

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2-4pm, Sunday 20 November in the Small Mansion

### FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Next year will mark the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum. We have been looking back over the archives and will be compiling a short history of our activities.

It is striking to note that the group which originally came together to prevent the Stables being transferred for office development to a property company was imaginative and positive in its aspirations for the future. Our recommendations included the preparation of a complete plan for the park and its historic buildings and a number of unusual ideas for leisure related businesses which would probably not have fallen foul of the covenants.

All of this was rejected or ignored by successive generations of members of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee and it now feels very much like it did in 1981, though in some ways worse. Some good things have been undone, the opportunities for the Friends to put in voluntary effort have waned, completed restoration work has declined and our observers on the Joint Committee have had to maintain confidentiality over many months on issues which should have been the subject of public consultation.

The proposals which have now been agreed by the two local authorities may provide the last chance for the future of the estate to be put on a sound footing, so it is important to come to the AGM when members will consider them in detail. A summary of these proposals appears inside this newsletter.

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### WORK EXPERIENCE GARDENING PROJECT

*Philippa Dolphin writes:*

The Sybil Elgar School in Acton provides further education for students aged 16-19 who have been diagnosed with autism. Some of the more able students do work experience in various businesses and a couple of them have chosen gardening at Gunnersbury.

They come two days a week to work in the vicinity of the café. On Mondays I meet with a teacher and two lads from the school, and Tony, from the parks staff. Tony is very kind and patient. He tells us what needs doing, providing equipment like hoes and rakes, while the teacher and I cajole the lads into doing some gardening for an hour – usually tidying up and edging.

Joan Catterall (the Friends' Membership Secretary) works with them on Thursdays, when she has got them planting bulbs and plants which have been purchased and donated by the Friends.

This is a small project but a pleasing one that provides an opportunity for the boys to experience some gardening and may make a small difference to one area of the Park.

## LONDON MELA 2005

The Director of Cultural Services for Ealing reported to the GPJC on the Mela held in the Park in August. The event was seen as being a huge success.

Over 54,000 people attended, slightly less than 2004 as a result of the poor weather. Information was collected about the kind of audience that came. It was culturally mixed, with over half Asian and about a quarter white.

Over half were under 35, and a quarter over 45, 29% came from Ealing, 13% from Hounslow, so about 35,000 came from a wider area. 80% of the people sampled felt it was “good” or “excellent” and praised the food, the music and the atmosphere.

Traffic management had been better this year and a £5 parking fee had reduced the numbers of cars and encouraged the use of public transport. More cones in some connecting roads would have been better but there were no policing or security problems reported by the local police.

Minor problems were reported on noise during setting up but there was a noise monitoring officer on site during the event when no complaints were made.

There was no reported site damage and visible rubbish had been cleared by the following Tuesday. Clearing was completed satisfactorily by Thursday lunch-time.

The report on the Mela shows what is possible for an experienced team managing a big event like this. The team comes from 2 local authorities and a number of other bodies and is learning how best to work together. Each year they gain more insight into what succeeds and the small problems that arise and this will help to improve this event (and others) in the future.

## GUNNERSBURY'S FUTURE MANAGEMENT

At their 30 September meeting the Joint Committee received a report written by Nick Pratt (LB Hounslow) and Peter Lipman (LB Ealing) entitled *Options Paper – A Way Forward*. It explores the difficulties facing both councils in securing Gunnersbury's future, in the light of reduced funding and the decline of the park and the structures within it.

The paper was “for members' debate and comment” rather than for a decision on their part; it arose from a meeting of the Leaders of both councils in March 2004, which also led to the commissioning of two major reports before they met again in July 2005. For the purpose of these studies, the Museum was regarded as the equivalent of a tenant whose future would need to be decided separately. A review of its work is planned with the help of ALM London.

### Specialist consultants' reports

The first report was prepared by *Arup Research* who reviewed the potential of the two mansions, exploring alternative uses and their viability in the context of their historical significance and their location in a park. Arup considered 3 possibilities could be appropriate to the buildings and bring in investment and income: a 40 room hotel in the existing mansions, a larger, 80 bed hotel, requiring additional building near the mansions, or conversion for sale as residential units.

The second study, prepared by *The Parks Agency*, considered the political and operational management of the estate, assessed it in the light of the national, regional and local contexts and commented upon the legacy of the lack of investment. It estimated that in order to restore the estate the councils would have to contribute £2.75m in partnership funding to obtain grant support from bodies like HLF.

The studies were conducted independently of each other but both concluded that “the decline is rooted in the lack of strategic direction and vision for the estate – a direct result of the joint management arrangements and the apparently low priority given to it by Ealing and Hounslow Councils. Successive budget reductions combined with the lack of a strategic direction have led to operational malaise reflected in the poor quality of the grounds and buildings maintenance”.

Both consultancies recognise the fragility of the councils' revenue and capital funding to date and the fact that this is unlikely to improve in the future. The failure of so many attempts to find a solution to the restoration of the Stables illustrates the failure of the current set up.

As reported in the last Newsletter another recent study, commissioned by English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), considered the plight of a number of mansions in London public parks (including Gunnersbury) and drew much the same conclusions.

### Options for change

All of these studies recommend that major investment is essential and recognise that this is only going to come from external sources, including the HLF, business and earned income. All agree that new forms of management arrangements are needed to make this possible and halt Gunnersbury's appalling decline.

Three options, set out below, were outlined in the GPJC paper:  
**Option 1- Preserve the status quo and explore opportunities to secure revenue funding and external funds.** The Parks Agency said “the track record of the joint arrangement from the 1970s onwards

can be judged by the current condition of the park, proof that it has not been effective and that this option should be disregarded”.

**Option 2 – Revise the existing arrangements so that one council has sole responsibility and can take a strong leadership role.** The Parks Agency believes that this would be effective only if the retiring partner made an endowment to buy out its responsibility, the equivalent of at least 10-15 years’ current funding, and the responsible council would have to fund the appointment of a Director of Development.

**Option 3 – re-launch Gunnersbury as a social enterprise and hand management and/or ownership to an independent trust.** The Parks Agency favoured this option since a new trust would overcome existing organisational problems and would have Gunnersbury as its sole purpose. It would not be burdened by local authority bureaucracy but it would need secure and sufficient funding in its early years while it sought external funding and developed new means of generating income. To succeed it would need committed, imaginative leadership.

The Leaders of the two councils already recognise that only Option 3 offers any real way forward. A social enterprise would have to be carefully constructed to ensure that it was accountable – it was suggested that national bodies, like English Heritage and CABESpace, might be asked to nominate board members. The GPJC, which would be wound up as these changes were implemented, requested that Option 3 be developed further for consideration at its December meeting.

### **Issues for the Friends to consider**

We have said since the early days of the Friends that a solution for the whole estate was the only one likely to succeed. We know the current arrangements under two-borough ownership and the weak management of CIP cannot go on. The proposed social enterprise, if led by a politically skilful and imaginative director and a committed chairman with real qualities of leadership, may offer the only chance of halting Gunnersbury’s terrible decline.

We also recognise that the Museum is unable to serve adequately the whole population of Hounslow and Ealing, in part because it is located at the eastern end of the two boroughs, but also because it is massively under-resourced and carries the burden of crumbling premises. It is clear that the two Mansions offer the best hope of creating a development to sustain Gunnersbury’s future. The Small Mansion Art Centre’s lease ends next March and the Museum may also have to vacate the Large Mansion to make this possible. The Museum’s future role and location must be agreed and funding found to implement these as part of the same process. Our local collections are important and we must not lose our Museum while saving the Gunnersbury estate.

Experience elsewhere demonstrates that transferring local authority services to new trusts succeeds only when the originating organisations continue to sustain their investment in the new bodies. In addition, the new body must remain publicly accountable as a public resource. The transfer of Hounslow’s leisure services to CIP was accompanied by funding cuts, exacerbating existing shortages of resources. Nor could CIP focus on a single service as the proposed social enterprise would.

Significantly, Dukes Meadows in Chiswick is already managed by its Friends and a new trust set up in 2004 will take on Chiswick House and Gardens in the future. There are great risks involved in all this for Gunnersbury, but they may be preferable to the existing regime.

## **CAPEL MANOR COLLEGE at Gunnersbury**

### **Hampton Court Show**

Last July, a group of 10 students from the BTEC National Diploma in Horticulture course created a garden called *The Angel Garden* with which they won a Silver Medal.

### **Garden Maintenance and Garden Design**

Should you need advice on your garden, or someone to maintain it, Capel’s qualified students offer such work at a reasonable cost. To place a small ad on the jobs notice board, setting out what you require, phone 8993 6266.

### **Friends’ Prize**

Each year the Friends provide a prize of books to the student who contributes most to Gunnersbury during their time on the course. This year it was won by Joshua Mohain to whom we send our congratulations!

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## **AT THE MUSEUM**

### **COLLECTIONS GRANT**

The museum has been given a grant of £2,198 by ALM London, the capital’s agency for archives, libraries and museums to pay for shelving in a new store in part of the former Flat 10 (above the museum galleries). This will house boxes of watercolours, prints and archaeological metalwork currently stored in a small cramped room which has suffered from leaks in recent years.

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### **THE MUSEUM SHOP**

Don’t forget that the Museum Shop has a wide selection of unusual items which appeal to children and which would make excellent stocking fillers, as well as local history publications – do call in when you are in the Park or coming for the AGM.

## **THE FOUR SEASONS**

On 26 September the oil painting by E T Parris was restored to the Long Gallery ceiling.

Originally painted in 1837 as part of the renovations to the house commissioned by Nathan Mayer Rothschild, the canvas was damaged by a leaking pipe in October 2004. The whole painting was saturated, the paint and varnish had bubbled, large areas of paint were flaking off and the gilt and gesso frame was broken into fifteen pieces in the process of removing the canvas from the ceiling.

The insurers paid for the painting to be sent to specialist conservators Bush & Berry of Bristol, who consolidated the flaking paint, cleaned the mildew from the back of the canvas and gave it a waterproof lining.

To fit the canvas back into the ceiling the *Window Shopping* exhibition in the Long Gallery had to be dismantled and packed away and scaffolding erected.

It took 5 people to hold the 12 foot-long canvas up while it was fixed to the ceiling. One more day was spent re-fitting the broken frame. It is now complete and well worth a visit. The *Window Shopping* display is also back in place beneath it.

## **MERI ZINDAGI (My Life): until March 31 2006**

November 25th sees the opening of the *Meri Zindagi* exhibition celebrating the lives of South Asians now living in Hounslow and Ealing. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, this exhibition features the memories, photographs and objects collected over the last year for the museum's South Asian archive. A smaller version will tour community venues in both boroughs after the exhibition closes.

**Museum opening hours: 11am to 5pm daily. Admission free**

**Please note: The Victorian kitchens are now closed for the winter.**



*The Long Gallery filled with scaffolding as the oval oil painting is lifted back into place*

## **FRIENDS OF GUNNERSBURY PARK AND MUSEUM**

**Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome**

**Next issue February 2006**

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### **MEMBERSHIP DETAILS**

***The membership year began on 1 April – please renew your membership if you wish to come to the AGM.***

If you are already a Friend, please encourage someone else to join; if you are not yet a Friend do sign up now. The subscription, at £5, is very modest - but a bigger membership means a better income and a stronger voice! Send your cheque made out to the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum, with your name and address, to Joan Catterall, Membership Secretary, 39 Lionel Road, Brentford TW8 9QZ. And donations are always welcome!

**The Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum is a Registered Charity no 286310**