



Beckenham Place Park to Crystal Palace

This walk is cherry-picked from Capital Ring. Take extra time to explore the two parks at either end. The signs are a great help but don't be confused by the signs to the stations or you may end up back at the beginning.

Beckenham Place Park to Crystal Palace

A pavement walk connecting two interesting parks.

Beckenham Place Park

John Cator (1728 – 1806) was a wealthy timber merchant in Southwark who diversified into property and was responsible for the layout of much of the areas around Blackheath and Beckenham. In 1773 he purchased the Manor of Beckenham from Lord Bolingbroke who had acquired the manor as a marriage settlement in 1765. The land was inherited by his son, who started selling off and leasing parts of the estate. By the 1860s the house was sub let or unoccupied.

The land was bought from the Cator Estate by London County Council in 1927 to provide open space for the new estates of Bellingham and Downman. The park covers around 240 acres and includes 60 acres of ancient woodland, large areas of grassland managed as meadow or sportsground, golf course, formal gardens, a sensory garden, a Ravensbourne riverside walk and nature reserve.

For history of John Cator and Beckenham Place see

<http://www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk/history.html>

Cator Park

Cator Park was once part of the extensive Cator Estate, owned by the Cator family from the late-18th century. On payment of an annual subscription, residents on the estate were provided with private recreational facilities at Kent House Pleasure Gardens, which were laid out between 1885 and 1889 with facilities for football, tennis and bowling. In 1931 the local council purchased the pleasure gardens and Cator Park was formally opened to the public in April 1932 by Lawrence Chubb. The River Pool, canalised in concrete, runs north/south through the centre of the park, bounded by iron railings.

Crystal Palace

The Crystal Palace and Park were built by Sir Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace Company between 1852 and 1855 to house the relocated building designed for the 1851 Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. Sadly the Crystal Palace itself was destroyed by fire in 1936. In the 1960s the National Sports Centre and Athletics Stadium were completed in the centre of the park.

This walk starts up the original approach to the Palace, passing a statue of Paxton and climbing to the site of the former palace

with its fine views south.

This walk ends through the southern part of the park and passes the dinosaurs. These life-size 'statues' were commissioned to accompany the Crystal Palace on its move to the park and unveiled in 1854. Sculpted by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins under the scientific direction of Sir Richard Owen, they represented the latest scientific knowledge at the time. 21 distinguished guests dined in the belly of the Iguanodon before the opening. The models were Grade I listed in 2007.

The park used to be serviced by two railway companies, however the high level Nunhead to Crystal Palace was closed in 1954. The Crystal Palace pneumatic railway was an experimental atmospheric railway that ran in the Park in 1864.

Crystal Palace Transmitter

The transmitting station was constructed in the mid-1950s. The Aquarium on whose site it stands was destroyed in 1941 during the demolition of the Palace's north water tower. (John Logie Baird's earlier transmitter and TV studios were a separate development at the other end of the Palace and perished with it in 1936) Its new 219-metre tower was the tallest structure in London until the construction of One Canada Square at Canary Wharf in 1991.