**WELCOME ...**

...yes, welcome to our third Newsletter.

The first full year of the Royal Parks Guild has passed and on 6th October we held our first Annual General Meeting. The 'official' business of the day was confined to a short meeting explaining how and why the Guild was set up with various committee members speaking about their roles and progress to date (see over). Following this the Park Manager, the irrepressible Ray Brodie, gave us an entertaining talk on the history and character of 'his' park! Lunch came next and it was then off 'on safari' for the final part of the day, to see the park for real. It was during the visit to the site of the long gone World War II USAAF base (headquarters to General Eisenhower prior to the D-day Landings) that one of our members, Bryan Alderson, a former RPC officer, astounded us by saying he had been the officer handed the keys of the base by the Americans when they left in the early 1960's. A truly memorable event.

I would like to thank all those who came along. The weather was kind – and so were the many people who helped and gave up their free time on the day. If, like Bryan, you have memories of the Royal Parks in the past or thoughts about the Guild itself do get in touch with me, All ideas and suggestions are very welcome including your views on the newsletter.

---

**TWO NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The Guild's official business (meetings, events, presentations, publications, and of course our increasing contact with apprentices) has increased immeasurably over the first full year of life. As a consequence of this it recently became apparent that the small founding Committee of eight people - all volunteers of course - would be unable to devote as much time as they would like to the work at hand. So we have enlisted the help of two more members, and have welcomed them to the Committee. They are:

Right: **DAVID IVISON**
Former Royal Parks (TRP) apprentice in the Central Parks from 1969-73; now an Environmental Steward for the M25, co-ordinating ecological, arboricultural and landscape works for Mouchel Parkman; brother of Committee member Bob Ivison.

Left: **BARRY HAYNES**
TRP apprentice from 1968-71, in Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. He worked for the parks in various posts, leaving in 1977 to become foreman at Westminster City Council. He is currently Parks Manager there with responsibility for the Northern Area of the city.

---

**Forthcoming events**

It has been very encouraging to have received so many positive comments from members who attended the social events organised during 2007, and the question is how to follow this for 2008?

So... it is with great pleasure that we announce the date for the Guild's Spring event, which will be held in Richmond Park on **Saturday 3rd May**.

The day will begin with a visit to Holly Lodge, the park HQ, to meet the Shire horses and a very stern school ma'am who runs the Victorian Classroom there! This will be followed by lunch at Pembroke Lodge, former home of Bertrand Russell and base for the mysterious Phantom Unit during WWII. In the afternoon we take a tour of the famous Isabella Plantation (pictured below) where we can enjoy the beautiful rhododendron and azalea floral display!

*Other events being planned include a mid-summer tour of the American Ambassador's garden in Regent's Park, and then, in September, an exciting event linked to the 'Last Night of the Proms' held in Hyde Park. More details to come.*
Date: 6 October, 2007  Venue: Hampton Wick Cricket Club, Bushy Park
Attendance: Guild Committee and 75 members and guests

Introduction: Chairman Mike Fitt opened the Meeting and welcomed everyone. A special greeting was made to our Honorary Member, Jean Cooke (pictured left), who travelled far to be there. Mike spoke about the broad spectrum of membership, from ex-apprentices and ex-staff to those involved closely with the parks, contractors and concessionaires and many more. Now membership would shortly include current Royal Parks staff who wish to join.

He said: “There will almost certainly be a surge of interest from people who are currently involved in running the Royal Parks, and this will give a new dimension to the Guild’s membership base. However, it will not alter our stated objectives – to organise membership activities, foster friendship and to underpin the excellent work of TRP and to help drive the Apprenticeship Scheme.” It will take around two years to set up the constitution whereby Guild members will be able to vote, and the Committee is working on this. It needs to first get a robust and democratic system of management in place. It will want to consult on this issue.

Finance: The Guild’s Vice Chair Jennifer Adams introduced herself and said she was the committee member responsible for Finance. She explained that a Co-op Community+ account had been opened, and each Committee member had contributed £50 to this account. The general account was standing at £1500 but this needs to be built up. A promise of a £15k donation had been made, and this would be ring-fenced for the initiatives such as awards and bursaries, including those made to apprentices.

A Business Plan would be developed to show where we are going and what needs doing, especially the need to raise necessary funds for projects in mind. It is important that we make events self-financing and membership subscription covers running costs, such as newsletters, postage, stationery, etc.

Committee structure: Committee member Sid Sullivan said that the Committee’s aim was to keep business as simple as possible. The setting up of separate sub-committees in order to spread the workload and focus on specific areas was in progress – an Editorial Group will look at publicity and the Guild’s website; a Bursaries and Awards Group will administer such matters; and a Horticulture Group will work with apprentices to give them coaching and support where necessary.

Links with outside organisations: Bob Ivison said that links were being developed with the All-Party Parliamentary Horticultural and Gardening Group, the Kew Guild and the RHS Gardens Club, amongst others. We will look at the possibility of joint events, with key elements being greenskills/ education/apprenticeships and so on.

Communications: Finally, Graham Clarke (Editor of the newsletter) said it was important to receive news, views and photos for inclusion in future newsletters. A third newsletter was in production, and in 2008 it was hoped that each newsletter would run to 6-8 pages. It was also, he said, important to have the Editorial Group up and running. Graham may be contacted through the Guild’s internet links.

And thanks go to...
The Guild Committee would like to record its thanks to those who gave up their time to make the AGM – and the day itself – such a success. These include TRP staff Ray Brodie, Nigel Reeve, Mark Bridger and Sophia Bryant; plus Ernie Colchie (for sponsoring the wine/beer and soft drinks), the Cricket Club (for use of the facility and food); Gill and John Hinson for providing the vintage bus (pictured above); Ian Allen of Fountains (for providing the minibuses) and to Tony and Shaun for driving them; Richard Briggs of the Liberty Drive Buggies (and to the driver), and to Simon Richards for arranging transport of the Liberty Buggies from Hyde Park.
FROM THE ARCHIVES

RIGHT : This picture was taken in Green Park at one of the many tree plantings arranged by Neville Labovitch (second left, with Jennifer Adams, and two recipients of a tree planting certificate). Neville, who died in 2002, formed the Prince of Wales Royal Parks Tree Appeal. This was Prince Charles' idea - he became Patron to the scheme, the aims of which were to help put right some of the damage following the terrible storm of 1987.

Neville also raised a great deal of money for various Royal Parks projects over the years.

He lived in Knightsbridge and arranged various events with Royal connections. He was heavily involved with the Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1977, and in particular the Jubilee walkway. In 1979 he organised the greatest children's party ever, for the International Year of the Child.

WHAT A WALK ON THE BEACH MEANT FOR DENNIS SMITH

A WALK on the beach at Dunwich, Suffolk with his dog Daisy lead RPG member Dennis Smith to make a fascinating discovery among the flotsam and jetsam - the leg bone of a giant mammoth. He says: “Daisy was very interested in something sticking out of the sand and when I saw what it was I knew it was worth investigating, I soon realised that it must be a bone of a very large animal.”

The bone had been sticking out of the beach just below the high water mark. “It is very heavy, because the bone has been mineralised with iron oxide,” Dennis said. “Now that it is all dry and the sand has been cleaned off I think it definitely looks like the top half of a very large leg bone.”

After making the discovery in September, Dennis contacted a retired geology curator at Ipswich Museum, who examined the fossil and said it appeared to be the middle part of a leg bone of a fossil elephant, probably a Southern Elephant. He also said the bone was around 2million years old. The Southern Elephant or mammoth was very common in Europe during this period and they were known to have lived along the Suffolk Coastal area.

MY MEMORIES...
FORMER HEAD GARDENER AT HAM HOUSE HARRY MARTIN ADMITS ALL

“I can’t believe it but I’ve just turned 80.
I’ve been retired 20 years, and I was at Ham House for just short of 40 years.
That means my memory of the place goes back as much as 60 years, and a lot changed in that time!

“For many of those years my wife and I lived in a flat in Pembroke Lodge, Richmond. Then, in 1971, a tree fell on it and we had to move out. It prompted us to buy a house for the first time, and we found one in Twickenham. It cost £4000 and I remember how it was a real struggle for us at the time - I hate to think what it’s worth now!

“Because I was at Ham for so long I knew every inch of the house and garden. The long herbaceous border with its central steps was my favourite part of the garden, and the rose garden was a delight!

“I saw a lot of ‘guvners’ come and go, including Major Hepburn, Tom Barber, Bob Legge, ‘Bunny’ Hare and Ashley Stephenson (who both became Bailiffs) and Jim Buttress.”

“They often let me out, and a few times I helped plant up the beds at Buckingham Palace, and spent time at the Central Parks Nursery.”
The ROYAL PARKS GUILD meets the ROYAL PARKS APPRENTICES

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Arthur New, Mike Fitt, Joseph James, Bob Ivison, Zoe Basham, Thomas Clark, Marlon O’Connor, Steve Garvey, Daniel Stafford, Rosemary Gray, Sid Sullivan, Peter Rattenbury-Neate, Steve Pontner, Philip White, Christopher Johnson, Richard Griggs, Thomas Hampton, Michaela Haines, Sharon Evans, Chris Coupling, Alison McAtamney.

Members of the RPG committee have officially met up with the new Royal Parks Apprentice intake.

Committee member and amenity consultant Sid Sullivan said: “It is so good to see horticultural training and education re-introduced to TRP. The new Apprenticeship scheme, in partnership with the grounds maintenance contractors Fountains, Enterprise, Veolia and Turfsoil, re-started in September after several years’ absence.

“The Royal Parks Guild aims to assist the scheme by supporting the apprentices, and providing back up to the scheme’s administrators, Capel Manor College, as well as TRP itself,” he added.

Sid Sullivan, with the Guild’s chairman Mike Fitt and committee member and consultant Bob Ivison, all former Royal Parks apprentices, met the new apprentices at the Capel Manor training centre in Regents Park.

Mike Fitt said: “We had an opportunity to tell the apprentices about the work of the Guild and particularly our plans to provide coaching and other kinds of support for them.”

Each apprentice was presented with free membership to the Guild, and a professional budding knife (donated by nursery contractor R.A. Meredith) which will hopefully, said Mike “stay with them throughout their professional careers, even long after they’ve left the Royal Parks. I still have a knife given to me on my first day at work back in the 1960s. Some of our members may recall commencing as an apprentice themselves and being given a budding knife as part of the essential equipment of a ‘budding’ horticulturist. We feel it is appropriate to continue that tradition.”

The Royal Parks plan to have two further annual intakes to the scheme making for a total of 30 apprentices at any one time.

VINTAGE BUS TOUR OF LONDON

On the afternoon of Saturday 15 December, some 50 Guild members gathered in Hyde Park for a vintage-bus tour of London, and to see the Christmas lights and spectacles. The weather was cold, but not wet, so fortunately we could see through condensation-free windows!

The route was ideal, criss-crossing all the bridges up to Tower Bridge, so we had the most spectacular Thames views, as well as those of the impressive flood-lit buildings. We were plied with delicious food and, ever mindful of Health & Safety, were served scalding hot mulled wine. As vintage buses do not boast heaters this was especially welcome. We could move around the bus, chatting to our friends and make it a really social occasion.

Gill Hinson, one of the co-owners of the bus, drove us so majestically, as would have befitted a Royal chauffeur. The question on all our lips is: when can we have another visit like this? Perhaps in warmer weather so we can stretch our legs in a Royal Park?

- Visit www.theroyalparksguild.org to see a video of the day, complete with seasonal music!
From *keeping* birds to *making* birds

Former Regent’s Park birdkeeper Guy Taplin now makes birds out of wood and sells them to the stars. In October, to coincide with the launch of a new book on him and his work, the *Daily Telegraph* interviewed him. The following is an extract:

"You get a bit of wood," Guy Taplin says, "and you chop off anything that doesn't look like a duck. It's a piece of cake really, dead easy. A lot of it I find very boring."

His birds now sell for anything between £3,000 and £20,000. They're in Tate Britain and the Royal Collection. Jacqueline Onassis bought them. Michael Palin and Jon Snow buy them; so do Guinesses and Sainsburys. The birds are beautiful: graceful and lovely to the eye. It makes you want to touch them, something you couldn't do if they were alive.

Guy, 68, lives with his wife Robina and two children in Wivenhoe, Essex.

He’s an East Ender, born at the outbreak of war within the sound of Bow Bells. In the ‘60s, he started making beautiful belts sold by Mr Fish and worn by famous people. "We were Mods and we had motorbikes which made us nasty. We would go up to Wardour Street on Saturday nights and get paralysed on purple hearts."

But he gave it all up, turned to the practice of Zen, and became head bird keeper in Regent's Park. He married Robina, who worked in the greenhouses, and began to carve birds. In 1978 the Portal Gallery in London held a small exhibition. When it closed, Taplin went to collect what was left – but every sculpture had been sold. If you saw his workshop, you’d never guess what he makes in it. It's at the top of a rickety set of wooden steps, tiny, inches thick in dust.

The filthy windows, which overlook the railway line from Wivenhoe to Liverpool Street – not that you can see out of them – are festooned in ancient fairy lights strung with grubby Barbie dolls. There’s an old cake tin full of broken fake Rolex watches, some rusty lids of tomato tins, a very dead pike, some plumbweights from a 15th-century Portuguese trader sunk off the Cape Verde islands, a bullet from the American Civil War, three nude plastic ladies with very dirty hair covered in cobwebs... "I like their company," he says.

And, piled up to the ceiling, are the hunks of driftwood he collects from the Essex coast and all over the world – leaving barely room for two of us to stand up. He buys plastic beads for the birds' eyes but he has never bought a piece of wood in his life and he never throws anything away.

"I like remnants, echoes of a life lived intensely, of the man who ran this old bit of Spanish fishing boat into port. I want to make something wonderful from the residue of a life lived, of what people have used. These objects have power and birds are transformed into what we're talking about."

"What a load of old tripe!" he laughs, and then thinks better of it. "It's the turning-dross-into-gold department."

*Bird on a Wire* by Ian Collins, about Guy Taplin and his work, is published by Studio Publications for £29.95. Taplin's work may be commissioned through Messums, London W1. Visit www.messums.com

Guy Taplin spoke to Maureen Cleave. This extract is taken from the *Daily Telegraph*, 20 Oct, 2007.

---

**BRING YOUR MEMORABILIA:**
If you are attending any of our Guild events please bring with you photos or other items of interest from your days with The Royal Parks. Other people will be interested to look at them – and we may, with your approval, wish to copy them for The Royal Parks archive.

**CONTACTING THE GUILD:**

**BY POST:** The Royal Parks Guild, Rangers Lodge, Hyde Park, London W2 2UH

**TELEPHONE:** 07973 402810

**EMAIL:** info@theroyalparksguild.org

---

*Please do not distribute this document.*