

# FRIENDS of GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

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# NEWSLETTER



## "WE CAN'T EVEN GIVE IT AWAY!"

"We can't even give it away". These were the words of Cllr Dodkins (13th March 1992) on hearing that the National Trust was not interested in taking over the Park!

This amazing state of affairs came out of the previous meeting of the Gunnersbury Park Committee in December. What follows is the text of a Press Release put out by the Friends after that meeting which explains just how desperate things are in the Park:

### "GUNNERSBURY PARK TO BE OFFERED TO THE NATIONAL TRUST?"

As the finances of Gunnersbury Park are so bad, the Gunnersbury Park Committee is investigating the possibility of handing the Park over to the National Trust. At the Gunnersbury Park Committee Meeting (Friday 3rd December) the councillors heard that:

\* LB Hounslow's plan to finance the restoration of the Stables by "planning gain" from the British Oxygen site on the Great West Road has fallen through. £250,000 was raised in this way and spent on something else in the Borough.

\* A full survey of the condition of the Large and Small Mansions has shown they need £2.2m for urgent and vital works.

\* The nursery in Gunnersbury Park is being offered on a lease to the wholesale nursery trade for commercial operation

\* The Pitch & Putt and the Hire Boats are being offered as a franchise to private operators

\* LB Ealing wanted to cut £31,000 from the Park's budget (so LB Hounslow would match it; total £62,000). On a vote, the Committee refused to accept this cut. The Chair (Barbara Yeiolomou, Ealing, Conservative) said "I cannot see the point of this vote - the cut will go through anyway".

James Wisdom, Chair of The Friends Of Gunnersbury Park & Museum, said:

"We have lost too many historic buildings in this Park already. The Park is facing a major crisis and the Councillors are tinkering at the margins."

The Friends of GP&M are establishing a professional fund-raiser (June Hoare) with an office in the Museum, starting in January. "There are still good things happening at Gunnersbury - for example, the Museum's new Costume Gallery is excellent - and we want to support these initiatives as much as possible" said James Wisdom.

Further details:

1) The scheme put forward by LB Hounslow to restore the Stables with planning gain and put a children's day-centre in the park was always a cynical device to block Ealing's proposal to restore the Stables by building an office in the enclosed ground north of the Stables. Hounslow knew it would never persuade Ealing to put up its share of the cost. The news that Hounslow's proposal had failed was only mentioned at the Committee by accident! They had not even bothered to write a report on it. It is now up to Hounslow to come up with a real proposal.

2) The survey was conducted by Stephen Bond, from a specialist firm of historic buildings surveyors - Tuffin, Ferraby and Taylor. It shows all roofs needing urgent repair, walls painted with the wrong coatings and moisture trapped within, perhaps some structural failures, massive risk of wet and dry rot, overloaded floors and staircases, electrical rewiring and safety work etc etc. The Councillors were told they needed to find £2.5m for urgent works to these and other Park buildings. How much did they vote? £103,300!

3) The Nursery in the Park produces bedding plants for LB Hounslow. Hounslow has decided to replace plants with shrubs (all across the Borough) - it is called The Green Strategy - and so does not need the Nursery (with its nearly new, high-tech glass houses). So it is offering the buildings to commercial operators.

Ironic, isn't it, that Hounslow councillors who have fought tooth and nail against the principle of using commercial operators to restore the buildings they have left to rot, are so keen to hand over a major part of the Park to commerce without any discussion of how that site could be best used.

There was a real row at the meeting because Hounslow had applied for planning permission for a change to commercial use before getting the Councillors' agreement to the scheme at all! Hounslow officers and councillors often behave in a thoughtless way and give the impression they think it's their park.

4) The Pitch and Putt and Boats are costing more in staffing than they are taking in tickets. Offering a subsidised service to franchise is pretty daft! To make a profit they will have to alter the costs or the level of service.

5) The National Trust proposal is ridiculous. They were told that at the meeting but they went on with it. The NT will only take properties that come with a dowry to cover their costs. Some hope!"

## THE ACCIDENT IN THE PARK

You will recall the tragedy on 17th February 1991 when two children drowned after falling through the ice of the Potomac Pond. Immediately Hounslow organised an internal enquiry, the results of which were made known in November after the inquest returned a verdict of accidental death.

The facts reported to the inquest in September were that the gates of the Potomac Lake were open and that there were no warning signs which showed how deep was the water. (There had been handwritten signs warning that the ice was dangerous, but it appears that some of them had been removed.) There were no lifebelts near the pond and the lifebelt that was eventually brought did not reach the people in the water. The

jury found that Julie Moles dies while trying to save her younger brother, Stephen.

The Hounslow enquiry was not made public but some of changes that Hounslow have introduced have been described to the Gunnersbury Park Committee. There has been a review of the procedure for water safety across the whole of the Borough and a management routine has been introduced for periods of freezing and thawing which deploys the staff in a different way. The older policy of breaking the ice at the edges has been discontinued. Extra sign and lifebelts have been erected and the gate in the fence will be fitted with a self-closing mechanism and a catch at adult height. A new base for the Park Rangers has been created (this is the North Lodge by the main entrance gate). There was some talk of using the Bowls Hut as an aid point; the Friends pressed for the use of the Mess Room in the Farm Changing Rooms (which is much nearer to the Potomac). The licence to operate the Potomac Fishing concession has been re-written to make clearer the responsibilities of the council and the club. The Committee was informed that the Moles family were suing the Council for negligence.

The Gunnersbury Park Committee had had a discussion about the safety of the Park only a week or two before the incident. That discussion was about the conditions in the Park on a busy summer's day when many hundreds of people are moving about, with dogs, cycles, children car parking and games of all sorts. How well is the Park supervised? Are there enough staff? How easily can people get help? Do they know where to get help from? Where are the phones and radios that can summon an ambulance? What is the boundary between parental responsibility and the duty of care? We must ensure that, by focusing on the steps needed to prevent this particular tragedy from happening again, we do not ignore other aspects of Park safety and security.

## CHANGES IN THE MUSEUM

The new Curator is Sarah Levitt and she has come to Gunnersbury from Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. She is a specialist in the history of ready-made clothing and has recently published "Fashion in Photographs 1880 - 1900".

The new Assistant Curator is Dr. Lynne Fox who has specialised in archaeology and medieval history; she worked at Aldershot's Military Museum and the Ragged School Museum in East London before coming to Gunnersbury.

The Costume Gallery opened on the 27th November (this is in the room which used to be the temporary exhibition gallery, before that the Boardroom for Gunnersbury Park Committee Meetings, before that the Rothschild's Library). With a substantial grant from the Wolfson Foundation a major new display case was designed by Richard Nash Associates and the original mirror above the fireplace was reconstructed by Victorian Joinery. The lighting and heating has been adapted for the display of costumes. The opening exhibition (until the end of May) is "Fashioning the Image: 1860 - 1900" which explores the changing outline of women's clothing at that time.

The first exhibition in the new "Billiard Room Gallery" is "The Victorian Child" which will run until June. It will show many aspects of 19th century childhood from rich and poor backgrounds - health, infant mortality, baby clothes, working children, street children, toys, games, dolls houses etc.

In the Long Gallery until August: A display of recent acquisitions - including the naval bell from Heston Aerodrome, a shroud, refrigerators, prams and a set of prescription books from an Ealing Chemist's shop.

## FRIENDS FUNDRAISING

The Friends have arranged with the Gunnersbury Park Committee to provide and support a fund-raising consultant to work with the Museum and the Park. June Hoare has worked with a major London arts-based fund-raising project and is now able to devote some time and effort to seeing what can be done at Gunnersbury. The Friends have provided the necessary phones, office equipment etc and she has been offered an office space within the museum.

The Gunnersbury Park Committee has prepared a fairly daunting list of projects: refurbishing Princess Amelia's Bath House and the East Lodge facade, providing toilets for disabled people in the Museum, refurbishing the Long Gallery and the Carriage Room, producing promotional materials for the Park and Museum and some furniture restoration. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. We will keep you informed of progress.

## THE PAVILION CAFE

Tony Marren, who ran the Park catering for the last 4 years, has decided not to bid for the licence this time around. He has gone to Malta to open a restaurant! You may have seen an article in the local paper reporting his dismay at the way Hounslow handled the arrangements. Last year they put the contract out to tender, made a botch-up of the paperwork, delayed making a decision, he carried on at the Cafe and they decided they would do it properly this year. It is hard to make sensible business decisions against that sort of background. This year they let the whole thing drift, no one was appointed by 31st March and so instead of handing over a going concern to a new licensee Tony had to lock up and leave. It is a strange way to treat someone who has worked hard and successfully to keep up a good service to the Park's visitors.

The new licensee is Alfonso Dilieto of Dauria Bros. He is now redecorating the Cafe to get a service in place before too much of the Easter holiday is lost. We welcome him to Gunnersbury Park and wish him the best of luck!

## PARK WALK

On Sunday 7th June at 2.30 Peter Edwards, Chair of the London Wildlife Trust's Ealing Group, will lead a Park Walk called "Trees & Other Wild Life", starting in front of the Museum. Please bring your friends.

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### THE FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM:

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