

SECRET MEETING CLOSES RIDING SCHOOL

At very short notice the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee met on 2nd November. The question was would they grant the riding school a bridle path around the southern perimeter of the Park. This was the one matter outstanding from their previous meeting. Normally a few Friends manage to get to these meetings to listen to the debate. On this occasion the meeting opened and immediately went into secret session. We protested but they refused to allow us to listen to their deliberations. Even on Monday (5th November) the officers at the Civic Centre were sworn to secrecy until a press release had been published.

To our amazement they have decided not to renew the riding school's lease which ends on 31st December. This means that the riding school will have to close. This also means that they will not now be able to re-apply for the grant of £30,000 from the Museums and Galleries Commission to transfer the Museum's transport collection to the Stables. It also means that the riding school will not now repair the remainder of the derelict stable buildings.

What reasons do they give for this complete volte-face? All they say is that a full-scale riding school with a bridle path would intrude far too much on the character of the Park. Remember, they were quite happy to grant the riding school permission to erect a temporary structure for indoor lessons in the winter. We have to report that in all our conversations with people about the Park we have not yet met one person who feels that a bridle path would intrude too much.

There surely must be something else to this decision and their press release suggests, without actually daring to say it, that the riding school has not been managed efficiently. Yet on Thursday 8th November the London Borough of Hounslow

Continued overleaf

PUBLIC MEETING ON SUNDAY

We are holding a public meeting to discuss the future of the Park, in the Scout Hut, Pope's Lane, (opposite the entrance to the Park) at 3.00 on Sunday 18th November.

We have invited every one of the 12 GPJC Councillors, together with Mr. A Holloway, Director of Arts & Recreation, London Borough of Hounslow (the chief responsible officer) to take part in this discussion.

It is most important that this meeting does not become a lobby of angry horseriders, who we feel sure will wish to organise a campaign of their own.

We apologise for giving such short notice of this meeting. If you are unable to attend we suggest that you write to the Chairman of the GPJC, Civic Centre, Hounslow asking for a full explanation of their decision. If you do not find this satisfactory then write to the Leaders of both Ealing and Hounslow Councils, and ask for the decision to be reversed.

restrict any development to leisure and recreational purposes, and that this building should be effectively 'marketed' by advertising and publicity.

- 6) We would of course be very willing to assist in the promotion of this building, especially from the point of view of communicating with the press to gain publicity and with any developers or architects who express an interest.
- 7) As the Small Mansion occupies such a vitally important position in the Park we are most concerned that no decision should be made concerning its future before there has been the widest possible consultation with both our members and the general public.

The Café

Due to the retirement of the Licensee tenders have been invited for the catering rights in the Park's two cafes. Although this came upon us very suddenly the Committee decided that it represented an opportunity we should not pass by. So we have secured the services of a professional caterer and have put in a bid on the basis that all our profits would be spent in one way or another for the benefit of the Park. Now is the moment, if you are full of bright ideas on this subject, to pass them on!

AND...

Sunday 25th November - CHRISTMAS BAZAAR in the Temple. Plenty of goodies plus your chance to buy our blank card - a frog with a parcel. (Frog? Friends of Gunnersbury etc etc). 2.00 to 4.00.

Saturday 26th January at 2.00 in St. Faith's Church Hall, Windmill Road, Brentford - A BAZ-JUMBLE! Whatever it is, we need volunteers for it! You can help either by an hour or two distributing leaflets in the week before, or on the day; details below.

THE KITCHENS: We opened these for the last weekends of the four summer months and we had 2804 people through the doors and they donated £136.14p. If you have spent cold Saturdays and Sundays in February and March cleaning and painting, plastering and scrubbing, then it is enormously gratifying to see the rooms full of people talking, pointing, asking questions and so on. Come and help us in the spring to prepare the third room.

The SUMMER FETE was a great success. It stayed fine and the crowds turned up. We had fewer stall holders this year but still made £450 profit. The whole burden of this event is carried by Joan Catterall and Eva Swann, to whom we are enormously grateful. By the way, does anybody know where we can get a public address system which actually works?! It would make such a difference when we draw the raffle.....

The experiment of hiring 3 Walkie/Talkie machines for the Park staff was successful (see the last Newsletter under 'Vandalism'). Within a very short time they were seen to be essential equipment and we are now trying to buy some for the permanent use of the staff.

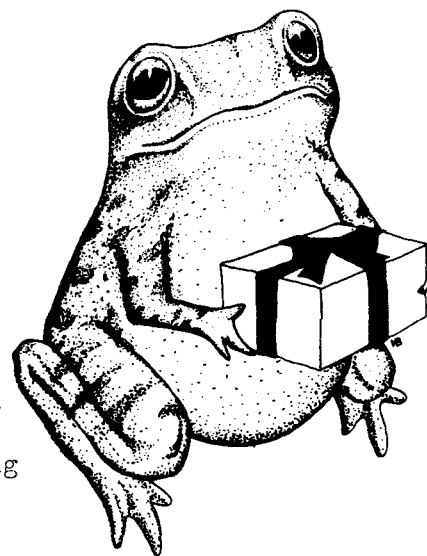
Anne Stead (574 8341) - The tights and nylons you have sent her for stuffing soft toys have been very successful - please keep sending it in. She can supply patterns, if required.

Mike Rowan's guided tour of the Nurseries was fascinating, and by popular demand he has agreed to repeat this in May 1985 - Watch for details in a future Newsletter.

The Museum has published a new full-colour Guide to the Museum with a history of the Park. At 60p it is excellent value and it even has a photo of the Kitchens Give them to all those friends at Christmas who have been meaning to visit the Park and Museum but haven't yet got round to it!

Thanks to Margaret Schofield-Palmer for her talk on 'KENTWELL 1610'. No doubt before very long we will all be dressing as the Rothschilds and running sessions called 'GUNNERSBURY 1850' for the hordes of visiting schoolchildren.

Comments, volunteers, suggestions etc please to me, James Wisdom, 25, Hartington Road, Chiswick, W.4. 994 4231.



People who showed concern at the areas of the Park which have been cleared should by now be taking heart as the benefits of such a policy now become more tangible. The area around the Orangery, which for years has been neglected and had become an eyesore in the middle of the Park, was cleared and, to some people, vandalised. But this "vandalism" was necessary - without total clearance it would have been impossible to eradicate the perennial weed problem and any planting would very quickly have been taken over by the weeds. Now, one year later, we are ready for phase two and very soon a whole new range of plants will be planted amongst the rocks, transforming an eyesore into a feature. The base of the water-way will never hold water but we hope to cover this with shingle and put in some picnic tables and benches to utilise another aspect of the feature and increase the enjoyment of people using the Park.

Another area where some people gasped in horror as holly trees and some yew were removed was by the East Lodge entrance to the Park; accusations of "wanton destruction" were levelled at us almost as if we were dedicated to destroying the Park. What did people see in this area before we began our programme of site clearance? When we first began to draw up plans in 1983 for the development of this site we were presented with an area where trees and shrubs which once were in perfect shape and scale had now become mis-shapen, overgrown and impossible to manage. The area behind, shielded from view, was a dumping ground for tins, bottles and other litter, brick debris and empty glue tubes. In 1983-4 we have been able to clear this and we are in the process of constructing paths from the entrance into the Park. This area, once disowned by the Park, is now to be transformed into a Winter Garden where trees, shrubs, plants and bulbs of winter interest will harmonise between October and April and hopefully provide the general public with ideas for their own gardens. The first border has already been planted and, weather permitting, the remainder will be planted before Christmas.

So, if you were one of the people who were horrified and sceptical about our clearance schemes, think back to how it was before. Think how many plants were in the area and what shape they were in and then count how many plants have been replanted in the same area. I guarantee the figures will astound you. Of course they are smaller, of course the area now looks new, but Nature moves on and in twenty to thirty years' time much of the present work will be getting cleared and replanted - and members of the public will be getting worried that we don't know what we are doing. . . This is not a disadvantage, this is the beauty of Nature; things are constantly changing, growing, dying or being replaced - and as Nature moves on we should move with it.

Mike Rowan (Leading Hand, Gunnersbury Park)

The Small Mansion

Since the Teachers' Centre moved out of the Small Mansion some of its main rooms have been left virtually empty. The GPJC has asked The Friends for their views on the future use of this building, and the following is the text of a paper which we intend to send them soon.

- 1) In view of the refusal of both Ealing and Hounslow Council to finance the restoration of the listed buildings in the Park we reluctantly have to accept the GPJC's stated desire to attract some commercial development in the Park.
- 2) Any commercial development must be in keeping with the covenants and consistent with the concepts of leisure and recreation, and of the legitimate purposes of a public park.
- 3) Although we would prefer the Small Mansion to be used for non-profit making leisure and recreational activities we recognise that it is the most commercially 'attractive' building in the Park.
- 4) Any development should allow the building to be as open and available as possible to the general public, should involve the minimum of structural alterations and any lease should be for the shortest reasonable period of years.
- 5) We therefore think that a brief should be prepared describing the building, the rooms available (together with the possibility of re-locating the Training Consortium), the terms of the covenants and the requirement to

renewed its licence to operate until the end of the year. So there must be another reason for this decision and, at the moment, it looks to us as if it has simply been bungled by either the councillors or the officers or a mixture of the two.

The position is far more serious than it looks because it confirms to us something we suspected from the very beginning, namely, that the Joint Committee is incapable of managing the Park with any degree of success at all. They sit surrounded by the ruins of listed buildings: the Dairy has been demolished, the East Lodge has rotted away through neglect, the Orangery is a ruin as is Princess Amelia's Bath-house and the Potomac Tower. The listed section of the stables is still decaying though its (unlisted) out-buildings have had £1000s invested in them by the riding school! The major part of the Small Mansion has lain empty for two years. Rather than make decisions they ask the officers for yet more reports - were these reports written on glass we could have reglazed the Orangery by now. It is time that both Councils recognised the deep-seated failure of this committee and we are asking the Leaders of both Councils to step in over the Joint Committee and negotiate a satisfactory solution to the crisis brought on us by the decision of 2nd November.

Autumn in the Park

The exceptionally mild autumn has paid the Park some unexpected dividends this year and bewildered summer flowering plants are hesitantly flowering around the Park. *Spirea arguta*, the Bridal Wreath, normally flowering in April and May, is to be seen flowering behind the Small Mansion Car Park in November. *Choisya ternata*, the Mexican Orange, more often seen flowering in spring and early summer, has been flowering profusely since the beginning of October at the bottom of the Nursery. *Berberis* in the same border as the *Choisya* is throwing out some unexpected orange flowers more usually seen in the spring.

The lack of frost has meant that the regulars in the Park can enjoy an extended season of autumnal colour - a walk to the Potomac is well worth the effort to see *Arbutus unedo*, the Strawberry Tree, in full flower with the waxy white/pink flowers in clusters and the fruits from which its name is derived. Whilst in this area of the Park do try to catch the amazing autumn colours of the group of *Malus tschonoskii*; although it had obviously reached its best at the time of going to press, you might still see it if the weather remains mild.

The small tree with vivid crimson leaves on the Pitch and Putt opposite the Nursery gate, is *Perrotia persica* - how many visitors to the Park have made a mental note of the garden? - and be sure to look at the attractive peeled bark of the older specimens. Most plants warrant a closer inspection than is afforded by many visitors to the Park.

In the border behind the Dahlias, towards the main office, and in the border by the Nursery two magnificent *Rhus typhina* are so rich in autumn colour they appear to be on fire. The one on the main drive is associating well with the blue-grey foliage of the *Eucalyptus* and it is a pity that the *Rhus* is not to the fore of the *Eucalyptus* where its true beauty could be more fully appreciated.

The walk around the Boating Lake is also well worth a detour; plants providing some rich autumn colours include *Prunus*, the *Cotinus coggygrea*, the Smoke Bush, and, on the cafe side of the Lake, the fiery bronze Swamp Cypress, *Taxodium distichum*. Behind the Boat Shed stands *Liquidambar styraciflua*, with almost all the shades of red thought up by Nature.

Also at this time of year the more interesting coloured evergreen shrubs come into their own as a foil for the autumn colours; notice how well the silver leaves of *Senecio greyii* and the lime green shiny leaves of *Grissolinia littoralis* brighten up the borders, especially after a shower of rain.

Finally the profusion of berries around the Park should be enjoyed now. The mild weather has delayed the attacks by birds who are not, as yet, finding difficulty in locating alternative food sources but the berries are ripening more quickly and will no doubt fall much sooner than usual. As for the old adage that heavy crops of berries foretell an exceptionally harsh winter, well, I've never been convinced of the validity of this but we are enjoying a bumper crop of berries, so perhaps in the next Newsletter I will be eating my words at the same time as the birds are eating the berries!