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# NEWSLETTER

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Saturday 28 Sept**

Friends are invited to the AGM in the Small Mansion Terrace Room at Gunnersbury Park. Coffee will be provided from 10.30 and we expect the meeting to be over by noon.

## **FALCONS SCHOOL REJECTS SMALL MANSION**

The Gunnersbury Park Joint Advisory Committee, at its meeting on Friday 7 June, learnt that AlphaPlus, the owners of the Falcons School, have withdrawn from discussions to take over the Small Mansion. The Committee also learnt that it had not yet proved possible to hold or even arrange a meeting with AlphaPlus to explore the reasons for their decision. Despite having known this for over a week, it was not included as a late item in the Committee's agenda, and it would have been withheld had not questions been raised at the meeting.

The report to the Committee, written before receiving the AlphaPlus decision, said: "Meeting has taken place with alpha plus group following the decision by both councils to award preferred bidder status. This start up meeting covered a number of project areas, but most importantly the consultation and engagement. Both authorities have received letters from local residents on this proposal, with specific comments on the covenants. It was agreed that a consultation meeting would take place in June, at the small mansion, where residents could attend to speak with the full project team from Alpha Plus Group. This meeting has yet to be arranged"

This type of tendering process was conducted under European (OJEC) procedures, and we have been advised that if the preferred bidder withdraws, it is not possible to transfer the preferred bidder status to any other bidder. The process has to start again from the beginning. The Friends have asked Ealing Council officers to be able to see the documents which marketed the building. We have been passed on to Ealing's property advisers, Cushman and Wakefield, who will only release access to them after receiving a signed confidentiality and indemnity agreement, to which the Friends are not prepared to accede.

The decision to get the Small Mansion "off the books" and thereby save the costs of repair, restoration of a listed building and long-term maintenance was part of the strategy agreed between Hounslow and Ealing after Ealing's rejection of the outcomes of the public consultation in 2009. The two councils' Project Board wanted to go straight ahead with marketing the Small Mansion, citing (amongst other things) the dangers of procrastination. The school's interest was already known. The Friends' had urged them to wait until we were successful with the main Lottery bids to get the best conditions for inviting tenders. While many companies logged on to the Cushman and Wakefield tendering web site, very few took it further. By the end, the catering/wedding venue (similar to Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park) had withdrawn, leaving only two proposals for apartments and the school.

The Friends held a special meeting on 11 May to discuss the AlphaPlus proposal and to prepare their contribution to the anticipated public consultation. 23 members attended. Had the proposed consultation gone ahead, the Friends' position would have been to reject the proposal for

this school. It brought too little public benefit to the Park. We did not want to see an area of the park fenced off for the school. We were sceptical about the amount of community benefit being offered (such as hiring of school rooms when not being used). We thought a 200 year lease was far too long and the rental far too low; indeed, the details of the future rent review process would have been important. We would have wanted to know which company would own the Mansion – the school, or its parent property company - and what control on future uses there would should the school close or move. We would have been looking for information about things like traffic, parking, security and the integration of the school into the management of the whole estate. Some of these issues were

related to its being a school and others to coping with the implications of private ownership within a public estate.

We are only faced with this situation because of the long term failure of the two councils to properly maintain this (listed) building. If they are determined to continue with the strategy of getting it “off the books” and out of public hands, then it would be better to decide what use would be best for the Park and work to bring that about. This sequence of events reveals just how much we need a strategy which treats the Park as an integrated estate with a proper system of management and governance.

After James Wisdom, our Chairman, published the piece above on the Friends' web-site, the family of local community websites (including ChiswickW4.com, ActonW3.com, etc) reprinted the article, adding the following text after contacting the councils and the school on 12 June:

"A spokesperson from AlphaPlus said: Following long and detailed consideration of the plans for the Small Mansion at Gunnersbury Park, we have decided not to proceed with our involvement in the process. We have concluded that the scale of the project meant that it would not be possible for us to deliver it financially in a manner which would be sustainable and we have therefore decided to withdraw at this early stage. We want to thank the Councils for their courtesy and professionalism during the process and we wish them every success with the plans for Gunnersbury Park, which, we very much hope, will return it to its full glory."

"A joint statement from Ealing and Hounslow Councils has just been released: 'It is disappointing that Alpha Plus Group has decided to withdraw its support, particularly as Ealing and Hounslow councils do not have the estimated £4million required to carry out the much-needed restoration work. As this was the only viable option put forward, the councils are now faced with the significant challenge of trying to find a sustainable short term use for the building, as well as preventing it from further deterioration. The councils will also be investigating other viable long-term options for the site over the next few years.'"

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## RE-DISCOVERING GUNNERSBURY

Purcell, the conservation architects, have begun to update the Gunnersbury Conservation Management Plan. Their work currently includes a detailed analysis of the internal layout of the Large Mansion to identify original rooms hidden within later alterations.

The next specialist to be recruited will be a hydrologist to identify Gunnersbury's water sources and plot past water features.

Work has begun on the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) study of the Park. A gazetteer of existing information, listing chance finds and past excavations in and around the Park, and

documentary references to features worth investigating, is being compiled. The project also includes a walk-over of the Park and geophysical surveying. Friends have contributed local history knowledge to support these studies. The Gunnersbury page (<http://tinyurl.com/ov9cbm3>) on MOLA's web-site promises opportunities to participate during the national Festival of Archaeology, 13 - 23 July. Details of this special event at Gunnersbury on 21 July were being finalised at the time of writing this *Newsletter* and will be added to our web-site when known.

One activity that day will be *Finding the Gunnersbury Parks of the Past*. In this map game, led by James Wisdom and Val Bott, participants will try to pin evidence from old maps onto today's landscape. It will last for 1 ½ hours, and we will do it even if it rains. This will be an active event, full of discussion and disagreements - old maps are nowhere near as accurate as today's GPS! By the end, we will have discovered the two earlier parks woven into today's landscape: the Gunnersbury of around 350 years ago, when it was owned by a lawyer, Sir John Maynard, and of around 250 year ago when Princess Amelia, the King's daughter, was in residence. Did they live behind high walls? Were their grounds full of trees, flowers, fruit, and ponds? Or were there open lawns with distant views? Meet outside the Museum - start time to be confirmed. Details of the day from Ellie Lewis-Nunes, Gunnersbury Outreach Officers on 020 8825 6787 or 07753 311258 or by email on [LewisNunesE@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:LewisNunesE@ealing.gov.uk).

## THE GUNNERSBURY PARKRUN

David Bays writes:

A hidden gem of Gunnersbury is Parkrun; they organise free, weekly, 5km timed runs around the Park. These are open to every one, and are safe and easy to take part in. They are part of a world-wide network in which over 500,000 people are now registered. They are mostly run by volunteers, with a handful of national organisers. Locally, Ealing Eagles Running Club provide the voluntary marshalls.

Just turn up at 9am on a Saturday, as I did on my 70th birthday a few months ago, and you'll see about 200 other people assembling in the field near the car park by the Capel Manor entrance. Like other Parkruns, the Gunnersbury one takes you on a tour of the Park. Passing sports areas, the Potomac Tower, the boating lake and the café, it's a refreshing start to the day.

Register on the Parkrun website – [www.parkrun.org.uk](http://www.parkrun.org.uk) – take along the bar code you are given and later you'll get a message with your time and position in the field. Children (under 11s with adults), dogs and buggies are all welcome.

Runners come from far and wide in all weathers – in early May, for example, there was a man from Denmark and others who normally run in the Old Deer Park at Richmond. Not to mention a mother running with her three sons.

On an earlier run there was a woman attending her fiftieth run, and so qualifying for a special T-shirt. I have a way to go before I get to that one!

But I was happy to beat my Personal Best just before the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum Special Meeting on 11 May, recording a time of 30 mins 51 secs.



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## GUNNERSBURY JOINT ADVISORY PANEL

At the start of each local government year in May the membership of Council committees is reviewed. The membership of the GPJAP (formerly the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee) for the coming year comprises Cllrs Mel Colins, Matt Harmer and Adrian Lee from Hounslow Council and Cllrs Joanna Dabrowska, Yvonne Johnson and Bassam Mahfouz from Ealing Council.

At their meeting on 7 June Cllr Johnson was elected to chair the Panel for the coming year, with Cllr Collins as Deputy Chairman. Next meeting, 6.30pm, 18 October.

## THE 11th LONDON MELA

This year's Mela will take place on Sunday 1 September, from 1 to 9pm. Admission is free.

There will be live music on several stages including the BBC Asian Network Mix Tent and a main stage with international artists, as well as street-arts, performances, family fun, good food, exhibitors and a market.

A local residents' briefing session will be held at 6 – 7 pm on 10 July at the Park Café.

## AT GUNNERSBURY PARK MUSEUM

### LICENSED TO SELL: the Brentford Magistrates Court pub paintings 6 July 2013 to Jan 19 2014

This special exhibition shows a tremendous collection of 16 watercolours of local inns and taverns from the mid-19th century. Presented by Andrew Pears, the soap manufacturer and local dignitary, to his fellow JPs in 1900, they were hung in the Magistrates' Court House in Brentford for many years. When it closed they were transferred to Hounslow Council. The exhibition has been put together by Hounslow's Local Studies team, co-ordinated by James and Mary Marshall, both members of the Friends. The exhibition also includes the licensing registers for 1906 to 1925 and a history of the Magistrates' Court.



*The London Apprentice, from one of the Magistrates' Court watercolours*

### SURPRISES IN STORE! throughout 2013

A quirky exhibition showing museum objects with local connections that have rarely been displayed before, including the Robot of Death mask from Dr Who, Albert Dallory's penny-farthing bicycle, part of the neon sign for Lucozade from the Great West Road, mediaeval kitchenware from Northolt Manor, film designs for Ealing Studios, clothing for maids and for grand ladies and last, but not least, a flower-printed Victorian toilet pedestal.

### MUSEUM OPENING HOURS

The Museum is open daily from 11am to 5pm, April – October and from 11am to 4pm, November – March.  
**Admission is free.**

Phone: 020 8992 1612, or for (education and events) 020 8825 6787.

Email the Curator, Vanda Foster, on [vanda.foster@laing.com](mailto:vanda.foster@laing.com).

### EDITOR'S NOTE

The next issue of the Newsletter will be assembled in September. Members' contributions, short articles or Gunnersbury pictures, are welcome. Send them to the Editor, 25 Hartington Rd, W4 3TL or email them to [info@gunnersburyfriends.org](mailto:info@gunnersburyfriends.org)

### *Behind the Scenes* tours, Saturday 6 July 2.30-4pm or Sunday 14 July 11am -12.30pm and 2.30-4pm

Tours visit parts of the Museum not usually open to visitors and offer a chance to hear about future plans for the Museum Service. Please note, part of the tour is only accessible by stairs. Free but advance booking essential on 020 8992 2247 or [gp-museum@laing.com](mailto:gp-museum@laing.com).

### *Back to Victorian School!* Sunday 8 September, 3 sessions: 11am-12 noon, 1-2pm and 3-4pm

The Rothschilds of Gunnersbury gave charitable support to local schools including the Brentford British School (now Brentford School for Girls). The Museum is marking this with a family version of the session it offers to schools. Children of 7 and over only, who must be accompanied by an adult at all times. Advance booking essential, as above. £2 (adult), £1 (children 7-16) payable in cash on the day.

### FRIENDS' SUBSCRIPTIONS

A warm welcome to new members and thanks to those who renewed promptly and signed up for Gift Aid after the reminder in the last issue of the *Newsletter*. Do continue to encourage others to join - the £5 subscription is modest and a bigger membership means a better income and a stronger voice. Donations are always welcome too. An application form can be found on our website and cheques should be made out to "the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum" and sent to The Membership Secretary, Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum, 55 Park Drive, London W3 8ND  
**Registered Charity no 286310**