WELCOME ...

...yes, welcome to our second Newsletter. We have had an extremely successful – and gratifying – start to the Royal Parks Guild. In the first six months since launching the RPG we have enrolled more than 160 members; we organised one highly successful event in Hyde Park and participated in further events at Regents Park and the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show. Also there will be two further great events planned for this autumn and early winter.

We have a historical theme in mind for our visit to Bushy Park in October, which ranges from Henry VIII to World War II. The day will also include our first AGM. This will be followed by a Christmas “special” in December.

We hope you will enjoy this second Newsletter. As always, we want to hear from you, as your thoughts, views, ideas and suggestions are important to us. The RPG is your Guild, so do get in touch. Contact details are at the bottom of the last page.

But first, we have two important items of news...

OUR FIRST HONORARY MEMBER

Mrs Jean Cooke has been invited to be the first Honorary Member of the Royal Parks Guild which, we are delighted to say, she has accepted. Jean is the wife of the late George Cooke (right), the first Apprentice Master for the Royal Parks (the scheme was instigated in the 1960s). He later became Superintendent at Hampton Court.

Apart from founding the Apprenticeship scheme, George, as Apprentice Master, was responsible for setting the high standards that others were to follow and guided many young people in the first years of their horticultural careers.

Jean now lives in Somerset and, like us all, has a fondness of the Royal Parks. We wish her well, and hope that she will be able to attend one of our forthcoming events.

POSTSCRIPT: It is the intention of the RPG to launch the George Cooke Award, named in his honour. Its aim will be to assist and encourage one or more current-day Royal Parks apprentices; details of this will be announced in due course. If you would like to make a donation to this Award fund, please get in touch (RPG contact details appear on the last page of this Newsletter).

OUR FOUNDING PATRON

Alan Titchmarsh (below) is best known as a TV presenter, author and celebrity. With best selling books, and major BBC documentaries to his credit, his is a household name not just in the UK but throughout the world where his programmes appear and where his books are published.

However, as his celebrity status grows, and his media work diversifies (he is soon to launch a daytime chatshow on ITV), his skills as a highly qualified horticulturist, who started life as an apprentice with Ilkley Parks Department in Yorkshire, will become less talked about. Yet Alan is very proud of his early life in the parks department, and he holds the whole ethos of apprenticeship schemes dear to his heart.

He is a great supporter of the Royal Parks and will be following with interest the progress of the re-launched Apprenticeship Scheme, and also that of the Royal Parks Guild.

We would like to thank Alan for agreeing to be our Founding Patron and, as with Jean Cooke above, hope that we will see him in the future at some of our events.
The first ROYAL PARKS GUILD event

Date: Saturday 2nd June, 2007  
Venue: Rangers Lodge, Hyde Park  
Attendance: RPG members, plus guests

On a scorching day (yes, we did get one this year!) more than 70 RPG members and their guests gathered in the grounds of Rangers Lodge, Hyde Park, to be welcomed by the RPG steering committee. Afterwards chairman Mike Fitt said: "It was great to have such an event, on such a good day weather-wise, and in such a place. Rangers Lodge was, of course, the home of the Bailiff of the Royal Parks, and is now Hyde Park's headquarters."

Our special guest on the day was Royal Parks Chief Executive Mark Camley, who said: "There may be a number of former apprentices here, but I am still an apprentice myself, having only been with the parks for two years!"

He added: "The Guild is a marvellous initiative, and it is testament to the love people have of the parks that so many have turned out at this, the inaugural event."

Members and guests took a tour around the 1.2ha, glass-covered Central Parks Nursery in the middle of Hyde Park, and marvelled at both quantity and quality of the plants nurtured there. We are indebted to Mike Jones of RA Meredith for taking us behind the scenes for such a fascinating visit.

There was also a trip on the Serpentine onboard the £240,000 solar-powered Bluebird Solarshuttle – the UK's first solar-powered vessel, which glides silently across the lake, powered only by sunlight. Thank you to Peter Scott and his team for laying this on for us. And thanks to Bluebird also for the loan of deckchairs and the most appreciated Land Train.

Our thanks for the day also go to Capergreen, the park caterers, especially Ian Stephenson for the fabulous food; to Daniel Hearsom of Pembroke Lodge, Richmond, for the wonderful wine; to Richard Briggs of the Hyde Park Appeal for the loan of a Liberty Drives Buggy (and to the driver); to Sara Lom and her team from the Royal Parks Foundation for the loan and erection of the marquee, and to the Royal Parks Agency for allowing us to use Rangers Lodge. And thank you to Steve Edwards and Bob Worthylake for all your help.
QUEEN MARY’S GARDENS
75th anniversary

Date: Tuesday 19th June, 2007
Venue: Queen Mary’s Rose Garden, Regent’s Park
Attendance: Royal Parks Chief Executive Mark Camley invited guests who have had an association with Queen Mary’s Gardens over the years, along with a number of specially invited dignitaries and guests, including RPG members.

To celebrate this special anniversary the Royal Parks Agency held an informal evening reception, hosted by Mark Camley (left). He said: “These Gardens have a long and varied history. The park would not be the fabulous place it is today were it not for the enthusiasm and vision of its custodians over the years. They believed, as I do, that parks are not static spaces, but living places that need to adapt, change and grow. And these gardens have grown into some of the most beautiful, and well respected gardens anywhere.”

ABOVE The ornate fountain ‘Triton and Dryad’ was built in memory of Sigismund Goetze, a local artist who lent his hand to much of the redevelopment of the Gardens during the 1930s. He died in 1939, and the fountain was donated and unveiled by his wife, in 1950.

LEFT Guests were treated to drinks and nibbles in a specially erected marquee.

LEFT BELOW The rose garden was at its best in June, but the area within the Inner Circle ring road hasn’t always been a haven for roses. In the early 1800s it was used as a plant nursery, and in 1840 it was leased to the Royal Botanic Society. Today’s gardens owe much of the landscaping and original planting to the RBS, which remained the leaseholder until 1931. The grounds were taken over by HM Office of Works, who had to manage the then overgrown gardens. The first Superintendent was Duncan Campbell and it was he who brought in the rose beds, with plants supplied by the British Rose Growers Association.

UPDATE: THE ROYAL PARKS APPRENTICE PROGRAMME

By Rob Dowling, Assistant Park Manager, Hyde Park

We have now recruited the 10 apprentices for the 2007 intake of the re-launched Royal Parks Apprentice Programme. We received over 40 applications from a varied range of ages and backgrounds.

The recruitment process was a three-way effort, between representatives from the Landscape Maintenance Contractors, Capel Manor College and The Royal Parks. Interviews were held at Capel Manor’s College in Regent’s Park, where the apprentices will spend their day release sessions. It has excellent teaching facilities including a well-stocked library, PC terminals, classrooms and full access to the facilities of Regent’s Park.

The course inductions start on 13th September, by which time the apprentices will have already started working in the parks. In the first year, the apprentices will work towards NVQII and the RHS Certificate. The first year will be very intensive and all of the apprentices have been told that in year one they can expect to “live and breathe horticulture”!

We are now eagerly waiting for the start of the scheme, and seeing the results of all the hard work that has been undertaken to bring back a new and revitalised Royal Parks Apprentice Programme.
FROM THE ARCHIVES

ONE OF the aims of the Royal Parks Guild is to assist with written archive recording, be it written, pictorial or oral. Do you have any old photographs of the Royal Parks – and of the people who worked in them? If so, we would like to borrow them for the Archive – and for possible inclusion in future Newsletters. We will scan and return all photographs loaned to us. Please contact us at the address at the end of this Newsletter.

HAMPTON COURT, 1951

LEFT: The Great Vine at Hampton Court is more than 230 years old and 36.5 meters (120 feet) long. It is believed to have been planted by Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown around 1768, during his time as Surveyor to George III's Gardens and Waters. The vine is the oldest plant in the palace gardens, having come from a small cutting at Valentine’s Park in Essex (which no longer exists).

This 1951 picture shows suited foreman Owen Clarke weighing a bunch of grapes, assisted by vine keeper Bill Tizzard.

WILDLIFE GARDEN IN A SKIP!

EYEBROWS WERE raised at this year’s Hampton Court Palace Flower Show when visitors saw a ‘Wildlife Garden in a Skip’! This was a joint project between the London Wildlife Trust (LWT) and The Royal Parks (TRP), with the Royal Parks Guild, Bluebird Ecological and other sponsors, and was designed by TRP Landscape Architect Ruth Holmes in conjunction with Moya O’Hara of LWT.

RPG chairman Mike Fitt was one of the horticultural brains behind the garden. He says: “The idea was to create a sustainable garden, using plants with a low water requirement. All the materials used were recycled, re-used or donated, including some of the plants which had previously been on display at the Chelsea Flower Show.”

The focal point of the garden was a solar-powered water feature made from a bath, shower and sink, showing the importance of the water cycle. “It also demonstrated how renewable energy can be harnessed, making a garden or green space more environmentally friendly,” said Mike. “The whole project was extremely worthwhile – we were awarded a Bronze Medal from the RHS, and it also helped to draw attention to the Royal Parks Guild!”

ABOVE LEFT Leaflets were handed out to show visitors

ABOVE RIGHT Despite rainy weather at the show, the garden was seen by thousands

LEFT The sponsored skip, with a log-edged plant area using recycled plants and artefacts collected from the TRP waste dump in Bushy Park

RIGHT RHS President Peter Buckley looks on as RPG chairman Mike Fitt shows HRH Princess Alexandra the ‘Wildlife Garden in a Skip’