

NEWSLETTER

THE GUNNERSBURY PARK REGENERATION BOARD

This body, which has councillors from both Ealing and Hounslow, replaced the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee, but it was not the new and inspiring body which had been proposed and of which we had some hopes. The Friends have complained for some time about its meeting in secret and the last few months have seen a flurry of changes.

In September the local press relished the story that an application under the Freedom of Information Act for access to the Board's minutes, led by Bela Cunha of the covenant-holders' group, had been successful. The minutes of the meetings are now on the internet; you can read them at www.gunnersburyparkcovenant.com. These minutes reveal the board to have been dabbling in discussions about possible options for the Park and its buildings, despite knowing that they were soon to appoint consultants to carry out an expert appraisal of all the options for Gunnersbury. Some these were high risk or inappropriate projects and gossip about them has caused a lot of unnecessary anxiety.

When people began worrying about land in the Park being sold off for development the local MP for Brentford, Ann Keen, signed a petition against the proposal. This led to more press coverage. To try to limit the damage, the Leader of Hounslow Council, Cllr Peter Thompson, was forced to issue a press statement in early October. It said, *"There has been much speculation in recent weeks about Gunnersbury Park and plans for its future. I am very happy to be in a position to set the record straight.*

Gunnersbury Park has suffered from years of historic under-investment and neglect. The new administrations of Ealing and Hounslow are committed to safeguarding this wonderful resource and to preserving it for future generations.

Let me be very clear. There is no secretly adopted plan to build on the park. Nor is there any intention to take decisions about the park's future without the fullest involvement of the community as a whole. Since September of last year a small group of members and officers from both Ealing and Hounslow has been meeting informally to explore the possibilities. It is worth stressing that the group has no decision-making powers.

A conservation management plan has already been produced after consultation with stakeholders. It sets out both councils' vision for Gunnersbury as a 'sustainable high quality park with varied uses which serves the local community and the region while respecting, enhancing and interpreting its historic framework and fabric'.

The task now is to look at the options which are available to us to turn that vision into a reality. The councils are therefore jointly commissioning an 'options appraisal' and have asked a number of recognised specialist consultancies to bid for this work. The results will be seen early in the new year and we intend to launch the fullest possible public debate on all of the options at that stage.

The informal joint working group between Hounslow and Ealing will continue to meet to hear progress. I have no objection to this being in public as it will help to dispel the suspicion and mistrust which appears to have been built up recently. Meanwhile Hounslow and Ealing are working on the constitution for a new joint body and will be taking this through their respective councils in the next 2 months."

According to Hounslow Council's web-site future meetings of the Board will be held at 7 pm in the Terrace Room of the Small Mansion at Gunnersbury on 27 November 2008, 5 January, 26 February and 2 April 2009. Members of the public will be able to attend but, as with all council meetings, may have to leave during discussion of confidential matters.

REBUILDING THE TOILETS

Responding to the continued complaints about the state of the toilets at Gunnersbury, Ealing Council has established a project to rebuild the broken toilets between the Large Mansion's Kitchen wing and the Children's Playground by the Café.

We think that part of the existing wall may be the remains of the estate wall built by John Maynard in the late 1650s when he created his new mansion and its walled garden. Also in this area in the 19th century was The Dairy, quite a large building which was derelict by the 1960s and then demolished.

So the rebuilding project will have to be careful to preserve the historic fabric and depending upon how the design emerges, perhaps conduct some archaeology.

Designing good looking, vandal-proof park toilets is not easy and creating a safe setting around them is also important (look, for example, at the new toilets at Battersea Park, built as part of the refurbishment of the children's play area). It will be interesting to see how this project progresses.

THE "OPTIONS APPRAISAL"

This forthcoming study is crucial to the planning of a viable future for Gunnersbury as a whole. It will be part funded by English Heritage which recognises how important this work will be. The creation and evaluation of a full range of options for the future of the estate (buildings, landscape and activities) requires expertise in a number of specialist areas. It must work within the *Conservation Management Plan*, assess Gunnersbury's potential on a number of fronts and attempt to balance the many things which current users love and want to see continued against the actions needed to halt its decline and give it a long term future. It will have to assess the costs involved in any recommendations it makes and indicate how these might realistically be funded. The consultants should prepare a genuinely independent study with achievable recommendations.

Following a competitive tendering process, Jura Consultants have been appointed within the last two weeks to do this work. The firm specialises in financial and economic analysis and has a strong reputation throughout the UK for work in the fields of culture and heritage. It has considerable experience of working with the Heritage Lottery Fund, as project monitors and expert advisors, and produced the business planning guidance which HLF now uses as part of its criteria for assessing applications for funding. We look forward to assisting them however we can, at the very least by giving access to Newsletters and other records of the Friends' activity over the last 27 years.

THE GOVERNANCE OF GUNNERSBURY

It has been clear for some time that one of the core reasons for the crisis at Gunnersbury has been the structural failure of the Gunnersbury Park Joint Committee and its successor, the Regeneration Board. It is not impossible for local councils to work successfully together, but it is hard to achieve and requires great skill to manage. For example over the years both councils' have been unable to align their plans for either revenue or capital expenditure.

When it comes to commercial activity within the Park – such as the Café, Greenscene and Capel Manor College – the model has been to create a lease or licence with the councils as landlord. If there has been community involvement it has taken the form of occasional protests (like those over the proposals for pop concerts) and the invitation to the Friends to send to the Joint Committee two observers who were able to speak but not vote.

It is hard to believe that this structure can continue. It is unlikely that any major grant-giving body such as HLF will support a model which has so abjectly failed. Similarly any appropriate commercial activity which might restore and use the buildings will need a secure long-term relationship, and may possibly expect to take a role in overall management. The park users and the Friends may have a lot to offer, and community engagement is an essential part of the life of parks and museums, but keeping voluntary groups in existence for long periods cannot be guaranteed.

The fashionable solution is the creation of a Charitable Trust, for example at Chiswick House and Gardens, which is expected to spend the income raised through commercial activity and fund-raising directly on the park. In many cases these trusts are heavily dependant upon continuing financial support from their local authorities and would fail if it were reduced or withdrawn. However, once a local authority is no longer directly accountable – either to get the praise for success or the blame for failure – the gradual reduction of funding becomes more likely.

The Friends' Annual General Meeting is advertised elsewhere in this Newsletter. It will be mainly a business meeting for reports and finance. If we have time at the end we should consider these governance issues. They are as important, in their own way, as the questions about the future of the buildings and landscape. Please come along with some good ideas!

CAPEL MANOR COLLEGE AT GUNNERSBURY

Capel Manor's Gunnersbury Campus is now well established with excellent facilities in the walled garden. It offers evening, part-time and full-time courses in horticulture, garden design, floristry, arboriculture and animal care for adults and for 16 to 19 year-olds.

It makes use of facilities at Horsenden Farm (near Perivale tube station) for arboriculture and now provides practical experience at Brent Lodge Park Animal Centre (the "Bunny Park") for animal care. It has a high reputation with its students; a recent evaluation indicated that 89% of them would recommend its courses to other potential students.

For some years now the Friends have provided an annual prize of high quality gardening books for the student at Capel Manor's Gunnersbury Centre who contributed most to Gunnersbury during their time there. A long gap between Newsletters last year meant that we omitted to report the 2007 winner of the Friends' prize. However, as the College recently awarded its prizes for 2008 in a ceremony at Ealing Town Hall it is now possible to announce the winners for both years.

This year's winner of the Friends' Prize is Rick Smith (below). His tutor described him as "an always enthusiastic and capable student who overcame huge problems during the year to win through". He is currently working as a volunteer in arboriculture in the exalted setting of Kew Gardens. This year's prizes were awarded by Adam Curtis, currently Assistant Park Manager at Richmond Park, and also a former Capel student.

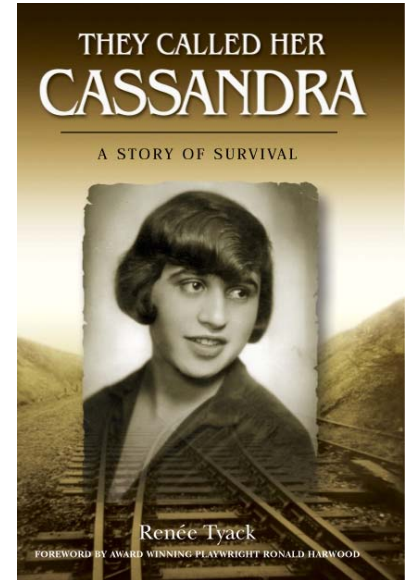
The winner of the Friends' Prize in 2007 was Simeon Flemmons. He later entered the Hampton Court Garden show with a college friend and won a Gold Medal for a garden which represented a "cemetery" of native wildflower species which are on the edge of extinction.

If these successes inspire you, the Greenheart Practical Gardener course starts on 6 January and runs till July (6 hours every Tuesday - and five hours on a series of Saturdays). Entry requirements are "a willingness to learn new skills and experience in horticulture, and the knowledge and understanding to undertake practical tasks". You need your own safety boots and secateurs.

You can order an information pack by phone on 020 8993 6266 or visit Capel Manor's informative web-site at this address: www.capel.ac.uk/gunnersburypark.



THEY CALLED HER CASSANDRA: a new book



Fred Bergmann is a promising young surgeon. His wife Ruth has great intuition and lots of *chutzpah*. They have their whole lives in front of them and a young family to love and cherish. But the year is 1933 and the setting is Leipzig in Germany. Hitler has just come to power.

Fred, the optimist, believes the danger will moderate but Ruth sees the writing on the wall. As Germany hurtles towards war and the systematic persecution of Jews becomes endemic, she knows they must act or die.

Written by the daughter of Ruth and Fred, this book shows the plight of one family at one of the pivotal moments in world history and sheds light on post-war Britain from a refugee perspective. It is a story of love and endurance.

The book was launched in early November and Renée Tyack, the author, is one of our committee members. She was born in Leipzig in 1934. After RADA she worked in theatre and television, later training as an FE lecturer who taught English and Drama to refugees and immigrants in the 1980s and '90s.

**Book Guild Publishing,
ISBN 9781846242694 £16.99**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2008

2.30pm

Sunday 7 December

GUNNERSBURY PARK MUSEUM

followed by tea and mince pies!

All paid up members are welcome to attend

THE LONDON MELA

This remarkable event took place on 10 August. The weather was not perfect but the crowds flocked in and made it another huge success. Richard Gill, the Regeneration Manager and Vanda Foster, the Curator, set up stalls to promote their wares, in amongst a tremendous variety of stalls, shows and catering stands. A few of us spent some time handing out leaflets about future museum activities to those strolling past.

This is a remarkably good natured festival with something for everyone, from families with small children during the afternoon to young people who come for the music later in the day. The involvement of BBC DJs meant that there was once again good coverage on the radio and on the London regional television news.

WHAT'S ON

In Bhangra We Trust

This lively exhibition recently opened at the Museum. It looks at the birth of modern British Bhangra music in Southall from the 1970s to the 1990s.

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

STAKEHOLDERS' MEETINGS

Richard Gill, the Gunnersbury Park Development and Regeneration Officer, has chaired two meetings of a Stakeholders' Group. Membership of this seems fluid – some attendees are representing organisations while others attend as individuals.

In July the main topic for discussion was the *Conservation Management Plan* and what the stakeholders saw as the priorities within it. Getting the environment right was the greatest priority and the participants wanted some quick changes such as improvements to the toilets, removal of graffiti and a stronger emphasis on security. The other most commonly expressed idea was the importance of restoring the Park and its buildings – continuing as we are was not an option.

There was a wary recognition of the likelihood of commercial involvement but only if it was in line with Gunnersbury's purpose as a park for recreation. Preserving the Museum was often raised. There was support for notions of making links with as many local groups as possible and for the role of volunteering. It was an "ideas" meeting more than a choice-making session so it did not end with decisions.

At the October meeting those present decided not to form themselves into an association with a constitution. Richard Gill used the Hounslow Leader's statement to reassure those present that no secret decisions were being taken, and the purpose of the options appraisal was described. The scale of the problems at Gunnersbury, the costs of restoration and the possible role of the Heritage Lottery Fund were discussed as was the likelihood of some commercial involvement. The question of how the estate should be managed in future was raised (see the piece on *Governance* above)

Future meetings will be held in the Terrace Room on 24 January at 10.30 am, 23 April at 7.30 pm and 30 July at 7.30 pm.

FRIENDS of GUNNERSBURY PARK & MUSEUM

The membership year began on 1 April – please renew your membership to stay in touch and to be entitled to attend the AGM. Thanks to all who have done so already. 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**. Additional donations are always welcome.



Friends' contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome – the next issue will be prepared in February 2009

To contact the Honorary Editor, write to Val Bott, 25 Hartington Road, London W4 3TL or email ValBott@museums.freeserve.co.uk

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