

FRIENDS OF HYDE PARK & KENSINGTON GARDENS

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FOUNDED IN 1991 TO PROMOTE THE PEACE AND BEAUTY OF THE PARKS

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Spring 2019 Newsletter

Aim to be the best

So says Tom Jarvis, Royal Parks Director, about his ambitions for the five thousand acres of historic parkland in the heart of London for which he is responsible.

When Tom Jarvis took over his role as Director last October, he was no newcomer to the Royal Parks and after a break of seven years working elsewhere, he is delighted to be back. His role encompasses the oversight and strategic direction for all the Royal Parks, each of which demands an individual approach. While Tom is constantly planning ahead, the Park Managers, who report to him, are operationally focused. I sat down with him in his office at the Old Police House in Hyde Park and asked him what his main ambitions for the Royal Parks are.

"The Royal Parks must strive to be the best in the world", he replies. So how does he benchmark them? "I'll use as references any parks that are expert in an aspect of park management, even if overall they cannot be compared to the Royal Parks."

He cites the example of some French parks, even at town level, e.g. Bayeux, where the local authority has paid attention to detail, engaged the public and runs an outstanding park that is heavily used and much appreciated. The elements of best park management against which Tom seeks to measure the performance of the Royal Parks include design, plants and maintenance. "And with reference to best maintenance," he says, "that must include hidden corners that could easily get neglected. By giving those places as much attention as the showier areas, you set the attitude of visitors, with cared-for space encouraging positive behaviour more effectively than any amount of signage."

We then moved on to the principal challenges he faces in his new role. "The continual rise in visitor numbers is certainly a major one" he says, "but the Royal Parks are there for people to use, so the real challenge is maintaining a balance between sometimes conflicting demands and making the Royal Parks the best they can possibly be for everyone. It's our responsibility to look after the Parks for future generations and to achieve this, the whole management approach needs to evolve, as each Park has its own character and needs individual treatment. As an example, even the two Parks of most interest to

FHPKG members are very different from each other - Kensington Gardens has formal landscaping while Hyde Park is bitty and idiosyncratic, and we must avoid any tendency to homogenise our approach. Each Park is a separate entity."

A second growing challenge is the management of pests and diseases which, coupled with climate change, is creating many new problems to tackle. The impact of the long hot dry summer last year will not be visible for five or six

years, but the threat may be devastating, even if many plants are able to adapt to changing conditions in a short space of time.

Tom says that his love of open spaces has defined his life and determined the steps by which he has arrived at his present position. He holds a first-class honours degree in Landscape Management and a first class Masters in Environmental Management. He got his first job working for the local authority in Bracknell.

He was always on the lookout for a move to the Royal Parks, and in 1998 was appointed Horticultural Technician before moving through

the ranks to become Assistant Park Manager in Hyde Park and later Park Manager for Kensington Gardens until 2011. Tom says that his happy memories of that time are closely linked to being able to live in lodges inside the Park, when his children were very small. "We were living in central London in the midst of nature and greenery," he recalls. "It was a wonderful privilege."

Working for 12 years in Hyde Park gave him invaluable experience in the setting-up and growth of Winter Wonderland, the creation of the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain, as well as tree planting and horticulture in general. In 2011, Tom took the opportunity to become Superintendent of Parks for the Windsor Estate and, despite regret at leaving the Royal Parks, he felt it was the right thing to do and took the chance.

With six to seven million visitors per year and the greatest collection of vintage oak trees in the world, Tom had plenty to keep him busy at Windsor Great Park and the experience undoubtedly set him up well for a return to the Royal Parks and his present role, seven years later.



The position of the Royal Parks in its new guise as an independent charity augers well for the future. Tom says that seven years of government austerity had a detrimental effect on them, but now that the Parks are no longer a forgotten bit of the DCMS (Department for Media, Culture and Sport), they can take their own decisions. "We need to become a little more commercial" he adds, "but not in terms of simply generating more profit to the detriment of the beauty and integrity of the Parks. The management team is held to account by stakeholders and visitors and sometimes we need to be more agile and take a chance, but not necessarily by taking the cheapest and quickest route."

The Royal Parks team has been strengthened and two new flexible roles at Park Management level have been created, one of which will be taken up by Rob Dowling (former manager of Hyde Park) when he returns to the UK. Tom says that the huge knowledge and experience of his team must be shared

between all its members - working as a team achieves so much more than working individually. A key priority is to refocus attention on horticulture, rather than facilities and contracts, and share horticultural knowledge between them by rotating Assistant Park Managers around between different Parks.

At the end of our discussion, Tom says "I am so proud to be back in the Royal Parks working with the people here, with a sense of common purpose. From ecology to events, rubbish collection to engagement with wildlife, on every level we must aim to be the best. The value of the Friends' groups is significant - they are strong stakeholders and their views are important to us. I feel we're well positioned to face the challenges ahead."

Tessa Singleton

News Round-up from the Parks

Kensington Gardens

Andy Williams, Park Manager

Long Water Enclosures

Works to enhance habitat on the eastern shores of the Long Water have continued, being the second year of a planned seven-year rotation in habitat management works. Towards the latter part of 2018 Bloomberg volunteers undertook a workshop in coppice management including instruction in hurdle making. We have carried coppice works through into January and February with more dead hedges being constructed as new habitat. In March we are sowing woodland glade seed mixes and naturalising native bulbs including wild garlic and English bluebell.

Silver Thimble Shelters

We are pleased to have been able to restore benches to the two Thimble Shelters. Four new benches have been fitted to each shelter with work taking place in Feb and March. The previous benches were removed some 10 years or so ago. We have utilised restricted funds donated to the parks under bench dedication schemes. Members may recall earlier conservation and restoration works some 12 months or so ago when a number of roof shingles were replaced, and some timber repairs carried out. We hope that visitors will now once again enjoy these listed structures.

Mission Invertebrate

In 2019 Mission: Invertebrate will have a focus on invertebrates associated with trees. The team have earmarked several activities for the Gardens including:

- Surveying oak gall wasps (there are 340 oaks in Kensington Gardens) as we believe the park is home to some unusual species; finding out which invertebrates are using our trees will help us to target our conservation efforts.
- Supporting new planting as part of the Peter Pan statue project. The plants chosen provides vital sources of food and shelter for invertebrates and will allow us to showcase how visitors can plant for invertebrates in a more formal bedding style.
- Developing year-round planting to support pollinators within the North Flower Walk.

We will be back with our free family activity days during the school holidays on Tuesday 28th May and Tuesday 27th August so please come along to discover the wonderful invertebrates living in the park. More details coming soon on our website.

Gorilla Circus

The flying trapeze school returns for another run with us in May through until September. They will be located on the Picnic Lawn situated just west of the West Albert Lawn. Sessions are open to beginners and the more experienced. More information can be found at: <http://www.gorillacircus.com/flyingtrapezeschool/>

Trees and Arboriculture

Work to safeguard the parks veteran trees continues. Over the past few months permanent estate railing has been erected around two veteran Sweet Chestnut trees following on from similar work to the notable Field Maple in summer 2018. This fencing will protect these precious trees by reducing the footfall, and therefore the amount of compaction, around the root zone of these trees. The trees themselves provide important habitats for many invertebrate species and other wildlife and many have stood in the park for upwards of 300 years.



Our Assistant Park Manager and Arboriculture Manager are hosting a veteran and ancient tree seminar for TRP staff in March. The speakers include national leads from the Ancient Tree Forum and consultants engaged in veteran and ancient tree management.

This winter's tree planting is focusing on 'beating-up' (replacing) tree losses incurred over the past couple of seasons; planting includes London Plane on Lancaster Walk and Sweet Chestnut and a single Elm in the Dials area.

Green Flag and Green Heritage Assessments

We are gearing up for our biennial visit from Green Flag and Green Heritage judges; the judging date is usually in May or June. We try and focus on Easter as a key date in the calendar by which to have completed horticultural projects and ensure that all newly seasonal core maintenance is embedded to the right standard. We hope for a strong judging event and look forward to the Friends being part of the day.

Allotment

The Allotment has had a very productive start to 2019, with new volunteers joining since the New Year and the successful overwintering of peas, broad beans, brassicas and salad. The Allotment Coordinator and up to 10 volunteers meet every 1st and 3rd Monday of the month to sow, plant and take care of all the plants and enjoy the harvest. The sessions are a fun way to learn how to grow a wide range of annual crops and perennial plants, meet new people and to experience the park throughout the seasons.

Drop-in volunteer sessions take between 11am to 1pm on the 1st and 3rd Monday of the month and twilight gardening sessions recommence from 6pm to 7.30pm in April on the 1st Monday of the month.

During 2019 we hope to reintroduce new hens, establish new beehives and replant the herb area, as well as growing a diverse range of vegetables for our main event of the year, the Harvest Festival, which takes place on Sunday 15th September

Continued next page

The image below shows salad, beetroot leaves and baby beets, Daikon Korean spicy salad, Sautéed Daikon leaves and Sautéed green vegetables. "All made with the harvest from today, it was delicious." Christine (volunteer).



You can find out more details and how to get involved via the website: <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/kensington-gardens/things-to-see-and-do/gardens-and-landscapes/the-allotment-in-kensington-gardens>

Hyde Park

Jason Taylor, Park Manager

As I sit here writing this report looking out of the window, I can see that Spring is on its way, the days are lengthening, and the Magnolia are just a few days away from being in full flower.

It's been a busy winter, even by Hyde Park standards. Winter Wonderland had left the park by the beginning of February and Talbot Farms, the company who carry out the **reinstatement of the Parade Ground**, were on site and starting to cultivate soil ready for re-turfing. This is a well-rehearsed routine in the park, but this year to keep everyone on their toes, Cadent Gas were also installing a new 18-inch gas main along the length of the Parade Ground. Considerable planning went on prior to this work starting, to ensure that the parade ground will be ready for the **Queen's Birthday Gun Salute on Easter Weekend**. I'm pleased to update that the gas pipe is now in and Talbot Farms are on schedule, so fingers crossed.

Whilst the Parade Ground reinstatement works have been in full swing, there have been other works going on in the park, including:

- **The restoration of Serpentine Bar and Kitchen** which is due to reopen by the end of March.
- Refits to the **Hyde Park Corner and Boat House** catering kiosks.

- The replacement of the other catering kiosks at **Triangle Car Park, Serpentine Bridge, the Play Area and Hyde Park Corner**.



Peter Pan Project

The project to improve access and enhance the setting for the Peter Pan statue is underway. Works started on Monday 4th March and runs for several weeks. Works include:

- the replacement of all paving to create additional ramped access,
- conservation of the statue (cleaning and re-waxing),
- the introduction of wildflower turf to create a floral, species rich meadow,
- new ornamental tree and shrub planting,
- management of existing woody perennials.

Members may note some local disruption around this area of the Gardens during these works, for which we apologise.

Additional horticultural improvements this spring include restoration work to shrubberies within the **North Flower Walk**. Some over-mature and inappropriate/poorly formed specimens have been removed ahead of layering in some new planting. This is a first phase of works to improve this somewhat tired area as identified during the development of our current management plan. Over time we will look to refocus the area with further phases of tree, shrub and ground level planting to provide a garden area that welcomes and provides greater interest to park visitors.

- Transport for London are currently working on North Carriage Drive to finalise the cycle lane and junction onto West Carriage Drive. They will also be installing drainage which should stop the flooding when it rains.

The Royal Parks every year make funding available to park managers for horticultural improvement projects and Phil was brought in temporarily to project manage these improvements. These Cyclical improvements included:

- Clearing over mature shrub beds and replanting next to the Serpentine Bridge Kiosk.
- Improvement to the woodland planting at The Bandstand and Tool shed beds off Serpentine Road.
- Replanting the Bee Bed on West Carriage Drive.

I'm pleased to say that when we recently recruited to fill a vacant Assistant Manager post, Phil applied for the role and was successful. So he now joins the team on a permanent basis.

This year the park was allocated funding to trial the installation of **Pictorial Meadows**, with a view to making a greater impact at some of the entrances to the park. The person who is the world leader in this type of planting is **Professor Nigel Dunnett B.Sc PhD**, from the University of Sheffield. Nigel, who was responsible for the meadows in the Olympic Park in 2012, came to Hyde Park in December and led a joint learning session with park management teams on pictorial meadows. As a result of this session the Hyde Team are going to be trialling this style of planting at Hyde Park Corner and Victoria Gate. If this trial is successful, we hope to expand this to other areas of the park.

The Hyde Team are currently finalising the first draft of the **Hyde Park 10 Year Management Plan**. This should be ready in early summer, at which time we will set up a meeting with the Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens to get their feedback.

I'm sure that we are all looking forward to a fantastic summer of activities, events and hopefully some great weather. Although, wearing my Park Manager's hat, I do hope it's not quite as extreme as last year.

Update on membership

The following new members have joined The Friends since the Autumn 2018 Newsletter:

New Life Members

Mrs Alison Sola
Dr Margaret Lane

New Annual Members

Mr Nicholas Beaumont
Mr Alan Beesley
Mr Chris Cochran
Miss Helen Wilson
Mr Christopher Colosimo
Mr Nigel Cooksley QC
Mrs Stephanie Cooksley
Mr Simon Cox
Mr Mark Goodwin
Mr Raymond Lancashire
Mr David Lindstrom
Mrs Mary Frances Lindstrom
Mr Jonathan Moore and Yan Luo
Mrs Clare Poulter
Mr K Roskell
Mrs M Roskell
Mr Ian Seagrave
Mrs Aisling Sykes
Mrs Greta Trevers
Mr Charles Williams
Mrs June Williams
Mr Christopher & Allen Woodcock

As of March 2019 we have:

*TOTAL MEMBERS	628
LIFE MEMBERS	156
NEW MEMBERS	24
Corporate members	13
Associate members	12

*After the Autumn Newsletter we removed our Honorary members from the data base and have lost 25 members for various reasons

Could you help, please? We have no addresses/telephone numbers for the following members who are still paying their subscriptions:

1. Mr & Mrs K & M Roskell New members from October 2018
2. Janet Carol Johnson Member since 2017
3. Mr Robert J Moreland, no longer at Westminster City Hall Since 1992
4. Mr & Mrs Leon Sassoon Since 1992
5. Mrs Frieda Taylor from Cuckfield Since 1992
6. Mr Harry Turner from Deepcut, Surrey Since 2002
7. Mr J M Williams Since 2015

Obituaries

1) **Lt Col Sir Seymour Gilbert-Denham KCVO** died on 19th June 2018 at home, in Suffolk, following a stoic battle for two years with a blood disorder which became acute leukaemia. He was a Life member together with his wife Patricia since 1992. He was a former senior member of the Royal Household, appointed CVO in 1994, and advanced to KCVO, in 2002.



Photo by FHPKG member Harry Reid

2) **Sara Pinto** died in March Sara lived in Barrie House, overlooking Kensington Gardens during the war with her family, and being rather naughty would not go to the air raid shelter upon the warning. She saw the incendiary bomb hit the church, called the fire brigade and thus saved half the church, now residential called appropriately, "Spire House". She was a friend of Philip and Pam Joseph, who started the Friends and so was the first to join. She loved the trees and always admired the work of the gardeners who kept every space so well. Sara was a wonderful person and was much loved by her many friends. She was a magistrate and a hub of the community. Written by Jacky Hyer Past chairman of FHP & KG

3) **Mr Roger Jospe** of London W8, died in September 2018. He had been a longstanding supporter along with his wife since 1995

4) **Mrs Julie Durham** of Ralph Court, London W2, died early this year. She had been a loyal supporter since 1997.

5) **The Revd Dr John Wilkinson** passed away on 13th January 2018, aged 88. Former Dean of St George's College and director of the British School of Archaeology (now Kenyon Institute) in Jerusalem. Known internationally for his academic work, John will be remembered most for his translations and commentary on texts written over the centuries by Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem. When in charge of BSAJ, he supported

several archaeological projects and significantly improved the library. John was a true "scholar-priest", whose vocation to teach and research to influence a variety of people. This was part of his wider ministry. He shared his love of Jerusalem energetically and enthusiastically with others. In the mid-1970s, he was a Priest-in-Charge of Holy Trinity and All Saints, South Kensington, and the Bishop of London's Director of Clergy Training. He served as Priest in Charge at Christ Church from 1992-1995 and was very well known in this area and attached to other local churches in his time.

Revd John Wilkinson was a committed member of Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens since 1993. John used to jog in Kensington Gardens even at the age of 76. Later when less able to do so, he used to visit exhibitions at the Serpentine Gallery or just enjoy the beauty of Sunken Garden and Italian Fountains.

He will be sadly missed, and remembered with great affection. Written by Mzia, his wife, who survives him.

Lynden Easton

Chairman's Report

In my last report to you I was worried that Hyde Park with its massive footfall from a Summer of major events and the Christo sculpture, combined with a long very hot period of drought, was showing serious signs of wear and tear.

Things have moved on and the Royal Parks team has been very proactive in their Parks' particular needs to replace, replant, repair and generally tend the infrastructure as well as flower beds, natural areas and trees. Many of you will have seen all the work which is going on at the moment. It is really very cheering and we are enjoying watching the progress in the different areas.

We are very pleased to welcome Phil Newcombe to Hyde Park as assistant Park Manager. With his horticultural background he is already making a difference.

The "payback" to Hyde Park for having Christo's Mastaba tethered in the Serpentine has taken place in part. In the Mastaba area the bottom of the Serpentine was cleared of rubbish which resulted in a "massive unexploded bomb" being dragged up. This turned out to be a rather small dummy mortar, probably left over from WWII training. There has been repair to the Phoslock treatment to the bottom of the lake in this area.

The Serpentine Island clean-up was ready to go ahead when four herons flew in and built their nests in the tops of trees there. You can certainly see the nests with heads sticking out.

New Kiosks are arriving and they are welcome, especially the one on the Serpentine Bridge. This one, in my view, is probably the grimmest place to sit and eat anywhere in both Parks where you are enveloped in exhaust fumes with a view of a traffic jam.

Soon you should be set back a little further from the road with a view down to the water helped by recent thinning of trees and shrubs and some new planting. When you are there you are close to the Diana Fountain car park. The planned planting to soften the view of parked cars is now being re-addressed and we look forward to that being put in soon.

The bee-friendly bed and hotel on West Carriage Drive has been replanted and when things warm up we hope this will quickly become an area to attract a multitude of pollinating insects.



The bee friendly bed and hotel

In Kensington Gardens our tiny band of Friends' volunteers (see article elsewhere in the newsletter) has started on the S Flower Walk beds by the Albert Memorial.

I was really pleased to join an induction morning for them together with Kensington Gardens staff, OCS staff and apprentices. When I arrived there was a small training session underway on the planting of a thousand snowdrops in the green. When these were done we all moved off to Lancaster Walk where a new five meter London Plane tree was being lifted into place (helped by our team of course).

Those of you on our tree walk last year will remember what we heard about tree diseases, the need to manage trees in a public park and to balance that with maintaining the look of the stately avenues. Join us this spring to look at Hyde Park trees.

We are proud, thanks to our increasing membership and your enthusiasm to attend events, to be able to fund some smallish projects and you will see our various appeals in the newsletter.

We need extra support with running the organisation and there is always a need for more funds so that we can do more. I have always been keen not to turn us into a begging organisation. There are, I know, too many of these around and in the end we all get fed up.

I believe Winter Wonderland had a good season, certainly numbers were up, though it's too early for us to know what the figures are looking like. Winter Wonderland, which a section of our members hate and another group loves, is a massive earner for our Parks and a contributor to all the other Royal Parks too. Our funding now relies on this source as well as, amongst other things, the other major events, takings from the catering concessions and residential income. Central government funding reduces each year and is now a small part of the Royal Parks necessary income.

What many of you may not know is that Kensington Gardens, throughout the winter, as the light fades and the gates shut, turns into a very lucrative film location.

Several major films (some of which we hope will see the light of day) with enormous support teams were based in the Gardens, and nice fat fees were earned!

Our trustees who attend the Safer Parks Panel meetings and work closely with the Parks police report a reasonably quiet Winter at Speakers Corner. There has, however, been an increase in problems associated with cyclists and specially Santander cycle hirers, who we sometimes think are associated with a crime wave all on their own.

Three of us were grateful to Hyde Park Manager, Jason Taylor, for setting up a meeting with Steve Barnes, our police officer and Matt Bonomi our new member of staff for transport across all the Parks. He is concentrating on walking and cycling (we hope in this order) and other traffic issues in all the Parks.

We are aware that, for a start, the signage for cyclists is still not consistent, visually clear and is sometimes contradictory between the two Parks. This needs to be fixed.

All of the trustees work so hard for the Friends. Sadly, this year at the AGM we will be losing Tom Newman who has completed three year term as a trustee. During this time he has been busy setting us up as a charity, guiding us through the choppy waters of GDPR as well as making sure we behave properly in all matters to do with governance. We will certainly miss him. We welcome new trustee Tina Higginson who volunteered to join us and to help having met us at our small stand at the Royal Parks show-case at the British Summer Time mid-week events. Tina has already got involved with our volunteers.

In addition to our always energetic trustees we have a small but equally hard working group of four helpers without whom we would be sadly lacking in membership organisation, photography, website up-dating and organising the discounts you enjoy when you use your membership cards. Thanks to Will to Win where their warm cafe has hosted us having small meetings throughout the winter.

Admittedly we drink plenty of cappuccinos and infusions as we all come and go but I am feeling a bit guilty about the amount of time we take up in their comfortable space.

My summary here only touches the surface of what goes on in our Parks. We now run quite a few events throughout the year for members at most of which you hear about and learn a lot more and this knowledge really helps us all to feel a sense of ownership of these wonderful spaces.



Chairman chats to volunteer

Out and about with the Friends

Winter Wonderland - enthusiastic reports from two younger visitors....

From Cece

Last Christmas, me and my friends flocked to Winter Wonderland as the place to go after work - who knew there was an outdoor bar with music and dancing! Although the pints were pretty expensive, it was all worth it for the atmosphere.

When Winter Wonderland finally came to an end it caused devastation amongst my friends, one friend going as far as an Instagram post devoted to Winter Wonderland and its departure:

"Can't believe Winter Wonderland is over 🥺 !!"

"RIP"

In conclusion, we loved Winter Wonderland and can't wait to welcome it back next year!

From Annabelle (aged 8)

"AAAAAHHHHH" That was the sound of my godmother screaming as I made her to go on a Rollercoaster.....

We had an amazing day at Winter Wonderland. I went with my mum and godmother on the first day of the Christmas holidays.



It was a very cold day. It was a slow start as my mum and godmother found the Crystal Lounge and had mulled wine and mince pies. Luckily Anthony, who was in charge of the Lounge made me a delicious hot

chocolate. I also ate two mince pies! My mum and godmother did not seem too keen to leave the Lounge but at last we left! First of all I went on a Roller Coaster with my mum, which was great fun, although my mum had her eyes shut most of the time.

We then went to see the Peter Pan ice show, with people flying through the air, and we all wanted to be ice skaters. Then, we all got on the Snow Bicycles and tried to cycle on the ice which was great fun. We kept



spinning on the ice. I then went for a second ride on the Roller Coaster, with my mum (who was a bit reluctant) The next thing we did was go to the Magic Ice Kingdom. The sculptures were incredible but it was very cold but that did not stop me going down the ice slide.



Mum said I could have one last ride on the roller coaster - I managed to persuade my godmother to go on it with me this time. She wasn't at all keen and whilst she was on it she did scream a lot. She only went on it the once! The next thing we did, after hot pasta for lunch, was to go and see the film of *The Snowman*. It felt like you were in the film and at one point a real snowman came in and waved at everyone. After more hot chocolate and mince pies, I begged my mum for one more ride on the rollercoaster before we went home. And one more ride turned into about 3 more rides!!

It was a brilliant day.

...and the experience of another intrepid visitor

From David Pollock, who tried ice-sculpting



Everything was really well organised for what is clearly hugely popular. There were about eight individual tables in a special tent kept at a normal temperature. I of course, was daft enough to be well rugged up to work at sub-zero!

On arrival, we were each kitted out with overalls, rubber gloves and a wide and very sharp chisel. (Most of the students worked in pairs, but I chose to be on my own). Each table then took delivery of a block of ice some 25x12x12cms and a delightful ice-carving of the head of a polar bear was produced for us to copy. This was all great fun and clearly enjoyed by all. Not surprisingly I suppose, I found working with ice hugely different from other materials I have worked with and, like most others, could not near completion in the allotted time. All in all, I would strongly recommend other members and their guests to have a go next year.

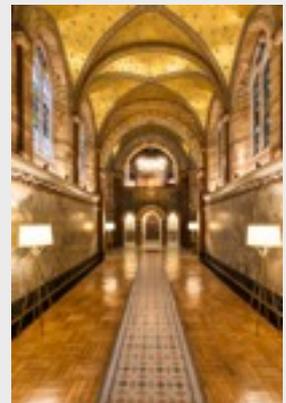
Fitzrovia Chapel visit

We much enjoyed a private visit to this hidden Grade II* listed little gem. It is the last remaining part of the Middlesex Hospital and is tucked away in a newly developed residential square.

A three year restoration project has breathed new life into this glorious and richly decorated chapel. The building is only open to the public on Wednesdays when it is not booked for an event, but we had it to ourselves and the bonus of an enthusiastic and knowledgeable keeper. She is in the process of extensive research on the history of the building and all the people it served for over 150 years.

Amongst our group we had one member who had trained and worked there when the building was entirely candle lit!

Thank you to Sue Heywood for arranging the visit and for organising a most welcome tea in a comfortable hotel just round the corner.



Sue Price

Breaking the ice - meeting the Serpentine Swimming Club

Trudging through sleet and wet snow in Hyde Park early one morning in February wouldn't normally make you feel like taking a swim in near freezing water. However, contact with the Serpentine Swimming Club may well persuade you to reconsider your feelings. Meeting George Cselko, the club's Secretary, that morning, certainly gave me pause for thought and opened my eyes to the benefits of a routine early dip, whatever the weather.

Although I'd personally thought that getting out of the water would be the main appeal, the Serpentine Swimming Club members I spoke to that morning were unanimous in their view that taking a swim early in the morning not only keeps you fit, it also invigorates you and sets you up for the day ahead like nothing else can. They all seemed to emit a positive, cheerful glow and looked ready to face the day, whatever it brought.

In the comfort of the Lido Café (open from 8.00am), George having had his own daily morning swim, told me about the club, its history and membership and his own involvement with it. Back in 2001 he started to bring his 3 daughters to school near Kensington Olympia, which meant that his old routine of swimming early close to home at Hampstead Ponds could not continue. Searching for a solution between his daughters' school and his legal work in the West End, he discovered the Serpentine Swimming Club - and has loved it from the start. He says that in addition to the invigorating swim, the atmosphere in the admittedly spartan changing room (mixed) is hilarious and he compares it to going to the pub first thing, with laughter, chat, bobble hats and banana cake.



Robin and George - post-swim

over the years at the Serpentine. This may be due in no small part to swimming with other members and the competitive Saturday races. Membership is split fairly equally between genders. George says that swimming is a good leveler and his proudest moment was seeing his 3 teenage daughters swim the Channel in a relay with their schoolmates in 2014. He mentions that more women than men have completed a double Channel swim.

In case the talk of swimming the Channel should frighten off potential new members, George is quick to reassure them that all are welcome. From a low of barely 100 members thirty years ago, the total now stands at 1,700.



Regulars emerging from the water early February

Fortunately, not everyone turns up at the same time on the same day and most come to swim in the summer. To ease congestion, the Club has been granted an extension to the area in which members may swim, which will not affect other activities on the Serpentine.

Swimming is now more regulated than it used to be, but the basic principle of allowing people to take reasonable risk is maintained. This follows a landmark case between swimmers at Hampstead Ponds and the Corporation of London who manage the area and wanted to restrict swimming to daylight hours for safety reasons. The court found that councils owning natural swimming areas have no obligation to prevent people from taking obvious risks such as swimming. The same principle of course applies to the Serpentine and means for instance that swimming in near darkness in February is fine, if you accept that you do it at your own risk.

Given the extraordinary range of abilities of the members, handicapping is essential part of the varied races the Club runs, so that all can compete on equal level. George speaks with feeling of the community spirit the club has, with friendships forged over many years. The common interest in swimming brings together people from everywhere: vicars, lawyers, scaffolders, nurses, stallholders, psychiatrists, silversmiths, MP's - these were some George reeled off the top of his head.

It costs £20 per year to join the Serpentine Swimming Club and members may swim between 5.00 and 9.30am. The Serpentine Lido offers swimming in a smaller area of the lake between 10.00 and 17.00. Plans are underway by the Royal Parks to reconfigure and rationalise the space and changing facilities between the Lido and the swimming club, with work expected in the next 18 months.

I finish by asking George about the challenges he faces as club secretary. He replies with a smile that managing the membership is the main one. "Open water swimming is booming" he says, "being able to swim here gives you a wonderful feeling of privilege. But there is plenty of room in the lake if not in our current changing room. I'm happy to offer a free swim to any FHPKG members interested in joining the Serpentine Swimming Club. Just ask them to get in touch!"

And with that cheerful encouragement, George departed, leaving me to consider a possible future dip in the Serpentine when the weather's a bit warmer.

Contact details for the Serpentine Swimming Club:
<http://serpenteswimmingclub.com/>
serpenteswimmingclub@gmail.com



George + hot coffee at Lido Café

Catching up with Crunchie



Crunchie tells us that she “has a feeling of déjà vu, but...” she adds, “something is missing”.

We first met Crunchie and her great aunt Smartie four years ago sipping at the dogs’ drinking fountain. The two little Norwich Terriers had their photo taken and became the Friends’ first poster pin-up girls. We were very pleased to get re-acquainted in early March.

Sadly Crunchie is now on her own, as Smartie died aged 15.

Crunchie herself is 10 years old.



She takes up the tail.....

“I know I am a very special dog and everybody is happy to see me. There are hardly any other dogs like me left at all. All those others I see out and about in the Parks are Norfolk Terriers. But every now and then I meet up with my brother and his other Norwich Terrier friend when they are walking in Kensington Gardens with their Mum.

My mummy Penny, loves me a lot and I have been very close to her since our lovely daddy Julian died. We missed him a lot, especially when we thought he was waiting for us in the London house.

However recently I had a starring role (which I am good at) when I walked Penny up the aisle. I wore pink ribbons and fresh flowers round my collar. I lay perfectly quietly on the steps in front of the altar and Penny and I are very happy with my new Poppa.

I love everything about my life: the walks in the Parks mean I meet lots of new people, I enjoy going on the buses and to the shops. When we are away I am happy in boats and sit up nicely looking over the edge. Everybody seems to be

happy to have me to stay or visit and they make such a fuss of me that although there have been some sad times I now feel like a very lucky little dog.

But at this moment I am really fed up with hanging around sitting on this bench. And I have had more than enough cold rather muddy water to drink. Can’t we get a move on?”

As told to Sue Price and pictured by Paul Shelley

If you are a member who regularly walks your dog in either Hyde Park or Kensington Gardens and if your canine companion has an interesting story to tell and would be happy to be interviewed and photographed, please get in touch.

Email: contact@friendshpkg.org.uk

Supporting the Royal Parks

Over a year ago the Friends offered £2,500 to each of our two Parks to fund a project which would not be included in the normal budget.

Hyde Park management chose to have Cyclamen Hederifolium planted amongst the London plane trees in the fenced areas at Speakers Corner. This was done in the



Autumn by a team of OCS staff and Royal Parks apprentices. With time it is hoped that these will naturalise and become a carpet of colour under the trees.

Kensington Gardens staff have chosen to have an improved information board at the Bastion at Buck Hill, and some rustic seating in the same area.



Last summer the Friends helped to support, both financially and with helpers, a series of three concerts on Sunday afternoons in August on the restored bandstand in Hyde Park. We have agreed to repeat the exercise in August 2019 and on Sundays 4th, 11th and 18th between 3pm and 5pm you will be able to enjoy The South London Jazz Orchestra, Here to Havana and the Lindy Hop dancers and the Snowdown Welfare Colliery Band.

We mean to fund this series by donations and need £1,600. So far we have raised £1,000 from generous donations by a Knightsbridge business, a Parks concession and two very generous trustees.

Please could you help us reach our target total by helping us raise the remaining £600?

Any donation of any size (and we are charity number 1168319 which helps UK tax payers) would be welcomed with open arms.

Recognition of your generosity can feature in our concert publicity.

Please contact the Chairman contact@friendshpkg.org.uk

Update on Volunteers

Volunteering in Kensington Gardens

Tina Higginson recounts how she got involved...

I was walking through Hyde Park with my husband in the summer last

year during the Hyde Park British Summer Festival. I was intrigued to see what plants were being sold at the pavilion being run by The Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. During a conversation with Simon, one of the Trustees, I was given a newsletter and information about joining The Friends, which sparked me into taking out a membership. I then noticed in the newsletter that Kensington Gardens were looking for volunteers, and here is where my journey began.

After completing an application form and providing a reference, I was all set to go. I started my volunteering in early December, not the best of months, however I must say I have been very lucky with the weather. My first introduction to volunteering was to clear what seemed to be a never-ending pile of fallen leaves from the north flower bed by the Albert Memorial. After 2 hours I had barely cleared a quarter of the flower bed and with an aching back and limbs it was time to stop for that week. I managed to fill what I believe is 1 cubic metre bag full of leaves from a small section, which gave me a lot of satisfaction, but made me realise just how much work and maintenance these beds are for the gardeners.



Tina at work

It's been 2 years since the South flower bed was replanted, this bed had previously been made up mostly of shrubs with some bedding plants. The new scheme is now composed of mainly flowers and plants with a small collection of shrubs. However, in winter time when the leaves fall, the wind drives the leaves onto the beds which need constantly clearing to prevent mildew on the plants, not to mention keeping this area looking tidy and well kept for all of us to enjoy and admire.

I am now well into my third month and happy to say most of the leaves have been cleared. Due to the amazing weather in February, I have been helping to cut back some of the plants and as the gardeners tell me - "tickle the soil" around the beds. It's been very interesting to see each week how the plants have grown since my previous week's work, slowly more flowers are appearing along with new growth. I am also learning gardening tips and when to cut plants back, which all adds to the experience.

It is amazing how many people stop to talk, asking all manner of questions: the nearest toilets? where the tiny owls live? Its also great when you get feedback from people strolling in the park and commenting on what a good job you are doing. I am pleased to say that I have helped recruit another volunteer who stopped and asked about what I was doing, and I encouraged her to join.

I really enjoy my gardening time in the park and get great satisfaction with what I have achieved after just a few hours.

If you are interested in volunteering and becoming a gardening buddy, please email contact@friendshpkg.org.uk



Tina + new recruits!

Volunteering at The Kiosk

(situated next to the Lodge Café by Hyde Park Corner)

Patrick Read tells us about an average day



I've been helping as a volunteer since 2004. I really enjoy meeting the wide variety of people from all over the world and find handling unusual questions keeps my brain agile. The kiosk is manned 7 days a week, come rain or shine.

We are a group of 10 in total and we usually man the kiosk for a half-day's volunteering per week. On an average day we probably get about 55-60 visitors, with questions ranging from how to get to Buckingham Palace, where the nearest loo is, how the Hop On/Hop Off buses work, the location of the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain, the Changing of the Guard, Museums, Harrods, Speakers' Corner... to some more unusual ones.

One day a couple from New Zealand arrived whose name was Burton and they were descendants of Decimus Burton, architect of the Wellington Arch and Hyde Park Screen. They said their great grandfather (brother of Decimus) had been banished to NZ for misbehaving with a servant girl.

You never know who's going to turn up - that's why it's never dull and I'd encourage anyone interested in joining us to get in touch.

Email: contact@friendshpkg.org.uk

And this time, a footnote from the editor, who has managed to box herself into a corner with very little space to comment on this Spring 2019 Newsletter. However, I'm delighted that thanks to more contributions from readers and members, the content is varied and I hope makes an interesting read - even if as a result, space requires evermore juggling

The main message in this issue is to ask for your assistance on various fronts, if you possibly can. From volunteering to offering expertise on the IT/admin front, to helping us complete our funding for the August Bandstand Concerts, we're asking for your support. Do please get in touch by email to newsletter@friendshpkg.org.uk with questions, letters, opinions, photos - and offers. Thank you!

Tessa Singleton, Editor



Optimism at the start

Your photographer and the author set off in the dark on the first Sunday morning in November to witness the thrill of the sun-rise start of the 122nd London to Brighton Veteran Car Run.

On the way there the roads surrounding the

Parks were full of amazing old vehicles, support teams, low loaders and all the paraphernalia which go with these high maintenance vehicles. The Serpentine Road was busy with the added excitement of the noise, tapping, rattling, banging, small explosions and hissing steam from engines of 2 horsepower upwards and candles flickering as headlamps.

The tension on everybody's faces as they crossed, or sadly in some cases failed to cross, the start line and leave the Park through the Decimus Burton Screen was heart-stopping



Smoke and steam

At 6.58hrs (sunrise) a red flag is ceremoniously ripped up and the oldest vehicles sets off.

We collected, as well as dramatic photos, a mass of memorable quotes, some of which are printed below:

“The French were a bit ahead of us on design“

(Peugeot, Panhard et Lavassor, Decauville and Hurlu)

“Facing backwards all the way to Brighton“

(De Dion Bouton)

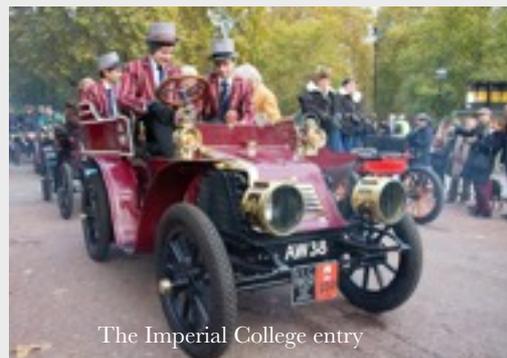
“It’s got a roof and a windscreen which is always a bonus“ (Darraq 1901)

“Is it still lit?“

(Question to us from an anxious owner of headlamps containing tea lights)

“Last year we got to Tooting“

(The Imperial College team in their 1902 James and Browne)



The Imperial College entry

“This is the only one to exist in the UK. It was way ahead of its time“ (An electric Columbia 1902)

And to finish:

“I was given this as an 18th Birthday present, I’m now crossing the line with my grandson on my 70th Birthday today“ (1904 Cadillac)

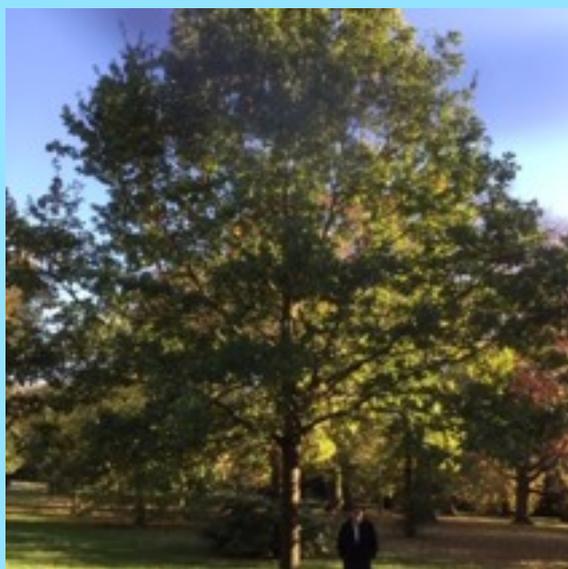
We wandered home munching on bacon rolls.

It’s a morning to treasure as there is simply nothing else like it.

Words by Sue Price, photos by Paul Shelley

The Elias Fawcett oak tree in Kensington Gardens

The picture shows an oak tree in Kensington Gardens, which was planted in 1997 under the Royal Parks ‘adopt-a-tree’ scheme (www.supporttheroyalparks.org) in memory of Elias Fawcett, who had died aged 17 in 1996. It was planted at the behest of Elias’ aunts (one of whom is the painter Charlotte Johnson-Wahl). I hope readers will agree that the tree is looking magnificent and makes a wonderful memorial. It is to be found just below the bandstand by the pond. (Google Maps reference: 51 30'13 N, 0 10'56.5 W.)



At the time of the Elias Fawcett tree planting, Kensington Gardens was still feeling the after-effects of the 1987 hurricane, the violent extra-tropical cyclone that occurred on the night of 15-16 October that year, with winds exceeding 120mph. The storm caused havoc over much of

England, felling an estimated 15 million trees, not only doing terrible damage to forests and parks, but falling against buildings, onto vehicles and across roads. It cost the insurance industry £2billion (the second most expensive weather event on record). Trees in Kensington Gardens were badly affected, with the lime trees lining the Jubilee Walk particularly devastated. The Mayor of Berlin (who came on a visit to London not long after the hurricane) donated 100 new lime trees to the park.

The storm actually had some beneficial effects. In its aftermath, a nationwide tree-planting scheme was developed, with people encouraged to plant broad-leaved trees in place of the unpopular post-war conifers. Since 1987, more than 500 million saplings have been planted and tree cover in Britain is now greater than it has been for 150 years. Elias’ tree is one of the 500 million.

As an additional memorial, the Elias Fawcett Musical Trust gives young musicians in and around London a chance to perform before a live audience (www.eliasmusictrust.org.uk)

Anne Greenstock

The Royal Parks Apprentice Scheme

Meet Nida, apprentice and enthusiastic participant

We met by an Edgeworthia...

Early one morning our photographer and I came across Nida setting up to start her work in the flower bed by the Kiosk at the Albert Memorial. Her backdrop was a most extraordinary bright yellow flowering shrub with no leaves. It set us, plus a passer-by, talking. Nida looked it up and told us the Edgeworthia originates from China and it certainly looks as though it is straight off a painted Chinese vase.

Nida is a second year Royal Parks apprentice. She attends Capel College for one day per week. She is working on a 1.5 year course which leads towards a Horticultural Landscape Operative Qualification. The course is intense and, she explains, is a trail blazer.

She has done a nursery placement in the Hyde Park Super Nursery and has also done extra courses on Ride-on Mowing, Spraying and First Aid at Work.



In the third year she hopes to reach the RHS Level 2 Award.

She tells us that she loves working in the Royal Parks, she feels that she too has grown as it is such a supportive environment.

Nida couldn't have been a better ambassador for the Royal Parks Apprentice Scheme on that morning.

Sue Price

For more information, go to <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/apprenticeship>

Ralph, the bird blogger... a tweet to the Friends

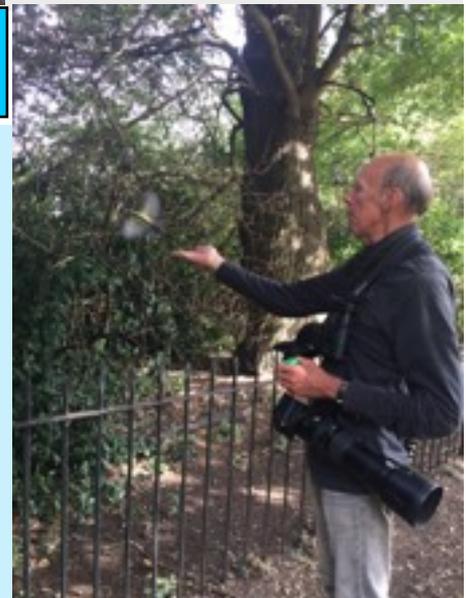
*You may have been fortunate on some occasion when in the Park to have come across **Ralph Hancock** who writes the excellent Kensington Gardens & Hyde Park Birds blog. He visits the gardens almost every day, mostly mornings, with an array of excellent cameras and pockets full of pine nuts and peanuts for those few lucky birds.*

Ralph is hugely knowledgeable about the visiting and resident bird life in Kensington Gardens & Hyde Park and we invite you to view his informative blog which is complete with excellent photographs:

kensingtongardensandhydeparkbirds.blogspot.com

Early March sightings include a Great Spotted Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, three Grey Heron chicks, a pair of Great Crested Grebes and a beautiful male Mandarin Duck.

Joanna Clark



!! SOS !!

We do really need your help very badly. As the Friends organisation has grown and become much busier, the trustees and the helpers (eight trustees and four helpers) have become almost impossibly stretched. You are very good about giving us enthusiastic and encouraging feedback and we appreciate your thanks very much.

We would like to do even more and are full of ideas, but there is a limit to our energy!

Do you have any particular skills, and could offer to help in any way for any level of commitment?

Please get in touch with us by email contact@friendshpkg.org.uk

**Sue Price
Chairman**

Readers' Letters

Comments, opinions and suggestions to the newsletter - write to newsletter@friendshpkg.org.uk

Cycling in the Parks - more views from our readers

From Andrew Beverley

It's great to see the new Readers' Letters section.

I too deplore the behaviour of many of the cyclists in the park.

I did make an interesting observation recently though: the faster that one cycles along Mount Walk, the more comfortable the speed bumps are.

That's surely not helping matters.

In terms of cycling on the pavement on Bayswater Road that Haydn

Dickenson highlights, whilst not wishing to condone this behaviour,

it is not that surprising, given the intimidating nature of the road:

vehicles break the speed limit, undertake on the inside, go through red

lights, cut cyclists up, drivers use mobile phones, and so on. It's

high time that a protected cycle route was installed along the road,

which would also help reduce the number of people cycling in the park.

There is certainly plenty of space on the road to do so.

From Dimity Spiller

"It is by politeness, etiquette and charity that society is saved from falling into a heap of savagery." William Wykeham d.1404

Riding a bike is a question of balance, the slightest thing can have you off, even for the most cautious cyclist this can lead to an edgy attitude to the

world. However, as William Wykeham noted, good manners are what gets us

by in this overcrowded world and there is no excuse for bad behaviour.

We know all too well how rogue cyclists can endanger pedestrians but I

would like to outline some of the everyday perils that pedestrians pose to

cyclists:

People crossing the road without looking; people crossing the road looking at

their phones; people crossing the side road without looking at the main road

traffic as it turns in; people who step off the pavement to overtake another

pedestrian; people in the Park who suddenly dive across the cycling path; the about-to-be pedestrian who opens the car door without looking

Interestingly, the Dutch all open car doors with the inside hand, thereby being forced to glance over their shoulder.

All these things happen with no warning and cyclists are hurled to the ground, breaking bones and losing teeth. Please remember to look over your shoulder for mutual harmony.

How about a Royal Parks phone app?

From Paolo Gregorio, visiting from Italy

On a recent visit to London, I took a break from the museums in Exhibition

Road and wandered into Hyde Park for some fresh air and somewhere quiet to

eat lunch. But where should I go? Google maps was not much help as it gave

little information about the inside of the park. I then found the

royalparks.org.uk website. This had a lot more information, but the map was

difficult to use on my phone. It's a great resource to help plan a visit, but less

use in the park.

What is needed is an App!

Most things have a phone app these days, so why not the Royal Parks? With

notices at prominent points displaying QR codes (those funny patterns of black

and white squares), I could just point my phone at the notice for it to tell me

something about what I was seeing. The information could be in different

languages as well for all the overseas visitors who come to the parks. How

about walking routes, distances to the nearest coffee bar or toilet, today's events

etc.?

Of course, doing it right would cost money, but most apps have some form of

sponsorship or advertising that could help with that. With most of the young,

and not so young, permanently attached to their phones, it would help make the

parks more accessible to a new generation of visitors who do not necessarily

have British history or the Latin names of plants at their fingertips.

Members' Photos

In the last newsletter, Paul Shelley our accredited photographer encouraged readers to send in their own photos. We are delighted that two members have responded - the pictures below have been sent in by Harry Reid and Rosa Davies. We hope they may inspire more of you to submit your own examples.



All aboard by Harry Reid



Foxgloves by Rosa Davies



Unexpected neighbours by Harry Reid



Serpentine sunset by Rosa Davies