

FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

NO 103
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GUIDED PARK WALK, FRIDAY 29 APRIL

Join us for a stroll round the works in progress at Gunnersbury for an hour or so. Meet at the Car Park at 10am. We have chosen a weekday as we hope Chris Ellis, the new Head Gardener, will be able to join us then. Despite so much being fenced, there is still a huge amount to see. The work is progressing swiftly, so this is a chance to catch up on changes you might have missed.

PROJECTS UPDATE

Planning permission was granted for the sports hub in January. Our detailed response incorporating Friends' views gained from emails and the site visit seems to have carried little weight. The plans were approved with a condition that the colour and type of the materials should be agreed by the Chair of the Planning Committee after discussion with the ward councillors before construction begins.

The Round Pond is empty, its fish having been moved to the Potomac; the mud has a sprinkling of golf and tennis balls like hundreds and thousands on an ice cream! Half of the Horseshoe Pond is being excavated carefully before it is reinstated to reflect The Orangery, which is also being restored. The Temple is clad in scaffolding and the orange paint in the portico seems to have gone, while the 18th century brick kitchen garden wall nearby is being restored.

The Large Mansion is wrapped in a white shroud around its scaffolding while chemical poultices are applied to remove the modern plasticised paint on the rendering, and the roof and interior are being restored. Work is in progress on the arches along the terrace behind the Mansions, the ugly industrial brick steps leading down to Princess Amelia's Grotto have been replaced and stretches of the 17th century walls south of the Grotto are being carefully repaired with matching bricks. The café has gone and the rubble and compressed straw roofing have been cleared away. The walled garden of the Small Mansion, near the gothic ruins and north of the Stables, is being refurbished as a community garden.

A CONVERSATION WITH GUNNERSBURY'S NEW HEAD GARDENER

Several new staff members have been appointed. We hope to include in future Newsletters short interviews with the new Curator, Julia Tubman, and the Public Programme Officer, Sharon Walters.

Gunnersbury now has a permanent Head Gardener, Chris Ellis. He arrived in mid January to take on this new role. He is ebullient and enthusiastic about the potential of his job and is looking forward to the opportunities it offers for getting involved in education programmes and in working with the local community, including the Friends. So far he has been getting to know the staff in the Museum and the project team at Ealing Council and undertaking various kinds of training.

He has met staff at Capel Manor's Gunnersbury Centre whose students and recent graduates will eventually become involved in horticultural works in the Park. The huge scale of the work currently in progress means this will not happen immediately but he has hopes of identifying small projects, like the rock garden near the south west arch, where students could begin to contribute some practical work.

Chris grew up in Twickenham and, because family friends lived near Gunnersbury Park, he sometimes visited the Park with them during his childhood. He began his career in the wine trade, working for Oddbins branches in Barnes and Richmond and becoming deputy manager at Kew. He obtained his International Wine Diploma but began to get interested in conservation and joined volunteer projects set up by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. This led to him taking on part-time work on a 4-acre garden in Kingston during the day while he embarked on his horticultural training in the evening. When he qualified he wrote to Kew asking whether there was any chance of employment – amazingly ("it wouldn't happen now!", he says) they invited him for an interview the following week

with Tony Kirkham, the head of the Arboretum. Chris was taken on in a behind-the-scenes role. A few years later he was appointed to a new role in Kew's woodland garden and he gained significant new expertise in alpinism, working with expert Tony Hall.

He met his partner Kate at Kew and when she completed an MSc and obtained work in Oxfordshire, he found a post at Oxford University's Botanic Garden, working on their Horticultural Collections.

Subsequently Chris has worked on large private estates, including involvement in substantial restoration projects, experience that is directly relevant to what is going on at Gunnersbury. At Cherkley Court near Leatherhead, once the home of Lord Beaverbrook, Chris spent four years on their massive restoration programme.

In 2007 those gardens were reopened to visitors while the house hosted functions and conferences. But in 2010 the trustees decided it was not going to be viable and sold it to a developer to create a golf course there. Chris then went to work on a private estate in Windlesham and then at another one at Dean Park in Hampshire.

With this wealth of traditional horticultural experience, Chris is following in the foot-steps of the important Gunnersbury gardeners of the past. His great enthusiasm for joining in the learning programme and working with visitors is very welcome!



KEN HAWKES 1940-2016

Ken Hawkes died on 28 January 2016 and over 100 people gathered for his funeral at Mortlake Crematorium. A founder member of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum in 1981 Ken was our first Vice-Chairman. When our organisation was registered as a charity in 1982 he became Honorary Secretary, producing meticulous minutes of our meetings until he retired from this role in 1996.

The Friends group grew out of the campaign to prevent Gunnersbury's stables being given away on a 99-year lease at a peppercorn rent to a property developer for conversion to offices. Like many at the time Ken was deeply cynical about this deal, which had been proposed between the local authority and a former Brentford footballer who ran a company in Hoddesdon. (This developer later returned to Brentford with a scheme to fill in the River Thames between The Waterman's Arts Centre and the islands, for private housing.)

When Ken joined the Friends he had already built up a track record of community activity around Strand on the Green. He once spoke of his involvement in the re-design of the roads around the Kew Bridge approach (when the magnificent subterranean gents' toilets were demolished) and the difficulty of exiting from Thames Road into fast traffic as a good example of a way to discourage rat-running. He continued his community activity in Brentford with long-term involvement in the Brentford Community Resource Centre (along with the late Joan Catterall, another founder member of the Friends).

Ken grew up in Acton and studied hard to become a chemical engineer. A long-term resident of Brentford Dock, he often signed himself to Friends and colleagues as "Ken of Brentford". His sardonic humour enlivened our meetings. Even though it was hard work in the early years of the Friends, we remember him so much, not least because he was always dissolving into laughter.



THE GUNNERSBURY DEVELOPMENT TRUST

The Friends' Committee has been working with the embryonic Development Trust on grant bids. The Trust has to raise £1.4m to support the current refurbishment works but is still awaiting its registration as a charity. Because some grant-giving bodies will only support charities and have very tight deadlines, an application was submitted in the Friends' name to the H B Allen Charitable Trust at the end of December. Furthermore, we supported a bid to the Foyle Foundation in February.

Two new trustees have joined the GDT, both of whom know Gunnersbury well. Hounslow nominee, Cllr Corinna Smart, was a member of the old Joint Committee for some years. To add horticultural expertise to the group, the Trust has also recruited Hounslow's former Head of Parks, Mike Rowan, as a trustee.

OPPOSITION TO "THE CURVE"

A planning application for a 32-storey building at Chiswick Roundabout was submitted to Hounslow Council in December 2015. The site is the land presently surrounded by advertising hoardings between B&Q and the roundabout itself. This is "The Curve". It will have a major impact on the experience of visitors in many parts of Gunnersbury Park, and especially anyone looking out of the new first and second floor museum rooms in the Large Mansion.

The restoration work includes protecting and enhancing the significant historic views of the landscape, but the building will induce the experience of confinement and restriction in a landscape which presently offers openness and freedom. People have enough confinement in their daily lives – many go to parks to experience the very opposite, fresh air, the enjoyment of the natural world, the changes of light and weather.

The developers (Starbones) submitted visualisations of the impact of their building on the Park. These are such remarkably deceptive images that we published them on our website. Starbones assert that the building will have only a moderate impact on Park visitors because if we do see it, the effect will be beneficial as the architecture is so excellent! The Friends committee wrote outlining our objections.

Opposition has been growing with public meetings and the local MP, Ruth Cadbury, speaking out against it. The project has also appeared in *Private Eye*. There is considerable concern about its impact upon river views and views from Kew Gardens as well as upon Gunnersbury.



GUNNERSBURY CONNECTIONS . . .

During February and March we made exciting and unexpected connections with people whose families were linked with Gunnersbury in one way or another in the past.

First a lady who lives in Acton made contact through the Friends' website saying she had a temple in her garden which was said to have come from the grounds of the 17th century house at Gunnersbury. We spent a little time trying to work out whether it was a survival from a much grander earlier house on whose land her street had been built. But when we visited her, we discovered that the temple was not in Acton but at Milton Manor near Abingdon, where she grew up! You may have seen the house and its owners in a recent television series about *Country Life* magazine.

The gardens there are open occasionally especially for historical re-enactments but the house is rarely open. However, a group of us was invited to visit, including Sally Jeffery, an architectural and garden historian, Treve Rosoman, another architectural historian who used to work for English Heritage, James Wisdom, Friends' Chairman, and Val Bott, both local historians.



The magnificent carved wood over-mantel in the drawing room at Milton Manor came from Gunnersbury's 17th century mansion. The oldest, central, part of Milton today was built in the 1660s, at almost the same time as the Gunnersbury mansion, and designed by John Webb, the same architect. The mansion was sold to a prominent lace merchant, Bryant Barrett, who made alterations and added wings, between 1764 and 1772. The over-mantel was installed in part of the original house. Barrett "modernised" the room but its 1660s ceiling with oak leaf plaster mouldings survives. The over-mantel, similar in date, fits uncomfortably against the cornice suggesting it was added later.

The temple or pavilion has two beautifully carved wooden columns and would have offered shade from the sun. It is in poor condition. Treve and Sally think that its carved wooden columns are from the 18th century but that the rest of the structure is later.

A tiny sketch in the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University



shows a similar temple at Gunnersbury with two columns each side, so these could have been re-used at Milton. Princess Amelia spent a fortune on improving her Gunnersbury estate from 1762 to 1786. The sale in 1787 included fittings from the house and, in 1800, when it was demolished, all the materials were sold, offering two occasions when over-mantel and pavilion might have been purchased.

Bryant Barrett supplied costly gold and silver lace, braids, trimmings and artificial flowers to the royal family. This was prestigious but also risky as they rarely paid their bills; they owed him over £18,000 in 1761! Might he have chosen to commemorate his royal connection with these architectural acquisitions? More research is needed.

We have also been contacted via our website by a descendant of the Farmer family who owned the Small Mansion from 1833 until the 1880s. They used their wealth to invest in their Gunnersbury house and garden and to support Wesleyan Methodism. The East Lodge was designed for them by W F Pocock and an extension to the Small Mansion, an aviary and the gothic ruins by W W Pocock, who may also have gothicised Amelia's grotto or bath-house. To our surprise we have recently also been put in touch with Pocock descendants in West London and hope to see family papers in the near future.

THE FRIENDS

Subscriptions of £10 fall due on 1 April; a reminder slip is enclosed. This year we have introduced the option of paying by standing order.

Do encourage others to join at this exciting time for Gunnersbury or buy membership as a gift. Larger numbers give us a stronger voice.

Your donations are always very welcome; one member left us a generous legacy. Our investment income enables us to make donations to support Park and Museum.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

David Bush has indicated that he wishes to step down in the summer. We are hoping one of you (the Friends) will take this on. It is really only busy in the spring when renewals are coming in and the committee meets quarterly.

You'll need to be careful at keeping records and spreadsheets. If you can help, please contact us via the addresses below.

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This will be compiled in June. Send items to The Editor, 25 Hartington Road, London W4 3TL or email info@gunnersburyfriends.org.

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FRIENDS' SUPPORT FOR MUSEUM PURCHASE



This beautiful view of Gunnersbury was painted by Maxwell Armfield in 1933, a few years after it became a public park. It was offered at auction in March and funds were marshalled from Hounslow and Ealing, the Friends, the Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund. In the event it went for less than we feared, the grants were not needed and the Friends' contribution will now pay for conservation and a new frame. It will be a star item in the new displays.

GUNNERSBURY BOOK

We will assemble a high quality illustrated book about Gunnersbury to mark the re-opening in 2017. We are delighted that the John & Ruth Howard Trust has just agreed a grant of £5,000 to support this.