

FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

No. 66

April 2002

NEWSLETTER

EVENT • FRIENDS EVENT • FRIENDS EVENT

18 APRIL 2002

7.15 - 9.30pm at the Museum

From the City and Back: Gunnersbury and The Rothschild Archive

A sociable evening, with light refreshments from 7.15, followed by an illustrated talk from 7.45. Our speaker is **Melanie Aspey**, the Rothschild archivist, who will show how the family's collecting instincts contributed to the diversity of the archives in her care, relating them to Gunnersbury.

Tickets are still available at £5.00 each. They can be reserved in advance at the Museum or by post (send a cheque made out to the *Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum* with an SAE to 25 Hartington Road, London W4 3TL) or you can pay at the door on the night.

FRIENDS EVENT • FRIENDS EVENT • FRIENDS

A ROYAL VISIT TO GUNNERSBURY PARK

This badly-kept secret has been whispered about for some weeks and has now been published in the *Brentford, Chiswick and Isleworth Times'* Easter issue. As part of the Jubilee celebrations a number of events, at which the Queen will be present, have been arranged in conjunction with the London Boroughs. The West London event will take place at Gunnersbury Park on 25 June; a number of organisations from the area will be invited to send representatives but we have no other details at present.

We hope there will be time for the guests and their families to explore the Park and enjoy what it offers; this will certainly be a way of reminding West London people of the delights of the Park and Museum!

IN MEMORY OF VINCE CULLING

The friends of Vince Culling have made a generous donation of £300 to the Friends of Gunnersbury Park in his memory.

Vince Culling was a member of the running club, the London Hash House Harriers, who frequently run through Gunnersbury Park. He loved the outdoors and particularly Gunnersbury; club members say they always feel welcome there. Sadly Vince died on Christmas Day, 2000. His friends held a memorial service for him at the Orangery in the Park in January 2001 and made a collection. This has been used to sponsor a bench and a tree at Gunnersbury to commemorate him, as well as a donation to the Scottish Mountain Rescue Team. The gift to the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum is the balance from this collection for which we are very grateful.

A THANK YOU TO THE BRENTHAM SOCIETY

We are delighted to be able to report further donations to Friends' funds. Following the recent exhibition at the Museum about the Brentham Estate, and a reception held there for the Brentham Society and the Brentham Heritage Society, donations totalling £150 have been made. We are very pleased that the Brenthamites have enjoyed the experience of being involved in a Gunnersbury exhibition and we are very grateful for their support.

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Details of the next event, Melanie Aspey's talk on the Rothschilds, appear on the front page. Events at Gunnersbury for the next few months are detailed below:

19 May, 3pm and 4pm "High Days & Holidays" – A Reminiscence Roadshow –

Actors from Questors Theatre bring memories to life – The Chiswick Empire, cycling in the '30s, Saturday night dances, street games and works outings. No tickets but limited places, first served.

15 June 10am -3.30pm Capel Manor Annual Plant Sale

A fund-raiser for the college within the Walled Garden; plants grown by the students will be on sale and the experts will be on hand to answer gardening queries.

20 June 5.30-8pm Capel Manor advice evening

If you are thinking of doing an autumn gardening course, come along and get details on this special open evening.

13 July 11am-3.30pm Gardeners' Question Time. . .

No, not the Radio 4 programme but a chance to get your soil tested or your plants and pests identified. Capel Manor is putting on this special event in their Walled Garden premises at 50p a question, to raise funds for the Friends.

22 September London Open House Weekend

Gunnersbury's contribution to this annual event will provide tours behind the scenes at the Museum (the Large Mansion) and the Bath-House and the Temple will be open to visitors on this afternoon.

We will need volunteers to help act as stewards for this afternoon - please contact the Editor if you would be interested. We will provide a training session in advance.

GROTTOES & SHELL HOUSES

The talk on 21 March attracted an audience of 34 people, launching our new programme very successfully. Diana Reynell described practical restoration projects with which she has been involved. This painstaking and slow work sometimes takes a number of years. At Goodwood over 50,000 shells were needed and this had to be negotiated with Customs and Excise and the Foreign Office, since importing them is restricted. (Fortunately, she revealed, the seashells in our Bath-House are nearly all British rather than exotic!)

Her slides showed grottoes at Marlborough College, Pains-hill, Goodwood, Mt Edgcombe (near Plymouth), Walton Hall in Warwickshire (decorated by Mrs. Delaney) and Hampton Court House amongst others. These showed the different kinds of decoration that may be found. Some is modest and may have been the work of amateurs, perhaps the ladies of a household. Elsewhere, more ambitious schemes, incorporating numerous shells and minerals, may be by professionals.

Those commissioning work of this kind have to decide between *conservation*, preserving what survives, and *restoration*, recreating the mood and sensation originally intended. Her work at Painshill has been in progress on and off since 1987; she demonstrated the difficulties of the latter by describing experiments at Painshill using temporary canvas structures to recreate the artificial "stalactites" which were once there.

Painshill is owned by a charitable trust which charges for admission so that supervision is easier than it is in a public park like Gunnersbury. The scale of the work needed on our grotto is more modest but a speedier solution will be needed, first to ensure that the building is brought into a usable condition which makes sense to the visitor, and secondly to reduce the risk of vandalism which accompanies any signs of apparent neglect or disuse.

In discussion we liked the idea that as fashions changed, a grotto might have begun with a slightly secretive spiritual or mystical purpose, only later becoming a garden room for picturesque banquets or tea parties, or a plunge pool like Gunnersbury's. Perhaps the recently refurbished chamber served as a tea-room for use after a cold bath!

To find out more Diana Reynell recommended

- *Heavenly Caves* by Naomi Miller (1982) and
- the exhibition about *William Beckford*, put together by Bard Graduate Centre for the Decorative Arts in New York, which sadly is only at Dulwich Picture Gallery until 14 April (www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk gives links to the Bard Centre's web-site for useful information).
- *Shell houses and Grottoes* by Hazelle Jackson (Shire Books, £4.50) is excellent and includes a gazetteer.

Visit Painshill Gardens, just south of the junction between the A3 and the A245 (follow brown tourist signs). They are open April-October, Tues-Sun & Bank Hols, 10.30am to 6pm (last entry 4.30), admission £4.50. The grotto is not always open; phone 01932 868113. There is a pleasant restaurant & shop.

2C – THE OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION EVENT 4-6 May 2002

This major event, built around the computer game of the same name, will take place in the Park, occupying the lower half of the football pitches with 5 arenas or marquees for games, cinema and freesports. This is a very new venture for Gunnersbury and the fee of £25,000 paid by the organisers will support future improvement works.

Mistakes made in the planning stage have caused initial anxiety amongst local people, perhaps because the promoters were not experienced at dealing with local communities and because this is a very large event (maximum 35,000 each day) and will take some days to set up and dismantle. Following a consultation meeting in March, at which the organisers did seem to listen to what was said, many problems seem to have been ironed out and many promises were made. Tickets (at £18 each) will only be available in advance and there may be a family ticket.

If this is a success it will do a good deal to promote the Park; during the day it is aimed at a family audience which is just right for Gunnersbury. As well as games-related activities there will be performance areas and a Channel 4 sponsored cinema. In the evening there will be music for 18-30 year olds, with the promoters promising careful supervision. Friends' Committee members are aiming to be present throughout the event to keep an eye on things and see what we can learn for the future.

THE STABLES

The threat in 1980 of the sale of the Stables to a property developer, proposing a very inappropriate extension, led to the formation of the Friends. These dignified buildings alongside Gunnersbury Avenue have remained unused and in poor condition ever since, though cocooned in scaffolding in recent years. Now an advertisement seeking serious proposals for their future use has been published and a number of expressions of interest have been submitted. We believe that a shortlist of preferred bidders will soon be invited to prepare more developed proposals for the Committee to consider.

At the time of writing the details remain confidential but we know they include a proposal for the Japanese Centre with cultural and sporting facilities upon which we have reported before. We will keep you informed in future newsletters.

STAFF RESTRUCTURING

We have mentioned before the staff restructuring which was underway within CIP, the charitable company which runs Gunnersbury. As a result several members of staff have been promoted. *Jill Draper*, who runs the Museum Service, will now also take responsibility for the whole of the Park. A team headed up by *John Keaveney* is now responsible for all parks and gardens in Brentford and Isleworth. *John Yates* has been promoted to run a team in another part of Hounslow which takes him away from Gunnersbury.

FRIENDS IN THE FIFTIES!

We were fascinated to discover that there was an earlier Gunnersbury Friends group – details in the newscuttings from the Middlesex County Times below. Is there anyone out there who was a member and can tell us more about their work?

PARK MUSEUM POLICY

27.4.1954

Public opinion to be consulted

In view of the public interest in the Gunnersbury Park Museum as indicated by many letters in the Press recently, and by the desire of local residents to assist in formulating the policy of the future, the Chairman and members of the Museum sub-committee have decided to hold a meeting in the Town Hall, Ealing, at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 23, to discuss the general policy and future of the Museum.

On the previous evening, Monday, March 22, at 8 o'clock, the inaugural meeting of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park Museum will be held in the Nelson Room, Ealing Town Hall. The Mayors of Ealing, Acton, and Chiswick and Brentford will be present. Sir C. Flower has been approached to become first president of the society.

Among those who have come to the meeting are Miss E. G. H. Aske's School, Mr. J. A. S. M.P., and Miss H. Brown. Their inaugural meeting will be held in 12th, 13th, and 14th century embroidery.

6.3.1954

Friends of the Park Museum

In recent weeks the Friends of Gunnersbury Park Museum have added to their number and arrangements for holding their inaugural meeting will shortly be announced. Among recently-joined members are Mr. R. A. Salaman, M.A., of the British Ethnological Society, which is charged with creating the projected "Museum of English Life and Tradition"; Miss Margery Roberts, B.A., writer and historian of the Home Counties; Miss Dilys Chunglas-Davies, who writes in the "Antique Dealer and Collectors' Guide," and "Ideal Homes"; Mr. Bernard Miles, of the B.B.C., a collector of ploughwright, shipwright and wheelwright tools and things made by them; Miss Constance Mitchell, B.A., headmistress of West Ham Grammar School; Mr. J. A. Pickard, B.Sc., F.I.C., the daughters of the late Mr. C. A. Buckmaster; Sir Michael Balcon; Mr. and Mrs. John Brophy; and the Rectors of Acton and Perivale. Affiliating societies include The Questors, Ealing Photographic Society, Northolt Local History Society and Acton Local H. The directors of the Bank-side Little Theatre have joined, as also the President and many members of the West London Professional and Business Women's Club. Applications for membership have been received from America, Scotland, Devonshire and the Isle of Wight. Forms and information will be gladly supplied by the Chairman of the Ealing Arts Club, 20, Rosemont-road, Acton, W.3.

MUSEUM CONSULTATION

Two meetings to discuss the future of the Museum to help with forward planning raised some interesting issues. One was the name of the museum. Is 'Gunnersbury Park Museum' a good name for a museum service covering two boroughs? Is it misleading? Would the Ealing & Hounslow Museum be better? What do Friends think?

FRIENDS' COMMITTEE

More information about members of the Friends' Committee:

John Brazier lived on the edge of the Park in Popes Lane for over 40 years and has been a Friend since the early days. Though he has now moved away, he is still a great supporter and joined the Committee at the last AGM.

Val Bott, a founder member of the Friends, was a volunteer on the restoration of the kitchens, helped run the Park cafés and is now Editor. A curator by training, she has worked in 4 London Borough museums. She is a museums consultant and a member of the Heritage Lottery Fund's London Committee.

FRIENDS' DONATIONS

The Committee has recently agreed to contribute £300 towards improving the management of the ponds in the Park, following the serious problems which arose from weed growth last year.

PARKS CONFERENCE

Our chairman, James Wisdom, is speaking at *Parks, People and Power*, the Urban Parks Forum's April conference in Leicester. His subject is the role of community groups like our own.

MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

If you are already a Friend, why not encourage someone else to join? If you are not, do sign up and join our mailing list to receive the Newsletter regularly. The subscription, at £3, is very modest - but the more members we have the better the income! In addition, a bigger membership gives the group a stronger voice. Subscriptions for 2002/3 are now due - a slip is enclosed with this Newsletter.

The Membership Secretary is Joan Catterall, 39 Lionel Road, Brentford, Middlesex TW8 9QZ.

CAPEL MANOR at GUNNERSBURY PARK

The horticultural college whose West London branch is based at Gunnersbury has now taken on the staff and students from Norwood Hall, which has closed. To cope with this expansion it is investing in new classrooms beside its existing accommodation in the Walled Garden.

Capel Manor is also putting on summer events (see below) which you may enjoy. These offer a chance to see behind the high wall (entrance from the main car park), to discover what they do and help raise funds! We are very grateful for their help.

AT THE MUSEUM

NOW ON

Window Shopping

Shopping in Ealing and Hounslow 1880-1930, with photos and objects from the local history libraries as well as the Museum's own collections.

Second Skin

From silkworms to lycra, an exhibition about the materials our clothes are made from.

Never had it so good? - Flashbacks to the Fifties

An exhibition to mark the Queen's Jubilee *until 6 October*.

The Japanese in Britain

A travelling exhibition of family photographs showing the history of the Japanese living in Britain from 1860 to the present day

Kumbh Mela from 1 October

Photographs by Peter Spenceley showing images and scenes from the great festival in India

The Victorian Kitchens

See behind the scenes in the Large Mansion. The Rothschilds' kitchens are open weekends April -Nov, 1-6pm.

The Blackland - the Archaeology of Egypt

A ten-week course led by J S McCracken, looking at Tombs, Pharaohs and the Nile presented in conjunction with Birkbeck College starting Wednesday 10 April, 2.30-4.30pm.

MUSEUM OPENING HOURS

November to March, daily (including Bank Hols) 1-4pm

April to October, weekdays 1-5pm, weekends, Bank Hols 1-6pm

☎ 020 8992 1612 ADMISSION FREE

To contact the Editor please write to 25 Hartington Road, Chiswick, London W4 3TL

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