I had thought we were about to come out of a long cold, wet winter but the weather forecast talks of snow again. Spring in the garden is far behind this year. One can only hope a ‘barbecue’ summer is on its way!

This bumper edition of the newsletter covers Winter 2009 and Spring 2010. Our volunteer Editor has also been snowed under – not literally, but with his own work commitments, so there has been a delay in the production of the Newsletter. I hope you will find this combined edition has been worth waiting for.

The Guild relies heavily on volunteers helping with all aspects of its running and we are always grateful for any offers of help; say with the website, events or Newsletter. Last year saw a number of our members kindly giving their time to assist with the allotment open days in St. James’s Park. This year will see allotments opening in Regents Park and Kensington Gardens, and the Guild will again be looking for help from its membership in the role of ‘expert gardeners’.

Hopefully, you will have already received the Guild Events leaflet, including a section for members to indicate their interest in volunteering at the Allotments and Park Open Days. If you haven’t done this before don’t be put off – even if you’re not an ‘expert’ gardener you could well be an expert at meeting and greeting park visitors!

Sadly this newsletter covers the death of several wonderful characters connected with the Royal Parks; all will be fondly remembered by those who knew them. Fred Mitchell and his experience with a horse drawn mower is a good example. And talking of mowers, if you ever thought it was a nightmare driving down from Scotland to England then spare a thought for those hardy souls described on page 4!

I look forward to catching up with many of you during 2010, maybe at one of the events.

PEOPLE...

Congratulations to TRPG member Nigel Thorne (right). The former president of the Landscape Institute has won his bid to lead the European Foundation for Landscape Architecture. He travelled to Brussels to take part in the European Foundation for Landscape Architecture’s (EFLA) executive council and general assembly in November. He was nominated to stand as president and was officially voted into the role. "It is a remarkable challenge," he said. The role will involve the promotion of landscape architecture across the EU member states.

Staff at Landform Consultants (left), headed by Guild member Mark Gregory, and their families raised £2,200 for the Greenfingers charity after successfully completing the Royal Parks Foundation Half Marathon. The cash raised goes to help create gardens at children’s hospices across the country. The fastest person was landscape foreman Richard Lavelle who finished the race in 1hr 36 mins.

RADIO WINNER: Guild member Ken Crowther (left) was named Local Radio Broadcaster of the Year at The Garden Media Guild awards ceremony in London in November. Ken has been giving gardening advice on BBC Radio Essex for more than 20 years.

CONIFER HONOUR! Congratulations to the Isabella Gardeners, Richmond Park, who won the Rosse Cup at the Royal Horticultural Society Autumn Show for an exhibit of conifers. In the picture are (l-r): Toby Vane, Damien Black, Garry Scarffe and Dick Farr.

New Apprentices: The following joined The Royal Parks Apprenticeship Scheme in Autumn 2009, and have been welcomed as new members of the Guild: Alex Carroll, Sam Goodyear, Lee Swift, Gary Robertson, Richard Overington, Sam Cannon, Tom Read, Adam Saville and Luke Payne.
Hundreds of acres of landscaped grounds on the Northampton-Oxfordshire border are usually the private domain of Lord Heseltine, but a couple of times a year he graciously opens them up to parties of interested groups, so that they can see his beautiful gardens, fascinating sculptures, landscaped grounds and thousands of trees, many of them rare and unusual.

And so it was on Sunday 18th October, that a number of Royal Parks Guild members and their guests were invited to see the grounds. The weather was kind – if a little grey on the day and damp underfoot – and the TRPG party of 78 were delighted to share the occasion with 19 members of the Kew Guild and several other organisations. In total several hundred people came along, but owing to the size of the grounds, it looked as though there was just a handful present.

Lord Heseltine, with his faithful dogs, and several members of his close family were also present.

The preservation of unusual trees is a personal passion of Michael Heseltine, and his knowledge of and dedication to the subject have earned him the accolade of Vice President of the Royal Horticultural Society, a title bestowed upon him last year.

As we walked around the gardens (each of us having been presented with a coloured map of the grounds) we visited the Rose Garden and Spring Garden, between which were herbaceous borders and stunning views down to the lake, and fields beyond. The Canal, Yew Avenue, Medieval Fish Pond, Willow Pond, Bog Garden and ‘Heselhenge’ came next, before one happened upon the contemporary Walled Garden, featuring greenhouses, water features and aviaries. The Rill, and various works of art in the Sculpture Garden were all stunning to see, too.

The three-hour unguided walk around the gardens, where we were left to tour more or less anywhere we liked, culminated in tea and cakes at the Church Barn tearooms at the eastern edge of the gardens.

Proceeds from these, and the ticket price, went to local charities.

Although we were able to take our cameras as we walked around the garden at Thenford, at Lord Heseltine’s request we were asked not to publish photographs of the grounds. He is currently writing a pictorial history of Thenford Gardens, and he did not wish for pictures of the grounds to appear in advance of the book’s publication. We are happy to honour that request.

We would like to thank Lord Heseltine for his hospitality, and for allowing us free rein to view his private gardens.
The Worshipful Company of Gardeners held its Autumn Court Dinner, in the presence of His Royal Highness Prince Edward, at The Inner Temple Hall, London on 12th November. With kind permission of Mrs. Louise Robinson, Master of The Worshipful Company of Gardeners, the Royal Parks Guild was delighted to be given the opportunity to present awards to the two Royal Parks Apprentices who have gained most marks over the past year. Other students receiving awards were from Capel Manor College, Kew Gardens and Wisley.

Prior to the presentations, citations for the two apprentices were read out. Of Jenna Waldron they said: “Jenna works for Veolia Environmental Services at Regents Park as a Royal Parks Apprentice. Having successfully completed her first year of the apprenticeship and showing a real commitment to her studies and support of fellow students she is being presented with The Royal Parks Guild Award for ‘Outstanding Achievement during Year One of The Royal Parks Apprenticeship Scheme’. For those who might be visiting Queen Mary’s Rose Garden in Regents Park next year it will be well worth looking out for some very special flower beds designed by Jenna.”

Of Rosemary Gray they said: “Rosemary is employed by Enterprise PLC at St James’s Park as a Royal Parks Apprentice. She has now completed two years of her three year apprenticeship and during the second year of her studies has made a significant contribution to the horticultural excellence of St James’s Park, including her work on the ‘Get Growing’ demonstration allotment project. For this, and dedication to her course work, she is being given The Royal Parks Guild Award for ‘Outstanding Achievement during Year Two of The Royal Parks Apprenticeship Scheme’.”

At the reception both Jenna and Rosemary were able to meet Prince Edward and chat about their apprenticeships. Escorting Jenna was her sister Lorraine and Peter Rattenbury-Neate from Veolia, and accompanying Rosemary was Arthur New from Enterprise. Both Peter and Arthur are TRPG members. Others present connected with the Guild Awards were Guild Committee members Mike Fitt OBE (Chairman) and Bob Ivison, also Dennis Clarke representing The Royal Parks.

(below) HRH Prince Edward presenting the Awards to (left) Rosemary Gray, and (right) Jenna Waldron. (Main picture below) Jenna & Lorraine Waldron, Bob Ivison, Mike Fitt, Arthur New, Rosemary Gray, Dennis Clarke, Peter Rattenbury-Neate. (Other pictures) Prince Edwards speaks with Rosemary and Jenna, with Mike Fitt and Louise Robinson (Master of The Worshipful Company of Gardeners)
In 1959 a group of students took a journey from Edinburgh to Hyde Park on a Ransomes mower, to test the reliability of small petrol engines. Fifty years on, they reunited to look back.

Back in 1959, a group of former employees of the De Havilland Aircraft Company were now all students at Hatfield Technical College, and they wanted to test the reliability of small petrol engines. So Tom Hudson, Mike Smith, Mike Savage, Hugh Tansley and John Wilson came up with a plan which saw them taking on a long journey across the country, and attracting a huge amount of interest along the way.

The project involved finding a suitable mower, so the team contacted Ransomes, Sims and Jeffries (the forerunner of today’s Ransomes Jacobsen company), who agreed to help them out. Mark Grimwade (pictured below right), an engineer with the company, was given the task of assisting the students in their research, and selecting the right model.

A Ransomes Matador petrol ride-on lawn mower was chosen. Some modifications to the mower were made, including the addition of a deeper sump to the 288cc Villiers engine, to provide enough lubrication for the 400 mile trip. An additional few tweaks saw the machine roadworthy. “If you imagine riding down a highway with a metal roller, it would jar and bang and be extremely uncomfortable, so we put a rubber coating on the roller,” said Mark. He and a team of four apprentices tested a couple of prototypes, running them non-stop around Ipswich for 90 hours, which was the estimated time it would take to travel at 3mph down the A68 and A1.

The date for Operation Matador was set for Easter 1959. The five students arrived at Edinburgh Castle in a Bedford Dormobile, which was to be their mobile home for the following four days and nights. The gift of a haggis was placed in the grass box of the mower to be presented to the Keeper of the Royal Parks in London, a Scotsman, at the end of the journey.

Following as straight a line as possible, the team travelled down the A68 and crossed the border heading for Scotch Corner and down the A1 to London. This was long before dual carriageways and the convoy of a Matador mower, Dormobile and an Austin A40 pick up truck, driven by Mark Grimwade, caused considerable congestion particularly as the route ran through many town centres.

Four days and three nights after they left Edinburgh, the students rode into Hyde Park to be greeted by a high-powered reception committee of Royal Park staff, Ransomes top management and dealer representatives, television crews and the press. The haggis, by then soaked in petrol, was handed over to the Keeper of the Royal Parks and a ceremonial strip of Hyde Park grass was mown.

On Wednesday 6 May last year, the Operation Matador team, now in their 60s and 70s, arrived at the College Lane Campus of the University of Hertfordshire in St Albans, on a replica of the Ransomes Matador mower complete with the number plate and signage of 50 years past. They then travelled to Hyde Park, where they re-enacted the completion of their journey by mowing a ceremonial strip of grass and presenting a haggis and personal memento to a representative of TRP: David Jordan (Guild member and Asst. Parks Manager, Hyde Park).

The successful completion of the journey was a real feather in the cap of a world renowned organisation which helped to put Suffolk firmly on the industrial map. Today Ransomes is still hugely proud of Team Matador’s effort, and the machine itself. The Matador mower is still being built today, albeit with a few technological enhancements!
Here were many events in the parks which often required specific approval. In my first month in post, I found myself giving evidence in the High Court in a judicial review case. The Department had given permission for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to have a rally in Hyde Park, but had refused permission for them to have a marching band. It was written that “…it was not the Department’s policy to allow music in the Royal Parks”. The Regulations actually said music could be played, but only with the Secretary of State’s permission. The Court ruled that the Department could have a policy, but not one that said “No” in every case: that meant the Department had removed its own discretion. We therefore lost, and had to reconsider the request. Ministers decided to refuse again, for an unrelated reason, but by then it was too late for CND to go back to the court.

Events in Hyde Park raised other difficulties. During this period, Sikh organisations were very active (Mrs Gandhi was assassinated around that time) and on a number of occasions they sought permission for rallies at Speakers’ Corner. The Indian Government exerted strong pressure to refuse permission for what they saw as a subversive organisation. But the Sikhs had committed no offence in the UK and there was no reason for refusal that would stand up in court (I did not want to lose another judicial review!). So they got their demos.

I also recall a complaint from Peter Coe, father of the Olympic athlete, Seb Coe, complaining that his son had been prevented by the Royal Parks Constabulary from training in Richmond Park. Coe had been running on the park roads, with his father driving behind him in his car. The RPC said this was delaying traffic on the roads, which provide through routes across the Park, but Mr Coe claimed his son was running at a reasonable speed. I replied that the RPC had been quite correct; and added that, on the basis of the pace Mr Coe had claimed, I was delighted that Seb was fit enough to be running at world record 5000 metre pace in a very hilly park! There was no reply.

We constantly had criticism of the lack of primroses on Primrose Hill, which was maintained from Regents Park. On one occasion Lord Skelmersdale (a minister in the Department but not then responsible for the Royal Parks) asked why. We replied that they were subject both to damage (underfoot) and to vandalism and simply did not survive despite all our efforts. He offered replacement primroses from his wife (who ran a nursery). We said we would be delighted to accept them as a gift; or she could tender on a future occasion - particularly if she had developed a vandal-proof variety.

The Royal Parks were responsible for the gardens at the Houses of Parliament, particularly Palace Yard. Over a period, Ashley Stephenson (the Bailiff), and I, were consulted about the state of the catalpa trees along Bridge Street, which were clearly dying back.

He recommended felling and replacement, either with catalpas or, as they are not a native tree, oaks or planes. The then minister, Sir George Young, was not prepared to pursue this. When I met him some time after I had left the job, he reminded me of this. I was able to point out that they were still dying back and recommended he compare them with the much younger, and healthy catalpas on the Parliament Square side of Palace Yard. Sadly, those on the Bridge Street side are still dying back.

Lower quality in the parks was of great concern. The peak of the year in this respect was the annual exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show, for which there was a degree of competition among the Superintendents. It was de rigueur to get a Gold Medal, which they did every year but one: park superintendent Michael Brown got a silver gilt for his woodland garden based on Richmond Park. The judges said it lacked colour - yet it represented the park perfectly. The Bailiff and I both thought that was unfair.
The Water Gardens in Bushy Park
Created c1710, Restored in 2009

Report: Guild member Richard Flenley

The Water Gardens at Upper Lodge in the north-west corner of Bushy Park, have been restored and were opened to the public by HRH Princess Alexandra on 1st October 2009.

This small enclosure, immediately adjacent to Upper Lodge, is the core of the once extensive scheme laid out by George Montagu, Duke of Halifax, around 1710. The Gardens formed part of Halifax’s domain as Ranger of Bushy Park. He developed his scheme by using three sources of water to supply the sequence of formal water bodies, basins and canal in a repeating pattern which extends across the park from Pantile Bridge across to the park wall on the NPL boundary.

Many changes have taken place over nearly 300 years in reducing the form and functioning of this fine Baroque landscape garden. Later uses include that for a convalescence hospital during World War 1, a school in the interwar period, and from World War II until 1994, housed the Admiralty research station.

With the termination of the Admiralty’s lease in 1994, there was uncertainty over the future of the site. Much effort by the Friends of Bushy Park in conjunction with The Crown Estate and the Royal Parks prepared the way for possible restoration. It took 10 years to secure approvals and funding to carry out the works. Meanwhile, the condition of the site was rapidly going backwards – loss of water supply; collapse of old horse chestnuts around the pools; regeneration of scrub and willow wood in the dried out pond areas, and so on.

Land Use Consultants were asked to prepare a masterplan in conjunction with TRP in 1997. It looked a simple enough task to lay out a symmetrical design onto the flat ground. But it was an extremely challenging process. Every step had to be respectful of history, and tuned to the physical realities of the site … and cost! Holding on to plan was a struggle and, in the end, a success. The landscape contract was let to English Landscapes in February 2008. The project cost just over £700,000 – about 10% of the overall HLF Project which has provided many essential repairs and other enhancements across Bushy Park.

Richard Flenley of Land Use Consultants has been involved with the Water Gardens since 1996. He assisted in feasibility studies, the HLF bid, and was retained during the demolition stages of work at Upper Lodge and finally was able to bring the Water Gardens through the Bushy Park HLF project (2004) and into contract (2008-09) with The Royal Parks management team.
GREENWICH PARK GETS NEW MANAGER

In a move to strengthen the park team as it gears up to host events in 2012, Graham Dear (left) has taken up the role of Park Manager of Greenwich Park. His predecessor, Derrick Spurr, will continue to work for TRP as Project Manager for The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

Graham joins the Royal Parks from Kent County Council where he was Country Parks Manager. Having trained in horticulture at both Oxford University Botanic Garden and at Kew, he gained experience in park management at both Wolverhampton Borough County and South Staffordshire District Council.

Graham said: “Greenwich Park is a fantastic place and it is so full of history and character. The fact that the 2012 Equestrian events will be based here is a big attraction of the job and I look forward to working with Derrick to maintain the integrity of the park.”

ST. JAMES’S PARK: The winner of the BALI National Landscape Awards category for Grounds Maintenance (Single Site) went to Enterprise PLC for their work in St. James’s Park. The judges were impressed by the excellent floral schemes (pictured below), high standards and lack of litter. The park has open-all-hours access, which pushes grounds management and maintenance boundaries to the extreme. The contract also covers the adjacent Green Park along with other important locations including Buckingham Palace Memorial Gardens and 10 Downing Street. The judges commented: “Both client and contractor are to be complimented on their joint vision for maintaining this national gem.” Enterprise was also recognised for its green waste recycling facility at Kensington Gardens and its high-quality seasonal bedding at Hyde Park.

BUSHY PARK: Don’t miss this year’s popular Chestnut Sunday Grand Parade. It will be taking place on Sunday 9th May.

REGENT’S PARK: The old petroleum based plastic flower pots used in the Regent’s Park nursery are gradually being replaced by biodegradable ones made from vegetable oils.

RICHMOND PARK: Put this date in your diaries: Sunday 19th September. There will be an Open Day at Richmond Park.

ALLOTMENTS 2010: An allotment growing fruit and veg will be open to the public in the Regent’s Park Store Yard during the summer of this year. This follows the decision after three years to close the very popular allotments in St. James’s Park, which demonstrated changes in popular eating habits since the second world war. Kensington Gardens will also have an allotment in 2010. Volunteers to meet the public are wanted.

FORTE: Since reporting on the new shire horses at Richmond Park in the summer edition of the newsletter, we are sad to say that Forte (above), who was 20 years old, has died. It was seen by many that his mate Jed was missing him but is now beginning to appreciate his new mates William and Massey, sharing the same field.

HIGHLAND: This is one of three Highland Cattle and two Dexter cattle brought in to continue the five year project to graze a four-hectare enclosure adjacent Sawry's Hill in Richmond Park, with the intention to improve the meadow land and encourage wild flowers, such as Harebell.

ST. JAMES’S PARK: The winner of the BALI National Landscape Awards category for Grounds Maintenance (Single Site) went to Enterprise PLC for their work in St. James’s Park. The judges were impressed by the excellent floral schemes (pictured below), high standards and lack of litter. The park has open-all-hours access, which pushes grounds management and maintenance boundaries to the extreme. The contract also covers the adjacent Green Park along with other important locations including Buckingham Palace Memorial Gardens and 10 Downing Street. The judges commented: “Both client and contractor are to be complimented on their joint vision for maintaining this national gem.” Enterprise was also recognised for its green waste recycling facility at Kensington Gardens and its high-quality seasonal bedding at Hyde Park.

BUSHY PARK: Don’t miss this year’s popular Chestnut Sunday Grand Parade. It will be taking place on Sunday 9th May.

REGENT’S PARK: The old petroleum based plastic flower pots used in the Regent’s Park nursery are gradually being replaced by biodegradable ones made from vegetable oils.

RICHMOND PARK: Put this date in your diaries: Sunday 19th September. There will be an Open Day at Richmond Park.

ALLOTMENTS 2010: An allotment growing fruit and veg will be open to the public in the Regent’s Park Store Yard during the summer of this year. This follows the decision after three years to close the very popular allotments in St. James’s Park, which demonstrated changes in popular eating habits since the second world war. Kensington Gardens will also have an allotment in 2010. Volunteers to meet the public are wanted.

FORTE: Since reporting on the new shire horses at Richmond Park in the summer edition of the newsletter, we are sad to say that Forte (above), who was 20 years old, has died. It was seen by many that his mate Jed was missing him but is now beginning to appreciate his new mates William and Massey, sharing the same field.

HIGHLAND: This is one of three Highland Cattle and two Dexter cattle brought in to continue the five year project to graze a four-hectare enclosure adjacent Sawyer’s Hill in Richmond Park, with the intention to improve the meadow land and encourage wild flowers, such as Harebell.

ST. JAMES’S PARK: The winner of the BALI National Landscape Awards category for Grounds Maintenance (Single Site) went to Enterprise PLC for their work in St. James’s Park. The judges were impressed by the excellent floral schemes (pictured below), high standards and lack of litter. The park has open-all-hours access, which pushes grounds management and maintenance boundaries to the extreme. The contract also covers the adjacent Green Park along with other important locations including Buckingham Palace Memorial Gardens and 10 Downing Street. The judges commented: “Both client and contractor are to be complimented on their joint vision for maintaining this national gem.” Enterprise was also recognised for its green waste recycling facility at Kensington Gardens and its high-quality seasonal bedding at Hyde Park.

BUSHY PARK: Don’t miss this year’s popular Chestnut Sunday Grand Parade. It will be taking place on Sunday 9th May.

REGENT’S PARK: The old petroleum based plastic flower pots used in the Regent’s Park nursery are gradually being replaced by biodegradable ones made from vegetable oils.

RICHMOND PARK: Put this date in your diaries: Sunday 19th September. There will be an Open Day at Richmond Park.

ALLOTMENTS 2010: An allotment growing fruit and veg will be open to the public in the Regent’s Park Store Yard during the summer of this year. This follows the decision after three years to close the very popular allotments in St. James’s Park, which demonstrated changes in popular eating habits since the second world war. Kensington Gardens will also have an allotment in 2010. Volunteers to meet the public are wanted.

FORTE: Since reporting on the new shire horses at Richmond Park in the summer edition of the newsletter, we are sad to say that Forte (above), who was 20 years old, has died. It was seen by many that his mate Jed was missing him but is now beginning to appreciate his new mates William and Massey, sharing the same field.

HIGHLAND: This is one of three Highland Cattle and two Dexter cattle brought in to continue the five year project to graze a four-hectare enclosure adjacent Sawyer’s Hill in Richmond Park, with the intention to improve the meadow land and encourage wild flowers, such as Harebell.

ST. JAMES’S PARK: The winner of the BALI National Landscape Awards category for Grounds Maintenance (Single Site) went to Enterprise PLC for their work in St. James’s Park. The judges were impressed by the excellent floral schemes (pictured below), high standards and lack of litter. The park has open-all-hours access, which pushes grounds management and maintenance boundaries to the extreme. The contract also covers the adjacent Green Park along with other important locations including Buckingham Palace Memorial Gardens and 10 Downing Street. The judges commented: “Both client and contractor are to be complimented on their joint vision for maintaining this national gem.” Enterprise was also recognised for its green waste recycling facility at Kensington Gardens and its high-quality seasonal bedding at Hyde Park.

BUSHY PARK: Don’t miss this year’s popular Chestnut Sunday Grand Parade. It will be taking place on Sunday 9th May.

REGENT’S PARK: The old petroleum based plastic flower pots used in the Regent’s Park nursery are gradually being replaced by biodegradable ones made from vegetable oils.

RICHMOND PARK: Put this date in your diaries: Sunday 19th September. There will be an Open Day at Richmond Park.

ALLOTMENTS 2010: An allotment growing fruit and veg will be open to the public in the Regent’s Park Store Yard during the summer of this year. This follows the decision after three years to close the very popular allotments in St. James’s Park, which demonstrated changes in popular eating habits since the second world war. Kensington Gardens will also have an allotment in 2010. Volunteers to meet the public are wanted.

FORTE: Since reporting on the new shire horses at Richmond Park in the summer edition of the newsletter, we are sad to say that Forte (above), who was 20 years old, has died. It was seen by many that his mate Jed was missing him but is now beginning to appreciate his new mates William and Massey, sharing the same field.

HIGHLAND: This is one of three Highland Cattle and two Dexter cattle brought in to continue the five year project to graze a four-hectare enclosure adjacent Sawyer’s Hill in Richmond Park, with the intention to improve the meadow land and encourage wild flowers, such as Harebell.

ST. JAMES’S PARK: The winner of the BALI National Landscape Awards category for Grounds Maintenance (Single Site) went to Enterprise PLC for their work in St. James’s Park. The judges were impressed by the excellent floral schemes (pictured below), high standards and lack of litter. The park has open-all-hours access, which pushes grounds management and maintenance boundaries to the extreme. The contract also covers the adjacent Green Park along with other important locations including Buckingham Palace Memorial Gardens and 10 Downing Street. The judges commented: “Both client and contractor are to be complimented on their joint vision for maintaining this national gem.” Enterprise was also recognised for its green waste recycling facility at Kensington Gardens and its high-quality seasonal bedding at Hyde Park.

BUSHY PARK: Don’t miss this year’s popular Chestnut Sunday Grand Parade. It will be taking place on Sunday 9th May.

REGENT’S PARK: The old petroleum based plastic flower pots used in the Regent’s Park nursery are gradually being replaced by biodegradable ones made from vegetable oils.

RICHMOND PARK: Put this date in your diaries: Sunday 19th September. There will be an Open Day at Richmond Park.
NEW TRPG MEMBERS
(those joining between Aug 2009 and end Jan 2010)
A = APPRENTICE or Ex-APPRENTICE
PA = PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH THE PARKS
CurC = CURRENT CONTRACTORS/CONSULTANTS/
CONCESSIONAIRES  ExC = Ex CURRENT
CONTRACTORS/CONSULTANTS/
CONCESSIONAIRES  ExS = Ex STAFF

NEW FULL MEMBERS
Allister, David  Head of Parks & Open Spaces, LBRuT. PA
Bowden, Mary  Gustafson Porter, Diana Memorial Fountain 2002-2005. ExC
Doyle, Terry  Hyde Park 1992-95, St. James’s Park 1995-98, New Regional Director For Glendale, A
Halksworth, Andrew  Supplier to Royal Parks & Palaces. PA
Galvin, Gaye  Partnership work with Regents Park/Camden Biodiversity Action Plan, Glen Flag, Greenspace stakeholders, YPIAD – now with LBRuT. PA
Gogus, Hasan  Westminster City Council – TRP links. PA
Henson, Ian  Volunteer at St James Park Allotment 2007-2009. PA
Holmes, Robert  Long-time supporter of Richmond Park and Trustee of Richmond Park Charitable Trust, and HLC. PA
Marsh, Barry  Bird watcher Richmond Park 1945-1998. PA
Player, Robert  TRPG Business Plan and support. PA
Sadler, David  GLC Apprentice - joint training TRP. PA
Tolhurst, Michael  Managing Director of Turfsoil. CurC
Trenga, Laurent  Royal Parks Estate section now with Company of Cooks. ExS

NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER
Kerton, Maureen Mrs  Wife of Geoff Kerton

Tour of St James’s Park...
At the end of the formal part of the Annual General Meeting, Mark Wasilewski took the stage. Guild member Mark is the Park Manager at St James’s, and has been with the Royal Parks for 20 years; he is also Vice Chairman of Britain in Bloom.

Mark talked of the changing role of his job over the years. In fact, he is so desk-bound that today would be the first time in three months he had managed to get out and have a proper look at the park. Around 30% of his time is now spent on event management. The parks are under immense pressure to take on more events. Annually, St James’s has 6.7m visitors (and 6.4m to Hyde Park 1992-95, St. James’s Park 1995-98, New Regional Director For Glendale, A)

Looking ahead to the Olympics – St. James’s Park will host Beach Volleyball on Horse Guards Parade and each day there will be four games, and each game will see 15,000 spectators – 60,000 people per day.

The allotment in St. James’s Park has been a great success over the last three years and Mark thanked all those who have helped from Enterprise staff, education workers, including school volunteer groups, special needs groups and the Royal Parks Guild members who came along on days over the summer to answer visitors’ questions. The Mayor of Westminster visited that afternoon. After a buffet lunch (for which our gratitude goes to the City of Westminster), Mark took members present on a brief tour of the park, where a special Harvest Festival Event was taking place at the Allotment. Thanks to Mark and his team for a great Guild visit.

CONTACTING THE GUILD:
BY POST:  14 Nelson Place, Ryde, Isle of Wight, PO33 2ET  TELEPHONE: 07973 402810
EMAIL:  info@theroyalparksguild.org  WEBSITE: www.theroyalparksguild.org
NEWSLETTER EDITOR:  Graham Clarke – 01202 575967 or gra.clarke@virgin.net

Royal Parks Guild
AGM
Date: 26th September 2009
Venue: Westminster City Hall

On a fine, early autumn day, 53 members attended The 2009 Annual General Meeting of the Royal Parks Guild. Key points to arise from the meeting Included:
- Membership was now running at 285.
- Although we are continuing to recruit we had lost some members.
- Recruitment was mostly by word of mouth but preparation was in hand for a recruitment leaflet in 2010. Could members let us know if they are able to think of any way to increase membership.
- On matters of finance, Jennifer Adams said that the committee had started with all members putting £50 into the account, plus a donation of £15,000 from Mantaplan. We are in profit by £4500 and in 2009 we had received £1000 in donations towards general fund and bursaries and awards fund.
- Committee member Bob Ivison said we had had a good year for moving on with our awards. We had seen the first year Apprentice Award going to Zoe Basham, who attended a presentation ceremony at the Worshipful Company of Gardeners’ Autumn Court Dinner (see p3 of this Newsletter for details of the latest awards presented to most promising 1st and 2nd year apprentices).
- The TRPG Wildlife Volunteer Award had seen its first recipient: Piers Eley receiving this at a summer event in Richmond Park. The award being jointly awarded with The Deer Fund.
- We had been approached by Thrive to become involved in a disability award they wished to develop, and the criteria were being considered.
- The Newsletter editor, Graham Clarke, thanked those who had contributed over the year, and he welcomed more input. After some discussion regarding the frequency of the Newsletter, it was agreed that four issues (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) would be produced annually.

(below left) The St James’s Park Harvest Festival Event took place at the popular allotment site, which after three years is now moving to Regent’s Park.
(below right) Mark Wasilewski in full flow, explaining some of the magnificent regal history of the Park.
Fred Mitchell, who died in the spring of 2009, was a real ‘character’ of the Royal Parks. Guild chairman Mike Fitt last met up with him when he paid a visit to St. James’s Park in 2006, to plant a tree (pictured here) in memory of his wife Catherine.

Fred started work in the Royal Parks in 1950, as a Labourer, but he rose through the ranks to become, in 1971, Asst Superintendent at St James’s Park. He had a fantastic collection of memories, and on the tree planting day he recalled that he started his career in The Royal Parks as a boy, cutting grass in Kensington Gardens. At that time it was done with a horse-drawn mower. Whilst mowing the grass near the fountains in the Italian Gardens, the water was turned on and the fountain jets caused Fred’s horse to bolt. Fred let go and the horse and mower ended up in the Longwater. This was the first – and last – time he was asked to cut the grass by horse!

Prior to the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, Fred was part of the team that decorated not only St. James’s Park but many buildings nearby. Although he said he enjoyed this opportunity to work outside the park it must have been a very busy time and quite stressful for some as the Superintendent in charge of Central Parks and the decoration overall, William Hepburn, died of a heart attack shortly after the Coronation took place.

When Fred took full charge of St. James’s Park, part of his role was to look after the garden at No. 10 Downing Street. Through this link he was to become quite well known to Margaret Thatcher who, as Prime Minister, would invite her staff to a Christmas party at No. 10. This included an invitation to Fred. Although a Tory himself he loved nothing better than to wind Mrs Thatcher up by wearing a red tie. She did get her own back when, to the embarrassment of Fred, she asked him to dance with her – which he did, reluctantly.

It was also interesting to note that if Fred ran into difficulty over matters relating to the maintenance of his tied cottage in the park he would refer his concerns directly to Mrs Thatcher. It goes without saying that the repairs were quickly carried out!

Another of Fred’s responsibilities was the garden at Clarence House, and he built up quite a rapport with HRH The Queen Mother. One of his favourite jobs at Christmas time was decorating the window boxes for her with miniature Christmas trees – one of these now surviving in the garden of New Lodge, Hyde Park where it was planted by Fred’s successor Dennis Clarke.

We are also sad to announce the sudden death, in his sleep, of Barry Day. A popular handyman at Richmond Park, he had clocked up 42 years of service. He was 58.

Dave Ellis, St. James’s Park, writes: “Barry started work for the DoE (Royal Parks Division), as a boy labourer at St. James’s Park moving onto Richmond Park in February 1970 after an ‘incident’ with a corgi at Clarence House! He worked on tractors and also in the tree gang until Feb 1992 when he was made redundant. He continued in TRP with Glendale, Serco, Sodexho and then Fountains, until his sudden death on 16th December. Barry will be missed by his colleagues in Richmond and Bushy Parks (both Fountains, The Royal Parks staff and the RP Police) but also in most of the other Royal Parks as he was a frequent visitor, at week-ends, by greeting colleagues with “Hello darling” followed by howls of laughter.”

Sharon Evans, head gardener at Pembroke Lodge Gardens, writes: “Barry was as a ‘legend’ and he was supportive and helpful to a fault. If ever you had a problem, you would go to him. He was so kind and funny, and I am going to miss him more than you could imagine. The two most important things in his life were the park and his mum, who was the most important lady in his life throughout.” Mike Fitt represented TRPG at Barry’s funeral, also attended by many TRP staff.
Allan Titmuss, secretary of the Serpentine Swimming Club, died last October following a battle with cancer. He was 73. Allan is seen in the picture (second from right) with fellow swimmers on Christmas Day 1991, ready for the annual competition for the Peter Pan Cup.

For 40 years Allan Titmuss was the power running the Serpentine Swimming Club. He tenaciously nurtured it through difficult periods in the 1980s and 1990s when many had called for it to be closed on the grounds of health and safety.

Formed in 1864 the organisation is the oldest open-air swimming club in the world and the oldest non-official body in The Royal Parks. It is best known for its Christmas Day race for the Peter Pan Cup. Allan fought hard to ensure that the privilege — that members could swim all the year round from 6am to 9.30am in the untreated waters of the lake, where for five months a year the temperature is below 10°C (50°F) — would not be lost.

Active membership is wide in age including teenagers and Second World War veterans. Allan ensured that the club be opened to women in the 1990s, against the stout objection of some older members, who claimed to have seen many a good tennis club ruined by the admission of women.

Membership of the club is eclectic, encompassing clergymen, politicians, the unemployed, an astrologer, a hatter, members of the medical profession and a market stall trader. A Polish builder and occasional American add an international strain to a group whose only concession to comfort is a kettle point and lavatory.

A kindly man, Allan ran the club as a benign dictator. All, on the weekly Saturday race, would await his pronouncement as to their handicap that day. He would brook no nonsense. The individual not striving their best, seeking to doctor a better time handicap for the Christmas Day race, would be spotted immediately.

He was blessed with a rugged, square-jawed physique as would befit one who served as a Royal Marine during National Service. This, however, belied his nimbleness with his hands. Apprenticed as a bookbinder before being called up, he taught the skill with enduring patience, showing the greatest sensitivity to those who made slow progress.

Self-disciplined to the end, only three days before his death he was giving instructions from his hospital bed as to what stance to take at a meeting with organisers of swimming events to be held in the Serpentine during the 2012 Olympics.

Allan is survived by his wife of more than 40 years, and by two sons.

TORBEN PETERSEN
We are sad to report the death in December of Guild member Torben Petersen. He was a local resident and long-time supporter of Richmond Park. Our condolences go to his wife Biddy.

ANGELA STOLLAR
We are also sad to announce the passing of Angela Stollar, wife of Guild member Howard, after a short illness. Our warmest wishes go to Howard and both Angela and Howard’s families.