WELCOME...

Have you ever wondered just how many trees The Royal Parks (TRP) has under its care? Or perhaps you have often wanted an answer to the question: What is the top speed of a stag beetle in flight? Unless you are a fan of pub quizzes perhaps not! The answers, incidentally, are ‘130,000+ trees’ and ‘6km an hour’!

If you would like to know more trivia like this about the parks, the Royal Parks Foundation has produced an excellent walks leaflet called Hyde Park – Walks for Tree Lovers, a fascinating guide to the arboreal delights of the park, and a spur to take some leisurely exercise around Hyde Park’s green acres. See Page 3 of this Newsletter.

Providing answers has been the role of a number of Guild members who took on the title ‘expert gardener’ recently, by dispensing gardening advice to visitors enjoying the wonderful demonstration allotment in St. James’ Park. My thanks to those who donned their gardening aprons for the day. Whilst there, a few of us also had the opportunity to enjoy the work of the park’s gardening team in creating beautiful summer bedding displays – stunning as ever! See page 8 for a taste.

I’m delighted that more than 50 Guild members and guests visited Lambeth Palace in June, admiring the superb work of head gardener Alistair Cook and his deputy Sue Madden. The pair have transformed a rather dull ecclesiastical plot into a garden of (sorry) ‘heavenly delight’!

And it was with real delight that I joined Guild members, parks staff, volunteers, Friends and other guests gathered at Richmond Park recently to launch the Guild’s annual award for “An individual’s outstanding contribution to Wildlife Conservation in The Royal Parks”.

Congratulations to Piers Eley, recipient of this first award, and thanks to award sponsors The Deer Fund and local estate agent, Robert Holmes. See page 4. It is with awards in mind that I look forward to the announcement of the winners of the Royal Parks apprenticeship awards in November, but more of that in the next newsletter.

Mike Fitt

PEOPLE...

Congratulations to TRPG member John Corless (right), Vice President and Trustee of the charity Phab, who has been awarded an OBE for his devoted services to the charity over a great many years.

Well done also to former TRPG member Ron Melville who received an MBE.

TRPG member and Sparsholt College lecturer Stephen J. White has retired. He began work at the college in 1976 after training at Worcester Teacher Training College, and was at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew on the diploma course, and at Regents Park as an apprentice gardener. During his career he developed a range of higher education garden design courses from Higher National Certificate and Diploma course level through to a Foundation degree and a BSc Honours degree. His former students include TV gardener and presenter Charlie Dimmock. Good luck on your retirement.

FRED MITCHELL

Finally, just as this Newsletter was going to print, we learned of the death of Fred Mitchell, charismatic retired Assistant Superintendent of St. James’ Park. Our condolences, from all the TRPG committee, go to his family. A full tribute to Fred will appear in the next Newsletter.
RPG visit to Lambeth Palace Garden

Date: 27th June 2009
Report by: Dominic Cole

I set off from Kentish Town on one of those magical June days when the sky is blue, the sun has already baked the pavements and there was a light breeze, to Waterloo and a walk along the river to Lambeth. Suddenly I am on holiday in my own city. The river sparkles and the throng of tourists and street performers transform the South Bank into one of the finest metropolitan experiences.

Traffic thunders over Lambeth Bridge and round the roundabout beside Tradescant’s Church and I join 50 members of The Royal Parks Guild assembling beside the beautiful Tudor Gateway of Lambeth Palace. We pass through the dark cool gatehouse and are greeted by head gardener Alastair Cook and his deputy Sue Madden. Suddenly it is quiet, the traffic noise deadened by the magnificent walls and we are in a green oasis.

Mike Fitt had been unsure about a visit because the last time he visited some 20 years ago it was basically one big lawn. We were not disappointed. Alastair has been in post for 15 years and served under three Archbishops. He has inherited a garden that has been influenced by successive incumbents and, with that, the associated politics and required diplomacy necessary not to upset those that have gone before.

However, instead of maintaining a status quo he has gradually transformed the garden into a vibrant place that serves not just the Archbishop but the whole community. On the day of our visit the lawns were being pressed into service to host the Annual Garden Fête – stalls were being set up with a tempting array of cakes, plants and books – a scene played out in villages across the country – but here in the heart of densely urban Lambeth. A rather brash modern building overlooks the garden and anywhere else would have seemed inappropriate – when we learned it was the Children’s wing of St. Thomas’s hospital and that the children can look out from the wards into this healing space we revised our opinions.

The garden has a magnificent collection of mature trees, enhanced by adjacent Archbishops Park and you can’t quite believe such a huge green space coexists with the urban buzz surrounding it. Enhancing the garden are now a herb garden, fruit, specimen trees and shrubs, a wonderful hazy wild garden with a pond and beehives, mixed native hedges, bulbs and a 400 year old fig tree. My favourite of the recent plantings is in the Rowan Walk “named after the boss” said Alastair!

The dry, sandy soil is used to great advantage to grow Mediterranean plants and to ripen fruit – Tradescant would be delighted with the diversity. I reckon that The Palace was a good two weeks ahead of my Kentish Town garden in terms of flowering and fruit – only three miles away.

It was lovely to see old friends and meet new ones and, as always to share stories and experiences – thank you Mike for your tireless energy and enthusiasm for Parks and People – it was a great visit.
At the end of July the Royal Parks Foundation (the charity for the Royal Parks), published a colourfully illustrated map of the trees in Hyde Park. The map (below), created in partnership with Hakluyt, includes two new walks designed to get local businesses out exploring the Park during their lunch hour.

The two routes, a North Walk and a South Walk, each take just over half an hour to complete and feature 30 trees, from the Common Lime and the pollution-tolerant London Plane, to five different kinds of Oak.

The oldest tree is a Sweet Chestnut, dating from the eighteenth century, and the most extraordinary, a Weeping Willow by the Serpentine, which is featured in Thomas Pakenham's best-selling book *Remarkable Trees of the World*.

The map not only allows the walker to identify tagged trees through their shape, fruit and leaves, it also contains fascinating information about their wildlife and mythology. Did you know, for example, that a single Pipistrelle bat can feed on 3,000 insects in one night, or that stag beetles fly at six kilometres per hour?

You can buy the map online for £3, at www.royalparksfoundation.org and at various Park concessions. Proceeds from sales of the maps will go to benefit the work of the Royal Parks Foundation and the Royal Parks' 130,000 trees.

A 3metre bronze sculpture has been unveiled in Hyde Park as part of a drive to raise £1.8m to create an environmental Education centre. The Isis sculpture – created by artist Simon Gudgeon – is the focal point of the appeal, launched by the Royal Parks Foundation and the Halcyon Gallery.

**NEW SHIRE HORSES TAKE UP THE REINS IN RICHMOND PARK**

Jed and Forte, Richmond Park's working Shire Horses are now 17 and 20 years old respectively. They are now a little long in the tooth and showing signs of arthritis. They will be retiring from active duty this summer when they attend the Harvest Festival in St James Park on the 26th and 27th September, their last official engagement.

If a suitable position can be found that does not require them to perform haulage work, they may be offered to an organisation that can give them a fulfilling 'retirement job'. Ideally they would be somewhere where they can still meet the public, live with other horses and enjoy good grazing.

In July a new pair of bay coloured horses joined the team (above). William (left) and Massey (far left) are just five and six years old and will quite literally be taking up the reins from Jed and Forte, following their induction period this autumn. They are gradually being introduced to the range of work that the Park requires of them, having only been used for recreational carriage driving until now.
The Royal Parks Guild
Wildlife Conservation Award 2009

Date: 6th August, 2009

Report by: Mike Fitt

One of the aims of The Royal Parks Guild is to develop a series of Awards. The first example being that given to an apprentice last year, the beginning of a series of awards for Royal Parks apprentices. This year saw the inauguration of a new award to be presented in recognition of an individual’s outstanding contribution to wildlife conservation in The Royal Parks.

To achieve this The Royal Parks Guild joined with The Deer Fund (an organisation very much involved in the study and welfare of deer). Through the efforts of Jeanette Lawton, Director of the Fund, it is The Deer Fund that sponsored the trophy, which is to be presented annually.

On a wet and windy Thursday evening in August, staff, volunteers and others connected with The Royal Parks gathered in the garden at Holly Lodge, Richmond Park to celebrate local volunteering in the park and 20 years of The Royal Parks Wildlife Groups. A surprise element of this was the presentation of TRPG’s Wildlife Conservation Award, made by me as Guild Chairman. The recipient was Piers Eley, Chairman of The Richmond Park Wildlife Group.

To capture the essence of Piers’ contribution I quoted Simon Richards, Park Manager at Richmond Park, who described him “as often Richmond Park’s conscience and mentor, a lover of country traditions, especially salmon fishing, and in particular a great love of Richmond Park”.

Piers has given long service to wildlife conservation in the park and was the inspiration for various projects, such as new ponds and water courses, enclosures to encourage regeneration of native flora, and recordings of much of the wildlife seen in the park, especially butterflies. He is somebody who has volunteered many hours of their own time in support of the park’s well being.

So it was with the congratulations of many that I handed the beautiful glass bowl, engraved with scenes of deer and ancient woodland, to Piers, and a bouquet of flowers to his wife Sarah.

As a further memento of the day, a beautiful engraved glass paperweight was also given to Piers, sponsored by Robert Holmes, director of a local estate agency.

(top right) The beautiful glass bowl trophy; (centre) Mike Fitt presenting the trophy to Piers Eley with Jeanette Lawton on the right; (right) Mike talks about Piers’ work over the years, with Simon Richards (centre) listening on
Duncan Campbell...
Superintendent Central Royal Parks during the War years

As reported in the previous Newsletter, back in February 1988 Mrs Margaret Feldon (niece of Duncan Campbell), got in touch by letter with Jennifer Adams, Central Parks Superintendent at the time, and visited Jennifer that year. The following is an extract from that original letter:

"My uncle, Duncan Campbell, was Superintendent there (New Lodge, Hyde Park) from early in the Second World War, until he retired in 1948. I visited the house often during that time, first of all when I was stationed in Dover Castle in the WAAF during 1944 to VE-Day, and later whilst at Biggin Hill. I left the WAAF in 1946. I lived for some time in Surrey and visited regularly, and if it was dark when I was leaving to get a bus to the station from Park Lane, he would ring for a policeman from the station opposite the house to escort me safely! He also took me to various places during that time, including a visit to the gardens at Buckingham Palace, and No. 10 Downing Street during the war, when I was able to see the wonderful autograph album owned by the then steward, a Mr. Carter, as well as visiting the Cabinet Room etc.

I remember going the day after a "doodlebug" (V1 flying bomb) had exploded in the greenhouses just behind the house [New Lodge], after circling the huge tree at the front. All the windows in the house were damaged. Previously of course part of the house had been bombed during the earlier part of the war. The dining room had gone, and he had it paved over and a fish pond installed where the crater had been. P.S. He [Duncan Campbell] was also at Regents Park for many years, and I was staying there "the day war broke out". He had me on a train back to my home in Leeds before I knew what was happening!"

(left) New Lodge – a beautiful Victorian villa house in the centre of Hyde Park – has obviously been through some rough times: World War II in Duncan Campbell's day and then again in the Great Storm of 1987, during Jennifer Adams' day.

(right) Margaret Feldon during May this year when Mike and Barbara Fitt went to visit her. She is proudly displaying her Uncle's MBE (for keeping London beautiful during the War). Barbara says: "Margaret made us very welcome, and it was a great pleasure to meet her and hear the stories about her uncle." The following are excerpts from that conversation:

- Duncan Campbell, when at Regents Park, received Queen Mary yearly and had to show her around the new rose garden – Queen Mary's Rose Garden – and apparently she didn't say much at all.
- Duncan was in Regents Park first and, we believe, Greenwich Park also. Trees had to be removed on Primrose Hill to make way for the anti-aircraft guns and Margaret remembers her uncle snoring in an air raid shelter in Regents Park.
- Duncan moved to Hyde Park to take over from Tom Hay, father of Roy Hay the well known author and horticulturist.
- Duncan had an official car and driver (Mr Capel), and a gardener (Charlie) who grew vegetables for the house.
- Margaret also spoke about Mary Churchill (Winston Churchill's daughter), being the Officer in charge of a gun battery in Hyde Park and would visit Duncan Campbell at New Lodge. Mary was in the ATS, and Winston is recorded as having visited her at the battery.
- Margaret also remembers, around the same time of the Victory Parade, a call being received from Kings Cross Railway Station to say: "Two sheep dogs here from North Yorkshire – arrived for the shepherd at Hyde Park" which had to be collected by a member of staff as there being no sign of the shepherd.
- Unfortunately, Duncan Campbell only lived a few years after retiring.

Margaret Feldon gave Mike and Barbara a photocopy of an article from Illustrated London News (dated 14th September 1946) and it was all about Duncan Campbell – but unfortunately it is too poor a copy for reproducing. It has been entered into the Archive, however, and is a valuable historical document in its own right.

Further research has revealed a meeting of the author Robert Henney with Duncan Campbell and described in Robert Henney's book The Incredible City (published in 1944) where Mr Campbell is described as "the horticultural king of the Central Parks". It also speaks about the conversion of the bomb crater into a sunken garden and pond (pictured right).
For our next look back in time, we target... 

THE ROYAL PARKS RIFLE CLUB!

In response to an enquiry from the Newsletter editor, the one-time secretary of the Royal Parks Rifle Club, retired superintendent Nick Butler (left), went out to the garage, pulled a file, and recalls his memories!

“There were several Royal Parks’ 25-yard rifle ranges: at Bushy, Richmond, Greenwich, Regent’s and Kensington Gardens. No doubt the Royal Parks Rifle Clubs were set up in times of war to encourage young men to take up arms.

In February ’75, as a young assistant superintendent of Hyde Park, I believe I can thank Grade III Superintendent Henry (Owen) Clarke for suggesting I became the Secretary of the Central Royal Parks RC. Indeed I have the evidence to prove it, (see reproduction of memo, below right)! In those days you simply did not say no, especially if you were new in the job and un-established in post.

From the records on 26th February I became Club secretary and succeeded Fred Blackburn, the charge hand at the Alcove in Kensington Gardens. I suspect Fred had been a club member post WW2.

Barry Haynes (RPG committee member, now working for the City of Westminster) was a member and subs were £2pa (£1.25 for apprentices). Other members included Ian Stephenson (son of Ashley Stephenson), and Derek Pollock (recently retired from the Met Police). I have a list of other members, including the Newsletter editor, Graham Clarke, and one record book records that he purchased 50 rounds of .22 ammo for 55p on 21 June 1976.

All the clubs slowly disbanded after 1981 as the cost for range insurance increased to £2.25 per member. Annual subs, in 1984 were £6 per member: all too much for the majority of clubs. Membership must have dropped in all the parks and then the rifle clubs closed. The last active year for Central Parks RC was 1985. I retained some rifles until 1996, and then let my firearms certificate expire.

The Portal Bowl

There was an annual inter-park competition – a long standing event where the best five or six shooters got half a day off to participate. With regret, I have no detailed records of the competitions, but from some paperwork and payment records I have scratched together the winners from the final years:

25th July 1975 Regent’s Park
16th July 1976 Bushy Park
July 1977 Richmond Park
July 1978 Greenwich Park
July 1979 Central Parks
July 1980 Regent’s Park
24th July 1981 Bushy Park

I recall 1981 was the last Portal Bowl, and I have a small trophy for the “Top Marksman”. I did not keep any of my targets, however over eight years I got quite good at it!

It is all history now. I suppose we should also ask the final question: where is the Portal Bowl Trophy now located?”

Edinburgh to Hyde Park – on a Ransomes motor mower!

In the early 1950s a group of students drove a lawnmower from Scotland to Hyde Park – with a haggis in the grassbox! Why the trip? And what happened to the haggis?

...More about this in the next edition of the Royal Parks Guild Newsletter!
BRIAN STRONG:

Memories of The Royal Parks

I was in the Civil Service from 1952 to 1993 and served in a number of departments. In April 1982, I became Head of the Parks, Palaces and Central Services Division of the Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings. These responsibilities covered:

-- The maintenance and operation of The Royal Parks (TRP).
-- The maintenance of the Occupied Royal Palaces, i.e. those actually occupied by members of the Royal Family, including Buckingham Palace, part of Kensington Palace, St. James’s Palace, Windsor Castle, Clarence House, Lancaster House, etc.
-- The maintenance and opening to the public of the Unoccupied Royal Palaces: The Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, part of Kensington Palace, Kew Palace and Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.
-- For the first year, I was also responsible for the presentation and opening to the public of the Ancient Monuments in England, which were transferred to English Heritage in 1994.
-- The Division also provided certain Central Services, including Finance, to the rest of the Directorate.

I was privileged to hold that responsibility until July 1987.

This series records my recollections of those years. They should, of course, be accompanied by a warning of my fallibility of memory after more than 20 years!

At that time TRP were also responsible for a number of other parks and gardens: the grounds of Osborne House on the Isle of Wight; Audley End in Essex; Eltham Palace in London; Walmer Castle in Kent; Palace Yard and the gardens at the Houses of Parliament; several squares and gardens in Central London, including Grosvenor Square and Parliament Square, the Embankment Gardens between the Houses of Parliament and Lambeth Bridge; Brompton Cemetery; the grounds of Ham House and Osterley House and of several London museums.

TRP was headed by the Bailiff, Ashley Stephenson, who was well known nationally as a horticulturist and appeared in TV programmes, and wrote articles in the national press, etc. His deputy was the head of the Central Parks, Bob Legge who sadly died in December 1982. We then recruited Jennifer Adams, originally as Head of Central Parks, who became the leading horticulturist in the parks as Acting Bailiff when Ashley retired, and The Royal Parks Agency was established, eventually to be headed up by David Welch (after I left the job).

There were then four Superintendent II’s in charge of the other parks: David Caselton was at Regent’s Park; Michael Brown at Richmond Park; George Cooke was in charge of Hampton Court Gardens and Bushy Park, and Jim Buttress was at Greenwich. There was also Eddie Fernley, who was in charge of the grounds at Osborne House, reporting directly to the Bailiff (he was transferred with Osborne when English Heritage took over).

Finally, the Bailiff decided on any horticultural issues which arose (on which I was clearly not competent); and was the manager of the organisation. He was responsible for all the superintendents (non-industrial); several hundred industrial staff (e.g. the gardeners in the parks); and the Bailiff and I was also responsible for the Royal Parks Constabulary, at the time headed by Police Superintendent Peter Gilbert.

The involvement of TRP as an integral part of a central government department caused many problems – particularly in issues of manpower. Whenever new posts were wanted elsewhere, greedy eyes were cast on TRP and we were subjected to repeated arbitrary cuts which bore no relationship whatsoever to the work needing to be done. By the time I left, park staff numbers had been reduced by more than 100 – and we were, of course, expected to continue to maintain the parks to the same high standard.

I remember when someone in Manpower Division, with an eye on reducing the size of the Civil Service, thought he was frightfully clever when he asked me why we needed a gravedigger in Hyde Park. Did we get many people needing to be buried there? Of course the gravedigger, a highly skilled job, was in fact based at Brompton Cemetery (which came under the Hyde Park Superintendent).

Essentially I was managing a multi-million pound business, but constrained by rules that applied to a Civil Service job with all the challenges that implies. In forthcoming articles I hope to introduce you to some of those challenges!
NEW TRPG MEMBERS (those joining between May and end Aug 2009)
ExA = FORMER APPRENTICE CurS = CURRENT TRP STAFF Exs = Ex STAFF
CurC = CURRENT CONTRACTORS/CONSULTANTS/CONCESSIONAIRES ExC = Ex C/C/C
ExRPC = Ex ROYAL PARKS CONSTABULARY ExS/TC = Ex STAFF/TRANSFERRED TO CONTRACTOR
MPS = METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE PA = PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH THE PARKS

NEW FULL MEMBERS
Aitchison-Tait, David Chairman of Thrive. PA
Burley, Joanna Central Parks ECSI. CurC
Hansford, Helen Former Trailblazer, Bushy Park. PA
O’Connor, Matt Grounds Maintenance Contractor. PA
Scrivener, Jo Assistant Park Manager, Richmond Park. CurS

Below are three views of the exemplary summer bedding in St. James’s Park this year: tropical bedding (top), traditional bedding (centre), and the ever-popular Birdcage Walk (bottom).

Tales from the...
ALLOTMENT
Date: August 2009
Report: Geoff Hyde

There is no doubt that TRP have captured the public mood with their allotment displays (for the third year) at St. James’s Park. During the weeks, teams of volunteers, with support from TRP staff, cultivated the allotment and also used it for the active experience and benefit of local schools. The Royal Parks Guild played a part by providing “expert help” during weekends in August, being there to answer the on-the-spot questions from the public.

Enormous interest was shown from the visitors, who included foreign holiday makers enquiring into the status of allotment gardening. Questions varied from “just how do you eat kohirabi?” to absolute beginners wanting to know how to clear a plot and starting off. Several people, having visited earlier in August, came back with lists of questions.

Great regret was expressed that this was the last year of the St. James’s Park allotment display, but mitigated by the probability that a similar scheme would operate in other Royal Parks.

Not only potential allotmenteers, but also people with no or very limited planting space, expressed their interest in growing fresh vegetables. Suggestions for grow-bag carrots, courgettes which are climbers, bean wigwams, leaf lettuce in tubs were noted – interestingly, most knew how to grow tomatoes. The fact that potatoes could and should be grown on balconies (in buckets) on account of their delicious taste, was a surprise to many.

There was not so much interest shown in the use of edible crops as part of a front garden floral display, but this is certainly an area where encouragement is required.

Children said they had school gardens and really loved their time in them. Sadly, parents did not seem to have capitalised on this enthusiasm.

Toni Assirati, TRP Head of Education and Community Engagement, and her team saw that all 10 of the TRPG “experts” were well looked after with vital refreshments and encouragement, for which we extend our grateful thanks.

(above right) Guild members Neil Cain, Matt O’Connor – and assistant Grace O’Connor – with (standing centre) Toni Assirati from TRP.

(right) Our intrepid reporter, Guild member Geoff Hyde, meeting one of the new gardeners at St. James’s!

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