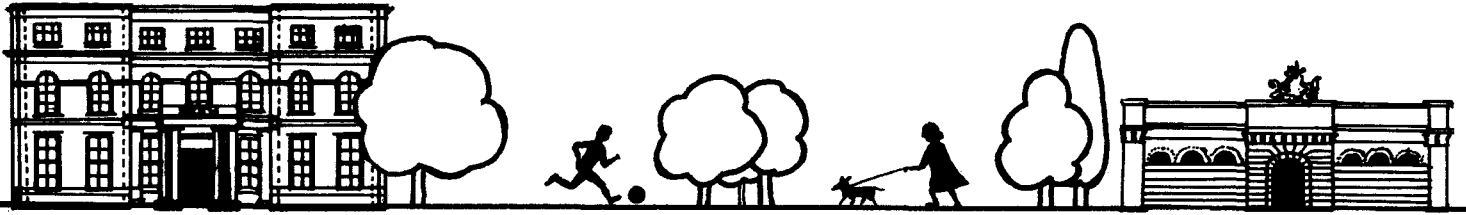


FRIENDS of GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

No. 1
Nov. 1981

NEWSLETTER



Editorial

This first issue of our Newsletter gives me a welcome opportunity to thank all our new members, firstly for the work they did in preventing the Stables being converted into offices and secondly for having enough confidence in the future of the Friends to subscribe as founder members.

We are at present preparing a Constitution (and considering the benefits of registration with the Charity Commissioners) in which the central aim of the Friends is to preserve and enhance the amenities of, and to increase the public's awareness of, Gunnersbury Park and Gunnersbury Park Museum. This will be submitted to the society for approval at the first Annual General Meeting in April.

It is our intention to set up a society which can outlive the controversy which brought it into being. As other parks and museums have found, there is always a long-term role for a Friends organisation. We of course have the added problems associated with the listed buildings in the Park.

The formula we have so far devised is a combination of a newsletter, open committee meetings and social events. When it comes to decision-taking, it is at the open committee meetings that the policies of the Friends will be formed.

What can the members do? Obviously the steering committee would welcome any help with the chores of running the society - from making the tea to taking an area and being responsible for delivering the Newsletter there. Equally we hope that you can come to the open committee meetings and the social events. But please don't feel that by joining the Friends you have incurred an obligation to do all these things. It is equally valuable to have members who simply take a concerned and thoughtful interest in the progress of the Friends; in return for your sub. we'll keep you better informed!

This first Newsletter will be distributed to the 375 members who have joined so far. Please remember that if you can recruit any more members the subscription (until 31st March 1982) is £1, or 50p for O.A.P.s and people under 18, and the Membership Secretary is Joan Catterall, 39, Lionel Road, Brentford.

James Wisdom.

The Story So Far...

We felt it would be helpful in this first Newsletter to give an account of the problems of the buildings in Gunnersbury Park and of the events which led to the formation of the Friends.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee (the GPJC) was wrestling with the problems of the Temple, the Dairy and the Small Mansion. All three were in poor condition and desperately in need of repair. In 1970 the Small Mansion was converted into a Teachers' Centre and the HQ of the Gardeners' Training Consortium

after permission was obtained from the Lands Tribunal to vary the covenants. The Dairy, a 19th century listed building near to the Large Mansion, was left to decay until permission to demolish was granted in 1972. By 1975 the Temple had been restored, with the help of a grant from the Historic Buildings division of the G.L.C.

It was in 1978, when the GPJC sought permission to demolish the derelict East Lodge (last occupied in 1966), that the G.L.C. first expressed its alarm in public over the policy of the GPJC. The Chairman, Cllr.

William Bell, accused Hounslow and Ealing Councils of making false economies by demolishing irreplaceable buildings. He said that it was vital to keep the buildings and the smaller structures, like the lodges and walls, to preserve the character and historic interest of the Park. The G.L.C. was afraid that, by stopping the maintenance programme for 'unoccupied' buildings, the two Councils were effectively going to demolish them by neglect. Permission to demolish the East Lodge was refused.

The GPJC then instructed its officers to prepare a feasibility study of the possible uses of the park buildings, particularly the Orangery and the Stable Blocks. In July 1980 the idea was floated that the Orangery might be converted into a restaurant, but no way could be found of giving it access at night when the Park was closed.

It has long been acknowledged that one of the problems for the Museum is the location of its very fine Transport Collection in the drawing room of the Large Mansion, and that the Stables were a more suitable space for it. If this were done it would also allow for future expansion within the Large Mansion. The Brentford and Chiswick Local History Society was therefore concerned to learn from the minutes of the GPJC meeting on 19th December 1980 that there was to be a special meeting of the GPJC on 13th Feb. 1981 when the developers who had already had discussions with the Borough Valuer were going to present their proposals. Clearly some form of commercial development was emerging as the front runner from the various ideas in the feasibility study.

We learnt later, particularly after the Arts & Recreation Committee meeting in mid-March, the outline of the proposals made by Dimsdale Developments (S.E.) Ltd. In return for a peppercorn lease for 100 years and permission to build a linking building, Dimsdale would convert the Stables into offices and pay the GPJC £300,000 which could then be spent on building maintenance and the erection of a building to store the boats and equipment then in the Stables. This conversion would result in 7,600 sq.ft. of lettable office space (9,000 sq.ft. altogether).

This scheme was rapidly approved by both Councils and in late May Dimsdale applied for planning permission and listed building consent. The Brentford and Chiswick Local History Society were opposed to the scheme because it blocked for a long time the expansion of the Museum. It also felt that the scheme was a new departure in Council policy and at the least required some public debate. So in late March it made contact with a number of local groups and informed them of the developments thus far. The local newspapers began to carry stories on the events as they unfolded, and an item appeared on the BBC's Nationwide programme.

Objecting to a planning application and to a request for listed building consent is, thank heavens, a rare experience in most citizens' lives, so Doug Stone and James Wisdom hired the Scout Hut in Pope's Lane one Sunday afternoon in June and by leaflet and poster invited people to come and get the necessary information. Despite the baking hot weather, 108 people did so. There had already been one petition, mainly from res-

idents of the L.B. of Ealing, with 174 signatures, and now a second was on its way.

The GPJC had met on May 15th and received a closely-argued alternative proposal from Mrs. Anne Stead, that the Stables could be used profitably as a small riding school for children learning on ponies. It was at this meeting that the GPJC decided to hold its public consultation meeting before rather than after Hounslow's Planning Committee considered Dimsdale's application.

The consultation meeting on July 22nd was attended by 200+ members of the public. Although the voting procedure at the end was confused it was plain that no-one in the hall actually supported the Dimsdale scheme. The Borough's Chief Planning Officer gave an assurance that his committee would not consider the application before the GPJC next met. Soon afterwards Ealing Council was asked to endorse the Dimsdale application, but after lobbying they also deferred their decision until after the next meeting of the GPJC.

Up to this point the 'campaign', such as it was, had been unorganised and uncoordinated. However the various discussions and meetings had produced certain ideas that were strongly held by many of the people involved. These were that an office development ran against the spirit of the Park, particularly in view of the restrictive covenants; that many people in the area were very fond of the Park and wanted to show that affection in some way; that there was a good deal of appreciation of the work of the Park staff, but that it was clear they were coming under great pressure from cuts in the Councils' budgets; and that if a society concerned with the Park had already existed possibly none of this would have happened!

On another hot Sunday afternoon in mid-August a second meeting in the Scout Hut decided to form a 'Friends' of the Park, on a similar model to the Friends of Holland or of Richmond Parks. The opinion of that meeting was that the Friends should cooperate with the Councillors, the staff in the Park and the officers at the Civic Centre to find solutions to the problems of the buildings and to improve the amenities of the Park in general. A steering committee was elected and the details of this can be found elsewhere in the Newsletter.

On the 4th September the GPJC met to consider the outcome of the public meeting, and after a debate decided that Dimsdale should be asked to withdraw its proposals. Many of the Councillors reiterated their belief that in the present political and economic climate it was impossible to consider financing the repair and restoration of the buildings from the rates. They also acknowledged that they had an obligation to prevent them from falling down, and they welcomed the possibility of assistance from the Friends.

The task then confronting the Steering Committee was to build up an organisation, a membership and the financial resources to sustain the Friends for the immediate future. We have held three open executive committee meetings in the Scout Hut, in August, September and October, at which we have reported back to the members and obtained their views as to future developments. We have also held ad-hoc committee meetings to handle details and arrangements.

We now feel that we have enough members and sufficient resources to turn our attentions to the major problems that the Park faces, and we hope that a combination of open executive committee meetings, this newsletter and the various social functions will make the Friends an effective body in translating the wishes of our members into action.

Friends' Activities

Since their formation the Friends have been represented at several events in the area to publicise the society and recruit new members. On September 19th Anne Stead and Joan Catterall provided two stalls at the Hounslow Carnival in Lampton Park. Despite the awful weather enough people bought the home-made popcorn and had pony rides to result in a modest addition to our funds. On October 24th the Friends managed to be in two places at once - the Community Bazaar at Chiswick Town Hall, which opened the Chiswick Festival and an Open Weekend at St. Mary's, Perivale (a redundant church which has been rescued by the Friends of St. Mary's). Our bazaar stall had plants, herbs, bric-a-brac and Gunnersbury Park honey as well as recruiting literature. At its close a car-load of goodies was shifted to St. Mary's, where our stall already had a large display of

photographs of the park, augmented with material from the museum. This combined 2-day effort brought us some new members and swelled the funds and was rewarded with photographs in the local papers in Ealing and Chiswick.

The major fund-raising event, however, was a jumble sale at St. Faith's Church Hall, Brentford, on Saturday, October 31st. A great deal of work went into leafletting to attract the jumble, receiving and sorting it, then leafletting near the hall to ensure a good turnout. In all, 3,000 houses received something from the Friends and on the day the tables were piled high with the results. As the good people of Brentford staggered off down the path with bulging bagfuls, Doug Stone kept the weary helpers happy with the news that we had made over £100 profit; in fact, these four events have together resulted in an income of £200 and lack of money is no longer an obstacle to our effectiveness. For this there are many people to thank, but especially the jumble sale supremo, Eva Swan.

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES:

18th Nov. Magic Lantern Show.
22nd Nov. Students' Presentations.
14th Dec. Musical Museum Trip.

Details - see below and back page.

Ideas for the Stables

One of the most important tasks that the Friends can do at this stage in the life of the Stables is to disseminate as many ideas as possible for the ways they might be used in the future.

Through the good offices of the Liberal Party's local newsletter, 'FOCUS', a lecturer in architecture at the North London Polytechnic (Mrs. Susan Gorka) came to hear of the state of the buildings. After their degree exams and a period in architectural practice, architects return to the Polytechnic for two further years of study. As part of this study fourteen of Mrs. Gorka's students were asked to prepare feasibility studies of the Stables. They had to examine the buildings, invent and design an appropriate scheme and explore the possibilities of financing it.

We have asked the students to come over to Gunnersbury and present their ideas to the Friends. They will display their drawings and each in turn will explain their suggestions, and of course answer any questions.

We hope that some of the Councillors on the GPJC, together with the Officers from Hounslow's Civic Centre, will be able to come to this event. It will be a chance to have some creative and valuable discussions about the future of the Stables.

Please do not feel that if you cannot manage to come to this you will miss all the information. We will write an account of each idea in the next issue of this Newsletter so that all the Friends can participate in considering the schemes; and of course the Newsletter is an open forum for letters and articles.

The presentation will start at 2.00 p.m. in the Scout Hut in Pope's Lane (opposite the entrance to the Park) on Sunday 22nd November.

The Steering Committee

At the inaugural meeting of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum on 16th August 1981 the following people were elected to serve on the steering committee. Formal elections under the new constitution will be held at the Annual General Meeting early in April 1982.

Joan Catterall, (Membership Secretary), 39, Lionel Road, Brentford; 560 4262.
Ray Gunston, 160, Gunnersbury Ave, W.3. 992 4509.
Ken Hawkes, (Vice Chairman), 18, Julius Court, Justin Close, Brentford; 568 2717.
Joyce Prince, 245, Pope's Lane, W5 4NH; 567 5521.
Anne Stead, 36, Raleigh Road, Norwood Green, Southall, UB2 5TW; 574 8341.
Doug Stone, (Treasurer), 228, Gunnersbury Ave, W.3. 992 4127.
Eva Swan, 152, Gunnersbury Ave, W.3. 993 2692.
John Wilson, 221, Pope's Lane, W.5. 567 8162.
James Wisdom, (Chairman), 25, Hartington Road, W.4. 994 4231.

The Museum

HISTORY OF THE 'FLICKS'.

Early Cinematography, 1895 - 1928, a small but fascinating exhibition, on loan from the Science Museum, outlines the development of motion picture equipment and techniques. One large room in the museum is crammed with information on filming and editing techniques, projecting, colour and sound.

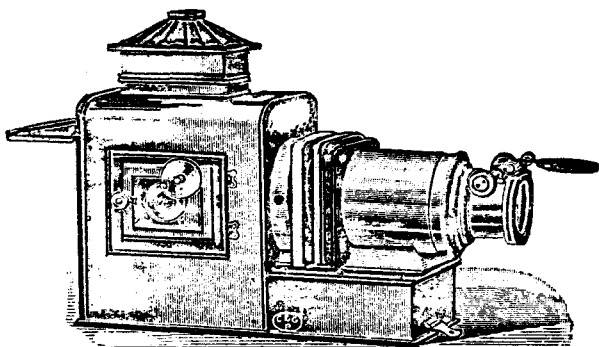
The exhibits - all of which, in a fashion uncharacteristic of museums, can be handled and examined by the children - include early cameras, projectors and a "What-the-butler-saw" Mutoscope. The exhibition does more to enable a child to understand animation than any amount of verbal explanation.

(This notice, by Judy Froshaug, appeared in The Times, Nov.6th, Preview.)

This is a temporary exhibition, on show until 22nd November. The Museum is open from 1 to 4 p.m. on weekdays and from 2 to 4 p.m. on weekends. For further information ring the Curator (Ann Balfour Paul) or the Assistant Curator (Phil Philo) on 992 1612.

MAGIC LANTERN SHOW

The first in the Friends' programme of social events will be a Magic Lantern Show, held in the Museum at 7.30 on Wednesday 18th November. Jeremy Fisher, a member of the Magic Lantern Society, has very kindly agreed to bring his lantern to the Museum and give the presentation, using some of his own and some of the Museum's Victorian and Edwardian glass slides. The presentation will of course coincide with the travelling exhibition - Early Cinematography - and the Friends will have the opportunity to see this and the rest of the Museum. For those in need a very few lifts home may be available from some committee members, but only by prior arrangement (the phone numbers are elsewhere in this Newsletter). Light refreshments will be served. We are sorry about the very short notice of this event, but we are sure it will be a very enjoyable evening.



A date for your diary: The next open committee meeting will be on the afternoon of Sunday, 10th Jan. It will be combined with a small New Year celebration. Details in the next Newsletter.

The Park

The Park is green and quiet early in the day the children are at school so no-one's come to play

The swing chains gently rattle when caught by the breeze,

the children, where are the children is whispered in the trees.

The boats are all upended till Saturday is here, the pond belongs to the ducks as the children are not near.

The cafe is open, but trade is very slow, no-one buys the ice-cream, no-one wants to know.

Tomorrow is Saturday, the park will be alive with children,

the children, who bring the park to life.

J.M.Catterall.

The Musical Museum

One of the ideas that has been floated for the conversion of the Stables is as a home for the Musical Museum. This museum is the creation of Mr. Frank Holland, M.B.E., and was established in St. George's Church, Brentford High Street (next to the gas works) in 1965. Inside the church is a truly remarkable collection of player-pianos, pianolas, violins and other instruments which can be played either by hand or automatically from perforated rolls. It also includes a mighty Wurlitzer. The museum is possibly the finest collection of Automatic Musical Instruments in Europe - even in the world.

Frank Holland opens his museum at the weekends when he takes the opportunity of playing the exhibits and explaining how they work. He also conducts parties around at other times, and he has very kindly agreed to open the museum for the Friends on the evening of Monday, December 14th. The tour will start at 7.45 p.m. and will last for about 1½ hours. As some of the museum Trustees will be there we shall have the opportunity for some interesting discussions. Although the museum relies on admissions fees to survive, he has most generously offered to waive them in this case (although donations are always welcome!). Light refreshments will be served, and as it is a large church you are advised to bring warm feet!

Are you looking for a 'local' Christmas card? Don't forget that the Museum sells a card of the 17th century Gunnersbury House (now demolished) for the amazingly cheap price of 10p each.
