

UNLOCK WALK 2023

This year's Walk took place on 22 April and involved Thamesmead and the Elizabeth Line. I started at Abbey Wood station, where I encountered a group of other walkers and we made our way to Lesnes Abbey and the Abbey Wood Community Church. The congregation meets in Lesnes Abbey Lodge which was not open to us on this Saturday, but there was an attractive café adjoining, and the whole site was beautiful and full of interest. The Abbey was founded in 1178 and closed by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525 but some of the buildings remain, and the Lesnes Abbey Woods are a nature reserve. The site also contains an ancient mulberry trees dating from the early 17th century.

The Community Church started in 2016 with thirty members of the Slade Evangelical Church, Plumstead. There is one Sunday service, weekday sessions of Bible study and other subjects, and plenty of outreach including supporting a primary school in northern India. "Our vision is to be a Church Family of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds who worship God and follow Jesus in the power of the Spirit according to God's word."

The walk went on to Emmanuel Baptist Church, which describes itself as a charismatic evangelical Baptist Church, founded in 1972. This was a lively place, and there is plenty going on there during the week as well as on Sunday, and the church is a foodbank distribution point. The local population includes many Nigerians, Ghanaians and West Indians.

The third church was Christian Life Centre, a non-denominational church in a very deprived area. The congregation includes many black Africans and the church aims to reach all ethnic groups, especially the indigenous residents. It started a football club for boys, and it also runs a Saturday morning Community Breakfast Fellowships. This has attracted many people who might not attend a church service, and has helped a great many people. "We praise God for every opportunity we have to be a light for Christ in Thamesmead and for all we have been able to accomplish for Him."

The CLC stands by the canal, so we walked on following the canal-side path, past a nature reserve and a lake – I saw a swan on her nest, and later a group of waterfowl including a cormorant - and on to St David's Catholic Church. The parish was founded in 1964 to serve the growing population of the Abbey Wood Estate. The walk then led past the Abbey Wood memorial garden, commemorating those who fell in all conflicts but particularly World War 2. A signpost indicated the directions to Ypres, Arras, Blighty and Paradise.

The walk then led us to St Nicholas Church, Plumstead, a wonderful ancient church with a churchyard full of flowering trees. The population of the parish numbers about 14,000 and is socially and racially mixed with high unemployment. The church is High Anglican; there is a daily Mass and parish life includes the Mothers Union, uniformed organisations and other Anglican organisations. It was a real treat to visit this beautiful church, quite apart from the excellent refreshments on offer!

I had to finish my walk soon after this as I was due to sing in a choral concert in the evening so had to make my way home which took about an hour and a half. So I missed the last two churches and the short journey on the Elizabeth Line which was planned. Another time perhaps.....but I enjoyed the walk which as ever was full of interest and lots of other keen walkers.

Juliet Chaplin, March 2024