**Timeball and Telegraph Trail Part 1 – Greenwich to Dartford, Sunday 3rd February 2019**

31 walkers, 17 miles – leader Peter Jull

After a record number of enquiries about this walk it was almost disappointing that the number of starters was a not quite a record 31. Not disappointing was the frostily crisp blue sky views from the start line spectacularising Canary Wharf and closer by the walk theme time ball resplendanted by sunlight atop its Observatory building.  Off across and out the park, a mile of urban streets reached the Capital Ring. Remnant snow crunched underfoot to soon reach the vicinity of Severndroog Castle to pause and disseminate information about the semaphore telegraph station that over 200 years before stood nearby on the shoulder of Shooters Hill. Many were relieved by the relief provided by the open toilets by Oxleas Wood cafe and a debutant departed deterred by the pace. Recounting so many there and later was an added challenge that didn’t always compute.  By the time elevenses were taken at the east end of East Wickham open space, mud was becoming less solidly frozen but across a following playing field snow persisted in shady spots and scattered lumps of deceased snowmen. Green Chain Walk signs perfected our perambulation of Lesnes Abbey Wood including the 172ft high point on the walk which felt more to those expecting a flatter day. From up there a little dog befriended and followed us far so that at the leaving point the last of us felt it incumbent to phone its collar numbered owner. Good deed done and doggy entrusted to another dog walker willing to wait for the reuniting, the dog group regrouped with the main group so the whole group, 31 again with the addition of one who’s late train had given us 25 minutes head start, could proceed to the Thames. At a smooth slack tide the river was looking its best and soon led to lunch in Erith. Regathered and recounted again in the Riverside Gardens the Thames Path led out onto Crayford Marshes. Turning inland the Darent and then Cray were ebbing to exposed mud. At the edges of Dartford’s sprawl our editor led the last 5 astray and while leader searched the leading lot wandered wrong as well. But all reached the station soon enough, or later, to finish a quicker than expected delightful day’s walking.

Photographs by Peter Jull and Roderick Smith