

Institute of Physics

LONDON AND SOUTH EASTERN BRANCH REMS SECTION

Ramble, Erith to Abbey Wood (Green Chain walk) and visit to ruins of Lesnes Abbey **Sunday, 26 June 2005**

This visit has been organised by Stanley Melinek

This is a ramble from Erith to Abbey Wood (the Green Chain walk), which is about four miles followed by visit to ruins of Lesnes Abbey. The route will include suburban roads, footpaths, parks and woods. The first half (before lunch) will be fairly easy going, with some hills. The second half (after pub lunch) will be more strenuous, with steeper hills and rougher ground. Participants can, if they wish, omit the second half of the walk by catching a bus (229/469) after the lunch stop.

Brief history of Lesnes Abbey <http://www.bexley.gov.uk/service/parks/lesnesabbey.html>

Lesnes Abbey was founded in 1178 by Richard de Luci, Chief Justiciar of England and was dedicated to St Mary and St Thomas the Martyr. De Luci, who had supported Henry II in his dispute with Thomas à Becket, which ended with Becket's murder in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170, probably founded it as an act of penance. Lesnes Abbey belonged to the order of Augustinian canons whose duty it was to 'baptise, preach, give penance and bury the dead.' The original canons at Lesnes were drawn from the priory of Holy Trinity, Aldgate.

Lesnes was not a large or wealthy foundation. Throughout much of its existence, the Abbey was in financial difficulties. This was partly caused by the expense of maintaining the river walls and draining the marshes along the banks of the Thames. Through the fourteenth century its buildings fell into neglect. Rebuilding in the early sixteenth century came too late. In 1524, Henry VIII's chief minister, Cardinal Wolsey, obtained permission from Pope Clement VII to close all monasteries in England and Wales with less than eight inmates. Lesnes, with only an abbot and five canons, became one of the first monasteries to be suppressed in England.

After Wolsey's fall, Lesnes met the fate of monasteries throughout the country after the dissolution. Its monastic buildings and land passed into the King's hands, later to be sold to wealthy laymen. At Lesnes, Henry Cooke, who acquired the site in 1541, retained the Abbot's Lodging as a mansion house of the manor of Lesnes. The Abbey site later came in to the possession of Sir John Hippersley, who had it dug over for building materials. He then sold it in 1632 to Thomas Hawes of London who bequeathed it to Christ's Hospital in 1633, in whose possession it remained until 1930, when the London County Council purchased it. In 1931 Lesnes Abbey was opened to the public as a park and since 1986 the site has belonged to Bexley Council. Extensive foundations and fragments of wall survive, showing clear outlines of the main buildings.

Meet London Bridge Station for 1109 train to Erith. Return from Abby Wood station.