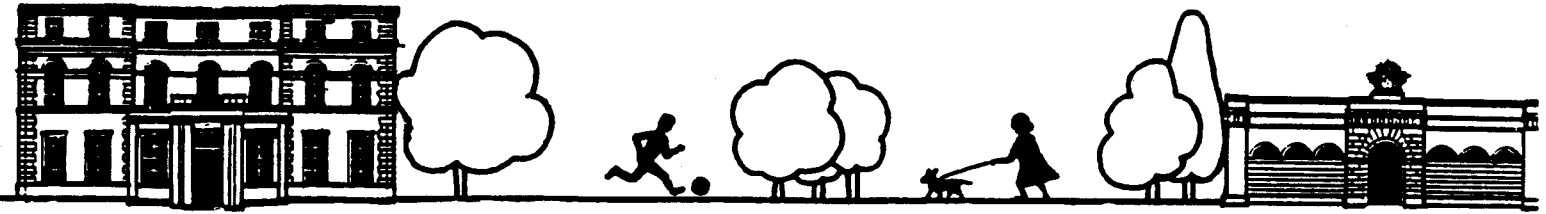


No. 38
April 1993

NEWSLETTER



DISPUTE OVER THE COVENANTS

The Councillors of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee (through its officers at LB Hounslow) have applied to the Lands Tribunal for agreement to modify the covenant over the walled nursery land to enable it to be leased to Greenscene Ltd, a wholesale nursery business. We do not know how long such a lease would run nor how much Greenscene would pay for this, nor even if the tenure would be in the form of a licence rather than a lease - all such financial matters are kept confidential. Bearing in mind that within the nursery land there are two very new and well-equipped large glasshouses with heaters, oil store and ventilators, many polythene tunnels, an open irrigated area, stores, offices, secure fencing and parking it might be reasonable to expect something like a 10 year agreement at around £25,000 p.a. When it was operated by LB Hounslow, this nursery produced all the bedding plants for the eastern half of the borough. Greenscene were invited to take over at the point that LB Hounslow moved out and are currently occupying the land on a temporary agreement. Unlike other buildings in the Park the land was not left unoccupied for long enough for vandals to do any damage.

The covenant restricts the use of the land and buildings of Gunnersbury Park. It says (slightly translated) that the owners will not use the property for anything other than a public park or sports ground, that they won't use the buildings except for public purposes linked to the use as a park or sports ground and that any new building will only be for public purposes. This covenant was then passed on - through the builders who built most of the houses in Popes Lane and Lionel Road which back on to the Park - to the new occupants. The purpose of this covenant was to protect the value of the building land - clearly the new houses were worth much more with a Park behind them than would have been the case if more roads were laid and more houses (or factories - the Great West Road was being built at the time) were constructed. When the people who live in those houses today bought their houses the deeds included the covenant, its existence affects the value of their houses and they are entitled to be consulted over any modification. As different builders prepared different deeds there is some doubt about the standing of the occupants of Nos 147 to 257 Popes Lane - the covenant does not appear in their deeds, though it is reasonable to assume that this was an oversight rather than a deliberate intention.

All around the Park there are householders whose properties are on land once owned by the Rothschild family. There is no evidence that they have this particular right to be consulted over the covenants - though of course they have every interest as local people for whom the Park and its future are important.

The application to the Tribunal was made in June 1992 and the first letter to the householders came from the legal department of LB Hounslow on 30th November 1992. While it might have been legally correct, as a piece of real communication this letter was a disaster. At the very least the Chair of the Joint Committee, Cllr Jagdish Sharma, should have written to the householders explaining what the Councillors wanted to do and why they wanted to do it. Many clear-thinking

householders concluded from the November letter that the Councillors were trying to get the covenants discharged altogether which would allow anything to happen to the Park. They started to take action, phoning Hounslow's Civic Centre, writing to Nirj Deva their MP or to local Councillors, consulting their solicitors and registering their objection. By 8th February, 30 households in Lionel Road and 5 in Popes Lane had registered objections with the Lands Tribunal.

The next move by LB Hounslow's legal department came as a complete surprise to the householders. The lawyers wrote to the Lands Tribunal saying that the objectors had not given the Council(s) any real evidence (other than answering the letters) that they really did have the benefit of the covenants. They wanted the Tribunal to decide who had these rights, and they wanted the Tribunal to instruct the objectors to show the evidence. Again, it was a letter written in legalese, with no covering note of explanation. To anyone who doubted the good faith of the lawyers and the councillors it looked like an attempt to challenge the existence of the rights of the covenant-holders; at the very least, to force them into the trouble and expense of finding and copying deeds. This rigmarole had not been needed in 1971 when the Lands Tribunal considered the future of the Small Mansion. What on earth were the lawyers and the councillors up to?

It is not surprising, therefore, that 120 residents attended the meeting in the Small Mansion in February. This had been called by Peter Blacker and others from Lionel Road and Popes Lane - the Friends paid for the room hire. No Councillors were there, but one Hounslow Officer - Sue Pritt - volunteered to attend. She made it clear the application was only for a modification, not a discharge; that it applied only to the Nursery, not to the Park as a whole; that Greenscene were forbidden to use the site for retail purposes; and that the likely traffic in and out of the site should be less frequent and intrusive than when it was used by the Council. Following the meeting Sue Pritt wrote to many of the residents confirming what she had said.

Peter Blacker and his colleague Victor Mishiku said that they had asked the Tribunal to take a sample of properties, decide if they had the rights and if so, to apply those rights to all the other properties. This would save all the residents having to ferret out deeds from building societies, lawyers etc which was fairly pointless as all parties agreed over which deeds said what. This appears to have been agreed by the Tribunal.

The residents decided that in the first place they should get quite clear who had these rights and that it was important to preserve them. A Gunnersbury Park Covenant Group was formed with Peter Blacker as Chair (63 Lionel Road), Peter Cocking as Vice Chair (37 Lionel Road) and Mrs J Edwards (17 Lionel Road) as Secretary. We will keep you informed as this story progresses.

THE CONSERVATORY

Visitors to the Park will have noticed changes to the Conservatory - the single story glass extension on the side of the Large Mansion. It was probably one of the additions designed by Sidney Smirke for Nathan Mayer Rothschild when he bought the house in the late 1830s. It is in a very prominent position because it abuts the path between the two Mansions which is one of the main routes through to the grounds. In recent years it has been used to store some of the Museum's larger exhibits (e.g. fire extinguisher, washing machine) and has been looking rather sad. But now things are changing!

Poores of Acton very kindly provided some labour and materials and it has been cleared, repainted and tidied up. Now we are looking for help to restore it as a Victorian Conservatory. We are appealing for suitable terra-cotta plant pots (particularly large ones) and Victorian plants to go in them! We have had the most generous donation of £100 from a local resident which has helped us on our way. We hope to have it open on 18th July, so if you can help, why not phone Marianne Booth on 992 9891.

MEDICAL CARE FOR SOLDIERS DURING THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

This will be the subject of a lecture at the Museum at 7.30 on Wednesday 14th April given by Col Eric Gruber Von Arni, the Director of Nursing at the Royal Army Medical College. This will be the last in the very successful series of talks which have accompanied the Civil War exhibition. It will be free to the Friends of Gunnersbury Park, £1 to the general public.

MASK MAKING, STORIES AND DANCING

On Saturday 17th April, from 10.30 to 12.30 or from 1.30 to 3.30, Sue McAlpine and Rachel Rogaly will be putting on an Easter Holiday Workshop for children between the ages of 7 and 13. Come and make an animal mask, dance to a story and learn movements based on the Chinese Art of T'ai Chi. Phone the Museum - 992 1612 - to book a ticket (£3.00).

THE CALUMET PUPPETS

The very popular Calumet Puppets will be performing in the Temple at 3.00 and 4.00 on the following Sundays: April 11th, May 2nd, June 13th and July 11th.

THE FRIENDS' BRIC-A-BRAC SALES

The Friends have resumed their monthly Bric-a-Brac sales in the Park for the Summer - the first Sunday in May, June, July and August, from 10.30 till around 2.00 (depending on the weather!) We are always looking for good stock for these sales - Are you moving or clearing out? - We would be pleased to come round to collect - Please contact Joan Catterall (560 4262) or Marianne Booth (992 9891).

THE GUNNERSBURY VICTORIAN GALA

Mark up the date of July 18th in your diaries - this will be a day of festivities in the Park including a Victorian (or Edwardian?) Cricket match, special events in the Victorian Kitchens where Mr & Mrs Rothschild will be entertaining, music, the opening of the Victorian Conservatory, stalls with Victorian games and goodness knows what else! We will send further details when we have them and perhaps be appealing for volunteers to help out on the day.

FRIENDS AND VOLUNTEERS

Moving the Storage - Pauline Hibbert is an Art Student who has, in her spare time, been working at the Museum helping to move the collection of Prints, Paintings and Drawings because the Museum is altering the arrangements of its Stores. This has involved lining all the shelving with soft and protective material and re-entering the details into the catalogue cards so that it can all be found in the future.

Cleaning the Stairs - A group of Friends met one Saturday and with the Curator, Sarah Levitt, scrubbed the Stairs of the Main Entrance Hall. These is the grand Staircase which is thought to be one of the additions designed by Sidney Smirke for Nathan Mayer Rothschild in the late 1830s. They used very mild cleaning fluids (so as not to damage the stones) and so the main ingredient turned out to be elbow grease! The improvement is quite marked and when the bookshelves have been moved from the Landing we will be appealing for another working party of volunteers to bring that surface up to its original condition.

The Costume Society - 40 or so members of the Costume Society spent a Saturday in March in the

Museum. The Friends organised refreshments and lunch for them and to show their appreciation they left us with a generous donation, saying how amazed they were at the quality of Gunnersbury's collections.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

A message from our Membership Secretary, Joan Catterall, 39, Lionel Road, Brentford (560 4262): "It's Reminder Time! If you have not yet renewed your subscription, please can you do so soon. It is only £3 per year. After costs of Newsletters etc, the rest goes to donations for the Park and Museum. If you have sent your subscription recently, you will find your membership card with this Newsletter. Some cards might have recently gone astray in the post - many apologies for any inconvenience, but if you have not received your card, please let me know."

MIDWINTER MODERN

Included with this Newsletter will be an invitation to the preview of the new exhibition "Midwinter Modern" - one of the most popular and stylish potteries since the War. We hope you will come along and enjoy this event - on Friday 30th April at 6.30. Please write or phone that you will be attending - to the Museum: 992 1612.

MATTERS IN THE PARK

We were sorry to see that repairs to the balustrade for the steps have been made by a piece of plywood fixed to cover the hole! At a time when Hounslow is making efforts to promote its Parks and its tourist attractions and when visitors from all over the world are photographing in our parks it would be sad to think this is anything more than a temporary repair. What the Park needs is a full programme of restoration of these features. Each year when the Councillors meet to decide the expenditure on the Park they are presented with this programme and each year they reject it without debate. They even reject the "essential" repair programme! In fact, they look for further savings. The state of the park is sliding from the tacky to the dangerous and our Councillors have absolutely no strategy to cope with this. The last meeting of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee was cancelled because there was nothing to discuss!

Some members recently expressed concern about what appears to be harsh pruning of the wisteria and some of the other shrubs and bushes in the Park - Mike Rowan assures us that no permanent damage has been done.

THE ROTHSCHILDS AT GUNNERSBURY

Good news on the way - Former Curator Anne Collett-White's book on the Rothschilds at Gunnersbury is due to be published this Summer. We will be inviting you to purchase it in advance (and save on the price). Details will follow. The other good news is that Anne and James have just had their third child, Richard James!

SMALL MANSION ARTS CENTRE

The Small Mansion Arts Centre has lost a substantial part of its funding from LB Hounslow which may have put its future in jeopardy. At the time of writing we know that it will be offering a Summer programme.