WELCOME...

...it is with great pleasure that I introduce our fifth newsletter and say a hello to you all, especially to recently joined members. In case you are wondering who your fellow Guild Members are, a full membership list is included on the back page. If you discover a former colleague or long lost friend listed there and wish to contact them do let me know and I will put you in touch. My contact details are on the back page also.

Many of the members listed were present at our first event of the season – a splendid day touring Richmond Park in the company of its enthusiastic and dedicated parks staff, plus one very stern school marm, called Mrs. Sawyer, miraculously transported from the 1880s, and insistent that we all learnt our ‘3 R’s’!

This was followed up with a visit to the home of the American Ambassador in Regents Park and, thanks to its Head Gardener, Guild Member Stephen Crisp, for an hour or two we were all able to sample the good life. As one member pointed out “the ornate antique chair they sat in was probably worth more than the new house they had just bought”!

Finally, a thank you to those members who took on the role of “expert gardener” at The Royal Parks Dig for Victory event in St. James’s Park, on June 22nd, advising members of the public on the best way to supplement their wartime rations, including a very tasty recipe for carrot cake!

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, and I look forward to meeting many of you at our Last Night of the Proms social event in Hyde Park on Saturday, 13th September.

Mike Fitt

PEOPLE...

Hearty congratulations to RPG Treasurer, former Royal Parks’ acting Bailiff and latterly City of London Director of Open Spaces, Jennifer Adams (below left) who was awarded an OBE in The Queen’s Birthday Honours. Similarly, RPG Committee advisor Terry Gough (below right), Head of Gardens and Estates for Historic Royal Palaces, based at Hampton Court, was awarded the MVO.

GOOD NEWS...

Historic London views will be protected again (as reported in the Evening Standard, 22 May). Boris Johnson has pledged to restore the protection to London's historic views which were previously slashed, it is claimed, by his predecessor Ken Livingstone.

Tony Arbour, planning spokesman for London Assembly Conservatives said: "We are delighted that Boris will now ensure the views are preserved for future generations."

Mr Arbour, who represents the Richmond ward, has been especially concerned about the view of St. Paul’s Cathedral from King Henry's Mound in Richmond Park.
Early May saw more than 60 Guild members and their guests visit Richmond Park for the first of this year’s RPG events. In a mixed, long and fairly cold spring, the sun shone for us on that day, making it warm, dry and welcoming.

The highlight of the day was undoubtedly the afternoon visit to the Isabella Plantation. It was here that the Assistant Manager responsible for the Plantation, Jo Scrivener, explained how the area came about, what changes have been made in recent years, and what the short and long-term plans are. It was certainly looking its best, and the few staff that are assigned to the Plantation deserve our congratulations on maintaining such a stunning area of high quality horticulture.

Earlier in the day, Richmond Park’s manager since 1997 (and Guild member) Simon Richards spoke a little about the history of the Park, as well as the current environmental issues affecting the Park and its immediate vicinity. We took a brief tour into the Park and saw ancient oaks, and many of the trees which fell in the storms of the late 80’s and early 90s, and which are left in place as habitats for wildlife (despite calls from some visitors for the Park to be “tidied up”; apparently it is “disgraceful”, the way in which the trees have “just been left there”!)

Also in the morning Assistant Manager, Adam Curtis, took some members to see the Park’s shire horses, whilst Holly Lodge project manager Pat Ealey, dressed in Victorian clothing, played the part of Mrs Sawyer (wife of one of the Park’s first Superintendents, during the 1800s), and explained how schooling took place in those days, and how the Centre today helps disadvantaged and disabled people, and even teaches them a little about gardening.

A wonderful lunch was provided by Guild member Daniel Hearsom of Pembroke Lodge, to whom we offer our thanks. Our gratitude must also go to all the Park staff and volunteers who helped to make this day very special.
Greenwich Park:
Plant sale & beds

IT WAS a wild, damp and blustery day in Greenwich Park on Saturday 21 June – but this did not deter a large number of visitors to Park Manager Derrick Spurr’s annual surplus plant sale in the Park, writes Jeff Lawson.

Enthusiastic buyers vied with each other for the bargains (including yours truly!) and it was amusing to see a steady stream of happy customers carrying their spoils back to their cars in Maze Hill. This very popular annual event, while essentially an income-generating initiative, encapsulates a real sense of community spirit.

With plants in mind (and despite the weather) I couldn’t resist visiting the flower garden. The newly-planted summer bedding looked stunning. Still on a ‘community’ theme, I was quite taken by the inclusion of four beds designed by children from local schools. Children as young as three and four years of age (from Pound Green School and Early Years Centre) designed and planted – with a little help from mums and dads, carers and teachers – an interesting flower bed, while the children from St Mary Magdalen’s C of E Primary School based their design on ‘The Creation Story’, or the six days it took God to create the world. Their bed was divided into six parts in ‘pie-crust’ formation and planted-up with a variety of summer bedding to represent People, Land, Sea, Sky, Weather and Animals.

However the contribution that really took my eye was Thorntree School’s superb effort. They created their school logo in flowers, using yellow begonia, Alyssum ‘Snowdrift’, ‘Ivory’ Junior petunia, and Begonia ‘Red Devil’. It was totally eye-catching.

This is the third year in which local schools have been invited to contribute to the Park’s flower garden bedding schemes and credit must go to Stuart Goldsworthy for the initial idea. Great stuff!

Plaque to John Lewis unveiled

This year marks the 250th anniversary of Richmond brewer John Lewis’ success in re-establishing the right of public access to Richmond Park (see below). A court ruling found in his favour on April 3, 1758, and the laddersstile gate at Sheen was opened to the public on May 16 of that year. In commemoration of the success, in May of this year the Friends of Richmond Park, supported by The Royal Parks, marked the event at Sheen Gate, when Susan Kramer, MP for Richmond Park, unveiled a plaque to John Lewis.

Pedestrian access to the Park had been permitted from the time of its enclosure by Charles I in 1637, but during the period of the Rangership of Robert Walpole (son of the Prime Minister of the same name) in the 1730s and 40s significant restrictions were imposed. The next Ranger, Princess Amelia, daughter of George II, then closed the Park in 1751 to all but those whom she had favoured with a ticket.

The failure of a legal challenge made by others in 1754 led Lewis to stage an incident in 1755 in which he was physically denied access on foot through Sheen Gate. It was the successful prosecution by Lewis of the gatekeeper, Martha Gray, for obstructing the Highway which produced a definitive ruling by the court on the existence of the public’s rights, and led to the paths being re-opened after an interruption of some 20 years. John Lewis’ landmark victory has, until now, not been the subject of any memorial within the Park.

Richmond’s superintendents

A name board hanging in the office of Simon Richards, the current Manager of Richmond Park, offers the names, and dates, of all the previous managers (or Superintendents as they were known, until the current structure came into force in 1993). Note that there are three generations of Sawyers holding the post between 1795 and 1904. Quite a run!
FROM THE ARCHIVES

AMATEUR GARDENING issue 26 Jan, 1980

GARDENER AT THE TOP

Britain's Royal Parks and gardens have a new bailiff in the form of Mr Ashley Stephenson, a Geordie who has been with the Royal Parks in London for 25 years. Since 1972, Mr Stephenson has been the Superintendent of the Central Royal Parks. This grand umbrella-title covers such prestigious areas as Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, St James' Park, Green Park, the gardens within the walls of Buckingham Palace and even the private garden at 10 Downing Street.

Mr Stephenson's new domain will now include the other Royal Parks of London — have to move house — 100 yards down the road to an even larger lodge. This, traditionally, is the home of the bailiff and is not so much a lodge — more like a 14 room mansion.

Mr Stephenson started his working life in the parks department in Newcastle, his home town. After National Service he studied at the R.I.S. garden at Wisley for two years and came away with the diploma. He then joined the Royal Parks and began working his way to the top.

He is now there, but does he have any major plans?

Mr Ashley Stephenson, who has recently been made bailiff of Britain's Royal Parks and Gardens, after 25 years with the Royal Parks in London

Richmond, Greenwich, Regents and Hampton Court in Surrey. He will also be responsible for the upkeep of the many hundreds of acres at Osborne House, near Cowes on the Isle of Wight, the country home of Queen Victoria.

To illustrate the extent of his responsibility, he will also be in charge of the gardens outside London's Tate Gallery, the Law Courts, the Tower of London, Audley End in Essex, and Osterley Park, Middlesex.

For the last eight years Mr Stephenson, who has often written in Amateur Gardening, has lived in a large Victorian three-storey house in the centre of Hyde Park. However, his new appointment means that he will really, for he assures us that the Royal Parks have taken centuries to build up to their current state — attracting millions of British and foreign tourists each year — and he does not want to see this successful structure changed. And so say all of us!

Annette 'Netty' Harwood

We are sad to announce that Netty (nee Kressinger), one of our valued members, died on 15th July after battling multiple sclerosis for a number of years. She was 40. 'Netty' joined the RPC, as a WPC, in 1969, first working in St. James's, and then Richmond Pk where she met her future husband Bradley ('Harry'). For a while Netty lived in Richmond Gate Lodge, before retiring on medical grounds in 1982. She and Harry moved to Devon, her home county, and there she lived the 'good life', rearing chickens, pigs, dogs and a cat. The sympathies from all at the Guild go to Harry and Netty's family. She will be sadly missed.

New homes for wildlife in The Regent's Park

HABITAT creation and improvement works are underway in Regent's Park, to enhance biodiversity and enable The Royal Parks to Meet Biodiversity Action Plan objectives.

In addition to woodland management works and hedge planting, a new reedbed is being created on the northern margin of the lake from Clarence Bridge to York Bridge Road. Reedbeds are a local and national priority habitat with benefits including nest-sites and food, absorption of pollutants, additional habitat for birds and invertebrates, and improved water quality and visual amenity.

Work to extend the existing wetland area to encourage naturally functioning and diverse habitats for wetland species has also taken place. It is hoped the area will become a refuge for many wildlife species including amphibia and waterfowl, as well as dragonflies and damselflies.

The new 'kingfisher banks' will encourage visiting kingfishers to stay and breed, whilst a mowing regime to encourage meadow and wildflower species to flourish in grassland areas is also planned.

MEMBER OFFER:
Royal Parks Guild members can take advantage of this special offer from Sir Michael Tims

Guild member Sir Michael writes:

"With Bushy Park a few feet from my doorstep, what possible excuse had I not to attempt the capture of some of its beauty on paper? First, a rather stag beetle discovered in some rotting pine log just had to be recorded; then a magnificent leaf (fully 25cm long) from an American oak; and, dare I even attempt to draw Bushy’s own 'Monarch of the Glen', a 12-pointer, grazing within yards of me?

‘I have this passion for painting, allied to an obsession with angling, (I had previously indulged in the painting of river scenes)... perhaps this is why the resulting painting seems to be so very cramped. I simply ran out of space!"

‘But what is depicted is a mere fraction of what is on offer in this magical park. I was fortunate in having guidance from good and knowledgeable friends locally – Kathy & John White, Mike Fitt, Ray Brodie, Bill Swan and Pippa Hyde – to whom I am most grateful.

‘The resultant illustrated map is presented as a signed, limited edition of 100 prints on fine art paper (310gsm), using the superior giclee colour reproduction process."

THE ROYAL PARKS

GUILD
REVEILLE most mornings! I worked under the head groom, Jim Alburne, and enjoyed looking after the park keepers' horses, and the little Welsh cob called Bruno, who belonged to Mr Thompson.

HOWEVER I was offered the chance to become a mounted park keeper myself. In those days to qualify for consideration for the post of Royal Park keeper, applicants had to be male, over 30 years of age, and be a time serving warrant officer or senior NCO in the armed services - a bit like the Chelsea Pensioners but without the red coats! These were rules dating back to Queen Victoria, who wanted to give employment to her ex-soldiers and sailors. I had to break the mould.

I WAS interviewed by Miss Marlow, secretary to Major Hopkirk MC, who was the Bailiff (I believe that Miss Marlow was the daughter of Marlow, the gamekeeper in Bushy Park). I was appointed, and spent the next eight years patrolling Richmond Park on my horse five hours each day. It was wonderful in the summer - but a bit nippy in winter! The grooms at the time were Jim, and Bill Martin. My two mounted colleagues were Stanley Smee and Len Harvey (a World War I veteran and ex-mounted officer with the Metropolitan Police).

MAJOR HOPKIRK had been an officer in the Seaforth Highlanders, and had won the MC in France in 1939, as a member of the British Expeditionary Force. He was taken prisoner at St Valery-en-Caux, when his Division surrendered to Ewin Rommel in 1940. In those days the Royal Parks were very much run by the Bailiff, the superintendents - and Miss Marlow!!

An illustrated Map of Bushy Park

This illustrated map is presented as a signed, limited edition of 100 prints on 310gsm fine art paper. The image measures 420x600mm (A2), on a paper size of 500x680mm. A smaller A3 size is available.

Both sizes are offered to RPG members at the special price of £60 a print (for the A2 size) and £55 (for the A3).

From the sale of each print, the Guild will benefit by £5.

Post and packing can be either by Royal Mail, rolled in protective tube at £4.50, or by courier, flat in protective hardboard at £18. If delivered by tube, the print should be immediately unrolled and left flat. This is perfectly acceptable if care is taken.

The giclee printing process allows for the original painting to be printed singly on demand.

Sir Michael Tims is a Guild member himself, and has suggested that any interested members should contact him directly by telephone (020) 8943 4748, or by email: mandjtims@tiscali.co.uk
THE WEATHER was glorious for the official 2008 opening of the allotment site, conducted by Mayor of Westminster Louise Hyams, on Thursday 22 May. The event was well attended and guests enjoyed refreshments provided by Oliver Peyton's 'Inn the Park', while Fuller's team of shire horses were an added bonus and received a lot of attention.

This is the second year for the 'Dig for Victory' event. It was originally conceived by Phil Reed, Director of the Churchill Museum Cabinet War Rooms, to coincide with the exhibition being staged there. Mark Wasilewski (park manager) and Toni Assirati (TRP Head of Education and Community Engagement) took up the challenge, and with cooperation between the two organisations, the event came to fruition in less than six months of the discussion.

Last year’s theme was 'Healthy Eating' and two differing vegetable gardens contrasted the range of modern day varieties with those available during World War 11. The 2008 theme is 'War on Waste' with the emphasis on sustainability, recycling and organic principles.

This ‘living’ exhibition also demonstrates the importance wildlife plays within the horticultural area. There is, again, a wealth of informative notice boards and I was particularly intrigued to read about the ‘Pig Clubs’ which were formed in 1940.

Those with suitable gardens were encouraged to form co-operatives with their neighbours to buy, feed and raise a pig which would then be slaughtered with each participant receiving a share of the meat!

Last year’s event was a great success. The volunteer input was invaluable and provided 1,590 volunteer sessions comprising local schoolchildren, adult and ethnic groups. Some 3,000 Teacher’s Resource Packs written specifically for this project were distributed, the allotment received 103,000 visitors and an estimated 6 million people had read, seen or heard reference to the allotment during the year.

Funding constraints and the absence of someone to manage the volunteer effort may mean that this will be the final year for the allotment project.

This would be a pity, but Mark Wasilewski hopes that other parks may be able to take up the baton and host similar enterprises in the future.

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MEET THE EXPERTS! A horticultural session was held at the allotment on Sunday 22 June, and several Guild members volunteered to talk to the public. Howard Stollar reports

IT WAS an unknown task before us. Would the public turn up and show interest in the War Time Allotment? Would they ask us lots of questions? And more importantly, would we be able to answer them?

We were a rich and varied panel: two executive, practising members of the National Vegetable Society, the Superintendent of West Ham Park (ex-TRP), a former supplier of gardening requisites to the Royal Parks, an ex-RP Police Officer, the Head Gardener of Winfield House, and myself (a former TRP Apprentice and keen allotmenteer). All of us represented The Royal Parks Guild.

Firstly the panel made themselves familiar with the allotment. Yes... A good compost heap [the powerhouse of the garden] nice ordered lines of crops: radishes, peas, turnips, sweet corn, tomatoes, potatoes, three types of cabbages, beetroot, carrots, parsnips, strawberries, blackcurrants, jostaberries and lots more. Hardy a weed in sight!

Most crops were thriving. A few were struggling. This was good for the public to see because they could identify with problems in the garden. As the day warmed, the public began to wander into the allotment area. Questions began to emerge. What are these herbs? What can I do about slugs? How do I combat club root? What is crop rotation and how can I do it? What can I grow in a small garden? What’s the secret of making a good compost heap? How can I prepare my garden for a lawn? How can I save my ailing Aloe vera?

Between us all we answered lots of questions, seemed to satisfy all enquirers and at the same time learned a lot ourselves. It was an altogether enjoyable and satisfying team effort.

We were fed, watered and well looked after by Toni Assirati and Mark Wasilewski. And Mike Fitt was there, as you can imagine, quietly organising and smiling benignly.

Above: The Dig for Victory allotment was visited by thousands! Below: Valuable horticultural advice was offered to the public by by (l to r) Geoff Kerton, Jeff Hyde, Geraldine King, Mike Fitt, Howard Stollar, Richard Bailey, Stephen Crisp and Dennis Smith.
We are indebted to Guild member Stephen Crisp (pictured above, right) Head Gardener at Winfield House, the home of the U.S. Ambassador in Regents Park. Stephen welcomed 28 Guild members to the House and Garden, which is rarely seen by members of the Public.

After refreshments, we saw Stephen's own fascinating collection of maps, documents and photographs relating to Regent's Park. These included several original maps showing different proposals for the development of the Park.

**History of the House:** Stephen described key stages in the history of the site of Winfield House, including the construction of Hertford Villa, the first house – a massive place for a party, with only two bedrooms! Amongst the many treasures installed in that house was a huge clock from St. Dunstan's Church, in Fleet Street, which was being demolished at the time. The Villa was subsequently named St. Dunstan's.

In 1936 it was acquired by Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton, who replaced the Villa with the current building. She occupied it from 1937 until 1939 when she returned to the USA at the start of the War. A year after the War ended she returned to find the house in a poor state. She instructed her lawyer to offer Winfield House to the US Government. It purchased the leasehold interest for $1, and secured a 99-year Crown lease. In 1955 it became the official residence of the American Ambassador in London.

**House:** We started in the reception room, and moved through the ground floor rooms: the family and state dining rooms, the entrance hall, then the Gold and Garden Rooms. Each room was fitted and filled with many antique items, some purchased from Barbara Hutton, others by various Ambassadors. All the rooms had a range of potted plants, shrubs and cut flowers; Stephen said that probably about a third of his time was spent on arranging and maintaining these.

**Gardens:** We left the house at the front and walked back towards the main entrance gate, past a row of clipped Magnolia grandiflora. Across the path, next to the road, was a shade-tolerant woodland for screening the house and providing an acoustic barrier to outside traffic. Stephen explained that he had been Head Gardener since 1987, and had been entrusted by successive Ambassadors with the development and replanting of the 12½ acre gardens (which are maintained by just Stephen and two staff).

Passing through various secluded gardens we came to a statue of Barbara Hutton, set in formal box hedged garden. Looking south east from the back of the house, Stephen explained that he thought John Nash was influenced by Repton in his layout of the site, providing a pastoral landscape setting. The visit finished with a brief visit to the greenhouses used to grow thousands of plants each year for the house and gardens.
CURRENT RPG MEMBERS

(End at July 2008)

ExA = Former Apprentice  CurS = Current TRP Staff  ExS = Ex Staff  PA = People Associated with Parks  CurC = Current Contractors/Consultants/Concessionnaires  ExC = Ex C/C/C

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