

The Green Chain Walk

Botany and Buildings

Green Chain Walk – an overview

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Thamesmead canals

The canals in Thamesmead are more than ornamental; they are vital in draining the area which is a natural marsh. Groundwater is collected in several large lakes and transferred to a pumping station by the canals, which are one foot deep and lined with concrete.



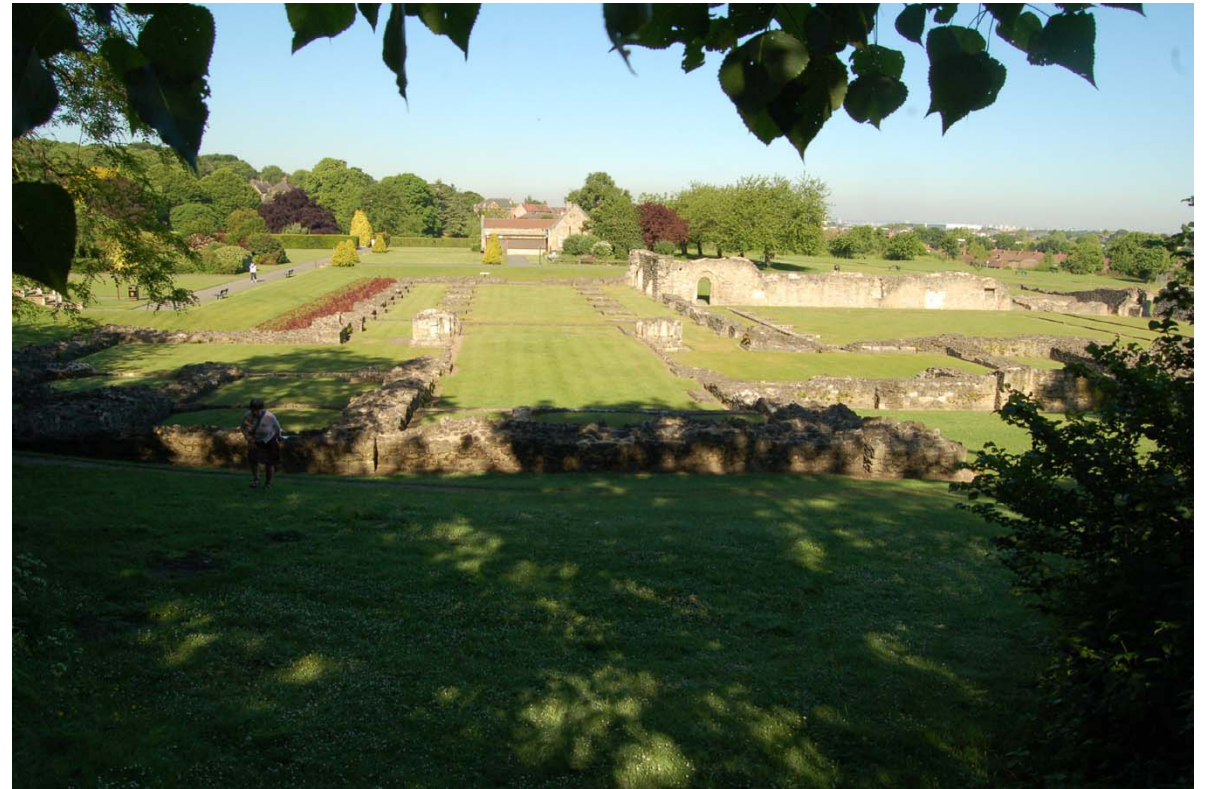
Crossness Pumping Station

Crossness Pumping Station is open on one Sunday per month and on Tuesdays for guided tours, both by pre-booked ticket only. The building features what may be the finest decorative ironwork in the world and four gigantic steam engines which, with their associated pumps, are almost 100 feet high. They are the most powerful of their type ever constructed. The pumping station was built in 1865 under the direction of Sir Joseph Bazalgette and has to be seen to be believed. It is a Grade 1 listed building.



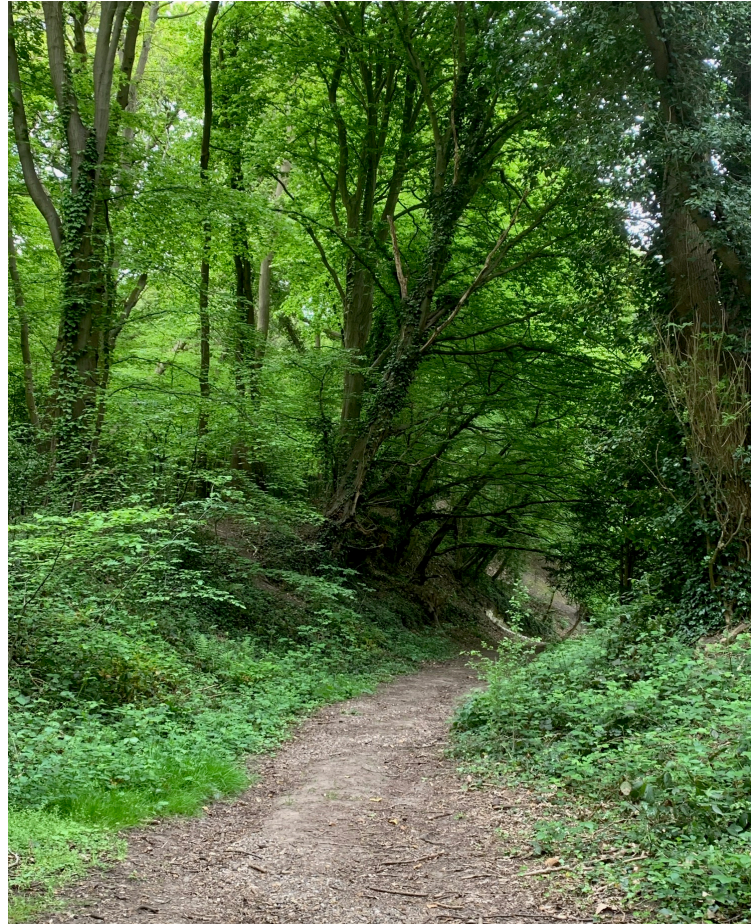
Lesnes Abbey

Lesnes Abbey was founded in 1178 by Richard de Luci as a penance for the murder of St Thomas Beckett. De Luci is buried in the abbey although his remains have not been found. His grand-daughter, Roesia, had her heart buried here and the spot is marked by a plaque. The abbey was ultimately unsuccessful and with fewer than seven canons remaining when the pope ordered that it should be closed in 1524. The site was extensively restored in the 1930s and again in the 2010s. Lesnes Abbey is a scheduled ancient monument.



Lesnes Abbey Woods

Lesnes Abbey Woods are the finest example of ancient woodland in London. Covering 180 acres they comprise mainly of oak and hornbeam with many sweet chestnuts introduced by the Romans as a food-source. The display of native English wild bluebells in April and early May is extraordinary and the woods contain fossil-bearing strata of national significance. There is also a series of bronze age remains.



Bostall Heath and Bostall Woods

Bostall means either 'a secure place' or 'a hillside path'. Bostall Heath was perhaps so named as it was above any inundation from the Thames and was reached from the flood-plain by steep paths. Bostall Heath was the first part of the protected *Green Chain* land. At the behest of the local Parish the Metropolitan Board of Works purchased the land to prevent it being developed in 1878.

Bostall Woods has been open to the public since 1893. Previously they were part of a private estate which built some of the paths used today, this involved some significant engineering. Once the estate had been acquired by the London County Council, the many Beech Trees to the north east of the woods were supplemented by Scots Pine which have not fared so well. During the Second World War the woods were extended onto Bostall Heath by the Commander of the anti-aircraft guns stationed there. His saplings have evolved into the finest beech wood in any Inner London Borough and are a glory to see.



Plumstead Common

Plumstead Common was referred to in the Domesday Book. Commoners still have the right to graze their animals there. Since 1878 the common has been protected by its own Act of Parliament. Attempts to reserve the common as a military training area and later to enclose it for housing development had earlier been met by rioting. Arsenal Football Club played their first games here in the early 1890s but Rugby is now the dominant sport on the common.



Oxleas and Shepherdleas Woods

Oxleas Wood is over 8,000 years old in places, covers 178 acres, and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The woods have been open to the public since 1930 yet were almost lost in the 1980s to motorway construction. After a vigorous campaign the road proposals were withdrawn in 1993. The woods are supported by a thriving friends group and are well managed.

Shepherdleas Wood is closely associated with Oxleas Wood; both contain significant parts that were established 8,000 years ago following the retreat of the glaciers. The woods have different names because Shepherdleas is where sheep were once grazed whilst Oxleas was grazed by oxen.



Severndroog Castle

Severndroog Castle is a triangular building 70 feet in height. It was built in 1784 to commemorate the life of Commodore Sir William James. Sir William had led an audacious Naval action in 1755 off the East Coast of India at Suvarnaderg which paved the way for the creation of the British Raj. The building has been saved and beautifully restored by the Severndroog Castle Building Preservation Trust and is open to the public on Sundays. Besides its fascinating history the building features the finest view in London excepting only the upper floors of the Shard, it is nothing less than breathtaking. Severndroog Castle is a Grade II* listed building.



Shooters Hill Water Tower

Shooters Hill Water Tower was built in 1909 – 10 to replace an earlier example. Within the gothic brickwork is a tank 25 feet in diameter and 75 feet high. It is visible from well outside London.



Woodlands Farm

Woodlands Farm (89 acres) was the last wholly commercial farm in any Inner London Borough. It was used by the Co-operative Group to graze cattle prior to slaughter. Changes to legislation caused the abattoir to become unviable in 1984 and a 12 year campaign began to save the farm from becoming a motorway junction and later, a housing development. The Woodlands Farm Trust gained a 999 year lease in 1997 and has operated the farm ever since. They have made great efforts to ensure that it remains a truly agricultural site. It is open to the public between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm.



Woolwich Common

Woolwich Common has belonged to the Ministry of Defence and its predecessors since 1812. This ownership has led the common to become one of the most natural open spaces in south London, much is still almost a wilderness.



Charlton House

Charlton House was built in 1612 for Sir Adam Newton and is one of the finest Jacobean buildings in London, it is also one of the best Jacobean Manor Houses in England. The house would become the home of the Maryon-Wilson family. It was bombed during the Second World War and carefully restored thereafter. It is now in the care of the Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust who offer guided-tours of the magnificent interior. Charlton House is a Grade 1 Listed building.



Maryon and Maryon Wilson Parks

Maryon Park is a former sand quarry and this accounts for its steep sides. The initial 12 acres were donated to the public by Sir Spencer Maryon-Wilson in 1890 and then landscaped to the designs of the London County Council's parks designer, J. J. Sexby. In 1908 Sir Spencer donated a further five acres and the LCC purchased two more. Further purchases in 1925 and 1928 expanded the park to its present 30 acres. Maryon Park was a principal location in Michelangelo Antonioni's cult-classic film *Blow up*. Extremely controversial when released in 1966 it's now considered to be one of the finest depictions of 'Swinging London'. The park has changed little since the film was made.

Maryon Wilson Park was donated to the public by Sir Spencer Maryon-Wilson in 1924 on condition that it should retain a rural appearance. He later donated the herd of deer that continue to thrive in their enclosure. The deer were temporarily evacuated during the Second World War and the park does indeed continue to enjoy a delightfully rural character.



Gilbert's pit

Gilbert's Pit was formerly 40 feet deeper, it was part filled with rubble from destroyed buildings during the Second World War. Closing in 1938 it had been an exceptionally important source of sand for industrial purposes. The type of sand available here is vital in the casting of metals and the nearby Royal Arsenal was an eager customer. South East London contains a great deal of such sand and its extraction was once a major industry. The removal of the sand at Gilbert's Pit has exposed the most important example of the strata which underlies London, they reach back 55 million years. Gilbert's Pit has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest since 1954 as the strata are invaluable to civil engineers working on deep foundations and tunnels. The engineers who built the Elizabeth Line sampled and studied here.



The Thames Barrier

The Thames Barrier is a retractable Barrier system built to protect the floodplain of most of Greater London from exceptionally high tides and storm surges moving up from the North Sea. It has been operational since 1982. When needed, it is closed (raised) during high tide; at low tide, it can be opened to restore the river's flow towards the sea. Built about 2 miles (3.2 kilometres) east of the Isle of Dogs, its northern bank is in Silvertown in the London Borough of Newham and its southern bank is in the New Charlton area of the Royal borough of Greenwich.



St John The Baptist Eltham

- St John the Baptist may have been a Roman place of Christian worship. The present building dates from the 12th century and was heavily restored in the 19th. It is a grade II* listed building



Eltham Palace

Eltham Palace dates from about 1300 and the royal family resided there until the early 17th century. Henry VIII spent his first 14 years there and it was popular with Elizabeth I. In 1933 a lease was granted to Stephen Courtauld of the wealthy textile family. He and his wife built an extraordinary house on the site that was successfully integrated with the great hall of 1479. The palace was taken over by the army during the Second World War and remained with them until 1992. English Heritage took the lease in 1995 and it is now open to the public but is often closed for private functions on Saturdays.



The Tarn

The Tarn is a lake, covering two acres, that was created by damming the river Little Quaggy, perhaps as early as the 13th century. It was once part of the grounds of Eltham Palace. Large parts of the grounds were acquired by the Royal Blackheath Golf Club in the 19th century which disposed of the lake and its surroundings to a private owner in 1904. Woolwich Council bought the lake in 1935 and opened it to the public. Eltham Palace's ice house was built here in the 1750s, no doubt supplied with ice taken from the lake's surface.



The Shuttle Riverway

The River Shuttle is a tributary of the River Cray. The river flows from springs between Avery Hill and Eltham. The Shuttle Riverway is a waymarked walk that follows the stream as closely as possible for the whole of its 5 mile length.



Beckenham Place Park

Beckenham Place Park was originally the grounds of Beckenham Place – the home of the wealthy 18th century timber merchant, Sir John Cator. He was an MP for three constituencies and High Sheriff of Kent. He and his successors were property developers who created many of the most affluent South East London suburbs.



Edward VIII Pillar Box

Edward VIII pillar boxes are rare as his reign lasted only from January to December 1936. Many were replaced after his abdication.



Crystal Palace Park

The Crystal Palace began as the home of the Great Exhibition in 1851. The building was only supposed to last for the life of the exhibition but in 1854 it was re-erected at Sydenham in a greatly enlarged form. The building was destroyed in 1936 by a fire. The park and surrounds are dominated by the 719 foot Crystal Palace transmitter which was built for the BBC in 1956. The park is home to the collection of 1850s dinosaur sculptures on the south side by the lakes.



Nunhead Cemetery

The 52 acres of Nunhead Cemetery, then set in open countryside, was opened by the London Cemetery Company in 1840. The same firm also constructed Highgate Cemetery. Burials were kept expensive to maintain exclusivity and this is reflected in the very high quality of the tombs. The cemetery became unprofitable and closed in 1969 when it was almost full. It then deteriorated into a vandalised wilderness. Restoration, begun in the 1990s, continues today. The site features some fine examples of Victorian Gothic and is eerily atmospheric.



Horniman Museum and Garden

The Horniman Museum and Gardens are the work of Frederick Horniman, who then owned the World's largest tea company. He was a collector of anthropological and ethnographic items, musical instruments and natural history specimens. In 1901 he opened his collections to the public within a new museum built on the site of his own house.



Sydenham Hill Woods and Nature Reserve

Sydenham Hill Woods Nature Reserve is managed by the London Wildlife Trust. Parts are remnants of the ancient Great North Wood but most of the reserve is of surprisingly recent origin. It is made up of parts of the abandoned railway and the rear gardens of large houses that once lined Sydenham Hill. The wood is home to more than 200 species of trees and plants as well as rare fungi, insects, birds and woodland mammals.



Dulwich Park and Dulwich Picture Gallery

Dulwich Park was donated to the public by the Dulwich Estate in 1885, it opened in 1890. It covers 76 acres and was laid-out by the London County Council's parks designer, Lt Col John James Sexby. The park remains very much as he designed it and extensive renovations were lottery funded in the mid 2000s.

The Dulwich Picture Gallery was designed by Sir John Soane and opened in 1815. It was the first art gallery to make use of overhead illumination by skylights and its design remains highly influential. The collection is of national significance and includes many world famous paintings. Both Turner and Van Gogh studied there.



Woodland plants

Wild daffodil



Snowdrop



Wood anemone



Celandine



Woodland plants

Bluebells



Wild garlic



Lords and Ladies



Trees and Bushes

Hazel catkins



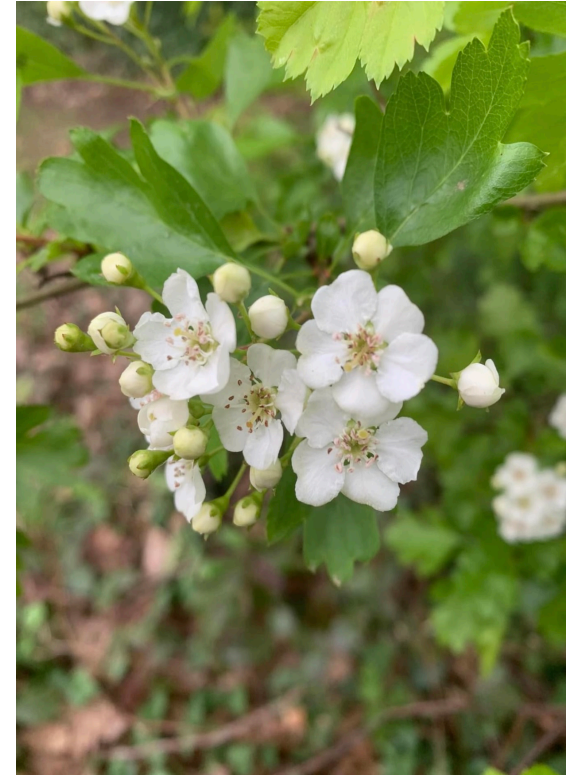
Apple blossom



Bird cherry

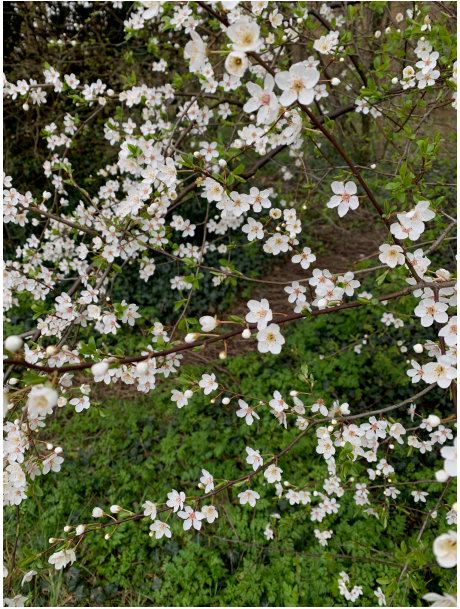


Hawthorn



Trees and Bushes

Cherry plum



Cherry blossom



Blackthorn



Spindle

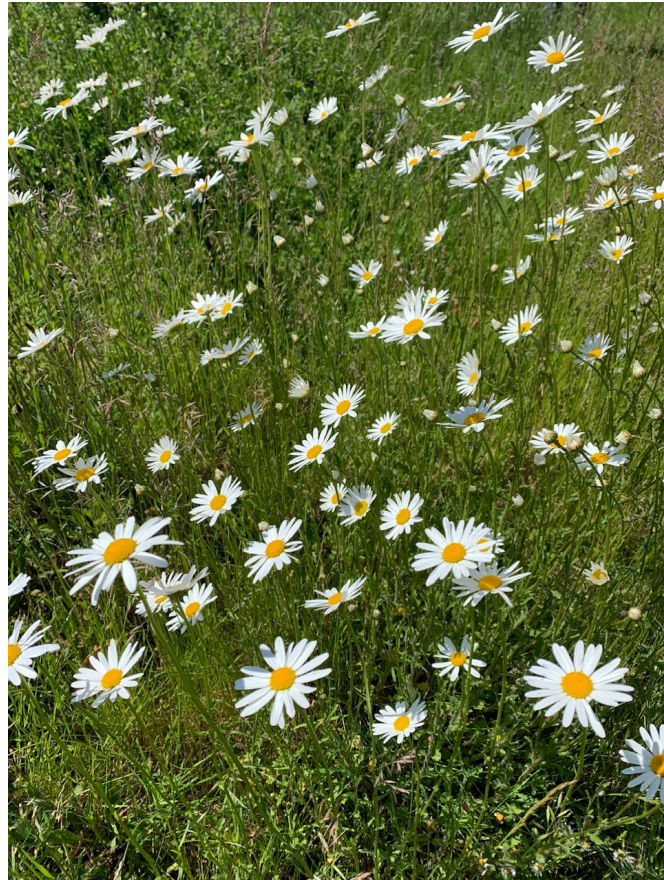


White plants

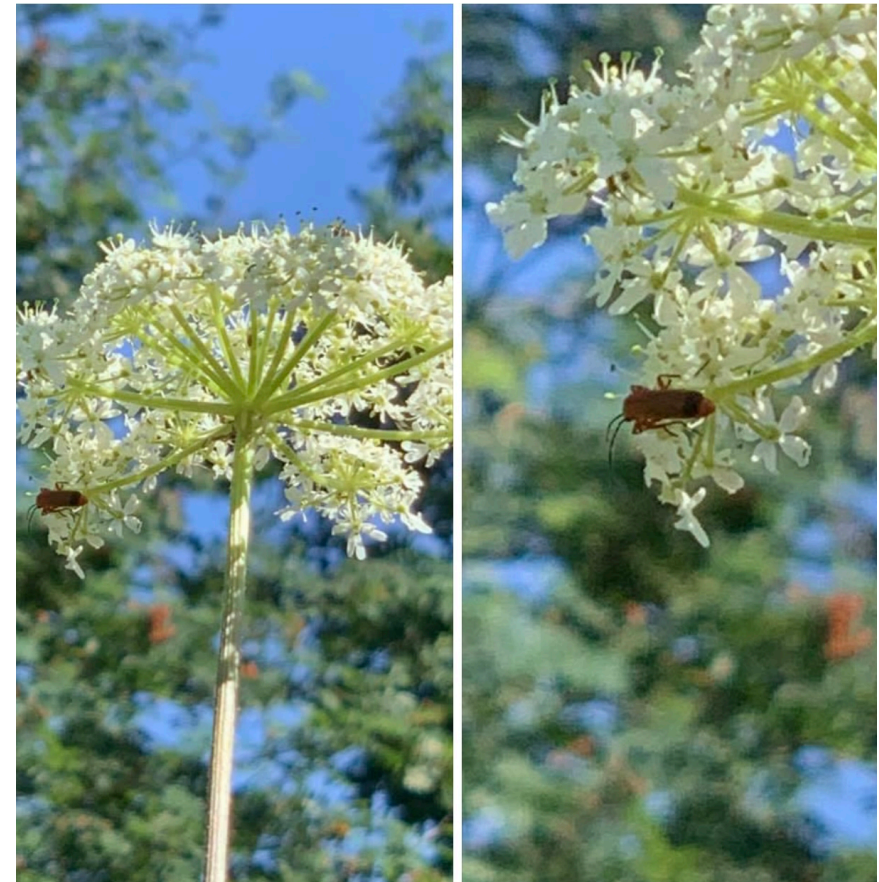
Yarrow



Ox-eye daisy



Hogweed with Hogweed bonking beetle



White plants

Star of Bethlehem



Hare's foot clover



Wild carrot with gall (Queen Anne's Lace)



Sticky mouse ears



Yellow plants

Bladder senna



Agrimony



Yellow toadflax

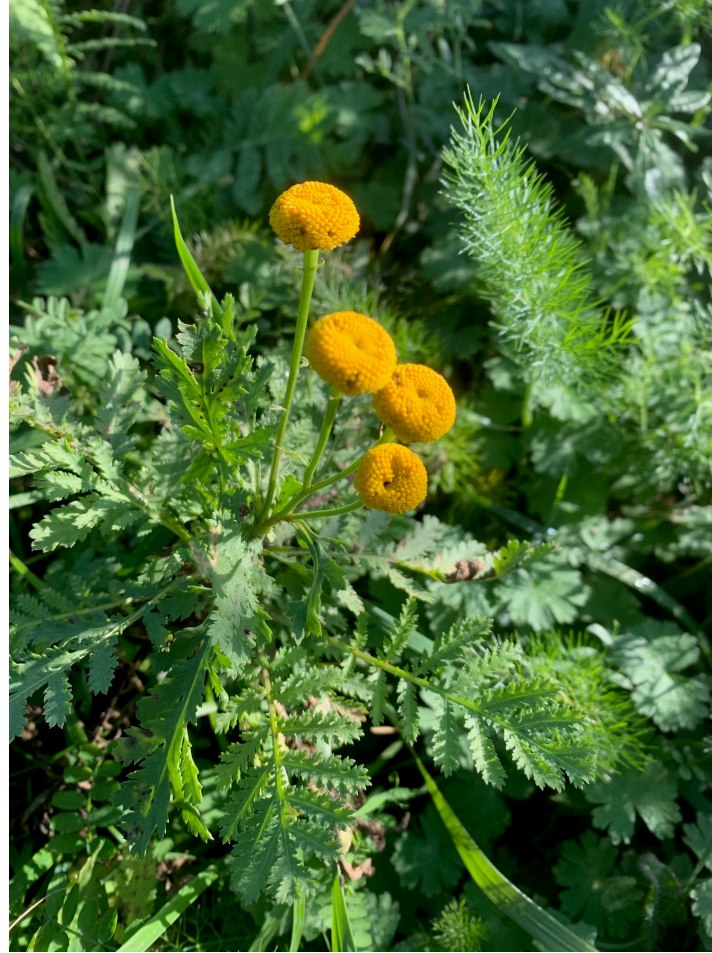


Yellow plants

Bristly oxtongue



Tansy



Coltsfoot



Pink and red plants

Red clover



Poppy



Japanese quince



Pink sorrel



Pink and red plants

Common mallow



Amphibious bistort



Wild pea



Purple plants

Michaelmas daisies



Purple toadflax



Goats rue



Blue plants

Grape hyacinth



Chicory



Alkanet



Vipers bugloss



And finally

Field horsetail



Green hairstreak



Fennel



Cinnabar caterpillars on ragwort



- The instructions are published by the Ramblers in conjunction with TfL
- They are online at <https://innerlondonramblers.org.uk/id>
- Make sure you use this link and no other as these are the definitive and accurate ones

