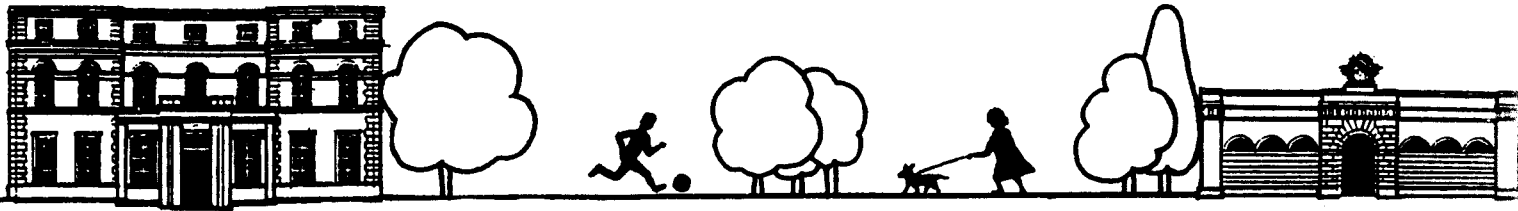


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# NEWSLETTER



## THE STABLES - ANOTHER CRISIS

We have called a public meeting in the Temple in Gunnersbury Park at 3.00 on Sunday 5th February to let our members know what has been going on in the last few weeks and to hear their views. There is also an emergency meeting of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee in the Small Mansion at 6.00 on Friday 3rd February which is open to the public.

Our last Newsletter (No. 24, July 1988) reported that the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee, after the collapse of their scheme to convert the Stables to a Craft Centre, had decided to find a "commercial" solution to the restoration, but they had taken out of their minutes a reference to offices.

At that stage two schemes were under discussion - conversion either to a restaurant or to a set of auction rooms - both of which included the possibility of moving the carriages etc. down from the Museum. The restaurant scheme failed, but two other proposals appeared and so three schemes were considered at the Joint Committee's meeting in September, but in the "confidential" part of the meeting after the press and public have been excluded. This is what we have been able to discover about them:

- The Auction Rooms. This scheme would have included space for a regular weekly or fortnightly auction, a restaurant, space for the Transport Collection, offices and car park for the staff and the auction rooms used by crafts-people for the rest of the time. It was not clear how car parking arrangements would work on auction days, with many people wanting to take away their purchases. The Joint Committee would have borne the cost of fitting out and running the Museum part of the scheme.

- The Motor Car Museum. This would have been a display of classic and vintage motor cars, with the Museum's transport collection included or near by. A notional 100,000 people per year would have visited it, paying an admission charge. It would also show vintage cars for sale and be available for receptions, promotions etc. The proposers wanted a 30 space car park. The connection between the Joint Committee's museum and the motor car museum was not clear but as far as we know the costs of fitting out and running the Joint Committee's section would have been borne by the Joint Committee.

- The Swakeleys scheme. Swakeleys House Ltd won an award for their restoration of the grade 1 listed building at Ickenham and so can claim a good record. The principle of their plan was to restore the North Stable Block and fit it out for Museum use, restore the East Block for office use and demolish the outbuildings (shower rooms, boiler house, garage) beside the East Block and build a new building in the same height and style - this would also be offices. The offices would have a 31 space car park on the land to the north that had once been glasshouses. They would have also paid over a substantial sum for the running costs of the Museum, and they would restore the Japanese Garden.

The Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee chose to negotiate further with Swakeleys. As these negotiations were confidential there was no detailed information available, but there was one major problem to deal with which would have threatened the success of every scheme.

This was the problem of central government's Capital Allocations to local authorities. The mysteries of this are hard to fathom, but it appeared that, when the buildings were restored, the improvement in their capital value would be set against the allocation that the government allows. This allocation is small but very important to local authorities and I gather that there were considerable negotiations between Ealing, Hounslow and the Dept of the Environment, which by Christmas had been settled satisfactorily. This was nearly a national news story as it looked as though central government was on the one hand persuading councils to go into partnership with private capital and then on the other hand penalising authorities when they did so!

At the same time the negotiations with Swakeleys were progressing. It appears that one of the reasons their scheme had been chosen in preference to the others was that they were prepared to invest a far greater sum into the restoration work. Within the last week we have learned that the value of this work (turning the North Block into a Museum, restoring the Japanese Garden and a substantial cash sum paid to the Joint Committee) is around £1m. They would spend a further sum (£1m?, £2m?) on restoring the East Block and constructing their new building on the "footprint" of the demolished outbuildings.

In the meantime Ealing had run into trouble on its budget and has had to cut £12m of expenditure and raise rents and rates. So Ealing needs to find a solution to the Stables problem that costs them little or nothing.

At the same time a letter arrived from English Heritage to the Joint Committee saying "... it would be extremely regrettable if it was felt to be unacceptable on office grounds especially since Government Circulars have encouraged local authorities to be flexible in considering change of use applications for listed buildings under threat".

The next stage in this saga is that, as the Joint Committee had got a scheme which brought, in their view, substantial public benefit, they sent it to both Councils to approve. Ealing did so, but Hounslow's Labour Councillors, meeting in their confidential Policy Group, decided they were against offices in the Park on any terms. So at Hounslow's Leisure Service Committee on January 23rd they voted against the scheme.

At that Jan 23rd meeting one councillor, John Grigg, said they should at least put the scheme out to public consultation but Cllr Pat Nicholas said there was no point as they had made up their minds. She also recommended that they refer to the problem to the LRT (Chiswick Works) Panel to solve.

The Chiswick Works is a huge piece of land north of Gunnersbury Station where 4000 men used to make and repair buses. When it is redeveloped there may well be some "planning gain" which could be used to repair the Stables. But this idea brings problems. How long will it be before this planning gain happens? There are no outline schemes for the site yet but we know that the Stables are deteriorating fast. How much money will it bring and will it help to cover the Museum's running costs? How do we know that other, equally worthy, schemes might not have first call on this planning gain? And can we be sure that the Park is near enough to the Works site to qualify?

It is clear that this proposal for planning gain is no more than a red herring. Pat Nicholas said in the local paper this weekend: "Even if it means the buildings become beyond repair we can't allow offices in a public park, it would set a dangerous precedent which would threaten all our parks". In fact the precedent was set when Hounslow's Civic Centre was built in Lampton Park, and confirmed in 1978/9 (when Alf King was Leader of Hounslow Council) when the Gatehouse at Chiswick House Grounds was converted into offices (and on that occasion the profit went into the general rate fund, not into the Grounds).

The Friends 12 - person committee has been watching these schemes as some details have become known, though a good deal has remained confidential. Since 1981 we have

been watching public reaction to the problems of Gunnersbury Park and we have seen scheme after scheme fail. We have also seen how impossible it has been to get both Councils to act together for the good of the Park. On this occasion we thought that in the minds of the general public the benefits of the Swakeleys scheme (restored buildings, Museum extension, Japanese Garden, a substantial cash sum) would outweigh the problems (offices in a Park, new buildings on the site of the outbuildings, car park).

So now there is an opportunity to hear what our members and the general public have to say. We disagree with Cllr Pat Nicholas saying there is no point in public consultation - there is every point. The Stables are still deteriorating, the costs of any repair are increasing, the insurance company has withdrawn its cover and time is short. Should we now try to persuade Hounslow Council's Labour Group to change its mind and support the Swakeleys scheme?

## New Appointments

It is good to be able to welcome Sue Silberberg as the new Museum Curator, replacing Phil Philo who has moved to Kirkleatham Old Hall in Cleveland.

Sue Silberberg is Australian and has served for 5 years as Properties Curator for the National Trust of Australia (Victoria State) where she was responsible for 64 historic properties and their contents.

Greg Arthur has been appointed Park Superintendent now that Tony Gregory has been promoted to Lampton Park. As Greg has been the Deputy Park Superintendent for the last few years the transition to his new responsibilities will not come as too much of a shock! We wish them both well and hope they both enjoy enough success to make their work worthwhile.

## Cycle Meetings

Last year the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee agreed to 4 cycle meetings on Saturday mornings as an experiment. After the first two meetings we received a few complaints about the danger of these events and we took the complaints up with the Park Superintendent. He then monitored the next two meetings very closely and concluded that they were being run responsibly and safely. When the cyclists applied to the Committee for 4 more races this year the Friends' advice to the Committee was that, on top of the hire cost (about £50 per morning), the cycle clubs should pay for a member of the park staff to be on duty with them for the whole session, to make sure they bring enough marshalls, signs, tape etc. They will be on 29 April or 1 May, 3 June, 15 July and 9 September. Please let us know your opinions.

## The Orangery

A workman's hut with "Crowngap Developments" has appeared. The restoration work must have started! (Their office development on the Great West Road is coming on nicely!)

## The Acton Town Pump

Deep in the basement of the Museum is the Acton Town Pump - and Acton wants it back! What happened was that it was donated by Acton Borough Council but it was not their's to give away! It really belonged to the Acton Charities, and now Acton is having its Town Centre redeveloped they think it would go very well in the scheme. During the discussion of this at the Joint Committee, Cllr Gallacher (Ealing) had to declare an interest - he is also one of the Trustees of the Acton Charities! High ethical standards and parish pump politics all in one item - it's all happening at the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee meetings!

## Condom Machines

You may have seen an item in the papers about the possibility of installing condom machines at Gunnersbury Museum. Actually they meant in either the loos or the changing rooms in the Park but nevertheless it raised some interesting ethical and

moral questions about what people might expect to see when they visit their local museum. A vigorous rearguard action from Cllr Fred Dunckley (Ealing), combined with an inspection by the company of the state of the loos, seems to have put an end to the idea.

## Bric-a-Brac & Books

On the First Sunday in every month we hold a Books and Bric a Brac Sale in the Pavilion Cafe. By this method we raise some hundreds of pounds per year, but we are always looking out for items for sale.

If you have anything suitable please phone Joan Catterall (560 4262) or Marianne Booth (992 9891) and they will collect!

## A.G.M.

At the Annual General Meeting in July the following people were elected to the Committee:

James Wisdom (Chairman 994 4231), Ian Harmer (Vice Chairman 568 7159), Ken Hawkes (Secretary 568 2712), Andrew Brown (Treasurer 948 1340), Joan Catterall (Membership Secretary 560 4262), Marianne Booth (Fund-Raising 992 9891), Jean Clarke (567 5523), John Brace (948 7017), John Catterall (560 4262), Vivian Winning (940 4116) and later Joan Fenton (579 5997) was co-opted onto the Committee.

## Diary

We will be opening the Victorian Kitchens on: 27 & 28 May, 24 & 25 June, 29 & 30 July, 19 & 20 August and 23 & 24 September.



*The newly installed bins in Gunnersbury Park, to help overcome the problem of dog's 'accidents' littering the park have been well used by dog owners. Pictured are from right to left: Marion Booth, with Charlie; Joan Catterall with Charlie and Vivian Winning with Dusty.*

The Summer Fete will be on Sunday 3rd September (if summer hasn't finished by then!)

One of the past Curators of the Museum, Ann Collett-White (though then we knew her as Ann Balfour Paul) will be giving a lecture on "GUNNERSBURY & THE ROTHSCHILDS" at the 9th West London Local History Conference on 15th April at Montague Hall, Hounslow. The whole day is called "HOUSES WITH INFLUENCE" and tickets or further details can be had from Gordon Spencer, 560 5814.

## Dog Bins

This photo comes from the Brentford, Chiswick & Isleworth Times, 9th Sept 88, and shows three of our Committee members on the day the 6 Dog Bins we donated to the Park (costing £300) were installed. Let's hope the bins are well used!