NEWSLETTER
Number 1 – Spring 2007

HELLO, AND A VERY WARM WELCOME

Yes, welcome to your first Newsletter in the first full year of the newly formed Royal Parks Guild, the 'RPG' as we have come to call it.

We are the founders and current Steering Group, and we want to get to know you all – and in many cases re-acquaint ourselves with you, too. For this reason we draw your attention to our first planned member event taking place on 2nd June (see back page).

Our chairman, Mike Fitt, shares some of his thoughts on the formation of the Guild overleaf. We hope that you'll enjoy reading through this first communication – and also that you'll be sufficiently inspired to contribute to future editions of the Newsletter.

Do contact us with your thoughts, views, ideas and suggestions; our contact details are in the panel at the bottom of the last page.

Mike Fitt, RPG Chair
Recently retired as Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Parks at the Royal Parks. He is involved with a wide range of green space organisations across London – being Vice Chair of The London Parks and Green Spaces Forum, a Director of London in Bloom and a Director of The London Parks and Gardens Trust. He is a keen horticulturist, currently designing a new garden for his home on the Isle of Wight.

Jennifer Adams, RPG Vice Chair

Bob Ivison, IT and Membership

Sidney Sullivan, IT and Membership

Graham Clarke, Communications

Terry Gough, Advisor

Paul Akers, Events

Barbara Fitt, Secretary

MESSAGE FROM MARK CAMLEY

I am delighted that the Royal Parks Guild is going from strength to strength. It is such a good idea that in some ways it is surprising that it wasn't invented before.

I see the real strength of the organisation as its membership. Everyone who has been involved in the initial stages of setting up the Guild is a parks' person, or linked to the parks, all with a genuine affinity for the parks.

Whether it is through enjoying fellowship with former colleagues, mentoring apprentices and park staff or taking forward specific projects (such as the archives), the real enthusiasm of the group is tremendous.

I look forward to the Guild playing an active role in the continued maintenance and enhancement of our parks.
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I have recently retired as Deputy Chief Executive of London's Royal Parks, and I know that I share a feeling with others who have been associated with the Parks for a long time. They get into your blood. Anyone who has worked in them usually ends up with a love of them, a desire to remain in touch, and a wish to see them protected and supported.

Therefore the newly formed Royal Parks Guild will be of interest to anyone who has been involved with the Parks – from staff, to apprentice, to consultant, to contractor, to volunteer and others. It aims to bring together people who have worked for, or who have been associated with, the Parks; as well as to support and promote the Parks in a manner that befits their horticultural status, unique heritage and cultural value.

Over the past 10, 20, 30 or more years there will have been many such people who left to go to different jobs or places, but who still have a close affinity with the Royal Parks, and a longing to know what is happening in them. We are now able to bring these people together – and at the same time support and promote the parks in ways that can’t otherwise be done.

One example of this is the Royal Parks Apprenticeship scheme. Several years ago the last Royal Park Apprentice passed through its ranks, and it has taken a long time to restart the scheme, but it is now happening (see page 4 of this Newsletter). The Royal Parks Guild will support and promote the apprenticeship scheme, and Guild members can actively share knowledge with the training officers and apprentices themselves.

The Royal Parks Guild, although run by dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers, operates fully with the blessing of the Royal Parks Agency, and we are in regular contact with the Royal Parks Foundation as well as Historic Royal Palaces. As a member of the Royal Parks Guild you will be able to share in the future of our fabulous Royal Parks, and meet up with some old colleagues at the same time. Our aim is a serious one – that of promoting horticultural excellence and friendship in the best tradition of the Royal Parks – but we aim to have a lot of fun doing it!

DEAR MEMBERS,

Mike Fitt

MY PROUDEST MOMENT...

FORMER GREENWICH PARK SUPERINTENDENT JIM BUTTRESS ADMITS ALL

"Winning a Gold Medal at Chelsea Flower Show is something you never forget. In the early 1990s under Bob Wadley, who was the Apprentice Master, we had won a couple of Golds, and then he left and I took on the challenge. All of the kids on the apprentice scheme created a fantastic cottage garden, using just annuals. And we won a Gold!

"The plants were all sown and grown at Eltham Palace, and I lost track of the times they were taken out of the greenhouses and then put back because the weather changed!

"We grew Godetia and Larkspur,

and the sorts of plants that aren't used to being told when to flower!

"The Gateshead Garden Festival was another proud moment for me. Every week for almost a year we drove a truck up north to create, maintain or top-up the Royal Parks garden we'd created. And blow me if we didn't win the top award for the best garden at the whole Festival. The RHS President, Lord Aberconway, and other notables had judged it.

"Both of these honours were as much achievements for the Apprentices as they were for me."

A message from HRH Princess Alexandra

"I am delighted to be able to give support to The Royal Parks Guild, which has been launched after what I understand has been a 10-year gestation and cultivation period.

The aim of The Royal Parks Guild is to harness the skills, expertise, enthusiasm and commitment of its members in a number of areas, including to promote and protect the unique heritage and cultural value as well as the horticultural excellence of The Royal Parks.

One of the objectives of The Royal Parks Guild is to support Education and Vocational Training, and the fact that six of the Officers of the Guild are former Apprentices speaks for itself."

H.R.H. Princess Alexandra, The Honourable Lady Ogilvy KG GCVO
ONE OF the aims of the Royal Parks Guild is to assist with archive recording, whether written, pictorial or oral. This is one of Mike Fitt's personal interests, and having had an association with the Royal Parks of more than 40 years, he has amassed an impressive private collection of photographs and memories.

Mike says: "I have managed to keep many photographs and records of the Parks and the people in them, and I know other staff and former staff have as well. We must not let these records disappear when we shuffle off, so I would ask any RPG members to sort through their photo albums and retrieve any pictures that show the parks, gardens and people in them, in years past. We will be happy to copy and return them!"

REGENT'S PARK, 1961

Our first archive picture (below) is of the Royal Parks Police taken in Regents Park in, we believe, 1961. The Park Superintendent at the time was S. Millar Gault (front row 4th from the left), and the Asst Superintendent was Henry (Owen) Clarke (front row 4th from the right).

Other people known in the picture are Insp. Len Friend (front row 3rd from the left), Sgt. Jock Gillis (front row 2nd from the left) and Sgt. John Martin (front row 3rd from the right). There are also park keepers 'Chalky' White (back row 3rd from the right) and Ed Baker (back row far right). The police dogs were 'Mick' and 'Flum', but we can't tell which was which!

But who are the others in the picture? Do you know? If so, drop us a line... and don't forget to look for old pictures you may have hidden away.
THE (NEW) APPRENTICESHIPS SCHEME

MANY MEMBERS of the RPG will have been at one time a Royal Parks Apprentice. The scheme was started in the mid-1960s and a huge number of people have passed through it, including six of the RPG committee. Some completed the course and stayed with the parks, whilst others found subsequent employment outside.

The RP Apprenticeship scheme was vitally important, and highly regarded, and many who completed it went on to senior posts across the world.

In 2003 the last apprentice completed the course, and the scheme was abandoned through lack of funding. This effectively lost a 40-year continuity.

But, we are all delighted to say, the scheme is coming back. The Royal Parks Apprenticeship Scheme aims to produce qualified apprentices, trained to a high standard. They will finish the 3-year scheme period with excellent knowledge in horticulture, landscaping, conservation and urban park management. Ten apprentices will be recruited annually with each apprenticeship. Apprentices will be spread across the eight Royal Parks and be employed by the existing landscape maintenance contractors. At any one time, there will be up to 30 apprentices training in the system all working towards NVQ 2 and NVQ 3 in Amenity Horticulture and the Royal Horticultural Society Certificate (Level 2).

The Apprenticeship Scheme is designed to deliver the wide range of skills and competences required by today's parks managers. It will cover a wide range of activities including fundraising, stakeholder management and complex contract and financial management in addition to horticultural management.

Colin Buttery, Director of Parks at The Royal Parks said: "The human aspect of the horticultural sector is easily overlooked. The Royal Parks is working to make people aware of horticulture as a career choice, as well as improving the skills of those already within the industry. Career changers will also be welcomed as we are looking for aptitude rather than formal qualifications as our baseline. Our apprenticeship scheme benefits from the enthusiastic support and industry expertise of our contracting partners Enterprise Plc, Fountains Plc, Turfsoil Ltd and Veolia Environmental Services."

Capel Manor College, Enfield is providing formal educational content by co-ordinating, administering and liaising with relevant partners and stakeholders.

The majority of the apprentices will be recruited from the 16-24 age range although older career changers will be considered according to their individual merits. A one-month probationary period will allow The Royal Parks to determine whether an apprentice has the necessary general skills and commitment to complete the scheme.

Students with particular interests will, in their second and third years be encouraged to take further qualifications in areas such as estate management in Richmond or Bushy Park, or sports turf management in Regent's Park. One unique feature of the Apprenticeship scheme is the inclusion of an Apprentice Co-ordinator funded by Capel Manor College who will mentor the students through their training and also help to promote the scheme at external exhibitions and events. The Apprentice Co-ordinator will also encourage take-up by recruits from under-represented groups and communities.

Apprentices completing their training will be awarded a special certificate by The Royal Parks to complement their nationally accredited qualifications.

YOU CAN HELP, TOO

THE ROYAL PARKS GUILD aims to play a role in the future of the Apprenticeship Scheme by mentoring apprentices, providing encouragement, and even holding workshops and skills sessions where our experience and expertise can be used to assist the Apprentices during their 3-year term.

We would like you to get in touch if you have a particular skill or speciality that would help one of the modern apprentices.

If you would like to assist, contact us at:

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