

NEW MUSEUM OPENING HOURS

Please note that from 1 April 2005 the museum has been open 11am to 5pm every day, admission free.

From the Editor

Here at last is Newsletter 77, some months late but with more pages than usual! We have reports on the Friends' AGM and on the 3 Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee meetings which have taken place since the autumn issue.

As usual there are depressing stories of vandalism and a burglary at the café, and only minimal progress has been made on the desperately needed development of plans for the improvement of the Museum and Park. However, the Museum's new opening hours have come into force, giving a single, less confusing pattern of opening throughout the year, and new exhibitions have recently opened. The toilets inside the Museum for which we obtained a grant are now open, but not soon enough to prevent a noisy complaint in the local newspapers about the state of the other toilets in the Park.

FRIENDS' ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members were welcomed with mince pies and tea in the old Kitchens before the formal business. After the meeting we all visited the new toilets within the museum premises provided with a grant obtained by the Friends from the Brentford Area Committee.

The Chairman reviewed the year then Sonya Leydecker, Hon Treasurer, presented the audited accounts for the period ending March 2004, at which date they held £15,472.11. Subscription income had risen and very welcome donations had again come in with some subscription payments. The talks and the Christmas event contributed to the modest total of £435 rose, while interest at £742 was the largest single item of income. The sum of £13,425 plus £614 of the interest it had gained was repaid to Links Japan after the failure of our plan to restore the Japanese Garden, and they kindly gave £1,000 of interest to us to cover work already done.

Small donations had been made to the Museum for making historical replica costumes for use with children and we again provided a special prize for a student of the Capel Manor courses at Gunnersbury. Extra gifts to the Museum, to purchase an early Brentford FC Yearbook (£150) and a beam alarm system to protect the carriages (£320) were approved.

The Newsletter (including postage and envelopes, etc) cost £526; members felt the cost should be covered wholly by subscription income which it no longer did. Since the subscription has remained the same for many years it was agreed that it should rise from £3 to £5 for the next membership year.

The accounts were formally accepted and the Hon Treasurer was thanked for her work. Chris Dakers, Hon Auditor, was formally thanked and re-elected for the coming year. The existing committee of John Brazier, Val Bott, Joan Catterall, Anne Hobson, Sonya Leydecker, Liam O'Brien, Helen Poskitt, Renee Tyacke and James Wisdom was re-elected. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chairman.

CAPEL MANOR AT GUNNERSBURY PARK

BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever wished that you could draw and paint some of the beautiful flowers in your garden and in the countryside?

If the answer is 'yes' then now is the chance to acquire the first essentials of plant drawing and painting in pleasant surroundings and in a friendly atmosphere.

Starting in September Capel Manor at Gunnersbury, will offer *Botanical Illustration* courses led by Christabel King of Kew.

Three levels of courses will take place on Wednesday evenings as follows:

- **Beginners**, 10 weeks 6.30–8.30pm,
- **Intermediate**, 20 weeks 6.30–8.30pm, and
- **Experienced** 30 weeks 1.30–4.30pm.

The courses will give students the opportunity to discover and enjoy this form of art, with individual attention but also the freedom of a workshop approach. Beginners will be shown how to make accurate drawings of their subjects and how to use their materials to best effect. Those with some experience can explore a range of techniques to make detailed studies of plants from life.

STAFF CHANGES

For some time a restructuring of the staff teams in CIP, the body which runs Gunnersbury for the Joint Committee, has been in progress. It was this process which resulted in the creation of a single post to run the Gunnersbury Park Estate reported in earlier *Newsletters*.

Two part-time Customer Services Assistants, Joan Catterall and Esme Roads, began work in

GUNNERSBURY in 1900

Vernon Radcliffe worked at Gunnersbury Park Museum in the 1950s and has recently joined the Friends. He spotted Gunnersbury Park images in a new book and has contributed this note:

In the autumn of 1900 the photographer for *Country Life* magazine visited Gunnersbury and six of his photographs are reproduced in Kathryn Bradley-Hole's new book, *Lost Gardens of England*. These show the Round Pond and the Temple, the Small Mansion seen through the arch, which has a statue on the left, views along the terrace with the Large Mansion on the right and along the terrace in front of the Small Mansion with a the arch in the distance, another across the Horseshoe Pond and a heated tank built for cultivation of tender blue water-lilies.

In her short essay accompanying the pictures, the author briefly describes the history of the estate, the tree planting from the 1840s, the water lilies, the flower borders, urns and tubs and pays tribute to the Head Gardener, James Hudson VMH, for his special interest – fruit trees. Hudson had already made a waterside bamboo garden and soon after was to plant his celebrated Japanese Garden at Gunnersbury.

HANDEL at GUNNERSBURY

Suzannah Fleming of *The Temple Trust* has spotted references to Handel at Gunnersbury in *Music & Theatre in Handel's World: The Family Papers of James Harris 1732-1780* by Burrows & Dunhill (Oxford, 2002).

James Harris was a philosopher of some repute, whose mother was the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury's sister; the Harris family papers are held at Hampshire County Archives. The Harrises and the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury and his Countess were among the most loyal of Handel's patrons; they were his main promoters in the London musical/theatrical world from the 1730s. Handel's other patrons included the Earl of Radnor at Twickenham and, it seems, Sir Henry Furness at Gunnersbury.

On 25 July 1741 the 4th Earl of Radnor wrote to James Harris: "Mr. Handel has dined with me but twice this summer but is much in the company with Mr. Furnes in this neighbourhood. I can send you no musical news at this time and all other is uncertain". And on 8 August 1741 the Earl wrote to James Harris to complain: "Mr. Handel instead of goeing to Scarborough to drink the Waters, drinks wine with Mr. Furness at Gunsbury, and I fear eats too much of those things he ought to avoid. I would fain methinks preserve him for a few years longer".

these new roles in January, together with Rebecca Smith, the new part-time administrator. (Joan, the Friends' membership secretary for many years, already had a similar post at the museum.)

The post of Deputy Estate Manager (Grounds), an essential post to assist in the day-to-day running of the Park, the monitoring of the grounds maintenance contract and the development of plans for its future – remains unfilled. In the meantime, a payment is being made to CIP's Grounds Maintenance team to reimburse Tony Keaveney for covering some of these duties.

Julian Rudd who, as Ealing Council's Events Manager, co-ordinated the first two London Melas at Gunnersbury, has left his post, but he is working freelance on the 2005 Mela.

THIEVES GRAB SLUSH PUPPY MACHINE

The community web-site at www.ChiswickW4.com reported that what it called "unorthodox thieves" had stolen an "Ice Blast" machine worth £10,000 from the park café on the night of 6/7 March.

The extremely heavy machine was taken out through a window and dragged across the park, leaving a trail of drink syrup on the grass, to a concrete area where police believe a van was waiting to pick it up. It appears that the thieves failed to take with them a vital part without which the machine will not function!

GUNNERSBURY PARK JOINT COMMITTEE

GPJC meetings took place in December, March and June.

The December agenda included an application for a Dance Music Festival in the Park. This was not approved for 2005 but could be resubmitted for 2006. A feasibility study aiming to achieve a better horticultural maintenance specification and options for re-tendering the contract was requested. The Small Mansion Arts Centre's bid for more space was rejected.

The March meeting agreed the 2005-6 budget with a small increase of £28,000. Section 106 funds from 1991 ("planning gain") were still ear-marked for Gunnersbury and unspent. Committee members were aware of reports with implications for Gunnersbury which they had not seen – the review of CIP, a study by Arups and the EH/ HLF *Mansions in Parks* report (see right) – and asked that they be considered in June. They also agreed to serve notice on the Arts Centre to quit the Small Mansion by the end of March 2006.

In June the GPJC members for 2005/06 were confirmed as Cllrs Barwood, Edwards, Kirton, Lee, Mann and Smart for LB Hounslow, and Cllrs Clements-Elliot, Delaney, Green, Johnson, Sumner and Woodroffe for Ealing. Cllr Delaney takes the chair for the coming year, with Cllr Lee as his deputy. Joan Catterall and James Wisdom continue as our observers.

The meeting discussed the reports requested in March. Key issues from the *CIP Review* include a strengthening of the team monitoring the CIP contract which moved into the Chief Executive's Policy & Regeneration Unit, a review of the tourism strategy and the potential for joint tourism development with Ealing, Hillingdon and Hammersmith & Fulham. New performance criteria for Gunnersbury would be developed and its future management arrangements reviewed.

Problems with rats in the area near the Mansions and the Café had resulted in the temporary closure of the children's playground, but a pest control programme was being implemented. The Museum had received grants from the regional agency, ALM London, to buy a humidifier for the carriages gallery and a dehumidifier for the costume gallery. A schools *Discovery Session*, interpreting the exhibition galleries, had been developed to take advantage of the new longer opening hours. In addition the Long Gallery ceiling painting which was damaged by flooding would return this summer.

PARK FRIENDS MEETING

A meeting was held on 13 July at which we were represented by **Joan Catterall**. She writes: The meeting was for the growing number of friends groups for parks in Hounslow. Both the Council and CIP seem to realise their importance, as a point of contact and a positive force for getting parks restored and preserved for the future. I am pleased to report that they are keen to work with local groups.

MANSIONS IN LONDON'S PARKS

English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund have published a study of the plight of mansions in 10 London parks, of which 4, including our 2, are discussed in detail. The study considers the significance of each mansion and the actions needed to ensure its future survival and use. It seeks long-term solutions which will last, something which we have struggled since 1980!

All suffer from the failure of their local authority owners to manage them as part of their property portfolio, from decades of inadequate investment in maintenance and security and an absence of continuing investment, from split management responsibility for mansion and park and, above all, from the lack of a senior political figure to "own" and champion their cause. There is plenty of common experience in each borough but this does not excuse this scandalous waste of public assets.

The study identifies some key requirements for success: clear political commitment and leadership, dynamic management and responsibility at a senior level, buildings refurbished to meet modern needs and maintained at a reasonable quality, an appropriate use for which there is a demonstrable demand, and one which is not dependant upon a single vulnerable source of income. The writers believe that Gunnersbury can only now be saved by for public enjoyment through a partnership with a commercial element.

HLF will meet each of the local authorities to seek ways forward; it is not yet clear whether there will be any special funding to get things moving. We will keep you informed of any developments.

MUSEUM NEWS

Re-defining the Body

Vanda Foster, Assistant Curator writes:

The Museum has particularly good costume collections which are studied by art and fashion students from several major London colleges, who visit every year.

As part of their Fashion and Marketing course, students from the University of East London made detailed studies of 19th century underwear at Gunnersbury. This was a period when it was fashionable to exaggerate and distort the female body; waists were pulled in by tightly laced, whale-boned corsets, busts and shoulders were padded and wired petticoats and bustles were used to exaggerate the hips.

The exhibition shows original corsets, a bustle, a crinoline and other Victorian underwear from our collections and alongside are the students' copies, some of which are so good that it is hard to tell which are which. For people interested in how the complex 19th century corsets were made, the students' sketchbooks show detailed patterns and studies. Some of their replica corsets, crinolines and bustles are available for visitors to try on. Also on show are the amazing garments which the students produced using the sewing and construction techniques they had learned from



the original garments. A range of jackets, made up in calico, uses padding, wiring and lacing to create incredible space age designs.



Tin hats, doodle bugs and food rations: memories of Acton in World War 2

This exhibition, during July and August, has been put together by Acton History Society, with the help of a grant from the Big Lottery Fund. It uses photos, personal memories and posters, as well as original objects from the museum's collections to tell the story of life on the Home Front. We are taken through the build up to war, the use of gas masks and shelters, life in the blackout, rationing, bomb damage and the aftermath of war. There are sections on "make do and mend", including patterns for making dresses out of parachute silk, on the role of women in the factories and on evacuees. From the museum collections there are the tin hats and gas masks used by firewatchers at S.G Brown's factory at Gypsy Corner, shrapnel from Ealing and local residents' clothing coupons and ration books – a typical week's food rations in 1940, which barely fill a plate, are displayed. From 26 July the recently discovered war-time street map of Acton, showing exactly where each bomb fell, will also be on show.

Twin Paintings

Ealing has been twinned with Marcqu-en-Baroeul in northern France since 1987, a link which provides an annual programme of Anglo-French activities. Last year amateur artists from both of the towns held a joint exhibition in

Marcqu-En-Baroeul. This year LB Ealing hosted the exhibition of 42 works, many of them for sale, at the Museum. The French took Rubens as their inspiration, while the English chose themes about landscape, home and garden, making this an exhibition of strong contrasts. The Mayor of Ealing, Councillor Ian Potts, attended the launch with nearly 150 guests.

BROWSING THROUGH AN OLD AGENDA BOOK

Christine Diwell works from time to time as a volunteer at the Museum. During her work there she has spent some time reading an old agenda book of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee, covering the period from 1937 to 1957. Since she did not have the appropriate minutes the list of topics which were discussed leaves us to speculate about the decisions made. She has written us a note of some of the: "Dull reading you might think, but not so!", she says.

Was the proposal in 1937 for "the provision of proper washing facilities, towels and soap for all members of staff" unanimously agreed? And who became the subject of a solicitor's report for prosecution over flying model aeroplanes in 1938?

It was intriguing to find a single item headed "Queen Mary's Visit 26 Oct

1947 "yet no previous mention of preparations or advance notice – did she turn up unannounced on the spur of the moment?

The entry "common seal affixed: contract Mudie Lee Builders for conversion of part of Large Mansion into three flats at a cost of £1,497.17s.0d" conjures up a picture of the committee melting their sealing wax and solemnly applying it!

In 1952 there was a proposal "to rescind the charge for the hire of children's boats of sixpence per half hour to become sixpence per 20 minutes". And in 1954 they considered a proposal to "convert the Round Pond to an ice rink for the winter". Does anyone recall whether this came to fruition?

The current Joint Committee may consider themselves fortunate not to have to grapple with war-time problems. In 1944 they considered "allegations of thefts etc within the requisitioned area of the Park" and later "gun site de-requisition". They also had to consider the sale of a grey horse called Jim – and the purchase of a replacement.

An application by the BBC in 1952, to borrow material to illustrate *The Victorian Woman* for a television programme and for an exhibition in the book department at Harrods sounds like something which still appear on an agenda today, however.

PARK NEWS

THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

In March Hounslow Council's Sustainable Development Committee granted planning permission for the construction of a new home on the old Bowling Green at Gunnersbury for Syon Park's Butterfly House. Its present site has been earmarked for a luxury hotel.

The new building will house *The Tropical Experience*, comprising three separate but linked walk-through environments - a Tropical Garden, a Tropical Aviary and a Tropical Mini-Beasts Gallery. In addition to tropical displays, a children's indoor soft play area and other facilities, such as a gift shop and education areas are also proposed. 75,000 paying visitors a year are expected, with additional traffic being accommodated by more effective use of the existing car park; for example, it currently has no space markings. Local residents' groups have been consulted and Hounslow Council has received only support for the plans. The planning permission removes a major hurdle, but funds for its construction still have to be found.

PRINCESS AMELIA'S GROTTA

Princess Amelia's grotto or bath-house was vandalised twice in May. The first incident involved three youths throwing tiles at traffic from the roof in the early evening. They were spotted by someone in the Small Mansion who alerted the relevant staff and called the police, who were able to catch them. On the second occasion the building was broken into and was found to have been used for drug-taking. Glass had been broken and the door badly damaged, with seats and a notice board turned sideways for use as a table. We do not know if anyone was caught in this case.

Many of you will have seen inside this garden building at Open House days. Sadly funds for completing the restoration have not been raised, nor has any purpose been identified to bring it into use and the building will remain vulnerable.

AND OTHER PARK MATTERS . . .

- The Temple Garden looked terrific when the clematis and wisteria were in flower; the other planting there has come on well though the chamomile was washed away when the pond flooded.
- There will be no classical concert in the Park this year as the sponsorship obtained from Waitrose for the previous two years has come to an end.
- A group of Probation Service volunteers will be working in the Park; they are minor offenders doing community service work.
- Donations of trees and park seats as a memorial for a friend or relative are still welcomed. Contact Lynn Acum at Gunnersbury 0208 992 1612 for further information and advice.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

IN THE PARK

**BUBBLE THEATRE:
THE CROCK OF GOLD
Summer Parks Tour 2005,
at Gunnersbury Park
26-28 July, 8.30pm**

Box Office: 020 7237 1663

Full information is on the web-site at www.londonbubble.org.uk, including music to download and listen to as you promenade round the park.

Adapted by Simon Startin from the novel by James Stephens and directed by Jonathan Petherbridge the Bubble Theatre's promenade production harnesses the power of the that magical moment when day turns to night and familiar surroundings become silhouettes of another world. Join them on a journey that starts at dusk and finishes past your bedtime, a journey through a forest with a wise philosopher, the Great God Pan, and leprechauns, desperate for the return of their gold – for as everyone knows "a Leprechaun without a crock of gold is like a rose without perfume, a bird without a wing or an inside without an outside".

AT THE MUSEUM

Re-defining the Body until 3 October
Special exhibition of fashions created by students of the University of East London, together with their sources of inspiration, original Victorian corsets and crinolines from the museum's collections.

Tin Hats, Doodle Bugs and Food Rations July 6 to August 31
Memories and mementoes of Acton in World War 2 in an exhibition prepared by the Acton History Group.

The London Mela

This free outdoor festival will be held in the Park on Sunday 14 August from noon to 8pm. It will celebrate Asian arts and culture with a wealth of music and entertainment – pop and classical music, dance, street theatre, and children's activities.

Performers confirmed for the main stage include Bollywood legend Usha Uthup and her big band, and up-and-coming girl band, Rouge. The Dum Dum Project, an international DJ collective from New York, Thailand and London has also confirmed it will be performing in the UK for the first time.

London premieres include the exhibitions, *From Soho Road to the Punjab*, which traces the history of Bhangra, and *Women @ Work*, a chronicle of working women in Pakistan.

The London Mela 2005 will also welcome back London Flavas, hosted by Radio 1's Bobby and Nihal, and featuring the best of urban British Asian music. Produced by Ealing Council and hosted jointly with Hounslow Council, the festival will also include the *Cabaret Mela* presenting circus, comedy, acoustic music and dance; *Magic Mela* where Save the Children will encourage everybody to paint, scribble and draw on *Melawall*; *Classic Mela*; and the *Community Stage*.

If you have been to one of the previous Melas at Gunnersbury you will know what an exciting event this can be; if you have not, do not miss this event. Parking is provided within the park and there are plenty of food stalls so you can really make it a great day out!

FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK AND MUSEUM

Letters and contributions to the Newsletter are welcome

Next issue Sept 2005

To contact the Honorary Editor, write to Val Bott, at 25 Hartington Road, London W4 3TL or email ValBott@museums.freeserve.co.uk

MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

The new membership year began on 1 April – do please try to renew your membership promptly if you are already a Friend. You can also help by encouraging someone else to join! If you are not yet a Friend do sign up now to join our mailing list and receive the Newsletter. The subscription, at £5, is very modest - but more members mean a better income and a stronger voice! We have included a renewal slip with this mailing of the Newsletter or you can just send your cheque, name and address to Joan Catterall, Membership Secretary, 39 Lionel Road, Brentford TW8 9QZ. And donations are always welcome!

The Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum is a Registered Charity no 286310