FRIENDS OF GREENWICH PARK
NEWSLETTER
Spring 2019 Registered Charity No: 1029933 Number 81

Annual lecture: Conserving a Masterpiece

This year's Annual Lecture was given by Will Palin, the Director of Conservation at the Old Royal Naval College. He attracted an audience of some 200 people and treated them to a beautifully illustrated account of the restoration of the Painted Hall that was rich in historical detail and thoroughly engaging.

Will briefly reviewed the planning and building of what we now see as the greatest group of baroque buildings in Britain. Wren was in his sixties when he started work on them and Nicholas Hawksmoor was appointed Clerk of the Works. The project took 50 years to complete.

Wren first ignored the original brief which required him to preserve the original palace of Charles II and to keep open the ground between the river and the Queen's House. His original submission envisaged a Chapel at the southern end of the vista and the removal of the Queen's House. Although never realised, this and many other plans developed by Hawksmoor, showed how the two of them had hugely ambitious ideas for the site.

(In a fascinating aside, Will revealed that Carl Laubin, the American architectural painter, is embarking on a 'capriccio of unbuilt Greenwich' comprising the Hawksmoor plans that were never executed. -Something to look forward to.)

Hawksmoor finished building the Painted Hall around 1705 and the man chosen to decorate it was the young and relatively unknown James Thornhill. There were well established Continental rivals such as Verrio in England at the time but the Hospital Commissioners wanted someone more suitable to the Protestant world of the British constitutional monarchy.

Photo by Nikhilesh Havel

Thornhill took 19 years to complete his masterpiece which was much admired even by his Continental rivals. There were pauses on the way to renegotiate pay but he was finally rewarded with not only £3 per square yard for the ceiling and £1 per square yard for the walls but also with the first knighthood to be given to a British artist.

He first painted the illusionist architecture that frames the ceiling and then filled it with representations of navigation, astronomy, the four seasons, the City of London and Old Father Thames, as well as a host of allegorical, mythological and contemporary figures, including John Worley a pensioner who had spent 70 years at sea and was a notoriously badly behaved drunkard. So there amongst the gods on the ceiling is this rogue whom Thornhill immortalised simply because he enjoyed his company.

The present restoration is just one of many that have been done to protect the painting against the effects of heat, sunlight and pollution. In earlier times layers of varnish were repeatedly applied; until the 1950s,

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when they were largely removed. This time, however, the cleaning methods have been minimally invasive, with new techniques that, as Will remarked, 'were developed in an amazingly collaborative way across all sorts of disciplines and will we hope have an influence on similar projects internationally'. In addition, virtually invisible solar shading has been installed in the window reveals and there are new heating and ventilation systems which bring the air down from the Hall into the Undercroft to maintain optimal temperature and humidity

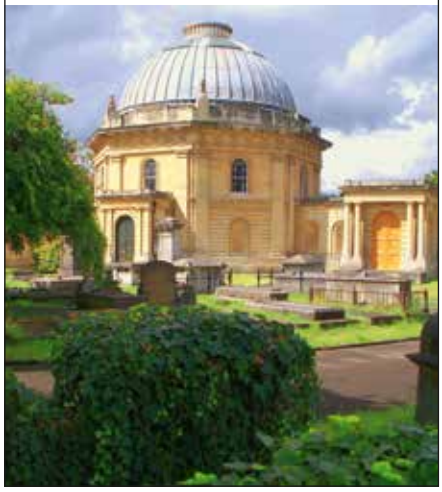
80,000 people came to see the restoration while conservation work was in progress and the scene is now set for many thousands more to enjoy Thornhill's crowning glory. Doubtless he would be delighted to see his old friend John Worley looking as he did nearly 300 years ago and similarly pleased to see this triumphant riposte from the restorers to the 19th century art critic who argued that 'a good painting, like a good fiddle, should be brown'.

The Painted Hall and Undercroft will reopen to the public on 23 March. Go to www.ornc.org for information and ticket bookings.

A visit to the Brompton Cemetery

We have been generously offered a tour of the Brompton Cemetery by its Friends group on 28 May at 11am. The cemetery, which is managed by The Royal Parks, has recently undergone a major restoration project, largely funded by the Heritage Lottery and BIG Lottery funds, which has returned the spectacular chapel to its original glory and among other improvements provided a new cafe and visitor centre. Opened in 1840, this Grade I listed site, where over 206,000 people are buried, covers 40 acres containing what is probably the country's finest architectural funerary complex. It is also a Conservation Area and a designated site of nature conservation interest.

The visit, lasting about one and a half hours, will cost £5. Please book early as places are limited. A booking form is enclosed.



Wildlife Notes by Sue Yates

In January our volunteers at the Drop-in were handing out leaflets for the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch, to encourage visitors to participate. Incidentally Julia Holland made that the theme of her Sunday morning bird walk the next day to further help attendees.

With such unusually warm weather, the Park has been very busy for this time of year. Our late February opening coincided with one of the sunniest days and we had over a hundred visitors. Inside the Wildlife Centre we were making apple bird feeders which kept many children very busy and we also had the new hornets' nest (completely empty of hornets, of course) on display in its perspex case. The cells are so much larger than those in the adjacent wasps' nest, demonstrating clearly why you want to keep away from hornets. In fact the nest came from a tree in Greenwich Park and would have been taken away but for the quick thinking of Christine Sheffield, the Greenwich Park resident beekeeper, who knew we would find a place for it.

We have been given a number of new and unused open fronted nesting boxes by the Royal Parks which we have on display in the Wildlife Centre. They are available for donations to the Friends and it is a good time of year to put them up. These are suitable for robins, I believe.

The only access to the Nature Trail is through the Wildlife Centre and most visitors take advantage of the Drop-ins to visit it and the Deer Hide. En route now they will see the newly restored Bug Hotel as pictured. One of our new volunteers, Stuart Mulholland, has a very practical turn of mind and he has transformed our very old specimen into a 5* dwelling: both beautiful and sturdy. The bugs have yet to write a thank you letter!

Our normally tranquil trail was transformed in February by nature red in tooth and claw. A sparrowhawk flew over, caught a pigeon and brought it down to the ground in the trail during our opening hours. It proceeded to pluck and partially eat the bird. As luck would have it, a visitor, Emily Forster, was on hand with a brilliant camera and has kindly said we can use her photographs. We were so lucky to witness this spectacle. There are more photos and information on the Friends' website.

More Help Needed

For nearly 10 years Esme Partridge and Valerie Byford have been making sure that the display boards in the Wildlife Centre are both seasonal and interesting; really keeping the place vibrant. They also check through the material that the volunteer teams will be using at the openings so that everything is available when the volunteers arrive to run the Drop-ins. It is a vital role. They now feel that it is time for some new blood to take on this role and we are looking for two people who would be interested in doing this. There is an archive of useful photos and material, but new ideas would be most welcome. There would be a detailed handover period.

If this interesting and creative role appeals to you please contact either me, Sue Yates *sueyates@ntlworld.com* or Helen Wallis *hwallis@royalparks.org.uk* for more details.

The Queen's Orchard

The Orchard will be reopening to the public around 1 April. The precise dates and times will be on the notice boards and on the Friends' website once they have been finalised. The volunteers now go in on alternate Thursday afternoons even at this relatively quiet time of year. They were recently able to set up a delightful bug hotel, purchased with money from a local donor. Everyone really appreciates this kind thought. This adds to the wormery which was similarly purchased last year.

Bird Walks

We are lucky to have two further Sunday Morning bird walks planned. Julia Holland will lead one on 31 March starting as usual at 8.30am (please note that the clocks go forward that day) and Joe Beale will guide a walk for the London Natural History Society and the Friends at 9am on 19 May. Both start at the Blackheath Gate. Binoculars are of benefit.

International Dawn Chorus day 2019

I have just learned that a person called Chris Baines decided to invite his friends to his birthday party at 4am to hear the dawn chorus. Great idea! That was in Birmingham in the 1980's. This wonderful idea has now spread globally and takes place on the first Sunday in May which is approximately when the chorus reaches its peak. Now there are all sorts of feeds you can link into to hear the chorus travel round the world with the sun. But is it as good as the real thing?

I believe that the Friends of Greenwich Park have run such an event in the past, but not for many years and before my time, as they say, but I have always wanted to organise a dawn chorus walk and one is now planned for Sunday 5 May. There will be a number of experts to help us identify the birds as each species in its turn joins the chorus. We will meet outside the Blackheath Gate. Parking is free along Charlton Way on Sundays.

If you would like to attend, please send in the enclosed form. We need to have some idea of the numbers and be able to communicate with you. Going into the Park in the dark has to be treated seriously and only those on the list will be allowed in. The list will close a week before the event which is free of charge. 4.00am is, of course, a bit of a shock to the system, but I think it will be worth it.

THE VIEW from the Park

Graham Dear, Park Manager

Looking out of my office window in the first week of March I was pleased to see a chiffchaff hunting for insects in a lime tree. It reminded me that whilst spring is a time of arrivals there are sometimes departures too.

Open Day Marquee

Many of the Friends will be familiar with our Gardening Supervisor, Michala Haines. After twenty-one years of loyal service, Michala is moving on. Going back to her first love of hands on gardening, she is taking up a position with a landscape gardening service in Kent. We wish her well and know that she will be missed.

I'll also miss that magnificent Red Oak tree with the fluted trunk that stood on Bandstand Field. For some years we have been monitoring this tree which had a basal root rot and a hollow trunk. Although we have previously done reduction pruning to reduce the weight of the crown the trunk had deteriorated to an extent that it could become unstable. In such a prominent location on the Bandstand Field the regrettable decision had to be taken to remove it.

You might be forgiven for thinking all was quiet on the Greenwich Park Revealed front, but we have been working away to develop proposals for presenting to visitors. On 21 and 24 February we started our programme of public engagement with open days in the Park. Nearly 600 people visited the marquee displays near the bandstand and over 120 left comments which will help us review our plans. The next consultations will take place on 11 and 14 April when we should have our final proposals, so please drop by if you can. The plans are also available on line at *www.royalparks.org.uk* and I shall be giving an update on progress at the Friends AGM in May. I hope to see you there.

Park People

Alan Young – Manager of the Park's ground staff

Alan's formal title is Contract Manager for Gavin Jones Ltd, which in practical terms means he heads up the team who we see working around the Park every day. Until 1992, all Royal Parks staff were employed directly by the Parks, but this changed when the ground maintenance was outsourced to private contractors. Turfsoil held the contract at Greenwich until last year, when the owner retired and sold the firm to Gavin Jones, another family-owned landscape and gardening company, who took over the contract and the staff. Managing the day to day activities within that contract is in Alan's hands, and for which he is responsible to Michael Loughnane the Park Assistant Manager. Alan and Michael work closely together, and once a month they have a formal meeting, when the long schedule of daily activities is reviewed.

Alan was brought up and still lives in Kent. He worked for Turfsoil for thirty years, at a variety of ground maintenance locations, including schools, shopping centres and parks. He came here in 1999 as Assistant Contract Manager, moving up to become Manager in 2012. His domain is the large Yard and Nursery at the south east corner of the Park, by the Vanbrugh Gate entrance, where he, his team and 14 vehicles are based.

He gets to the Park at 6.30 each morning. He employs some 16 staff in the winter and 26 in the summer. One third are skilled horticulturalists, responsible for the gardens, one third are responsible for operating the vehicles and mowers, and one third are the "scavenge team" of litter collectors and dust-cart drivers. His staff invariably present a cheerful presence in the Park, and, specifically for us, are always very helpful with the logistics of our concerts.

What has changed most about the job since he arrived in Greenwich? Alan is in no doubt about that. "The amount of litter. When I joined the Park, we all went home on Friday and came back on Monday morning. Not now. We have to be here all weekend, dealing with the litter, often not finishing until 10pm. Over a sunny summer weekend, we will collect some 8 tons of rubbish. It's not that people leave litter around; most people are very good – they clear up their picnic remnants and put it in the bins. It's just the increased number of visitors to the Park and the amount of food packaging that that seems to be used these days."

And his biggest challenge each year? "The London Marathon. As soon as the runners are away, we have to get the roads clear, and then tackle the grass areas. I want the Park to be back to its original condition by early afternoon. On that day we will have collected up to 12 tons of rubbish."

Finally, on a lighter note, which are his favourite parts of the Park? "The ever-changing view from the Wolfe Statue. And the secluded charm of the Secret (Observatory) Garden."

Friends AGM is on Tuesday, 7 May 2019

The 26th AGM takes place on Tuesday, 7 May 2019 at 7.30 for 8pm in the Howe Lecture Theatre, University of Greenwich, Old Royal Naval College. Copies of the Chairman's Report and the Financial Report are enclosed with this Newsletter.
Officers and committee members proposed and seconded for the coming year are:

Chairman:
Liz Coyle, 3 Orchard Drive, SE3 0QP

Vice-Chairman:
Richard Jones, 65 Hervey Road, SE3 8BX

Committee Members:
Clive Corlett stands for re-election.

Tony Butler, Tina Challacombe, Jonathan Chandler, Lesley Jones, Sophie Spencer, Brian Starkey and Sue Yates continue to serve.

The committee confirms the appointments of Christine Bevan as Secretary, Julie Punter as Treasurer and Fran Tyler as Membership Secretary.

After the AGM Graham Dear, Park Manager, will outline some of the work undertaken in Greenwich Park and take questions on the Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

Orchard Bug Hotel

Friends' Festival of Music in the Park

We have another terrific Festival of concerts lined up for this summer, all of which are organised, and paid for, by the Friends.

The Phoenix Dixieland Jazz Band is back for our Midsummer Jazz Concert
Our renowned Midsummer Jazz Concert takes place on **Sunday 16 June**. The Phoenix Dixieland Jazz Band will again be bringing their brilliant New Orleans foot-tapping style to the charming and enclosed Observatory Garden. They will be supported by a group new to the Park - the Crooks Saxophone Quartet.

The Garden will open at noon, with the concert beginning at 12.30pm and ending at 3.30pm. Come and enjoy the party. Our sponsors, Davy's of Greenwich, will run a bar, and the Park's Pavilion Cafe will have a stall providing food, ice cream and soft drinks. Just a reminder that seating is not available in the Garden, so do bring a rug or chair if you don't want to sit directly on the grass. Please note that dogs (apart from guide dogs) are not permitted in the Garden.

This is an event for the whole family. Tickets booked in advance are £5, with under-16s free. (Tickets on the gate, if any are still available for this popular event, will be £7)

A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter. Tickets are also available online at *www.friendsofgreenwichpark.org.uk*

Twelve Bandstand concerts this summer

We are once again staging our hugely popular series of free concerts at the Bandstand, which will take place on every Sunday from 23 June to 25 August. In addition, to start us off, there will be a Saturday concert on 22 June and, to bring the series to a close, a Bank Holiday concert on Monday 26 August. Concerts normally start at 3pm and end at 5pm.

There will be some exciting new bands, in addition to old favourites, covering a wide range of musical styles. See the full programme in the flyer enclosed with this Newsletter.

Dates for Your Diary

'Drop In' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 30 March *1pm – 4pm*

Bird Walk: Meet at the Blackheath Gate
Sun 31 Mar *8.30am*
Clocks go forward that day

'Drop In' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 27 April *1pm – 4pm*

London Marathon
Sun 28 April

International Dawn Chorus Day Bird Walk: meet outside the Blackheath Gate
Sun 5 May *4am*

Annual General Meeting
Tues 7 May
(Members only)
Queen Anne Building, University of Greenwich. See left hand column. The AGM will begin at 8pm and finish at around 9.30pm. Wine and soft drinks will be served from 7.30pm.

Bird Walk: Meet at the Blackheath Gate
On behalf of the London Natural History Society and the Friends
Sun 19 May *9am*

'Drop In' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 25 May *1pm - 4pm*

London to Brighton classic car run start
Sun 2 June *8.15am - 11.15am*

Meeting of the History Group in the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 8 June *11am*
Parking permits available from the office if needed.

Jazz in the Park Booking now
Sun 16 June
Tickets from Friends of Greenwich Park, 52 Greenwich Park Street, SE10 9LT. Tel 020 8853 2150. Cheques payable to Friends of Greenwich Park. For online booking see left hand column.

'Drop In' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 29 June *1pm - 4pm*

*** The Wildlife Centre** is near the south end of the lake in the Flower Garden. The 'Drop Ins' are organised by the Friends Wildlife Group on behalf of The Royal Parks and provide the chance for children and young people to find out about wildlife in Greenwich Park. Visit and watch any wildlife that is passing by. Included are wildlife-related craft activities and guided tours of the Nature Trail and Deer Hide.

Friends of Greenwich Park

Chairman: Liz Coyle, 3 Orchard Drive, SE3 0QP Tel: 020 8852 8831
Wildlife Group: Sue Yates, 34 Hyde Vale, London SE10 8QH Tel: 020 8692 1760
Newsletter: Liz Coyle lizcoyle@waitrose.com Tel: 020 8852 8831
Membership Secretary: Fran Tyler, 51 Lock Chase, London SE3 9HB Tel: 020 8852 9540 tylerfrantom@btinternet.com
Annual subscription: UK £5; overseas £10. Cheques made out to Friends of Greenwich Park with sae please, and sent to the Membership Secretary.

Greenwich Park (Tel: 0300 061 2380) is one of London's eight Royal Parks. The others are Bushy Park, The Green Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Regent's Park and Primrose Hill, Richmond Park and St James's Park. All have links with former royal palaces or hunting grounds. Between them they cover 2083 ha. (5000 acres) of historic parkland. The Royal Parks also manages Brompton Cemetery.
In Greenwich Park, there are police phone boxes at St Mary's Gate and at Blackheath Gate. In an emergency dial 999; for other calls Tel: 020 7161 9740

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Friends website: www.friendsofgreenwichpark.org.uk