church Hall and included a reception and a concert of a conventional type. Its lecture hall was set apart for a series of four of five "lecturettes" by members, and in the main hall members exhibited natural history specimens, curios, microscope slides and photographs.

One had been proposed in 1860, but it was 3rd June 1862 when the first one was held. By then amalgamation of Microscopical Society with the Natural History Club had taken place and that with the Photographic Society was in the offing – all three would have been involved. Another was held in 1863, when 300 tickets were sold, and again in 1864 when 400 were sold. It seems the Soirées were very popular; the Mayor would come and there was no difficulty selling tickets, the limitation being the available space. A soirée committee was set up, and ran a biannual event in May.

At a Society meeting in 1879 Mr Pearce complained that tickets for our soirée (on Wednesday 14th May) had not been sent to the Greenwich Society (for the Acquisition and Diffusion of Useful Knowledge). It was explained by Mr Clift, the Secretary, that in consequence of the limited space at our disposal we had not been able to send invitations to many societies when we would have been pleased to see them represented at our Soirée.

On 31-5-1907 the Borough News reported the SCIENTISTS' SOIREE in considerable detail, and carefully noted (one might say advertised) the names and titles of the principals attending, Reporting was possibly by the editor and an assistant, in a style no longer practised today:

WEST KENT SOCIETY'S BIENNIAL EVENT

NOTABLE EVENTS AT BLACKHEATH – LIVE REPTILES AND HISTORIC RELICS

The Blackheath Congregational church hall was on Tuesday evening turned into a museum. A varied and most interesting collection of curios, historic and remarkable things was brought together. The occasion was the biennial soiree of the West Kent Natural History, Microscopical and Photographic Society. The institution has a membership of about 100. The president (Dr Walter Kidd, FZS), the vice-presidents (Messrs G Draper, FRGS, J L Foucar, BSc, H Hart, MA, and R N Kiddle LDS) together with the Council issued some 500 invitations, and a great many were accepted. The president & Mrs Kidd welcomed the guests, who included the Mayor & Mayoress of Greenwich, General Haliday, Dr Harvey Bateman, Mr & Mrs E Pascoe Williams, Dr F S Toogood, Mr E Provis, the Revs H W Smythe, W H K Soames, F N Few and other clergy, members of the Royal Observatory staff, and Natural History societies at Croydon, Bromley, Catford & Woolwich, etc. Messrs Herbert Jones, FSA (hon treasurer of the Society), H S Saunders, ARIBA, and S Edwards FES (the hon secretaries) were present and took an active part in the proceedings, as well as the members of the Council, viz: Messrs H Jadams, FRAS, H F Billinghurst, W Webster, FCS, M C Matthews, Morgan, May, and E S Phillips, FRSE. The reception over a capital programme of music was contributed by Miss Ethel Attwood (pianoforte soloist and accompanist), Miss Lena Preston (songs), Miss E Marsh (violin solos), Miss Mackern (recitation), & Mr Shirley Kidd (songs).

LECTURETTES

In the meantime lecturettes and demonstrations were given in the small hall downstairs. Mr A C D Crommelin, FRAS dealt with the photography of the Moon, in a lecture illustrated with lantern slides. The Rev P Mulholland followed by describing some magnetic models illustrating the electronic theory of matter. Mr William Webster succeeded him by giving demonstrations of high vacua, whilst Mr J Louis Foucar dealt with Liquid Air and Liquid Iron. Each lecturette excited considerable interest, as also did the collection of natural history specimens, microscopical objects, curios, and photographs shown in the larger hall, which was decorated with flags and comfortably arranged. Refreshments were served from a buffet in the reception room, the event from start to finish, being of an exceptionally pleasant nature. The collection of objects of interest was so large and varied that it is only possible to mention a few:

REPRESENTATIVE EXHIBITS

The natural history section was a strong one. There were some admirable and rare entomological specimens shown by the assistant-secretary, Mr S Edwards, FES, and in addition a portion of the collection of the late Robert McLachlan, FRS. This was lent by the naturalist's nephew, who is a member of the society. Many of the butterflies and moths, in both exhibits, proved objects of general admiration, apart from their special interest to collectors. The array of microscopes was large. Here Mr H S Saunders was represented by a fine instrument in which the circulation of blood in the tail of a goldfish was shown. There were cases of stuffed fish and stuffed birds, of eggs, and a host of other things, but the "livestock section" – if such a term may be applied to snakes and an African alligator – claimed a major share of interest. The live reptiles embraced a:

7ft 6in PYTHON,

a lively young gentleman from North America, who Mr E W Smith, of Forest Hill, the exhibitor, handled and held out for visitors to touch, if they wished, with all the skill of an accomplished snake-charmer. The alligator, who seemed to find his 18 inch glass-sided-and-covered box rather close quarters, was also in great request, particularly amongst the ladies, who seemed dominated by a desire to stroke his head. On the whole the little creature was not disposed to resent their attentions! The preserved specimens of life dredged at the depth of two miles below the surface of the Pacific Ocean, and exhibited in the large collection of Mr Draper, were curious. A most rare specimen of branch black coral from South Jamaica was shown by the same gentleman, who had evidently been a veritable globe-trotter. In addition his travels were represented by Grecian pottery, 1500 to 2000 BC, Egyptian prayer calls, and relics recovered from

SUNKEN TREASURE SHIPS

off the Spanish coast. An exceptionally large ammonite, in a beautiful state, from Weymouth, excited the interest of geologists. In the days of a perfect water-supply in London, an old wooden

water pipe, excavated in Throgmorton Street, EC, was a reminder of the primitive methods of our Metropolitan forefathers. It was shown by Messrs Merryweathers of Greenwich, together with a hand fire pump dated 1588 – an appliance which looked more like a boy's toy squirt largely magnified than anything else. The same also sent other fire relics, whilst Mr E Pascoe Williams lent the log of the late Commander E Pascoe, RN, his grandfather, which constitutes a most interesting

TRAFALGAR RELIC.

In 1803 Mr Williams was a young Naval Officer. At the great engagement off Cadiz he was on the "Naid." The log, which is a large book and very neatly written, contains what appears to be a complete story of the events preceding and following Nelson's great victory as witnessed by Pascoe, who subsequently became the commander of one of the first steam-driven ships in the Navy. Before Trafalgar we find in the log a record of overhauling ships of various nationalities – Portuguese, American, Norwegian, Danish, German, Swedish and Spanish – and the result of each examination. Here and there are entries recording the vigorous way in which the Naval discipline was upheld. "Punished Archibald Carr with four dozen for drunkenness" is a typical entry referring to the application of the lash. Before the decisive battle there is an entry recording the sighting of the "enemy's fleet of 33 sail," and later, after Nelson's death, a record of the steps that were taken to build the column that now adorns Trafalgar Square. From this relic of the beginning of the 19th century we turn to the commencement of the 20th century. Although the

AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH FLAG

cannot be regarded exactly as a curio, the particular flag exhibited by Mr Walter Hitchcock has a history. It was first hoisted at the Mansion House on December 31st 1900, it afterwards floated from the flag-staffs of the City Hall Melbourne, the Town Hall, Geelong and the City Hall, Adelaide, when Prince and Princess of Wales, as the Duke and Duchess of York, were welcomed in Australia. This year, when the Colonial Premiers arrived in the City it was fluttered in the breeze in Queen Street. Mr Hitchcock, who resides at Blackheath, is proud in possession of the flag. He was instrumental in getting it hoisted at the Mansion House at the hour when the Commonwealth came into being. He has spent many years in Australia, having gone more than 60 years ago to the gold fields at Ballarat. In fact he is the sole survivor of the first party of four who resided there, and as a memento of his life in the gold fields he exhibited a gold licence, dated 1852. These are very rare. There were many other articles of exceptional interest exhibited.

ANNUAL DINNERS

From 1874 an annual dinner was held, usually at the Old Falcon hotel, Gravesend. It was the custom to have dishes presenting some special subject which could be discussed afterwards. In 1882 the subject was "Salmon" and several members are recorded as making interesting observations upon its form, habits and culture. The following year the President introduced the theme of "Vegetarianism", and at a subsequent dinner some Presidential remarks on "The Natural History of Eels" gave rise to animated discussion.

From 1903 till the First World War the dinners were held at the Café Monico, Piccadilly. Dinners have not since been held annually, and are now very rare.

WEST KENT SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

The Society changed its name in 1915, after 63 years as a 'Natural History' society. It ceased to have a Natural History secretary. It signalled a change in its activities that had become apparent over the previous few years. Ordinary meetings had changed their emphasis; conversazioni became fewer, while more papers were read by members or invited speakers.

Take for instance the:

1920 PROGRAMME

27 January	Prof. Bame	Petroleum and its Products
24 February - AGM	Dr A C D Crommelin	Einstein's theory and the Eclipse of 1919
13 April - Conversatzione	Mr Edwards	Antennae of Insects (slides)
	Mr Ord	Architecture
	Mr Watkins	Early Aeroplanes
	Sir R Robertson	Explosives
	Col Mathews	Shoddy

	Mr Hay	New Plants from China and Mexico
	Mr Gavin Burks	Formanifera and Dietomaciae
	Mr Green	Abnormality in Fossils (microscope slides)
	Mr Turner	Ores
27 April	Mr M Whitaker *	The Hammerer and the Camera (Geology)
18 May	Prof. G S Boulger, FRS *	Insectivorous Plants
19 June - Outing		Hornimum Museum
20 October	Mr G M Gill	Coal and its Products
23 November	Mr W L Turner	A Geological Ramble in the Lake District
14 December	Mr Evans, OBE *	Fuel from a Chemist's Standpoint

Note: * denotes an invited speaker.

THE WORLD WARS

Indoor meetings continued throughout the 1914-1918 war, but there were no Field Days. After the war Field Days were resumed but not on the same scale as before, although meetings were well-maintained.

This lasted until the outbreak of war in **1939**, when on 3rd September the Council decided not to start the next programme of meetings in October, or to hold further meetings during hostilities - the Society's activities were suspended.

The last meeting had been on 4th May, in the All Saint's Parish Hall (the normal venue at that time), and had been addressed by Dr King of the 'Fuel Research Station' on recent developments.

That could have been the end; the Second World War scattered members far and wide. The Archives had been stored, somewhat haphazardly; there was a book balance of £60/8/- and the Treasurer, Mr J S S Brame had 8/3 in cash.

However the Society was reformed. Early in 1947 the pre-war Secretary, Mr C A Newell, Mr A W Humphrey, Eng. Rear Admiral Williamson, and Mr D R Leggatt, a relatively new member, were instrumental in this. Meetings restarted on 18th March 1947 in the Community Centre newly established by Greenwich Council - and available free of charge. This was at "Kidbrooke House", on the Shooters Hill Road, diagonally opposite the "Sun in the Sands" pub.

So the Society continued in being, the first post-war meeting being addressed by Mr B S Cooper of GEC who spoke on the "Electron Microscope".

Since then monthly meetings have been held regularly from October to May. Despite the interruption the West Kent Scientific society emerged relatively unscathed.

THE CENTENARY

The centenary was marked in 1957, a hundred years after the Blackheath Photographic Society was formed. One might have expected it to have been held a hundred years after the Greenwich Natural History Society started in 1852, but that is a traditionally held date, not backed up by proper documentation. And anyway the 1952 Council had missed the date.

David Leggatt, the Greenwich Borough Archivist, scoured the Archives - their haphazard state is his description [though that is still the case] and wrote **A CENTENARY RETROSPECT**. It is a booklet of 12 pages, and has been a primary reference ever since.

BLACKHEATH SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

The Society changed its name again in 1967 adopting 'Blackheath' in the title as more suited to the area served. By then plans for the M25 showed it enclosing the old stamping ground - to which we were no longer having field days, nor specifically choosing for our summer visits.

(By then the second bore of the Blackwall tunnel was open, and the approach road had needed the land where the old Kidbrooke House was. So the Community Centre and Archives had moved to Woodlands in Mycenae Road - a Nunnery had occupied Woodlands and built an annex in the grounds; the annex became the Community Centre, taking the Kidbrooke House name - until relatively recently becoming Mycenae House. The Archives went to Woodlands.)

125th ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

Taking its cue from the 1957 centenary this was held in 1982, at Woodlands.

It was organised by the President, Dr J A W Dalziel, and Secretary, Mr F G Swift, who set members of Council to each research different topics. Mr Julian Watson, the Greenwich Archivist, agreed to make a room available to the Society for a fortnight in June on the top floor at Woodlands. The room was measured and the exhibition designed to fit.

The Society's announcement for the occasion was as follows:

125 years ago the Blackheath Scientific Society was born. Still very active with monthly lectures on new developments by visiting specialists, it is celebrating its 125th Anniversary with an Exhibition at "Woodlands", Mycenae Road, Blackheath.

Highlighting the mushrooming of Science and Technology during these 125 years, the Exhibition shows, with extracts from the Society's archives, how its lectures and activities often mirrored the scientific developments and their impact on our life. Working scientific displays reflect our debt to the Royal Observatory and other local Institutions and the pre-eminent Telecommunications industry.

We are fortunate to have Miss Heather Couper, BSc, AMInstP, FRAS in company with Mr Nigel Henbest, Astronomy Consultant to the "New Scientist", to open the Exhibition on Monday June 14th at 6.60pm. Heather Couper co-operates with Patrick Moore on the BBC-TV "Sky at Night" Programme.

The Exhibition will be open:	Monday	June	14th & 21st,	10am – 7.45pm
	Tuesday	"	15th & 22nd	" "
	Thursday	"	17th & 23rd	" "
	Saturday	"	19th	10am – 4.45pm

Mr Julian Watson, our host, attended the opening; as did Ann Stroud, Lady Mayor of Greenwich, and senior members of the Society who had served it in several capacities over the past years.

150th ANNIVERSARY DINNER

The Dinner was held in the evening of Friday 8th June 2007 at Devonport House, King William Walk, Greenwich. The cost per head was £33 – 22 attendees paying £37.50 to cover the 3 guests. The President, Mr Michael Fleming, welcomed everyone present, particularly the guests: two Honorary Members; and the Speaker, Dr Gloria Clifton, Head of the Royal Observatory.

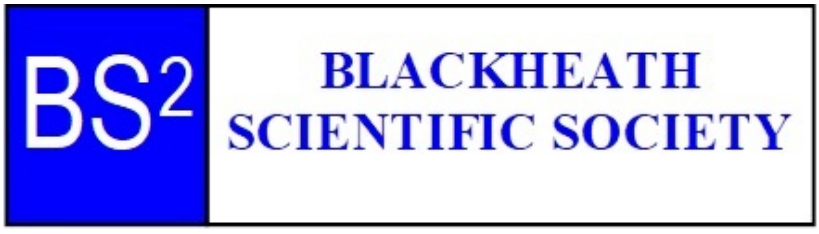
Appropriately we were in the 'Drake room', decorated with images of navigational instruments. After the meal, the President gave a brief history of the Society, mentioning that Sir Frank Dyson, when Astronomer Royal, had been President. He then introduced Dr Gloria Clifton who said the Royal Observatory was an even older institution, established in 1675 by King Charles II. She concentrated on their historic brief - to determine longitude, for the benefit of mariners. However she concluded by saying amateurs were still doing useful work - using the telescopes at Greenwich.

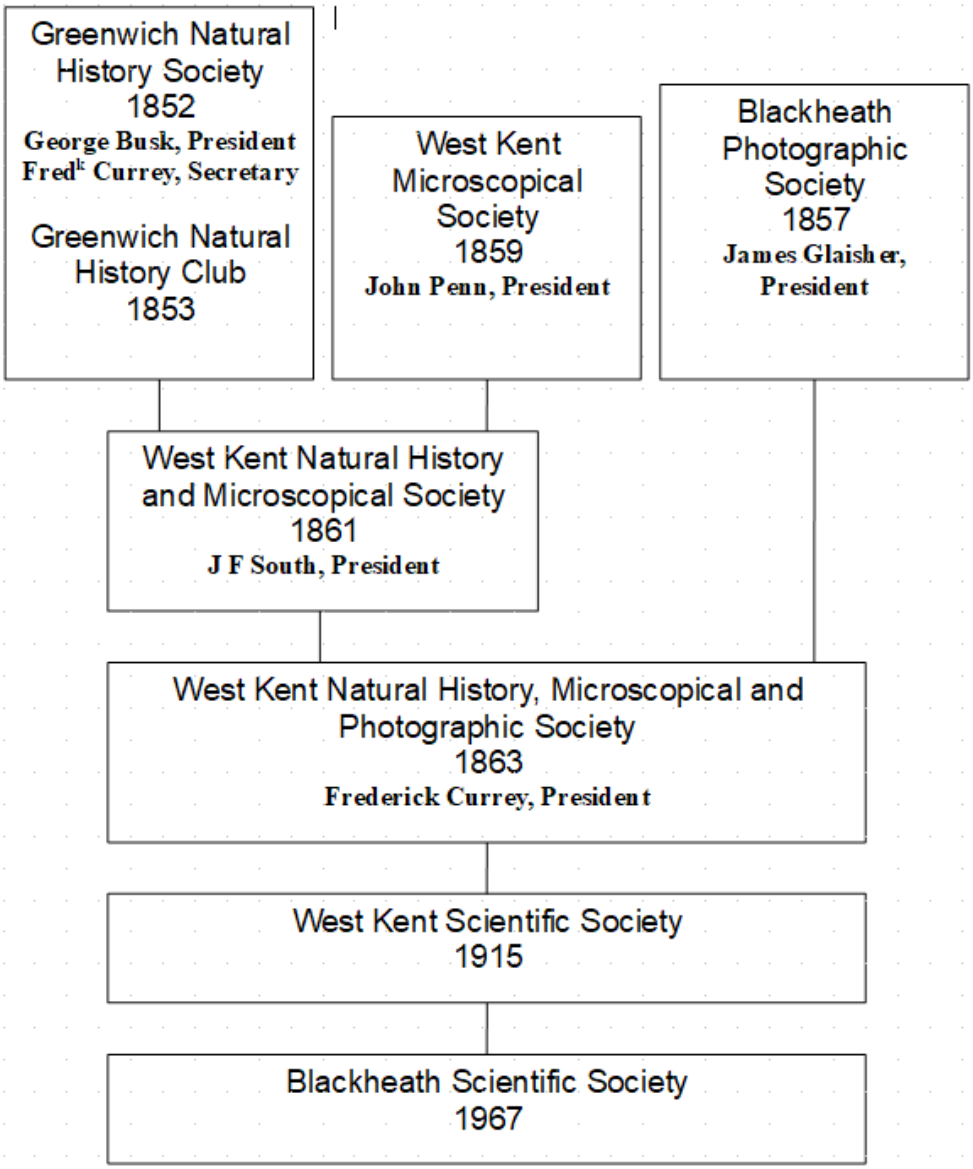
Mr Nurse, an honorary member, concluded the evening by mentioning some of the highlights from his time as Secretary, up to the time he left the district on his retirement 25 years previously.

NEW LOGO

In 2009 the Council decided that a Logo was needed for its publicity. Up till then the Society had simply used its name, usually written in capitals using the Times New Roman font. It might be abbreviated to BSS or BScS.

The full name is retained in a Banner, with a Square at the left containing the BSS abbreviation rewritten as BS^2.





Relationships Between the Societies and the Formation of the Blackheath Scientific Society