2012 saw The Royal Parks hosting major parts of two, once-in-a-lifetime, events - HM Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee and the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In one way or another these internationally famous parks became the setting for some of the year's most iconic sights.

In an effort to capture a flavour of the work, and people involved, the Guild has put together this collection of stories and photographs.

Mike Fitt OBE, Chairman, The Royal Parks Guild
Behind the scenes in The Royal Parks

DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS 2012

Her Majesty’s visit to Richmond Park for the ‘Wild London’ event

Date: 15th May, 2012  By: Simon Richards, Richmond Park Manager

The 15th May saw Her Majesty the Queen visit Richmond Park as part of her Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The Royal Parks were delighted to be hosting the event, which was organised by the London Borough of Richmond. Her Majesty was able to visit Holly Lodge following the main public event that took place on the Polo Field – now temporarily called Jubilee Fields. The main event was organised by Jason Debney, Becky Law and Ken McKinzie from the Thames Landscape Strategy, and TRP were able to offer substantial support from the Richmond Park team and also a lot of help from landscape contractor Fountains. The Royal Parks Guild organised the ‘Inspiration Zone’ (see opposite page).

Above left: Young Horse Rangers meet Her Majesty
Above centre: The Queen meets some of the staff of Richmond Park
Above right: Royal Parks Deputy CEO Colin Buttery meets Prince Philip
Far left: Horsewoman Sandra Croxall pins a special rosette onto ‘Jed’
Left: Jason Debney, organiser of the ‘Wild London’ event with Her Majesty

HM’s visit to Holly Lodge, the Park’s HQ

On a somewhat wet day, Her Majesty was accompanied by The Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Alexandra. Sir David Brewer (Lord Lieutenant), received Her Majesty. Just 25 minutes was allowed for the visit. The first 10 was allocated to HM to ‘tidy’ in a revamped conference room which had been adorned for the day by Pat Pritchard and her team. The remaining 15 minutes was to be spent meeting the people, planting a tree, retiring a horse, receiving gifts and saying goodbye. Simple – not!!

The carefully rehearsed programme became somewhat thrown after HM emerged from Holly Lodge after three minutes, thus not everyone had been moved to their allocated positions. I found myself standing outside the front door in splendid isolation! Departing from the script, I introduced HM to the first person in the line-up, by which time everyone else made it into place, so I was able to escape. The Royal Party charmed many of our guests and took time to speak to far more of them than was originally envisaged. The new Holly tree was duly planted along with gleaming brass plaque.

The Royal Party emerged from the Lych Gate to meet local schoolchildren, and others, lining the road to Holly Lodge. The next task was to ‘retire’ Jed, our long-serving shire horse who has now moved to a retirement home in the Chilterns. Here, HM was to present a special rosette to Sandra Croxall from the Shire Horse team, who would pin the rosette on Jed’s harness. Unsurprisingly, Jed was a little concerned by the general hubbub and was not being entirely still, pinning a rosette on a fast-moving target was not the easiest task! The Duke of Edinburgh took swift evasive action as he sensibly stood beside me and I stepped back to avoid a swinging head! Eventually we succeeded and HM was off to receive a posy from the Horse Rangers and a cast iron boot pull in the shape of a stag beetle made for us by Josh de Lisle who is the blacksmith who has made the new gates for the edge of Sidmouth Wood.

The final activity was for HM to regain the Bentley, which had of course disappeared to park, and had got stuck behind the largest contingent of police officers seen since Trooping the Colour! Eventually it emerged, and the goodbyes were said. HM and the Duke departed with an escort of the Hampton Court Shires pulling the Royal Parks show dray adorned by a Diamond Jubilee headboard and group of riders from the Horse Rangers.

We have subsequently received an extremely welcome and complimentary letter from Sir David Brewer, who indicates that Her Majesty enjoyed her visit to Richmond Park. I extend my personal thanks to all who helped out to make the day such a success. Above all, my memories will be of the great humour and charm which the Royal Family exhibited on what was a small part of an incredibly punishing schedule.

Actually, we understand that Her Majesty rather likes those events that, let’s say, don’t go entirely to plan!
Ron Froud, Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Gardeners, and TRPG Committee Member

As part of this event, The Royal Parks Guild, the Worshipful Company of Gardeners and the Flowers in the City Campaign, were involved in erecting a variety of displays in and around a small marquee in Richmond Park which was to be viewed by the public and also by Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. Display boards explaining the workings of each society were erected, and large displays of flowering plants and cut flowers beautified the area.

On the day before, as we arrived to set up, we were greeted by driving rain and cold winds which stayed with us all day — but it didn’t stop us working — or dampen our spirits!

Outside the marquee was a flower display fronted by two of the biggest spades in the world — one of which is owned by the Worshipful Company. The Royal Parks Guild displayed a Horse Drawn Cart (filled with wallflowers), in the middle of a country garden display with plants and materials from the parks. It was created by members of the Guild Committee and Royal Parks Apprentices.

On Tuesday the site was open to the public and HM was due to arrive around 1 pm. Up to the point of her arrival we had a deluge of rain and hailstones but it stopped and the sun shone as she was guided on her tour to our marquee by TRPG chairman Mike Fitt OBE. She was introduced to the several TRP apprentices — who appeared to be overwhelmed by the occasion — along with Guild Committee Member David Ivison and Secretary Barbara Fitt. Her Majesty was then introduced to the Master of the Gardeners Company, Daniel Caspi, who proceeded to introduce her to members who had been involved with the displays and others, including the Chairman of Flowers in the City Campaign.

Her Majesty then continued to visit other exhibitions before leaving. On her departure, the rain and hail became worse. At the end of a very enjoyable day several vehicles became stuck in the mud and needed to be towed out with a tractor!

Peter Holman, a Trustee/Director of London in Bloom

Georgia, daughter of Miles Watson-Smyth, a Director of London in Bloom alongside other directors, greeted HM The Queen at the event. Georgia, aged 6, curtseyed and presented HM with a bouquet made up by London in Bloom sponsor Windowflowers. The Queen was said to be delighted with the flowers and continued to hold them for the remainder of the event, only passing them to an attendant when torrential rain and hail made it necessary for her to hold an umbrella.

Georgia was delighted to have the honour. She said that the Queen was "very kind" and is now planning on sending her a copy of a photograph of the occasion. Geoff Hyde, Chairman of London in Bloom (and TRPG member) said: "Although a wet day, it was a pleasure to support the Jubilee event in Richmond Park."

John Dalziel, Secretary, The London Gardens Society

"Why are these barrows full of weeds", was the query from the very important visitor of the day. "Sir, these are examples of the Mad About Meadows initiatives that we have been working on for this special year," was the response which seemed to amuse the questioner. This was but one of many examples of the quick and witty rapport shown by our very special visitor — the Duke of Edinburgh — whom I had the privilege of accompanying when he visited on 15th May.

In the 15 minutes available for his visit to the Inspiration Zone, he managed to brighten the day of all he met. The young blacksmith, who had completed a wonderful new set of gates to be erected the following day at the famous vista view in Richmond Park, was delighted to also show him the magnificent metal horse that gained him the top student award in his final college exams.

We were sorry that he was unable to stop at every stand but I think it safe to say that his visit was undoubtedly the highlight of the day for all of us.

My thanks must go to Mike Fitt for affording The London Garden Society and myself as Secretary the honour of not only meeting Her Majesty and the Duke, and escorting him around, but also being part of this Diamond Jubilee Year event in Richmond Park.
The BIG weekend (2-5 June)

Guild member Dennis Clarke, Head of Parks Services and the Royal Parks Lead for the Diamond Jubilee weekend, tells how the Parks prepared for – and coped with – with the big event.

PLANNING FOR the Diamond Jubilee Weekend started, actually, immediately after the Royal Wedding in April 2011! But, for The Royal Parks (TRP), these celebrations would be on a huge scale, with a spectacular concert at the Queen Victoria Memorial, and a grand ceremonial procession in St James's Park. They were also to include a major festival, and massive facilities for screen viewing by the public in Hyde Park.

I was asked to lead TRP planning and delivery for the Jubilee Weekend events. In addition to leading TRP teams and ensuring all our planning was on track, I would focus on ensuring the celebrations across the inner London Parks were suitably designed and co-ordinated and that the associated multi-agency planning for the Parks worked effectively. This included the design of public support, crowd management and welfare provision for the public in the Parks. Throughout, it would be a priority to share the planning with the many organisations with which we work, particularly officials from Buckingham Palace.

Mark Wasilewski, Park Manager for St James's and Green Parks, would take forward the work for St James’s and Green Parks, in particular for the Concert build and hosting on the Monday evening, and the preparation and support for the ceremonial procession and balcony appearance on the Tuesday. Particular challenges for Mark included the arrangements for the massive concert construction for the performances, in the extremely busy and high profile areas around the Palace. At all times throughout the whole weekend Mark had to ensure that St James’s Park was extremely well presented, and then ensure that it was transferred effectively to the LOCOG teams who would within days of the Jubilee Weekend commence their massive construction for the Olympics.

Mark, a veteran of such events, said: “St James’s was a sea of red, white and blue. People were dressed head to toe in patriotic colours. An air of camaraderie abounded, the spirit of togetherness uniting young and old alike.”

In Hyde Park, Park Manager Steve Edwards would manage the Sainsbury’s Jubilee Family Festival to be held on the Saturday and Sunday. The Festival site would then be transformed into the massive screen viewing area to be used during the Concert and Ceremony on Monday and Tuesday. This area would accommodate those who would not be able to access the Mall due to space limitations. An agreement was made with the Family Festival event producer that allowed us to reuse the Festival’s screens and other infrastructure for the crowds on the Monday and Tuesday.
so making substantial efficiencies. A particular priority for Steve was working on and agreeing the complex site design and management that would enable a smooth transformation overnight from a closed arena for a 50,000 audience to an open site for a 100,000+ audience.

As Managers, we worked hard to ensure the safe, enjoyable and comfortable viewing of the celebrations by the vast crowds who would come to the Parks. All of the Parks would be immaculate, and well-resourced, with cleaning teams, catering, toilets and public information to ensure that our Park visitors (“guests”) would have the best experience possible.

Designing the crowd management plan was pivotal to this work. Each area of Park was assessed with regard to its crowd capacity, access routes and potential to view the spectacle. Detailed maps identified areas for public viewing, access, screens etc. and from this the arrangements for how crowds would move through the Parks were planned.

The plan made maximum use of the space to allow the largest audience possible to enjoy the celebrations. The crowds would be supported and directed on the day by the Metropolitan Police, working with our stewards.

Tim Owen, Commissioner for Contingency Planning at Westminster Council commented: “When the Weekend celebrations were announced it was very clear that London would host a very special set of celebrations. The Parks were expected – as usual – to host the celebrations safely and successfully, but to achieve this on such an intense two days of activities was unprecedented. However, once again, they helped us all exceed expectations and set a very high standard for the summer to come.”

Tim adds: “My most remembered moment was watching the spectacular presentation of Madness on the roof of Buckingham Palace – poignant to me because, at times, any outsider to the planning might well have thought ‘How on earth is all this going to work?’

“It was definitely not ‘madness’, but calm, professional and assured support as is expected – but not always appreciated - from The Royal Parks on a daily basis.”

A key focus for me, as lead, was the planning of the overnight logistical operation, covering the Queen Victoria Memorial and the Mall, from the end of Monday’s Concert through to the start of the Ceremonies the following morning. We had a five-hour window during the night to remove huge volumes of litter on the Mall, 10 screens, numerous media structures and miles of cable, and in this time we had to install more than two miles of barriers. This work would be done in darkness and would require the co-ordination of some 800 staff working with eight different organisations.

We worked closely with these organisations to produce a detailed logistics plan that directed operations to 15 minute intervals during the night. We knew that litter clearance would be the largest of the overnight tasks and I commissioned our contractor, Enterprise, to test run the litter picking by timing the trial clearance of different densities and types of litter. To see the scale of our operation was extraordinary with hundreds of litter pickers and numerous support vehicles clearing and recycling up to 100 tonnes of waste exactly to the plan!

The Weekend was a wonderful landmark and celebration of Her Majesty’s Diamond Jubilee. The celebrations were a resounding success and the Parks were visited by more than a million people. The Royal Parks are proud to have been hosts to much of the celebration and to have been part of the team of organisations who all worked together to make it such a success. I will never forget this amazing time.
PART ONE: 

Surprise invitation to lunch

IT ALL started off with an e-mail from the new clerk for the Worshipful Company of Gardeners (Jeremy Heritage), inviting me and a select group of people to attend a lunch at Westminster Hall to Celebrate Her Majesty the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee. At the time I thought it was an invitation to have lunch with the members of the Worshipful Company, and some key members of the Royal Parks Guild. Obviously I accepted. Other e-mail transactions ensued, and then I received the invitation. Instantly it became apparent this was no ordinary lunch.

In fact, Her Majesty the Queen, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, and Prince Harry, were to be present.

I thought that this is something very unique, and I felt hugely honoured and completely surprised to be invited to such a historic event as this. From all the millions of people who could have been invited, it was me! Completely and utterly amazing. After all, we will never see another Diamond Jubilee in our life times, nor even our kids’ life times (Queen Victoria had the last Diamond Jubilee in 1897). This was a very special invitation, and I was proud and extremely honoured to be part of it.

Once the word got out about the lunch, BBC1, BBC Radio 5 Live and ITV all wanted to interview me. I felt like a rock star! I did an interview with BBC1; they came to me at work (at the Still Pond, Isabella Plantation, Richmond Park) to film me and see what I do as a gardener. The main point of the interview was that normal people like me can be invited to have lunch with HM The Queen! Questions included: “How do I feel to be invited to such a prestigious and historical event?” And “how did it happen?”

The answer to the first part is completely predictable: “Completely surprised and very honoured!”

With regard to the second part, my invitation came via a collaboration between The Royal Parks Guild, the Worshipful Company of Gardeners, The Royal Parks and Fountains (part of the OCS group, and for whom I work). I had been an award winner for two consecutive years while I was a Royal Parks Apprentice (2nd and 3rd year Apprentice of the Year awards).

I also won the TRGP’s George Cooke Award for outstanding achievement, and without the help of all these organisations I would not have won these awards – and not been invited!

One of the other questions was: “How did I get involved in horticulture?” This is the start of it all! Six years ago I became very ill with Streptococcus Pneumoniae. Unfortunately, as a result I had to have both of my legs amputated below the knees.

With my physiotherapy, learning how to walk again using prosthesis, I used to take my kids (with my legs and walking sticks in a bag strapped to the back of a wheelchair) to The Regent’s Park and Hampstead Heath. The kids would run around and I’d put on my legs and practice my walking. I did this very regularly, and gained in confidence. That’s when I had the idea of working in horticulture; it would be great to work in such a pleasant environment. So I made some enquiries and a friend told me about the Royal Parks Apprenticeship scheme. I looked on the net, found it, applied and got a place, employed at Richmond Park. Afterwards, I was employed full time, working as a gardener here at The Isabella Plantation and loving it. I feel proud to be working in such a beautiful garden.

Another question: “Who will you be thinking of on the day?” This answer to this was simple – my lovely wife and kids.

The interviews were shown on BBC1 during the live coverage, hosted by Fiona Bruce, on the day’s events. But what took four hours of filming was edited down to just two or three minutes on the day. And some of the answers were ‘sieved’ during the editing. The power of TV!

Left: Playing on the day were members of The National Children’s Orchestra of Great Britain (all between 7-13 years of age)

Next Newsletter:

Ergun deals with his nerves, leading up to the big day – and having lunch with Prince Harry!
St James's Park

The Beach Volleyball just had to be the hottest party in town! Our office was only 73 metres away from the stadium and we found ourselves all joining in the conga each time the music came on!

It was most amusing to learn, on the first day that the beach volleyball courts opened, that girl players were stubbing their toes on nuts buried there by squirrels!

Working inside an event site was a unique experience – for us as well as the organisers – and a real challenge. Our offices were completely within venue and we ourselves were subject to airline-style security measures each time we came in, including the restrictions on liquids and fluids (it was just as well the Park Manager stocked up on milk, and champagne, in advance!).

I think it was the Paralympics that gave us greatest pride and sent a message to the rest of the world about attitudes regarding impaired mobility. The wheelchair assistance points at the edge of the park were hardly used – all of the Paralympic athletes were seen making their own way around the West End, sight-seeing and shopping.

The atmosphere in the park was electric and support from the crowd incredible; whether it was the Brownlee brothers cycling past Buckingham Palace to gain their double in the Triathlon, or David Weir coming around the final bend to take Gold medal in the Paralympic Marathon.

What was especially memorable was the way the public supported each and every athlete, irrespective of the country they were representing or of their place in the field. It was noticeable with the “Road” events that everyone stayed until the last athlete had crossed the line.

Although the start of the Olympics was upon us all of a sudden, it was very sad once it was all over. Everything seemed flat. We wished it could have gone on and on.

It was a real privilege to have had the opportunity to be involved in what some have claimed were the most successful Olympic Games in living memory.

Since the games we have re-turfed 36,000 sq metres which equates to 9 acres in St. James’s Park!

By Mark Wasilewski, mvo
Park Manager, St James’s Park

Above: Horse Guards Parade, transformed into beach volleyball courts
Below: Paralympic athletes made good use of St. James’s Park too

VOX POPS

Dave Parker, Contract Manager, Enterprise plc
“It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for us. Everyone came out a better person following the way they responded under pressure to deliver. It wasn’t just the athletes and spectators who gained.”

Pippa Hyde (Winner of TRPG's 2012 Wildlife Conservation Award)
“As a London Ambassador for the Olympics I spent six days covering St. James’s Park and Kensington Gardens. I read up on lots of literature, to be sure to have answers to possible questions from visitors. Besides the usual requests concerning wildlife in the Parks I also covered Ring Necked Parakeets, blanket weed on the lake in Kensington Gardens and spot identification of plants in the herbaceous borders. Luckily, a recent Royal Parks Guild visit to Brompton Cemetery meant I was able to help the lady wanting to find Emmeline Pankhurst’s grave!

“As a London Ambassador I was dressed in colourful magenta pink and purple and, whilst travelling on a bus, two small boys asked for my autograph. I told them I am not famous or important, to which they replied: “But you are, you are an Olympic Volunteer!””

Lucy Attias, Royal Parks Apprentice
“Military personnel (800) on security duties were extremely polite and professional. The Beach Volleyball practice courts were fun to watch, and to be part of the overall Olympic celebration was great. It is something I will never forget.”
Behind the scenes in The Royal Parks

LONDON 2012 – OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC GAMES

How the Parks played their part:

Hyde Park,
Kensington Gardens
& St James’s Park

Across all three parks Enterprise’s scheduled works programme was heavily disrupted during both build and games time that resulted in an unprecedented change in working procedures. This included overnight working across the parks to assist in managing the waste and cleansing aspect due to serious restrictions imposed on vehicle movement.

Prior to the “opening ceremony” numerous renovation works were carried out, including turfing, tree pruning and bark mulching, as well as carrying out all routine maintenance and grass cutting. Also the annual bedding displays were planted without disruption to the build of the infrastructure required to manage and serve the Games.

It was the commitment and dedication of all staff that ensured the parks were pristine at all times during the Games – and it was a privilege to have been involved.

Some of the greatest effort now being put in by staff is in repairing the damaged ground and returning the parks to their former glory – no mean feat considering the weather that we’ve had!

By Andy Grover
General Manager, Enterprise plc

The Regent’s Park

Sadly, during the lead up to the Olympics, two sports that were going to take place at Regents Park were dropped. However, this meant we could put extra effort into entertaining Olympic visitors who ventured into the Park, and this included the return of young Gilbert – a 3D floral model of a park’s gardener who, for a second year, stood guard at The Chester Gates entrance to Queen Mary’s Rose Garden. It was cared for by Veolia staff. Many people thought that Gilbert was modelled on the Head Gardener of Queen Mary’s, Tom Moss-Davies!

By Francis Duncan
Operations Manager,
Veolia Environmental Services plc

VOX POPS

Malcolm Kerr, Wildlife Officer
“No wildlife appeared to suffer as a result of all the activity during the build/de-rig or during the Games themselves. I was very pleased with the prompt response we received from LOCOG and their contractors as soon as any issues arose.”

Leon Charalambous,
Royal Parks Apprentice
“All of the celebrations during the summer made you feel proud to be from London. The event brought massive numbers of visitors to the Parks”.
Greenwich Park is home of the London Marathon. It also has a long association with horses, ever since Henry VIII introduced hunting for deer in the 16th century. In 2012 the Park hosted the ultimate test for horses in sport – the equestrian Olympic and Paralympic Games. Although there had been many negative comments about the choice of Greenwich as an Olympic venue, its spectacular success caused many doubters to alter their views.

The equestrian events (dressage, cross country and show jumping, both team and individual), and the modern pentathlon, were set against the spectacular backdrop of the historic Queen's House and the beautiful undulating landscape of the Park's natural escarpment, resulting in unrivalled photo opportunities. The artistically designed jumps blended perfectly with the Park’s own fine horticulture, seen at its best in the Flower Garden, where the brave decision to include it within the cross country course was amply repaid by the ‘wow’ factor so enjoyed by the 55,000 spectators.

Turfsoil’s association with Greenwich goes back 20 years, to the first year of ‘contracting out’. To witness an Olympic Games in London has been a unique experience, but to be as closely involved as we were as a Company in 2012 has been a privilege that none of us could have dreamt of when we were awarded that first contract.

By John Newton
Chairman, Turfsoil

VOX POPS

Mick ‘Tip’ Cheney – Turfsoil Contract Manager
“It proved a demanding time for our staff, to be so closely involved in preparing for, assisting at and clearing up after such a unique event. And we were always conscious that every move could be observed from the ‘bird’s eye’ TV camera strung on a long cable from the Isle of Dogs!”

Alan Young, Turfsoil Park Manager
“On the Cross-Country day I arrived at 5am and we did our final checks. The Park looked amazing and the atmosphere was electric. I would not have missed it for the world.”

Scott Stuart, Royal Parks Apprentice
“While the world soaked up moments of jubilation, celebration and triumph, few thought about the hard work that went into setting the stage and it was hard. But to watch Olympians reach their pinnacle, knowing that we had contributed in some way was reward enough.”

Michaela Hains, Turfsoil Assistant Park Manager
“The team worked wonders and to see the pictures of the fantastic looking Park beamed across the globe made me proud of the small contribution I had made. I frequently get asked ‘Would I do it again?’ My answer is ‘Yes. It was difficult at times, but to see the Park showcased in all its glory was magnificent, and an honour to be involved with.’

Dan Saul, Royal Parks Apprentice
“I think Greenwich Park was one of the best venues. I am looking forward to continuing the re-instatement work to get everything back to its original state, after what has been a very successful Olympics here at Greenwich Park.”
Behind the scenes in The Royal Parks

LONDON 2012 – OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC GAMES

How the Parks played their part:

Richmond Park & Bushy Park

At Richmond Park staff from Fountains helped create the five Olympic rings, with the help of the shire horses, on the flying field in Park – an amazing photo seen on TV and in newspapers. The rings covered an area 300m x 50m, and were cut into the long grass. They were visible from aeroplanes coming in to land at Heathrow Airport.

The men and women’s cycling also went through the park (twice in one day!) and staff were kept busy with road sweeping and litter clearance.

Bushy Park meanwhile hosted both the men and women’s cycling race, and staff assisted with general stewarding and clearance of litter. We also had the privilege of the viewing the men’s time trials through the park (and saw Bradley Wiggins fly past!).

On the day of the opening Olympic ceremony the Olympic torch was carried through Bushy Park on its way to Hampton Court where it was due to go down the Thames on the Royal Barge, Gloriana.

By Sally Ducker
Operations Manager, Fountains

Guild member Dave Ivison on being an Olympic volunteer:

We all heard of the Olympic “Games Makers” (see opposite page), and London Ambassadors, who provided sterling service during the Games. But there were also smaller groups of volunteers recruited by The Royal Parks who gave local help and information at the events within the parks. One such group was organised by the Friends of Bushy and Home Parks for the three cycle races that passed through Bushy Park on Saturday 28, Sunday 29 July and Wednesday 1 August.

More than 40 people volunteered for this never-to-be-repeated opportunity to be involved in the Olympic Games. My wife Claire and I were among them. Equipped with identity sash, maps and local information, each volunteer took it in turns to roam the route within Bushy Park, helping with questions from race timetables and local transport to where to get a cup of tea.

Bedecked with Olympic flags and banners, Chestnut Avenue was transformed for the period of the Games. Thousands of visitors enjoyed the spectacle of police outriders, camera crews, cyclists and support vehicles that sped through the park, even though it only lasted a few minutes. Many brought picnics, and there was a real party atmosphere whilst waiting for the event to pass through.

Seeing and hearing Elizabeth Armistead, Bradley Wiggins, Mark Cavendish and the rest of the Great Britain team speeding through the park and being cheered by the crowd was certainly something that will be a “once in a lifetime” memory for us!
Behind the scenes in The Royal Parks

LONDON 2012 – OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC GAMES

The Games Makers

Mary Duffy, Guild member and a former Events Manager at The Royal Parks, joined the ranks of those (it is said) who made the London 2012 Games really special

Ever since the announcement that the 2012 Olympics were going to be held in London, I knew I wanted to be involved. I was not going to let a significant event happen in my city without me! There was the additional factor, of course, that some of the Olympic events were to take place in The Royal Parks, where I spent a large part of my working life.

It was inevitable then, following the interview process and having been lucky enough to be chosen as a volunteer for the games, that I was offered a position in the Royal Parks Venues Games Maker team. I was mainly to be based in St James’s Park and the Mall, with away days to Box Hill for the cycling and to Greenwich Park for the Cross Country part of the three day eventing.

Greenwich Park for me was a highlight. On a previous visit there with the Royal Parks Guild, we had been shown the proposed site for the main arena so I thought I had some expectations of what it would look like. I was not prepared, however for such a transformation. It was so great that I had to admit to my colleagues, who had already been informed of my advance knowledge of the Park, that I was completely disoriented.

The main arena for the show jumping and dressage (below centre) was much larger than I expected, and it towered over the whole area leaving the Queen’s House colonnades a minor architectural attraction. However the biggest transformation was with the rest of the park land. What I knew as vast, open areas was now filled with spectacular jumps, including water, zip wires for remote cameras, temporary built infrastructures and, of course, people. I was completely lost.

At the first opportunity I took a map and walked the course so that I could orientate the Park as I knew it. Slowly the familiar sights returned and the Greenwich that I knew came back into my mind. The Park, now completely transformed into a cross country eventing course, looked truly magnificent. And on a sunny day the views from the top were spectacular.

My duties involved a lot of contact with the public, and they were full of praise not just for the Olympics but also for the Park. Could there possibly be this amount of open space in south east London?

My whole experience at the Olympics was indescribable. If the Olympic Stadium caught the headlines, it will be The Royal Parks however that bring people back to London. They showcased not only the best in sport but also the best places to relax and enjoy all that goes on around them. Finally after having been involved with numerous events in the Royal Parks in the past how nice it was to walk away, leaving the clearing up to somebody else.

Oh, I’m also proud that I managed to collect all the Royal Parks Olympic pin badges (bottom right)!
Behind the scenes in The Royal Parks

The restoration

Following the Diamond Jubilee celebrations it wasn’t long before The Royal Parks became the stage for 11 Olympic and Paralympic events. Some 2,000,000 people watched the events taking place in the parks (700,000 of these being ticket holders, and many others watching competitions such as the road races for free). Once the games were over and the infrastructure removed, so began the reinstatement of many hectares of parkland. This essential and skilful work is being carried out by the landscape maintenance contractors based in the parks, in association with The Royal Parks management team.

Lucy Attias, TRP Apprentice based at St James' Park: “The Jubilee was a great success. The downside was that as the gardeners we had to spend a long time re-digging the flowers beds in front of Buckingham Palace. But we managed to complete the summer bedding before the Olympics started.”

“What a fantastic year! 2012 was very special for everyone at The Royal Parks. The whole TRP team of staff, volunteers, concessions and contractors worked so hard to help deliver some amazing experiences for visitors to enjoy. The Diamond Jubilee celebrations in the parks were attended by over a million people and The Olympic and Paralympics games were a great opportunity for people who had been unable to buy tickets for the venues to experience the Games in the parks. The eyes of the world were on us in 2012 and I was proud of the quality show we put on. It really was a great team effort. I love my job!”

Colin Buttery, Deputy CEO, The Royal Parks

And a final message from Linda Lennon, CBE CEO, The Royal Parks:
“During London 2012, eleven Olympic and Paralympic events took place across six Royal Parks – each one looked great and gave us the unique opportunity to showcase our beautiful parks to the world. Now we look forward to Spring when the parks will be restored to their former glory.”

The Royal Parks Guild would like to thank all of the people who contributed articles, photographs and comments to this special Newsletter supplement.

The Guild would also like to thank, particularly, the four Landscape Maintenance Contractors (who between them maintain The Royal Parks to their continued high standard) for their generous financial support and help in the production of this supplement.

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