

# FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

No. 85

April 2010

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# NEWSLETTER

## A GENEROUS BEQUEST TO THE FRIENDS

A long-standing Friend, Alice Myers, died at the age of 54 in 2009. Alice lived in The Ridgeway for 25 years and was exceptionally fond of Gunnersbury; she had posted some of her photos of the Park on [www.geograph.org.uk](http://www.geograph.org.uk). She paid for a tree to be planted near the children's playground and contributed to the cost of replanting the Italian Garden behind The Temple.

She has left a legacy to the Friends which we were able to announce at the Annual General Meeting, though at that time we were still unsure as to the amount we would receive.

Alice was a Londoner, one of the three children of a Dutch mother and an English father. An architect by training, she worked in the field of information technology which took her to the Isle of Man and Jersey, Germany, Italy and Sweden. She loved walking, sailing, wind-surfing and especially ice skating – some of her skating boots and dresses are now in the museum collection. She learnt to ride a motorcycle in the early 1990s and her friends remember her enthusiasm for cake and occasional teas at The Ritz! They enjoyed long conversations with her – she was a good listener and a perceptive companion.

Alice's bequest – to support the restoration and refurbishment works she knew to be so badly needed – amounts to £180,000. We will ensure that this is spent with great care in her memory and we have taken careful advice as to how the money should be invested.

The investments will provide an annual income which we can use to make donations towards improvements in the Park. They will also enable us – when the time comes – to provide a substantial sum towards, for example, the partnership funding required to obtain a Heritage Lottery Fund grant.



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## FRIENDS EVENTS

We are planning four events for the coming year, relating to both the Park and the Museum. Full details of the first two of these are provided on the enclosed flier and we hope as many members as possible will be able to join in.

- ***The historic landscape of Gunnersbury Park, 16 May 2.30-4pm***  
A Park Walk, exploring the estate with Richard Gill, Regeneration Manager, and James Wisdom
- ***Recent Acquisitions 15 July 7-9pm***  
See items new to the collection and hear about the Museum's work, with Vanda Foster, Curator, with refreshments

Later in the year we hope to organise a visit to the Capel Manor College centre in the Walled Garden, with a talk on the history of nursery gardening in our area. We are also hoping to have a speaker from the National Trust to talk about the way they manage historic estates like Gunnersbury, which combine parkland and a mansion, to see what can be learnt from their approach.

## RESTORATION UPDATE

Since the last Newsletter little progress has been made. Ealing Council announced that it would make £5 million available but this was too little to enable any specific part of the restoration to proceed.

The two councils are supposed to put in equal funding to run the Gunnersbury estate but Hounslow was unable to offer a further £5 million. This left things at stalemate.

No further meetings of the Joint Advisory Committee or the Stakeholders Group have taken place since before Christmas, and now the politicians are all concentrating on the May elections.

As agreed at our AGM the Chairman wrote to English Heritage to express our concern and ask them now to serve an order on the two councils requiring them to start restoration work.

Simon Thurley, the Chief Executive of English Heritage replied saying that he too was extremely concerned about the situation at Gunnersbury and invited Friends representatives to meet the senior officer responsible for West London.

At that meeting it was agreed that the Gunnersbury problem is one of management and governance, and that it is an issue of London significance rather than just an Ealing and Hounslow matter.

We hope that as a result additional bodies, including the Mayor's Office and the London Regional Development Agency, may join in the discussions in order to find appropriate ways forward with the two Councils.

Four years ago, at the time of the last local elections, the Joint Committee was being wound up and the two councils were about to create a new Regeneration Board. Since then no decisions have been taken and we face yet another group of new Council nominees on what is now the Joint Advisory Board.

## MORE LEAD THEFTS

Benjamin Smith was charged with stealing lead from the Temple at Gunnersbury in October. The lead was found in the garden of a house in Acton, about a mile away. The lead was easily matched to that lost from the Temple because it was newly cut and painted white.

Nicolas Bond, a butcher and part-time constable, had apprehended Smith. Several of Smith's friends and work colleagues provided him with character references and an alibi and he was acquitted. Had Smith been found guilty he could have been transported – sentences at that time were very severe.

The trial took place in October 1786 when Princess Amelia owned the estate. One of the witnesses for the prosecution was Benjamin Pince, Amelia's gardener. The lead weighed 28 lbs and was worth 8 shillings. For comparison, a weeder woman in local gardens would have earned sixpence a day, so this was roughly two and a half weeks of her pay!

You can see the full report of the trial at Old Bailey online here: <http://tinyurl.com/y9zgc7>.

On March 18 and 31 2010 there were further thefts of lead from a large area of the west wing of the Large Mansion and some from the Small Mansion. Luckily this did not result in any leaks as the roof was repaired very quickly, but Museum staff once again spent considerable time dealing with police and contractors.

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## FAMILY ACTIVITIES on Wednesday 2 June 2010

### **Green Elephants and Mice!** *A family activity for children of all ages*

**Q:** When is a milk carton not a milk carton?

**A:** When it's a green elephant, of course!

Confused? Join one of these creative workshops and all will be revealed! Discover how to make your very own toy elephant and mouse to take home with you. Workshop led by members of the Isleworth and District Branch of The Embroiderers' Guild.

Two sessions, either 11.00am to 12.30pm or 1.30pm to 3pm, cost £2.50 per child to cover all materials, payable in cash on the day.

**Advance booking essential** as places are limited; call the Museum Education Department on 020 8992 2247. Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times (no fee for accompanying adults).

### **Toys from Around the World**

*Free family activity*

Meet Matryoshka the Russian doll, play the Maori game of rakau, and solve the mystery of the Japanese puzzle box!

Join one of these free family sessions to discover and play with toys from around the world. Where have they come from? How did their journeys begin? And if you have a special toy from another country that you would like to tell us about, then bring it along on the day.

Two sessions, either 11.30am to 12.30pm or 1.30pm – 2.30pm.

**No advance booking necessary.** Just come along and join one of the sessions. Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

## GUNNERSBURY – THE 1920s STORY

Using Middlesex newspapers and council minutes it has been possible to put together the story of the acquisition of the Gunnersbury estate as a public park in the 1920s. The Boroughs of Acton and Ealing twice tried to purchase land from the Rothschilds for this purpose. The first occasion, exactly 90 years ago, related to 71 acres stretching north from Popes Lane to the railway line, lying west of Gunnersbury Avenue. This was on the boundary between the two boroughs who argued that it was greatly needed for sports and outdoor activity in their two communities. Acton and Ealing invited the local authorities of Brentford and Chiswick to share in the purchase but they refused.

The proposal met opposition from various local groups, who argued that Ealing would pay most while Acton would get most benefit. A hostile petition attracted 1,183 names. The two councils requested Ministry of Health sanction for a £37,000 loan for the purchase. After a public inquiry in August 1920 this was rejected.

In April 1925 the two councils tried again. This time they wanted to buy Gunnersbury Park, which lay entirely within the boundary of Brentford Urban District Council. Land at the southern end had already been sold for a cemetery and factories on the new Great West Road. Brentford and Chiswick again refused to share in the project as both had recently acquired parkland. In fact, the Park represented one-fifth of Brentford whose Council had hoped that at least part of the land would be developed for housing and factories to bring in much-needed rate income. After more local opposition, on grounds of the likely costs, there was another public inquiry in May 1925. Ealing and Acton argued that the Park would be self-supporting through income from sports activities.

After a delay during which the press speculated that the Rothschilds were likely to put up the price of such valuable land (despite recent claims to the contrary, there was no suggestion that they were donating it to the public) the Minister of Health gave approval for Ealing to borrow £51,070 and Acton £45,342. The rest of the £125,000 price came from the Middlesex County Council which required the sale of building land for houses along Popes Lane and Lionel Road to recover costs.

Ealing Council's current opposition to building on the last strip of this land means yet again that it is their neighbouring council that has been deprived of potential council tax income which might have supported the Park and Museum in the future.

## IRON AGE COINS FROM BRENTFORD

Under the Treasure Act of 1996 archaeological finds which may be defined as "treasure" have to be reported. Seventeen Iron Age coins from the Thames foreshore at Brentford, found in 2008 and 2009, have been deemed by the Coroner to be treasure under this Act. Cast from potin, a bronze alloy with a high tin content, this kind of coin is found mostly in the south-east and they are amongst the earliest coins made here. They have been offered to Gunnersbury Park Museum and the Curator has officially registered their interest in acquiring them. The Friends committee has agreed to make a donation of £265 towards the purchase.

## CAPEL MANOR PRIZE

The Friends of Gunnersbury Park Award is presented each year to a student at the Capel Manor College Centre in Gunnersbury Park. The award is for the student who has, in the opinion of staff, contributed most to the Centre's achievements.



This year the award was presented to Newcome Edwards, a 20 year old second year student. He is studying for the BTEC National Diploma in Horticulture. His tutor described him as an outstanding student with a very positive attitude to his studies and life in general.

Newcome is always ready to help others around the college often offering to do additional work. He also volunteers at Kew Gardens where he is currently working on restoring the grass garden. He would like to continue his studies in landscape design after completing his BTEC course this summer.

His prize of a copy of the *RHS Plant Encyclopedia* was donated by the Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum.

## IN THE PARK

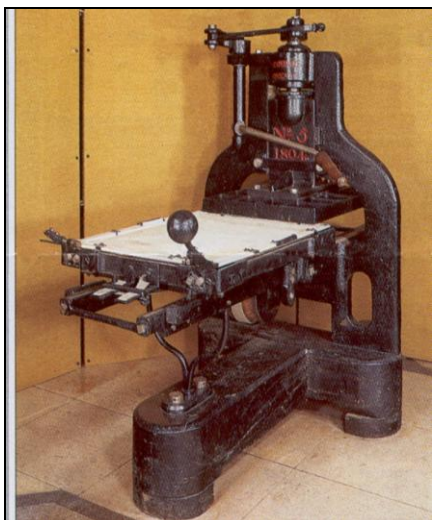
### The new toilet block

We have reported before on the proposed new toilets between the cafe and the Kitchens of the Large Mansion. We can now report that work has started on site. The area has been fenced off for safety and it is not possible to use the short-cut to the museum under the Flint Arch for the time being. The small playground near the café and the café itself remain in use during the project.

Surveys have confirmed that no part of the old toilet block was of archaeological interest and this derelict building has now been completely removed leaving only the flint arch. The rebuilding work will take about 14 weeks so the new toilets may be in operation by mid July.

### BBC website

Some Friends will have heard radio programmes in the BBC series *The History of the World in One Hundred Objects*. This was devised and presented by Neil McGregor, the Director of the British Museum. Alongside the programmes, museums have been submitting objects to the BBC web-site; Gunnersbury's rare Stanhope printing press now appears at <http://tinyurl.com/y2a853z>.



## IN THE MUSEUM

### *Polish Lives* exhibition postponed

This planned exhibition is based on an oral history project currently being run by Ealing Local Studies Library. Unfortunately there has been a delay in collecting the interviews and the exhibition has had to be postponed until all the interviews are available. More news soon!

### Schools and local history

An exciting new departure for the Museum has been working with Oldfield Primary School, Greenford, on the local history of their area. Three classes have visited on museum tours and museum staff have been able to give them a background to Greenford and show them local prints and objects from the collections. These include an 1870s dress dyed bright purple with the aniline dye made in William Perkins' Greenford factory.

### NADFAS volunteers

Generous donations from NADFAS have enabled the museum to buy archival materials and have volunteers trained by a specialist textile conservator to provide better storage for the dress collections. They have been taught to make archival dress bags and to pad coat hangers to fit individual garments. Teams of two or three work on this each week and have made great improvements to the costume wardrobes.



## FRIENDS of GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

Welcome to new members who have joined recently. If you are already a Friend, do encourage someone else to join. More members give us a better income and a stronger voice. At £5, the subscription is very modest; that for 2010-11 is due from 1 April. Send your cheque, made out to the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum with the enclosed form duly signed to The Membership Secretary, Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum, 39 Lionel Road, Brentford TW8 9QZ

**We welcome contributions to the Newsletter;  
the next issue will be compiled in July 2010.**

Contact the editor, Val Bott, 25 Hartington Rd, London W4 3TL.  
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