FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

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SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE FROM 1 APRIL

Welcome to a bumper Newsletter, reporting on what has been happening in the last 6 months or so. Please make sure you renew your subscription to support the Friends and ensure you remain on the mailing list. If you pay annually, rather than by standing order or a renewable PayPal subscription, you will receive a form with this Newsletter.

COMMUNITY CHOICE PROJECT ANNOUNCED

Following the success of the Community Choice vote in 2023 the Gunnersbury Museum & Park Development Trust (GDT) devised a new set of projects for 2024. Last year's vote supported hedgerow planting to create new habitats. This year's vote has chosen a travel bursary scheme to enable schools based in LBs Ealing and Hounslow to access the Gunnersbury learning programme. Rising transport costs have left schools further away from Gunnersbury struggling to bring classes to educational workshops, so some children could be missing out on chances to learn outside the classroom, sparking their curiosity and developing their skills. The scheme has £10,000 to support travel costs and is now open for applications from schools in Ealing and Hounslow with a high percentage of children accessing free school meals.

MARK SANDERS JOINS THE FRIENDS COMMITTEE

Mark Sanders was elected to the Friends' committee at our AGM last September. He has lived in LB Ealing for about 20 years though his wife has lived locally for even longer and remembers playing in the Park as a child. They have two teenage children, a son who uses the Sports Hub gym at Gunnersbury and a daughter who is now away at university but who has been a museum volunteer in the past.

Mark regularly walks in the park to help with his fitness so he observes what is going in on there every week. While he is really pleased at the improvements over the last few years, saying that the Park has really moved on, he feels there is potential for more progress. He has long been concerned about the dangerous state of the footpaths and worries about security in the Park, for example, after thefts of lead from the roof of the Small Mansion. He hopes that the Small Mansion and Stables will eventually be brought up to the same standard as other historic buildings.

Mark's background is in finance; he was involved in asset management for many years before taking early retirement about 8 years ago. He has volunteered with the Hounslow Foodbox for about 9 years, doing deliveries. He is a long-standing school governor and acts as Hon Treasurer to the Friends of Victoria Hall in Ealing. He has stood twice as a Lib Dem candidate in Ealing Council elections but says he won't be standing again. Now he will be bringing his local knowledge and his good citizenship to our committee.

FOOTPATH REPAIRS

We were delighted with the GDT's announcement in February of significant works to Gunnersbury's footpaths, expected to take 6 to 8 weeks, depending upon the weather. The very poor state of the footpaths has long been a major concern but it is very difficult to obtain grants from charitable bodies for this kind of infrastructure work. The plan was to deal with damaged and uneven surfaces and improve drainage in a number of areas of the Park; visitors were advised that these areas would be closed off so work could proceed without interruption and for safety. Funding bids for the work did not succeed so the local authorities will be submitting further funding applications to cover the cost of additional repairs in 2025.

ATTACK ON CAPEL MANOR COLLEGE ANIMALS

Two boys aged 11 and 12 faced charges at Uxbridge Magistrates Youth Court on 14 March about a serious incident on the night of 25 February.

They broke into Capel Manor College's Gunnersbury campus, opened enclosures where birds, rabbits, ferrets and snakes were kept and took some away. The prosecution said that CCTV footage showed them throwing animals down and stamping on them.

The police found them inside the Sports Hub with a snake. One of the birds the boys released was Shiraz, a white barn owl, which after being missing for a couple of weeks was eventually recovered near Heathrow Airport. Twenty animals died. We know this will have been very distressing for the animal care students who cared for them.

The boys pleaded guilty to causing criminal damage and unnecessary suffering to animals. The boys had claimed after their arrest that they had not intended to hurt any of the animals but dogs had gained entry when they broke in.

Sentenced on 4 April, they are now subject to a referral order; they must attend regular meetings with a youth offending team with their parents for the next year, the maximum term allowed.

And they were ordered to pay £200 towards a compensation bill of £59,000 – while their parents are liable, the judge said this was the boys' punishment, and they must do whatever their parents ask to pay them back.

Based on reports on ChiswickW4.com and other local news websites

TRAVELLERS

Over the last few months illegal encampments have been set up in the Park. Usually vehicles and caravans made for the car park near the Sports Hub.

Gunnersbury's management placed notices on their website in early December and again in mid January stating that they were they were doing their best to deal with the situation.

In late February there was another significant incursion. The same weekend there was a break-in at Putt in the Park where damage was done, and another at Capel Manor College but we do not know whether the events were connected. This is a problem which recurs in other parts of West London in the absence of official travellers' sites.

THE PROPOSED HUMANITARIAN AID MEMORIAL

In Newsletter 119 we stated that the Friends Committee was very concerned about this proposal. We recognised the value of such a memorial but felt that this design had little gravitas and that the location was inappropriate.

The planning application ignored our views and gave too little weight to the pre-application advice from Historic England (HE), so we sent in a substantial response to make clear our concerns – you can read it here: https://tinyurl.com/36jre4b2

While supporting the idea of a humanitarian memorial we have said that, reluctantly, we cannot support this particular scheme. The heritage impact of the proposal has been misjudged – the site lies within Furnese's 18th century William Kent-inspired parkland and is highly sensitive. Nor is this location conducive to 'quiet contemplation'. The hard landscaping, the path and the location of the seat are poor and the design lacks gravitas for such an important purpose. The application form lacks some information and denies any local authority link, yet councillors from the two local authorities are Gunnersbury trustees.

While the above are clearly planning issues, the committee believes that the scheme cannot be evaluated fully without greater clarity about the two issues below to ensure its sustainability:

- the infrastructure needed to maintain an online database of humanitarian aid workers has not been thought through
- more detail is needed on the endowment fund and its management.

After the intervention of a local councillor we expected this application to go to a Planning Committee meeting, rather than being decided by a Planning Officer. A formal response from Historic England (HE) was submitted in early May and HE have shared this with us.

They make it very clear that they consider that the proposals "cause harm to the Grade II* registered park, which we believe could be reduced or potentially avoided if a different location were selected for the sculpture. We do not consider the proposals meet the requirements of legislation, policy and guidance and consequently do not support the proposals in their current form. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss less harmful locations for the memorial within the park in conjunction with the applicant and your council".

We understand that the Planning Officer dealing with the application has now recommended to the applicants that they take up HE's offer and attempt to find a mutually acceptable location elsewhere in the Park, with a July deadline for finding an agreement.

SAKURA CHERRY TREES BLOSSOMING

Philippa Dolphin, one of the Friends Committee members, took this photo to record the young cherry trees in blossom in mid-March.

They were a gift from the Japan/UK Sakura Cherry Tree project. This originally aimed to mark Tokyo's Olympic Games, which were delayed by the pandemic.

The Gunnersbury garden team worked with students from Capel Manor College and volunteers to plant the young trees in November 2022.

'GARDEN OF RESISTANCE' FROM CAMPAIGNERS

A plaque with a few bedding plants was placed near the Old Cricket Pitch as a symbolic 'Garden of Resistance'; it was removed quite quickly by Park staff. The plaque read 'Say No to Commercial Exploitation by the local councils and CIC. This garden symbolizes community efforts to preserve natural beauty and resist exploitation by festivals and corporations, who take up this space every summer.'

The campaigners, calling themselves The Save Gunnersbury Park Group, say that their primary objective of the campaign is to address what they describe as 'the escalating disruptions, noise pollution, and access restrictions caused by a relentless schedule of paid music and members-only events'. They claimed that this was the opening salvo to a planned summer of protest ahead of the festivals and other events due to take place.

Our local online newspaper, BrentfordTW8.com, received a statement, perhaps from this group but calling themselves 'Gunnersbury Heritage', which said: "It is our firm belief that this trajectory not only undermines the historical significance of Gunnersbury Park but also disregards the well-being of local residents and wildlife. Our concerns are rooted in a profound commitment to preserving Gunnersbury Park as a sanctuary for all, in accordance with its original covenant. While we recognise the importance of some commercial activity, we advocate a balanced approach that prioritises community engagement, transparency, and environmental sustainability."

They claimed that the site for their garden was chosen because over-use by large corporate events has led to the ground there being compacted by trucks, increasingly prone to water-logging and that it requires liming as it is now strongly acidic. While some soil has been spread over affected areas, they claim this has not properly repaired the site.

They have made a series of complaints and requests for information to Ealing and Hounslow Councils; the latter has rejected a request for a formal inquiry and now the group says that if the councils fail to respond within the statutory time limit, it will go to the Ombudsman, ultimately seeking a reversal of the licence granted by the councils to the governing Community Interest Company.

The Park management has consistently defended its policy of hiring it out during the summer months, because the revenue is for essential maintenance of the park. The first events were planned by Keith Townsend, a senior Ealing Council officer, and inherited by the CIC. But all the advice we gave, from the beginning and repeatedly since, about the likely impact upon local people is only now being fully recognised. Gunnersbury needs its neighbours to support and champion it rather than running this kind of campaign.

RESPONSE TO RESIDENTS' FEEDBACK ON 2023 EVENTS

The Gunnersbury CIC have been trying to improve their relationship with local people affected by the events programme. There is a summary of their debrief meeting here: https://tinyurl.com/pufrvne4. For those who don't use the internet here's a summary of their responses to key areas of concern:

Sound Management: "We take our responsibilities to local residents very seriously and have once again commissioned an independent acoustic consultancy to review complaints received from local people and from Ealing and Hounslow councils in 2023, to reduce the impact of bass frequencies which were cited by many complainants. Our consultants will be present at each event this year carrying out sound monitoring and we will share more detail at the resident meetings. Frequently asked questions for each event are now available on the website".

Toilets: Soho House Festival will increase toilet facilities by 50% and Festival Republic by 65% this year at strategic locations in response to feedback. Waterworks will be doubling their toilet provision and increasing toilet signage by 50%.

Dispersal after events: Additional exit routes for attendees will be provided to try to ensure orderly dispersal. Pressure on Acton Town tube station should be reduced by encouraging the use of alternative transport.

Signage: "Soho House Festival and Festival Republic will introduce extra signage from Acton Town to the Park. Waterworks will increase way-finding sign. Working with the organisers we hope to make signage clearer, more effective and placed in good locations along the paths. Additional signage in the Park will aid way-finding including clear directions to crossing points".

The dedicated Noise & Complaints line for residents is 020 3781 0001.

SUMMER EVENTS AT GUNNERSBURY 2024

Julia Mattingley, Head of Operations and Commercial for the Gunnersbury CIC wrote to local businesses and residents on 2 May. The letter is on-line here: https://tinyurl.com/3u8dmku2. It states "We have created a dedicated section on our website for all residents, local businesses and stakeholders where all information related to the events programme is collated". You can access this here: https://visitgunnersbury.org/residents. The letter also states: "Whilst the events bring many benefits to the local area, we'd also like to acknowledge that the programme may be unwelcome for some local residents and stakeholders. We'd like to assure you that we are working tirelessly to address your concerns and would like to thank all of you who have provided feedback and contributed to the process". They have provided guidelines on how to get in touch before and during the events, details of consultation meetings providing the opportunity to discuss events directly with the organisers, and learn about projects and benefits that will be on offer for the local community including the chance to win tickets.

Although plans for the return of immersive cinema screenings in the Park were mentioned earlier this year these do not seem to have materialised on the festivals and outdoor events pages of the visitgunnersbury.org

Soho House Festival: A single Festival day on Thursday 4 July will offer music, food and drink for members.

The Recipe: using the same site as Soho House on Saturday 6 July, they promise great food and music, and amusement rides.

Festival Republic: A series 8 single-stage open air concerts across a range of music genres, Wednesday 7 to Sunday 18 August

Waterworks: Three days of multi-stage music events. Friday 13 – Sunday 15 September.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Before the regeneration project, a Joint Committee and then a Joint Advisory Panel oversaw Gunnersbury; the Friends had two representatives on these panels and played an active role. In 2022, before Gunnersbury's governance changed, the Friends Committee met representatives of the Trust and agreed to work more closely together. As a result we offered funds towards creating a collections hub in the Stables and to enlarge the Orangery.

After repeated requests we managed to meet the new Chairman, James Knowles, in September 2023. We asked that Trust proceedings should be made public; a short film on visitgunnersbury.org promised that Board minutes would be posted in December but they have not appeared.

A National Lottery Heritage Fund bid for the Stables scheme failed but we will press for another try. However, work seems to have begun on reviewing the Orangery project without our involvement, despite this being a condition of our funding. We fear that the concept has changed as we know they have appointed a catering consultant.

We've tried to contact Knowles several times, offering useful information and aiming to foster a relationship but without success. He seems to have no idea what partnership is – which bodes ill for the future.

SET TO STUN – DESIGNING & FILMING SCI-FI IN WEST LONDON

This ambitious exhibition which opened in October is now coming to an end. We contributed to the crowd-funding scheme which made it possible. Several Friends were able to attend the packed launch event, mingling with characters in costume.

The Museum website headlined the exhibition: "Beyond the stars and behind the scenes, for nearly a century West London has been home to design studios and workshops that fed into some of the UK's most iconic Sci-Fi films and TV". The show celebrated the artists and crafts-people who have brought to life sci-fi film and TV since the 1960s some of whom advised the project and took part in events.

Tom Crowley, who will soon be taking over the Curator's post, co-ordinated the Museum team who devised an innovative approach. Items from the Museum collections and many loans were brought together. Costumes, prosthetics, artistic visualisations and props from classics like *Doctor Who*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Red Dwarf* not only filled the special exhibition gallery but could be found throughout the Museum. They were added to existing display cases dealing with the home, local industries and leisure. It has been a tremendous success!

ALIEN WORLDS

Inspired by *Set to Stun*, Lionel Road Primary School pupils imagined how aliens might survive on planets with different atmospheres and landscapes for an outdoor exhibit. Each display panel represents a planet:

- fiery planet, Voltox
- volcanic moon, Ventar
- frozen planet, Blizzar
- dusty, rocky planet, Boldar
- watery planet, Drizzar, and
- swamp-infested, Moldar

See yourself on an alien body in the face-shaped mirrors on the larger aliens! Runs till 20 July.

MUSEUM ADVISORY GROUP

A new Museum Advisory Group is being established to work with the trustees and staff, to help develop the Museum's Forward Plan, advise on a major redisplay of the museum's permanent exhibition galleries and develop a process to help involve local people in decision-making and governance, from Young Curators through to Board level. The Group will meet quarterly to undertake this ambitious programme.

Your Editor, Val Bott, who has created four new local history museums in London Boroughs during her career, has been invited to become a member of the Group. The first meeting will be in June.

JULIA TUBMAN

We send our congratulations to Curator Julia Tubman who joined the Museum 10 years ago early in Gunnersbury's Regeneration Project.

She has recently returned to work after maternity leave, and will have her hands even more full as she has now left for a new post! She will be Croydon's Heritage Museums & Collections Manager.

ARTS COUNCIL

Arts Council England recently extended the status of the Museum as a *National Portfolio Organisation* until 2027. This national scheme brings significant financial support. It is very pleasing that Gunnersbury is one of the few smaller London museums to have achieved this.

THE CAFÉ

After the 2020 arson attack on the café, rebuilding its replacement has been a long, slow process. Insurance for loss of the building can support reconstruction by the local authorities, but fitting out was done by Benugo, the original operator which will not take up running the café again, so that source of funds has gone. Works began in 2023 but after the contractor left it took some time to find a new one. Meanwhile, refreshments are available most days from vendors near the Museum, by the Sports Hub and at the Putt in the Park café. And when no event is taking place the Museum's conservatory is open daily offering indoor seating.

UNAUTHORISED EVENT ON 25 May, 1.00 – 8.00pm

Residents over quite a large area had to endure what was described to us as 'quite a racket' – a very powerful sound system had been set up on the lawn between the Museum and Popes Lane. A poster claimed that it was part of a campaign for Truth and Justice and said that stalls were available. In the event there was almost no-one there and no stalls.

A statement on the GDT website on the previous day stated that they were aware of the proposed event but that it had neither been endorsed nor authorised by Gunnersbury Estate (2026) CIC or the Trust. They had contacted the Metropolitan Police and local authorities and advised the organisers that it was not permitted. Without success, it appears!

EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

POP-UP EXHIBITIONS

The Museum team was proud to launch its first pop-up exhibition, *Figuring Out Home*, at Feltham Hub as part of the Feltham Arts Festival in May. Photos and poems were created by Hounslow community groups who worked with photographer Narvir Singh.

Inspired by the photos of Southall's Punjabi community taken by Dennis Morris in the 1970s, it considers what it means to build a home in a new place. It involved these organisations: Community Access Service, Hounslow Community and Education, Trinjan, the West London Queer Project and Year 9 of Rivers Academy.

The next pop up exhibition will be in Southall Park on 22 July.

PATHS CLOSED, 1 June

Gunnersbury's management have apologised on their website for closing to visitors the path and outdoor area immediately beside the Orangery on 1 June, 9.00am – 7.00pm for two private events.

The GREAT WEST ROAD

Next year will mark the centenary of the opening of this major route. The Hounslow & District History Society and Brentford & Chiswick Local History Society have been working with James Marshall on plans for publishing an updated and more highly illustrated edition of his 1995 history of the road.

Meanwhile, an *Everyday Heritage* grant from Historic England has supported the *Temples of Industry* museum project looking at the decline of industry on the A4. A volunteer team collected memories of people who worked at AEC Southall, Firestone and Trico Folberth to create terrific web pages: www.visitgunnersbury.org/museum/temples-of-industry/

MORE THAN WORDS: WRITING THE WRONGS

The remarkable work of pioneering political activists, publishers and book-shop owners, Guyanese-born Jessica and Eric Huntley, is on show in an exhibition of photographs and book covers, till 15 August.

They came to England in the late 1950s and settled in Ealing where they founded Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, celebrating Black culture and history, in a wide range of writing, including seminal texts by writers from across the African diaspora. Later they opened the Bogle-L'Ouverture bookshop which became an important cultural hub.

Jessica was deeply passionate about young people's education and galvanised support to counter the rise of unfair practices that saw Black pupils classified as sub-normal and excluded from schools.

JIGSAW HERITAGE until 15 August

Jaixia Blue's multimedia textiles explore her close relationship with her grandmother who has dementia and Parkinson's disease. They reflect on her grandmother's journey aged 21, from Savanna-la-mar, Jamaica, to Paddington, towards the end of the Windrush era.

Drawing on her grandmother's hand-written musings and fragmented memories, she undertakes her own journey, piecing together the jigsaw puzzle of her dual British and Caribbean heritage.

JIGSAW HERITAGE LIVE, 23 June 2.00-4.00pm

To celebrate the 76th anniversary of Windrush, this is an afternoon of vibrant live performance, including song, steel pan and poetry from West London's finest young talent. Performers will include: Raquel Joseph - DJ; True Steel Band - Steel Pans; Jaixia Blue - Singer and Poet and Leon Jacques - Singer. Tickets £5 plus fee, booking is essential online at https://tinyurl.com/bddtt8h9

SUMMER SOLSTICE TREE WALK, 2.30pm 23 June

Storyteller Chloe Harbour offers a magical summer walk delving into the myths and legends of Gunnersbury's historic trees, The walk will be on paths and will be step-free, but may take in some steep slopes and patches of uneven ground. Suitable for all the family but children must be accompanied by an adult. Tickets £6 plus fee, booking is essential online at https://tinyurl.com/4np9hemd

NEXT ISSUE

The next Friends' Newsletter will be assembled in the autumn. We welcome your images, news and comments; post to The Editor at 25 Hartington Rd W4 3TL or email to info@gunnersburyfriends.org

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

The membership year starts on 1 April. If you do not pay by standing order you will find a renewal form in this mailing. Use the online form (eligible for Gift Aid) at gunnersburyfriends.org/friends/join-the-friends to pay by cheque or standing order. If choosing a standing order, please arrange payment on 1 April annually and mark the form accordingly when you return it to The Membership Secretary, The Manor House, Ampney St Peter, Cirencester GL7 5SH