

FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER NO 110 SEPTEMBER 2018



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 29 September 2018

As announced in *Newsletter 109* the AGM will be held on **29 September 2018 at Capel Manor College in the Walled Garden (entrance gate near the car park) starting at 10am. Following the business meeting, we will have a tour of the Capel Manor site including both the gardens and the small menagerie cared for by Capel's animal care students. From 11.45 we will stroll down to the site proposed for the Go Ape installation to discuss its impact.**

All paid up members are welcome and are able to vote. Subscriptions were due on 1 April and if you have not yet renewed your membership you will find a subscription form enclosed with this *Newsletter*.

FRIENDS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO GUNNERSBURY

We have now paid the sums promised over the last 2 years, a total of £18,316, to support the Gunnersbury restoration project. Our gift of £6,616 provided the partnership funding needed to release a grant of £73,512 from Historic England. This enabled work to proceed on restoring the elegant gothic arcade and terraces in the north-east of the Park which were once part of the separate garden of the Small Mansion.

The Museum's collection of clothing and textiles is vulnerable to light damage so items should only be displayed for short periods. Adjustable display supports, adaptable for individual garments, were needed. The cost, at £15,000, was higher than expected, so we have contributed £8,000 towards the work.

We paid £2,570 for the conservation and re-framing of the Maxwell Ashby Armfield painting, acquired at auction in 2016. This beautiful view of the Park, painted about 1933 only a few years after it opened, now hangs on the landing of the main stair in the Museum. And our donation of £1,130 towards the purchase of the £28,000 silver and enamel panel, made by Nelson and Edith Dawson of Chiswick in 1923, completed the amount required from local sources by the V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

CONSULTATION – Go Ape

The “Go Ape” proposal could be one of the most divisive schemes for the Park since the Lionel Road housing plan, which was the subject of a full scale, professional consultation. It has revealed many of the conflicting visions of how Gunnersbury should be managed in the future.

The Project Board envisages the west part of the Park committed to organised sport and recreation around what they call 'a vibrant hub'. Since 2016 they have wanted high wire tree top activities to add to the mix and generate income. Only Go Ape bid for this, offering at least £50,000 pa for a 25-year lease. Ealing Council's Cabinet report and press release show how pleased they were to have made the deal. The papers indicate that the CIC was fully involved in the evaluation and welcomed the proposal. In August it ran its own consultation with a poorly-designed online questionnaire and the chance to meet Go Ape representatives on site. It has now announced a majority in favour. After the CIC's formal agreement, the final stage will be a planning application.

The Friends wrote pieces for our website and emailed members asking for opinions. There has also been a public debate online with rather strong positions being taken. People who have used Go Ape elsewhere say it is well managed and great fun, and welcome it as an additional attraction to the Park. Pragmatists who expect councils soon to have to stop funding parks know that the money matters. Others hold that a park is somewhere to get closer to nature – trees, wildlife, open space, peace and quiet – and more specifically that the tree canopy is a special place, not somewhere to clamber around in. Another position is that the Councils are just exploiting the commercial opportunities of the park for their own gain, distorting what should be for the public good. A third view is that Go Ape's high charges send out the message that the Park is no longer for everyone. A fourth sees Go Ape installations as ugly intrusions – tall metal poles, fenced-off ground, log cabins, ropes, timber platforms high above, all accompanied by the shouts and excited shrieks of the participants.

Some issues relate specifically to Gunnersbury. One zip wire would encroach across the newly opened up former golf course, part of the restored 'heritage core' of the Listed Park. As a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, an independent environmental impact report will be required. Even an enlarged car park may struggle on days of high sport demand (note the Park Run chaos on Saturdays), possibly the same days on which Go Ape will need 35 more spaces.

LOVEBOX: the Apology

In two 90-minute meetings on 3 September the Lovebox organisers stood before groups of very angry local residents and apologised for the failures in their organisation of the Lovebox / Citadel festival.

These were very different meetings from the one held before the event where many people expressed the same fears about things which, in the event, went badly wrong. We wrote then:

A lot of the organisers' responses were a) we are still working this out with the authorities, b) we have done this many times before and it usually goes very well and c) we want to come back for at least three more years so it is in our interests to make it successful.

The Lovebox speaker accepted that there had been problems, sometimes blaming other agencies' bad advice. He called this the 'inaugural' event and wanted to return. They could fix everything for 2019 and event organisation would improve. This implied that after their 12 years staging the event in Victoria Park it ran like clockwork, though residents near that park would not agree.

The organisers' presentation relied on limited data showing 36 complaints and no breaches of noise regulation, discounting local people's experience and ignoring the evidence of discussion forums on local electronic newspapers.

And the siting and dominance of the installations may limit the CIC's capacity to rescue the derelict 19th century Farm.

Although older people also need to stay active, there is no sign of a strategic balance of investment for them at Gunnersbury whereas the people most likely to use Go Ape (young people and families) are the same who will benefit the most from the massive investment in sport.

The Gunnersbury Park Joint Advisory Panel and the Project Team did accept the Friends' proposal that free and open exercise facilities such as distance markers, trim trails and outdoor gym equipment were needed, but we fear this has been quietly dropped. Young people unable to afford Go Ape's charges would no doubt welcome an adventure playground to accompany the BMX track they built years ago. An agreement for 25 years is far too long, especially as this company is still inexperienced in adapting its offer to urban parks.

Many said that they could not get through on the complaints lines.

The map in the presentation showing the locations of the complaints indicated that thousands in a huge area beyond the Park would have heard the noise, especially the deep bass reverberations.

Poor stewarding, errors on road closures, dangerous overcrowding at Acton Town station, tailbacks on major roads, over-full buses and uber 'taxi' jams, residents 'trapped' in their homes, local businesses unable to operate, copious urination, badly-located open toilets – speakers recounted miserable experiences, even those who thought Lovebox a good thing to bring to the Park. These were not nimbys or trouble makers. Many had had a very rough time, caused by complacent over-confidence, lack of experience, incompetence and failure to invest properly in managing the event outside the park.

David Bowler, CEO of the CIC (which will grant future contracts) said they had not yet discussed Lovebox returning, a fact confirmed by one of 3 CIC board members present. Sustained applause greeted Cllr Mel Collins' comment that abolishing the Gunnersbury Park Joint Advisory Panel meant there was now no public scrutiny of CIC decisions by external parties such as ward councillors, nor any chance to influence its decisions. David Bowler felt that the CIC's management agreement with the 2 councils was closely scrutinised, especially by their 2 nominees to the CIC Board. 'Scrutiny' clearly means different things to different people. Will the CIC agree to Lovebox returning? Almost certainly. It gave great pleasure to over 100,000 people and the organisers promise to learn from experience. The CIC needs the money and the Councils are likely to instruct it if it doesn't agree.

The problem is the scale of the event. At the earlier meeting they promised that 40,000 participants would come and go during each day. By ending traditionally with headline acts they created an unmanageable mass exodus. Such festivals began in rural landscapes and stately homes but have been transplanted into suburban parks with unchanged programmes or business plans. The event went reasonably well inside the Park so the organisers think they just need to reduce local disruption to tolerable levels.

Senior politicians and council officers leapt at the chance to bring Lovebox to Gunnersbury for the significant income. The new CIC, still to establish itself, was dealt a poor hand, especially with a large area of Park already closed for the sports development. Now the issue is how the CIC can be a good neighbour and build the love and support for Gunnersbury it needs now and even more in future.

MUSEUM UPDATE

The fine painted Rothschild crest has returned from the conservator and is back in its original place over the door in the drawing room. The birds in the design are said to symbolise the banker's use of carrier pigeons for speedy and secure communication.

Three horse-drawn vehicles have arrived in their special display gallery adjoining the café. At the time of writing the information panels have not yet been unwrapped, and none of the other transport exhibits originally planned for this space have been installed.

The Museum is currently celebrating Freddie Mercury; he is rendered in glowing pixellated artworks until 23 September.

PARK UPDATE

Chris Ellis, the head gardener, now has an assistant to help with the management of such a vast area. We hope to carry an interview with him in a future *Newsletter*. To make their lives a little easier, especially when moving material about the Park Gunnersbury has acquired a Kawasaki Mule, a work vehicle which can pull a trailer.

Large boulders taken from the Horseshoe Pond area during the restoration project have now been placed along the main drive. Probably made from a Victorian artificial stone called Pulhamite these will act as a deterrent to car parking

The volunteer workers in the Community Kitchen Garden by the Stables have been harvesting a fantastic range of vegetables recently. If you would like to join in the digging, dead-heading, seed sowing and weeding, you would be very welcome on Wednesdays mornings between 10am and 12 noon.

FRIENDS' AWARD 2018



For many years we have funded an annual award for someone at Capel Manor who has contributed most to Gunnersbury during the year. In July the College organised a special celebration for Allan Gardner, this year's recipient, who is retiring. Chris Ellis led a Park tour followed by lunch in the café for Allan, his brother and a small group of staff and students. James Wisdom, our Chairman, who represents Gunnersbury on the Capel Manor Board, presented a certificate and gift tokens.

Allan has worked as a volunteer, 3 days a week for 15 years, with virtually no time off for sickness or holidays. He kept the College's plant collection and gardens watered, especially important in the summer when there is only a skeleton staff on site. Allan has no garden of his own but will have one in his retirement in the West Country.

At the presentation Sarah Neophytou (right in the photo), said that having a well-cared-for site and a reliable waterer meant students and staff had more time for work in the Park. In addition, Allan has cared for the plants propagated by the students which are sold to raise much-needed funds on Open Days. And many of these plants, such as herbs in the Italian Garden, the new Forsythia hedge and the Sunflowers in the Children's Playground, have been given to the Park.

CAPEL MANOR STUDENTS AT GUNNERSBURY

You can see the students' work in various parts of the Park. Matt Watson, Capel Centre Manager, writes: Supervised by the head gardener, Level 1 students began this year by clearing the wildlife area for new planting. They have also planted the Forsythia hedge in the Rose Garden and the row of cheerful Sunflowers in the Playground. They have dead-headed all the Dock plants in the Wildflower Meadow to prevent it from becoming a meadow entirely of Docks!

At the west end of the Terrace the Professional Gardeners have planted up the Rockery and pruned the Shrub Border. The Level 3 students have pruned the Wisteria in the Italian Garden behind the Temple and planted herbs there.

The College's next **Open Day** will be on Saturday 13 October between 10am and 1pm. The next **Advice Evening** will be on Tuesday 27 November between 5pm to 7.30pm

The Gunnersbury Development Trust

The Trust held the first event in the Large Mansion Drawing Room in June, a tea party with garden and museum tours.

Over 40 people, representing many of the organisations which funded or supported the recent restoration work took part.

Historic England felt that proposals for residential use of the Small Mansion and Stables were not appropriate for such significant buildings. It has paid for a study of their condition and likely cost of refurbishment. Now the Architectural Heritage Fund has given the GDT a grant to pay for an evaluation of the viability of potential future uses, to be completed early in 2019. This will also consider possible "meanwhile" or short-term uses for the buildings.

Enclosures

A copy of the latest edition of the handsome *What's On* brochure, covering the period from October 2018 to February 2019, is enclosed with this *Newsletter*. You will see that there is now far more going on after the restoration work than we can provide room for on this back page. Also included is a flier about opportunities for volunteering at Gunnersbury. Some Friends already volunteer – more will be welcomed!

EDITOR'S NOTE

We will be preparing the next issue of this *Newsletter* in December. Your contributions of news, images and comments are always welcome. Please send them to The Editor at 25 Hartington Road, W4 3TL or at info@gunnersburyfriends.org

THE CIC BOARD

The new community interest company has now taken over the management of Gunnersbury. There has been no announcement about board membership though 3 members attended recent meetings about Lovebox. It is officially Gunnersbury Estate (2026) CIC registered company 09696326. The Companies House lists the following directors:

- Jacqueline Akinlosotu, an accountant
- Stephen Paul Clark, described as retired
- Ian Wallis Hutchinson, a company director
- Howard Simmons, the Chairman of the GDT
- Victoria Lawson, Director of Customer Services & Communications at Hounslow Council
- Keith Townsend, Executive Director Environment & Customer Services at Ealing Council

The CIC's constitution allows for two lead directors, one each nominated by the two boroughs which own the estate; these are the last two names listed. The Friends look forward to meeting the CIC's board members as soon as possible, to discuss how we might work together.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Gunnersbury Opening Hours

The Park is open daily from 8am to dusk. The Museum is open Tuesday to Sunday, including Bank Holidays from 10am to 4.30pm admission free

Gunnersbury's Archives, Tuesday 2 October 11:30–12:30, Free

Discover items ranging from 18th century recipe books to historic photos with Archivist, Kathryn Rooke

Curator's talk & tour, Wednesday 12 Dec & 6 Feb, £8.00

Head Gardener's Walk, Friday 5 Feb, £6.00

Full details of these special events in the *What's On* brochure enclosed

To take part you must book a place via visitgunnersbury.org

Open House 22 September – free activities all day

10:00–11:30 Landscape tour with the Head Gardener

11:30–12:15 Life Below Stairs – family friendly kitchen session

13:00–14:30 Landscape tour with the Head Gardener

14:00–14:30 & 15:00–15:30 Writer in Residence, Nandita Ghose, in Princess Amelia's Bath House

14:30–15:15 Life Below Stairs – family friendly kitchen session

No need to book, sign up for a tour on the day at the Museum

SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you were previously a member and have not yet paid for 2018-19, you will find a reminder slip in this *Newsletter*. The cost is £10 a year, payable by Standing Order or by cheque. Subscriptions and donations via Gift Aid are welcome and we are pleased to discuss proposed legacies. Do encourage others to join if you can, as greater numbers make us stronger. At gunnersburyfriends.org/friends/join-the-friends you can find the membership form. Contact the Friends' Membership Secretary at 62 Creffield Road, London W3 9PS.

gunnersburyfriends.org; [@gunnersbury1](https://twitter.com/gunnersbury1); visitgunnersbury.org; gunnersburytrust.wordpress.com

The Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum is a Registered Charity number 286310