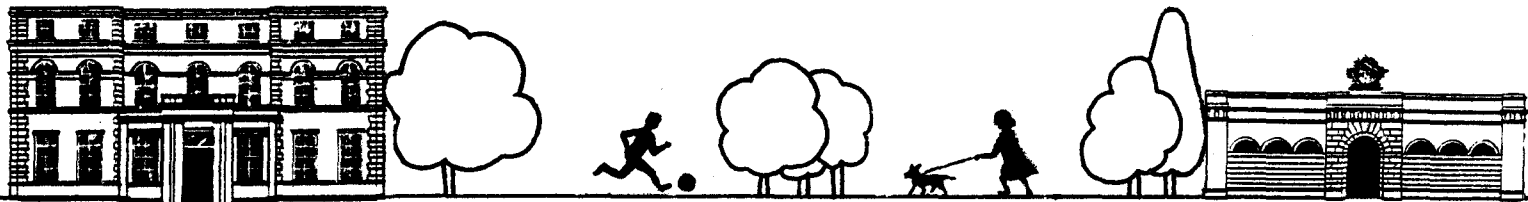


FRIENDS of GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

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NEWSLETTER



FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We will be holding the first Annual General Meeting of the Friends at 3.00p.m. on Sunday, May 9th. During this meeting the Steering Committee which was appointed in August 1981 will report on its activities since then, the draft Constitution (enclosed with this Newsletter) will be submitted for debate and approval, elections to the new committee will follow and then we shall discuss any other business. We are hoping to hold the meeting in a room in the Park, but the details have not yet been settled. We will circulate this information, together with other papers, nearer to the date of the meeting.

We hope that as many Friends as possible will come to this meeting, so as an extra attraction we will organise a small display of photographs of the Park over the years. And for this we need your help, because we feel sure that many of our members will have taken snapshots in the Park - perhaps of their children or during a day out - which when looked at all together will create a fascinating record. Do you have any of these photos? Can we display them on May 9th? Doug Stone is co-ordinating this, so please contact him at 228, Gunnersbury Ave; 992 4127.

Ideas for the Stables: Your Comments

In Newsletter 2 we published details of 17 schemes for the possible use of the Stables and enclosed a form on which members could return their comments and preferences. Forty-one of these forms were returned and thirty Friends trudged through the snow on the afternoon of January 10th to a meeting in the Scout Hut to consider the schemes further. It is clear from the forms that people had put a lot of thought into the various schemes and we were able to form a picture of the way people saw the park and its buildings and how, if at all, they would like the park to change in the future. In this article I will try and give an accurate picture of the responses to each scheme. It is not possible to reduce each answer to a yes/no vote with winners and losers but we can put the schemes into a rough order of preference, starting with the least favoured.

The Videocassette Library was recognised as a good idea which was very likely to become a moneyspinner generating funds for the repair of the buildings. But most of the comments suggested that it would be better sited elsewhere rather than in a park. The idea that the Stables could be used as a training, display and promotion area for the

fashion industry received few comments, none of them favourable, and the scheme to convert the buildings into a "Little Prince's Palace" had only one enthusiastic supporter.

The idea of an Artists' Co-operative produced some interesting but divided views. Points made by those against were that there was already plenty of scope for artists and craftsmen in the area and that the Arts Centre in Brentford will be adequate and will get priority. There was also the view that a co-operative would be unpredictable, difficult to manage and benefit only the few involved. On the other hand it did have its enthusiastic supporters: it was seen as an interesting idea which would add life to the park; it would tie in well with the museum; a gallery for local artists was welcomed, as was the possibility of seeing furniture being made to commission and it tackles two growing problems - increasing leisure time and increasing unemployment.

The ideas of "Gunnersbury Spa" and the Squash Courts produced similar comments so we will take them together. There were a few comments against them on the grounds that sportsmen were already well catered for and are well able to help themselves. As with

many of the ideas these two raise the problem of car parking and opening hours (as both facilities would be in demand in the evenings). Many comments on both schemes were favourable because they appeared to be attractive financially, but there was a fear that private capital (leading to a club with a membership fee) would be too exclusive and only facilities run by the Joint Committee would be in keeping with a public park. There was also the fear expressed that the re-developed Brentford Market site might be too strong as competition.

I think everybody agreed that the Adventure Therapy Centre, a small residential scheme for disabled people, was a very imaginative idea - "good", "attractive", even "marvellous" - but there were uncertainties about it as well. Some thought it would be very expensive to set up and to keep running; or that the site was not large enough and that an out-of-London site would be better. Traffic and access was, as with so many schemes, seen to be a problem. Many disabled people already use the park and the ideal will be reached when all facilities can be used by disabled and able-bodied alike (in fact this scheme allowed for this shared use). Perhaps the best summary of the comments is this one: "An attractive idea worth due consideration in view of the shortage of such centres".

Only a very few people were opposed to the idea of a garden centre; most of the comments were in favour, a few keenly so. It was seen as a useful local attraction, especially if the park staff were involved: the sales would bring in an income. But was there too much local competition? And how would the park cope with the increase in traffic?

There were two schemes which were similar - the Children's Domestic Working Farm and Herb Nursery and the City Farm. The Aviary/Bird Sanctuary scheme can also be dealt with here. The support expressed for each of the three schemes far outweighed opposition to them. In all three cases people felt that the projects might suffer from vandalism. We had a very helpful contribution from one member who described, as a prototype, a bird sanctuary near Neath in South Wales. It has had grants from many sources, has won a British Tourist Board award, has many school parties, is a runaway success and makes money. Others felt the aviary and sanctuary would be very popular and very interesting, fitting in well with the museum and possibly attracting tourists out of London. The idea of using the Orangery as an aviary has been considered by the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee in the past. Of the two farm schemes there was more support for the Working Farm and Herb Nursery. It was appreciated that it would take a lot of forethought and would involve a great deal of work but it was regarded as an interesting and attractive idea. It also had an educational value and would supplement the museum in bringing to life the origins of the park and its farm. All three schemes were seen to be of general interest to park visitors and so avoided the criticism of some other schemes that they were in one way or another rather exclusive.

The three riding schemes produced many comments and a valuable discussion on January 10th. A few replies were of unqualified

support but there were some firm objections. The comment was often passed that riding was an expensive and rather elaborate undertaking and therefore this would put it beyond the reach of most ordinary children in the area. It was feared that riding outside the park (on the roads and grass verges, on Ealing Common, etc.) ran too much of a risk from the traffic and that the park was too small, unlike Richmond Park, for riding or exercising the horses inside - it would spoil it for other activities. On the other hand there was strong and repeated support for a scheme which made riding available to disabled children. It was noted that these schemes would allow space for suitable museum displays on the crafts associated with horses, on their part in the farming of the area and so on. (There is more information on riding in the park elsewhere in this Newsletter).

The responses to the Pub and Restaurant scheme were very divided. There were a few strong objections, particularly to the idea of the pub; there were fears that both vandalism and traffic would increase. There were also some doubts - that there was already sufficient local competition or that the site was impractical. On the other hand there was more support for a restaurant, particularly if it had a hireable dining room (apparently there is a shortage of these in the area). There was a feeling expressed that the park would benefit from an improvement in its present refreshment and restaurant facilities and that this might increase the income which could be spent on other things in the park; but this raises again the problem of traffic and the opening hours of the park.

The suggestion that the Musical Museum at Brentford might occupy the stables was extremely popular. One comment will stand for many: "The museum has already proved its value and has the organisation and support of its members and is well established. It is already renowned world wide and would bring life to the park throughout the whole year, making the park as attractive in winter as in summer. It appeals to young and old and to many different cross-sections of the community." Frank Holland himself says that one of his Trustees has prepared a scheme for the museum's use of the Stables and he would still maintain the church on Brentford High Street. Many comments wondered if it could be combined in any way with the museum in the Large Mansion.

The Museum extension was the other extremely popular choice. It was felt to be a logical and sensible suggestion, with comments like "if the stored collections are not exhibited here, where else would they be exhibited?"; "the museum must be able to display the transport collection elsewhere" and "likely to appeal to the majority". Many comments recognised the need for finance for this project and various suggestions were made to combine it with a money raiser such as the Herb Nursery and shop, or by the sale of cards, booklets, etc. or even by charges for admission. One other combination suggested was with a restaurant, aiming for a lunch-time clientele and trade at the weekend. (There is more information about the museum elsewhere in this Newsletter.)

In some cases the replies came in the form of a general comment with one scheme

specifically approved. One, for example, draws attention to the absence of entertainment, particularly in Chiswick - no cinema, few halls, one derelict bandstand - and asks if there is scope at the Stables for a small theatre or concert hall or an open-air theatre for plays and music in the summer.

In another part of this Newsletter is an account of the deliberations that have followed from this exercise. Here it remains for me to thank all those Friends who sent in their replies and who came to the January 10th meeting. More especially we as a society are particularly grateful to the students of North London Polytechnic and their tutor, Susan Gorke, for applying their imaginations so creatively to our problems. They have succeeded in opening up the range of possibilities in a way we never expected when all we could foresee was a dreary office development!

James Wisdom

The Museum

At the opposite end of the Large Mansion to the museum galleries the kitchens which once served the big house survive. Much of the equipment has been kept in the museum stores for some time while the area has been used for storage and workshops for park equipment. At its February meeting the G.P. Joint Committee agreed in principle to the restoration of the kitchen area "at such time as finance is available." Since money is short and such a project needs elbow-grease more than anything else this is a task the Friends could undertake. The huge cast-iron grate and gas hobs are all rusty and the paintwork and the built-in dressers are grubby but intact. With careful cleaning the kitchen could be restored to its former glory, to provide an excellent setting for the display of domestic equipment in the museum's collections.

If we find we have enough volunteers for this project we could offer to take it on during this summer. It would be particularly attractive if we could enable members of the public to view the work in progress - we might even recruit some new Friends! No experience is necessary; we just need spare time, patience and the willingness to work carefully on an enormous task!

Through the Friends a perspex donations box has been designed and made for the museum. This will soon be fixed near to the counter and we hope it will help to boost the museum's funds.

The current temporary exhibition, "Life and Work in Old Chiswick" runs until May 16th and covers the history of the riverside village of Chiswick. It has been prepared by the Old Chiswick Protection Society which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Contact the museum for details of events arranged in connection with the exhibition.

A programme of concerts of 18th century music has been arranged for The Temple on the first Sunday in May, June and July. Details and tickets (£1.50 each) can be obtained at the Museum.

Opening hours: Monday to Friday: 1 - 5
Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays: 2 - 6
Admission free Phone: 992 1612

Gunnersbury Triangle

In the last few months you may have noticed in the local papers a vigorous campaign to preserve "The Gunnersbury Triangle". This is the 6 acres between the District and North London Lines a little to the west of Chiswick Park Station. It is an area of woodland and dense scrub which has been untouched since the lines were laid. It is now likely to be built over and a planning application has been submitted to Hounslow Council. Mrs. Ann Mayo (28 Chiswick Road, W4 5RF, 994 3151) has been leading the fight to preserve this woodland as a local nature reserve; it is a "reservoir" of wild life - both plants and animals - in the heart of an urban area which can be an extremely valuable educational asset. She needs help and support in this campaign so please get in touch with her for more information. Remember, for the wild life, Gunnersbury Park needs the Gunnersbury Triangle.

Riding

A lot has been said and written about the possibility of using the Stables as a site for a small riding school. Last year Mrs. Anne Stead prepared a scheme to show that this was a feasible idea, using the waste land north of the Stables. Some of her ideas were incorporated in Christos Orphanides' scheme. She intended it to be a school only, using 12 ponies, open to disabled and able-bodied children. She has made all her financial calculations assuming the fees to be much lower than rival schools in the area so that the school is open to as many children as possible, either at weekends or during school time.

The important features of her scheme are that it would use only the East Block and thus allow the North Block to be used for the Museum's Transport collection, it would attract grants for sports facilities and from charities for the disabled, it would generate at least £17,000 p.a. which could be spent on the restoration of the buildings and it would bring life to a neglected part of the Park.

At the meeting of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee on April 23rd she will submit a proposal to conduct a small-scale and temporary school this summer, with one or two ponies, just using the derelict land north of the Stables enclosed by chain-link fencing which she will supply. If she obtains permission for this project she will need a lot of assistance both in setting it up and running it. If any Friends wish to volunteer to help her she would be very glad to hear from them on 574 8341.

Discussions...

We considered the results of the questionnaire in detail at two open committee meetings (Jan 10th and Feb 14th) and we have held ordinary committee meetings on the sub-

ject. We were invited to the Civic Centre at Hounslow on March 5th to discuss our ideas with the Council officers responsible for the Park and Museum.

There was no doubt that the two most "popular solutions were (a) transferring the transport collection from the Museum and expanding its displays or (b) inviting the Musical Museum at Brentford to use the Stables. Many of the other proposals would be acceptable although all of them had some practical difficulties to be overcome. We detected some strong objections to the idea of a pub in the Stables but the same did not apply to the idea of a restaurant. If any private capital was going to be used then it had to be in a way which gave maximum access to the facilities for the general public. Few favoured the idea of riding horses in the Park but the main opposition lay in the belief that it was an expensive luxury for rich children.

As we considered the various schemes, many of the same problems arose time after time. They were the problems of traffic, car parking, access, park opening hours and security. Also we had to consider the effects that changes in one building would have on others - for example, where would the small boats be stored in winter? We also had to consider which building needed help most - the Orangery has a shorter expectation of life than the Stables. In the last few months there have been important changes in the other buildings in the Park - there is a possibility that the Teachers' Centre will move out of the Small Mansion and that the Kitchen area in the Large Mansion may become available for the Museum; and there is a scheme for the rationalisation of accommodation between the various users of both Mansions. It appeared to us that many of the ideas we were considering had "knock-on" effects, and that it was not possible to consider the future of the Stables in isolation from the rest of the Park.

There is a problem with the financing of the Museum. It is supposed to be the local history museum for both the boroughs and desperately needs to expand to provide a satisfactory level of service. Yet it is competing for resources with the Park since they are both administered within the same budget. For this reason we have asked the officers to consider the issue of treating the finances of the Museum separately and possibly linking its funding with the Education Committees of both councils.

There is another reason why we should be considering the future of the park as a whole and that is finance. There is no doubt that we can, and if necessary, will spend our time raising money for the restoration of the Stables (and the Orangery, and the East Lodge, and the Boathouse, and the balustrades and the Bath-house). We will try and attract grants, run lotteries, stage fetes and appeal to local people and local firms. But we will stand a far-greater chance of success if we can show that our efforts are part of an overall scheme.

A few years ago the Historic Buildings Division of the Greater London Council offered to conduct a survey of the Park and its buildings and make recommendations for the future. This would have been a large-scale and expensive operation. They were concerned not only with the condition of the historic buildings but also with the need to

preserve the features which make the historic landscaping of the Park so interesting and important.

The Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee has said it is prepared to consider schemes which used the buildings in a commercial way which brought financial benefit to the Park. We objected to the office scheme on the grounds that it was a totally unsuitable use; but the results of the questionnaire show that we would not be so hostile to a scheme which fitted more closely with the nature of a park - a restaurant, for example. But there is little point in pursuing this sort of idea unless it is part of a wider plan for the improvement of the Park as a whole. Many of these ideas require changes to the Park and park users are only likely to accept such changes if they are clearly seen to be part of a scheme which benefits the whole park. Bodies which give grants for the repair of historic buildings are far more likely to put their money where they can see it will do the most good than if they are approached for one-off ad hoc schemes; if we are to appeal to local people and businesses we must inspire them with confidence that we have a well-thought-out and coherent scheme. We would not get very far if we were just raising money on behalf of the two Councils which shouldn't have let the buildings rot in the first place!

There is one more important element to consider - the elections on May 6th may bring in a new Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee for the next four years. They have a formidable task ahead of them. But there are opportunities as well - the changes in the Small Mansion, the presence of the Friends and the GLC's offer of an overall survey. We feel that it is vital that a major plan is prepared setting out the priorities for restoration building by building, how the historic landscaping should be preserved and enhanced, how all the buildings can be designated for use, if there is any scope for outside finance and how grants can be attracted, what alterations need to be made to the Park (if any) and what part we volunteers, with labour and with fund-raising, can play. This is what we hope to be explaining to the next meeting of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee on April 23rd.

AND...

If there had been more space in this Newsletter we would have told you that the winning raffle number on Feb 14th was 168, that David Martin has created a scheme for pony and cart rides in the Park and possibly a horse and carriage service from the Stables, that we hope to hold a fete in the Park on Saturday July 24th and we need some experienced fete-holders, that we are hoping to set up a sub-committee to organise the social events of the society, that we are all desperate to find someone who is prepared to be the Hon. Secretary of the Friends, that there are many local fairs and carnivals throughout the summer at which we will (we hope) have a stall, that we would be very grateful if anyone knew of any other "friends" of parks here or overseas, that we are looking for someone with experience of running a Lottery and that the renewal of your subscription was due on April 1st!