

Help keep Burnham Beeches special

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common is a registered charitable trust and most of our funding comes from private sources. The money from parking charges, donations or legacies in wills supports work on the reserves. Donations can be made via our website or through the parking machines and donation boxes at Burnham Beeches.

Volunteers

Volunteers help with practical projects, providing information, office work or ecological monitoring as well as acting as 'eyes and ears' on the ground. Pick up our events diary or look at our website for more details.

Visiting Burnham Beeches

In normal circumstances, Burnham Beeches is open to the public at all times. Gates to the car parks are opened from 8am and locked at dusk. The café, toilets and Information point are open every day (except Christmas Day) from approximately 10am to 5pm.

Most roads are closed to cars but vehicular access is available to our Car Free Zone for blue badge holders (weekdays only – see website). Cycling and horse riding is permitted on tarmac roads only.

Dog Control Orders apply at all times at Burnham Beeches – please see the website, information boards and leaflets for details.

Please take your litter and dog waste away to dispose of and recycle responsibly, or use the bins provided on site.



Advice on the walk

The Historical Trail is about 8km long and takes about two hours to complete.

Most of the walking is fairly easy but there are several hills, both down and up. Some paths can be muddy in the winter months so stout walking boots or wellingtons are recommended; some sections are not suitable for pushchairs.

Livestock may be grazing in some areas; the behaviour of grazing animals may be unpredictable. Please do not approach, pet or feed them and ensure that all gates are closed behind you.

Contact us

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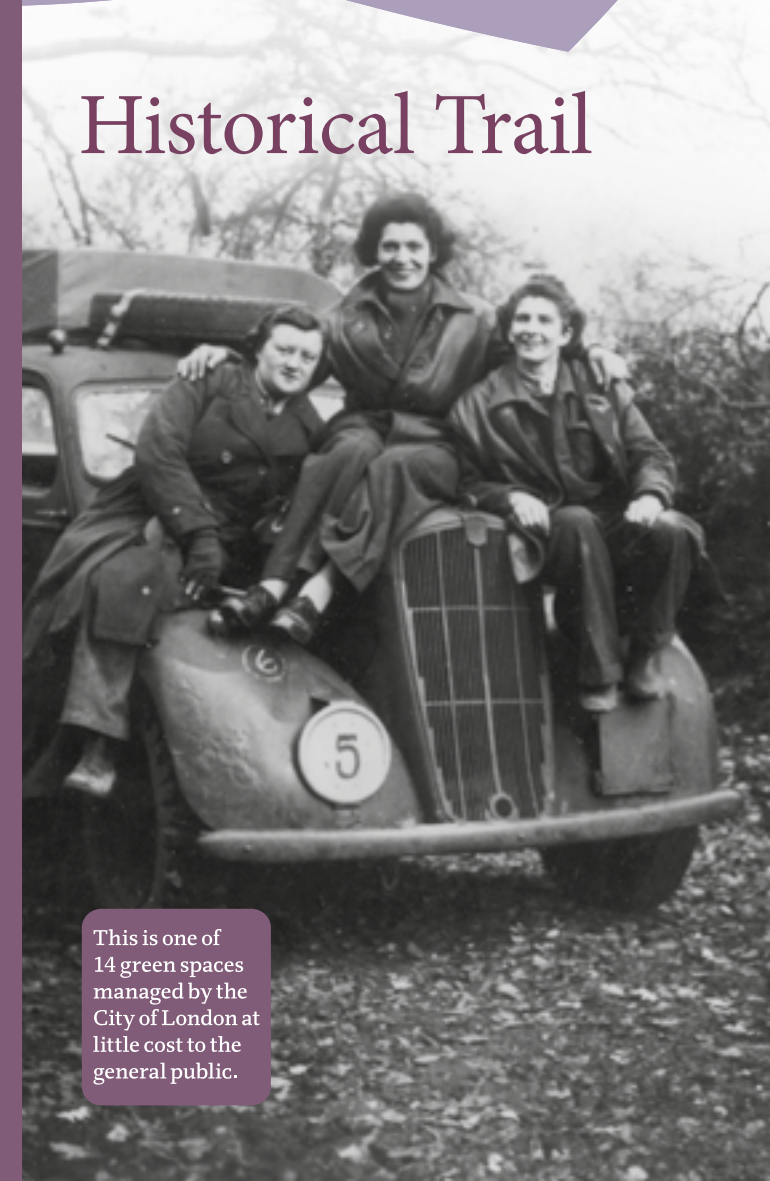
For general enquiries about the City of London's Green Spaces call **020 7332 3505**



Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

Registered Charity

Historical Trail



This is one of 14 green spaces managed by the City of London at little cost to the general public.

Common land

Burnham Beeches was common land owned by the Lord of the Manor of East Burnham, but used by the commoners (householders of East Burnham) for grazing cattle, pigs, horses and sheep and to provide firewood and turf for fuel. As coal, oil and gas became more popular fuels, cutting of wood and turf decreased. It was most likely discouraged by the Grenville family of Dropmore (Lords of the Manor 1830 - 1879) and had all but stopped when the estate was sold in 1879. The area known as Burnham Beeches has a wide variety of landscapes including woodland, heathland, bog, grassland and wood pasture. These differences have been determined partly by the underlying soil but largely by their past use.

Woodbanks

Woodbanks and associated ditches were constructed in medieval times to separate woodland areas under different management and/or ownership.

The bank running along the north side of Victoria Drive marks the boundary of New Coppice Wood; it prevented animals from straying from the wood pasture into the coppice wood. The bank after point 11 on the map marks the boundary of Fleet Wood which was given to the Corporation by Viscount Burnham between 1921 and 1947. Along this bank there are remnants of a beech hedge, which at one time may have grown along its entire length.

Wood pasture

One of the most distinctive and well-loved features of Burnham Beeches are the beech and oak pollards. These trees date from when much of the area was wood pasture; where livestock grazed the grass and heathland beneath the trees. The upper branches of the trees, above the reach of grazing animals, were cut and allowed to re-grow to provide firewood. When pollarding stopped about 200 years ago, the upper branches continued to grow, giving the trees their distinctive shape.



The old trees

In Victorian times many of the old trees were given names because of their distinctive shapes. 'His Majesty' was one of the largest, the 'Elephant tree' looked like an elephant on its back, the 'Lace Maker' was where the ladies sat to make lace and the 'Maiden Tree' was an old tree that had not been pollarded. At over 700 years old, Druids Oak is probably the oldest tree still alive in Burnham Beeches. Oak trees were revered by the druids but we do not know how this one came by its name.

Coppice

Sometime in the distant past, at least two large areas were taken from the common land and made into coppice woods, now known as Fleet Wood and New Coppice. Coppiced trees are those cut repeatedly at ground level to produce regular crops of straight branches. The most important coppiced tree was hazel which provided thatching spars, wood for making hurdles, and wattle for house walls. Beech and oak were also coppiced in the Beeches.



The Duke of Buckingham and the Lord Mayors Trees

In 1880 the Duke of Buckingham planted a tree at Victory Cross to celebrate the Beeches being saved from development. The original tree died but a new one was planted in its place. For many years the Lord Mayor of London continued this tradition by planting a tree in Burnham Beeches; more recently a tree has been pollarded instead.



The Pound

The pound was an essential part of the system of grazing livestock on common land. Here animals were impounded if they strayed out of the Beeches or were not properly marked. Their owners had to pay a fine for the animals to be released. On specific days, the pound was used for marking the animals before they were allowed to graze in the Beeches. East Burnham pound can be seen opposite the Crown Inn on Crown Lane. It is owned by the City of London and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Be careful if you stop to look at it, as the road can be dangerous.

A great day out












The Beeches had always been a popular place for family walks, picnics and Sunday school outings but after 1880 it became especially so for visitors from London. A bus service ran from Slough station which stopped at Wingroves tea rooms on the south western boundary of the site. From here people would go to see the ancient trees or even take a donkey ride on Sevenways plain.



More information

More information about the history of Burnham Beeches can be found on our website www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/burnhambeeches.

Key

-  Trail Route
-  Alternative Route
-  Fence
-  Other Paths
-  Gate
-  Bridge
-  Bank
-  Pollards
-  Grasslands
-  Heathland
-  Bog

14 At the end of Dimsdale Drive turn right onto Morton Drive. Go through some bollards then bear left into McAuliffe Drive. To your left is Hartley Court Moat.

13 At the junction of Woods Drive and Dimsdale Drive are two large gate posts (one fallen over) reputed to have come from Slough station. Turn right onto Dimsdale Drive.

12 At the top of the hill go past Dukes Drive on your right, then turn left into Woods Drive. When you get to the woodbank again turn right, keeping the bank on your left. On your left is coppiced beech and on the right are some pollards.

11 Continue for about 600 meters then turn left up Halse Drive. You will soon see another woodbank on your right.

10 Turn right along a wide track called Victoria Drive. The City of London bought the Beeches during Queen Victoria's reign. Notice the old woodbank on the left of the path; it marks the boundary of New Coppice Wood.

9 Turn left down the steep path. On both sides, near the bottom are some deep hollows where clay was dug for making bricks. A kiln for firing the bricks was nearby, on Hawthorn Lane.

8 Turn left along Lord Mayor's Drive then right through the gate near the large shelter. Keep the fence to your right. On your right is the site of an Iron Age hill fort.

7 At over 700 years old, Druids Oak is probably the oldest tree in Burnham Beeches. People used to take donkeys rides here in Victorian times.

6 Return to Middle pond and turn left, then after about 100 metres bear right across the grass aiming for the large old tree with a fence round it.



4 The ponds have always been a popular place for artists such as John Pedder and Myles Birket Foster.

15 At the end of McAuliffe Drive cross Duke's Drive into Burnham Walk. The bricks and rubble in the path were brought here during the Second World War and came from London following the Blitz.

16 Along the lower parts of Burnham Walk there are many coppiced hazel bushes. At the end of Burnham Walk turn left up Halse Drive.

17 Near the top of the hill turn right, cross the grass and then follow the surfaced path. The area to your right is called Mendelssohns slope after the famous composer, who regularly visited the Beeches in the 1840s.

18 After passing two very large oak trees, you will see a fence on your left. Go through the second gate and cross to the path on the other side. This area is an example of wood pasture.

19 Turn right onto the surfaced path, past the bench with holes in and then cross diagonally over Lord Mayor's Drive taking another surfaced path on the other side.

20 Continue on the surfaced path to Upper pond. This was the favourite spot of Jenny Lind, a popular 19th century opera singer known as the Swedish Nightingale.

21 Follow the surfaced path back to Victory Cross, named after the four beech trees planted here to celebrate the end of the First World War.

1 Set off down Sir Henry Peeks Drive. Sir Henry Peek was the local MP when the City of London Corporation bought Burnham Beeches in 1880. Without his intervention the Beeches may well have been developed for houses.

2 Turn right, before the second cattle grid, crossing the grass into an open heathy area.

3 The beech trees on your right were planted in 1980 to celebrate the centenary of the site being bought by the City of London. Behind the trees to your left a World War II Italian prisoner of war camp was located.

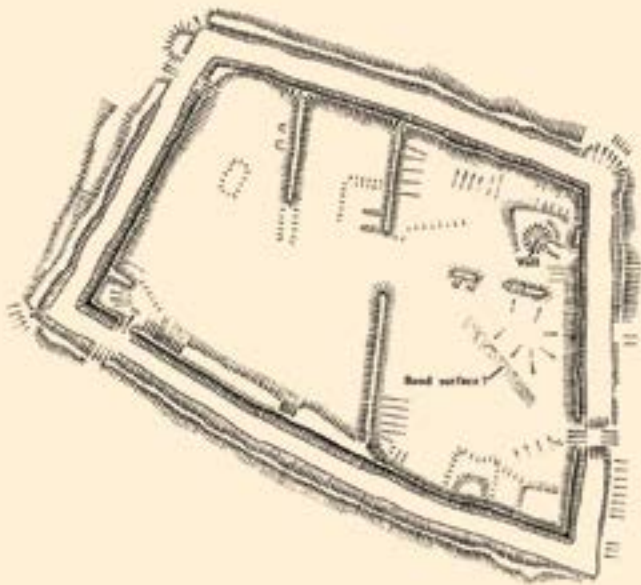


Iron Age hill fort 8

There are around 150 'hill forts' of this type in Britain. They are enclosures of banks and ditches on, or close to, hilltops. This one may have been a stock enclosure, redistribution centre, refuge or a permanent settlement. It dates from 8th to 5th centuries BC. Only some of the banks are visible but, as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, it is all protected by law.

World War II

During WWII, Burnham Beeches became a military vehicle reserve depot. Vehicles of all types were brought here for maintenance and, later, for water proofing prior to the D Day landings. The main camp, where the men lived, was built partly on top of the hill fort which was unfortunately badly damaged in the process.



Hartley Court Moat 14

The moat is also known as Hardicanutes moat or Harlequins moat. It is another Scheduled Ancient Monument, dating from sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries. Inside the moat there would have been a farmstead. As you continue along McAuliffe Drive notice the outer ditch and bank. This may once have had a wooden pale (fence) on top. The people living on the farmstead may have cultivated the land between the moat and the outer ditch and bank.

Music and poetry in the Beeches 5

Thomas Gray was a visitor to the Beeches in the 18th Century. His famous poem 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' includes a verse thought to have been inspired by beech trees overhanging the stream in this part of Burnham Beeches.

The historian George Grote and his wife moved to East Burnham in 1838. Mrs Grote was the leader of a literary and musical circle in London. They entertained many famous friends at their home including the actress Fanny Kemble, soprano singer Jenny Lind and composers Frederic Chopin, and Felix Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn favoured the area marked 17a on the map. This is where he is thought to have been inspired to write the incidental music for Puck and Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Jenny Lind used to practice her arias under an old beech tree (marked 20 on the map). When the tree fell a young one was planted in its place.

