FRIENDS OF GREENWICH PARK
NEWSLETTER

Summer 2019 Registered Charity No: 1029933 Number 82

Concerts pull in the crowds – who needs Glastonbury?

Our concert season is now in full swing. Our opening concert – Midsummer Jazz in the Observatory Garden – was another storming performance of New Orleans foot-tapping music from the Phoenix Dixieland Jazz Band, with the weather changing dramatically from a rainy morning to a lovely, sunny afternoon just before the band took the stage in front of an enthusiastic audience.

The following Saturday saw the start of our bandstand concerts, with our now traditional concert performed by youngsters from Greenwich schools. With another large audience, including many parents, the concert featured big band and steel band music. We are delighted to be able to support and encourage our talented local young musicians by providing them with the opportunity to perform publicly in such an iconic setting.

The next two Sunday concerts featured bands new to the Park, and what a treat they provided! First, the Country-Politan Band, formed by experienced musicians especially to perform for us, introduced the famous Nashville sound to Greenwich, with a playlist that included hit after hit from the American country music song book.

The Sunday after we welcomed Here To Havana, a dynamic band playing Afro-Cuban music, including salsa, mambo and Latin jazz. As their high-octane performance resounded across Bandstand Field, an audience of close to a thousand was attracted to the bandstand, with dozens dancing to the infectious music.

We look forward to the rest of our summer season, culminating in the usual August Bank Holiday concert, this year featuring the terrific Galaxy Big Band with their ‘40s and ‘50s swing repertoire. Do join us on any of these Sunday afternoons, if you can.

Wildlife Notes by Sue Yates

Nuthatch nesting boxes

In early April, Tom Evans a local resident and research scientist working at University College, London, approached the Friends with a proposal. He has been quantifying and categorising the impact of alien species such as the ring-necked parakeet on the small nuthatch population. Part of the problem could be competition for nest sites and he asked us to consider installing suitable nesting boxes in the Park. The Friends committee agreed to the purchase of three Schwegler nuthatch nesting boxes. These are made from woodcrete (a mixture of wood shavings, concrete and clay) and are therefore well insulated and waterproof, but also very heavy (18lbs). They cost £55.75 each but have a 25 year guarantee.

Although the boxes will be well fixed to the trees when they are put up in the autumn, for safety reasons, in view of their weight, they will be in secluded areas of the Park not open to members of the public. Tom and Joseph Beale will work with the park team in choosing suitable locations. The contents of the nest boxes will be analysed later in 2020 and we will report back.

The Queen's Orchard

The wood around the raised beds had rotted and needed to be replaced. This was quite an undertaking but all is completed now and the area is thriving. The strawberries have been amazing and the new asparagus bed, though not quite ready for harvesting this year, is coming along. The beehives have been moved up to the works yard at the top of the Park to make it easier for Christine Sheffield, the beekeeper, to work on them as it is much closer to the Park Office.

This year Alex Andrews is presiding over the Orchard and it is open to the public as follows:-Wednesday to Friday 10.45am-4.45pm (closed for lunch 1.00-1.30pm); and Saturday and Sunday 9.15am-4.45pm (closed for lunch 12.30-1.30pm).

Just as a reminder: no dogs, except assistance dogs; and cycles to be left just inside the gate please. The Orchard is well worth a visit.

Dawn Chorus Bird Walk

Nearly 40 people gathered outside the Blackheath Gate at 3.50am on Sunday 5 May, International Dawn Chorus Day. It was very strange to enter the Park when it was so quiet and dark. With our guides, Julia Holland, Joe Beale and Mick Miller, the group decided where to position ourselves in readiness for the bird song. As the group was so large, we eventually decided on the clearing by the deer viewing point near the Vanbrugh Gate.

Once in position we waited for what seemed like a long time. I began to wonder if this could be the one day of the year when the birds were not going to sing. Then, at 4.30am, the chorus started. We identified the birds by their song – starting with crows, which were followed by robins, blackbirds, wrens and song thrushes. By this time we were making our way back through the Flower Garden where we heard a thrush on the apex of the Wildlife Centre, two blackcaps responding to one another, ducks, dunnock, woodpigeon, magpie, great tit, blue tit, two green woodpeckers and stock doves.

While we were near the Wildlife Centre, there were many alarm calls, particularly from the blackbirds and we stood quietly trying to understand what was causing it. Suddenly, a tawny owl silently took off from the oak tree we were standing under and all became clear. We were very lucky.

By 5.30am we had exited the Park, locking the gate behind us. I have always wanted to experience the dawn chorus and I hope that the others enjoyed it as much as I did. I would like to thank the park management and the park police for allowing us in out of hours and also our expert guides for identifying the birds as they began to sing.

Wildlife Centre and Nature Trail

You may recall that in the last newsletter we asked if anyone might like to help with changing the content of our display boards. Cherry Simpkin, an experienced volunteer at our Saturday drop-ins, and Cindy Sheehan, a Friend of the Park, have stepped into the breach. In early June they met up with the retiring team and, working together, the boards blossomed into "summer". After the autumn equinox the new team will be flying solo.

We would like to thank Valerie Byford and Esme Partridge for giving us such varied and seasonal display boards for so many years. The visitors to the drop-ins frequently comment on how interesting they are.

Brompton Cemetery outing

In late May some 30 Friends met in the new Information Centre at the Brompton Cemetery. This, together with the adjacent cafe, has recently been built as part of the completed cemetery restoration project, funded mainly by a significant grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Here we were introduced to our guide, Robert Stephenson, a long-standing member of the Brompton Cemetery Friends. It was soon clear that we were in the hands of an expert with an extraordinary fund of knowledge about the cemetery. We saw gravestone and monuments and heard the fascinating stories of many of the famous and interesting people buried there. These included, among others: the singer Richard Tauber; the suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst; the pioneer anaesthetist and discoverer of the cause of cholera Dr John Snow; the oil magnate James McDonald; and the ship owner and art collector, Frederick Leyland, whose striking tomb was designed by Edward Burne-Jones.

Our tour ended in the chapel, recently restored to its former glory as part of the project, with its spectacular domed ceiling and impressive cleaned and improved stonework. This thoroughly interesting and worthwhile visit, which somehow was spared threatened rain, was much appreciated by all.

THE VIEW from the Park

Graham Dear, Park Manager

This year is going too fast. Well we probably all feel that, but the deadline for submitting the round 2 Heritage Lottery Fund grant application is looming (August 2019) and there is still a lot of work to do. One piece of good news is that the Royal Parks Board of Trustees has supported the application and agreed to underwrite match funding of £5m to go with the £4.8m HLF grant. Our fund raising team has already been hard at work and hopefully will raise a significant amount against this commitment – along with a contribution from the Friends. All we need to do now is get the grant. The decision will be made in December 2019. It's not a foregone conclusion, the grants are competitive and all we can do is our best. If we are unsuccessful this time we can try again.

Our Landscape team secured a separate grant of £350k from the London Marathon Trust for the completion of the playground. Worn out equipment has been replaced with an amazing sand and water play area with equipment that is accessible to children with impaired mobility. Greenwich Parents Voice, an organisation for parents with children with special needs and disabilities, worked alongside our team and landscape architect Matthew Wiggan to finalise the design. The improvements will allow many more children to use the equipment - vital for a playground that receives over 400,000 visits a year!

As well as exciting new initiatives, the Greenwich Park Revealed project is also addressing the unglamorous subject of waste. Over the last five years, waste in the Park has doubled, most of it food packaging. Our grounds staff do a great job, but collecting it is very labour intensive. On a busy summer weekend they work until 11.00pm emptying bins and are back again at 6.00am to pick up litter. Our 200 cast iron bins were time consuming to empty and too small, ending up with piles of waste dumped next to them. We are currently trialling fewer, larger wheelie bins. They aren't pretty but hold five times more waste, are easier and quicker to empty and have closable lids to keep out foxes and other scavengers. Steel covers would make them more acceptable in the landscape, but they cost £800 each! In some parts of the Park, such as the Flower Garden, we are trying out removing bins completely, which saves time unlocking the gates for vehicular access. This has been tried in other parks and resulted in people taking their litter home with them. We are also piloting separate recycling bins for plastic and glass and this is working well. Paper and cardboard must go in general waste, because if they get wet or are contaminated with food waste they can't be recycled.

Another trial is the mobility scheme, back for its third year, in partnership with the Royal Observatory. This year two volunteer drivers will work alongside the gardeners to operate the scheme. We are searching for an electric vehicle, but it is a challenge. That steep hill is a drain on the batteries, but we will keep searching.

From the Partnerships and Community Engagement Officer, Helen Wallis

We have been testing a range of Greenwich Park Revealed (GPR) activities this summer. The most successful projects will be funded through GPR over the next four years.

In April, The Royal Parks "Mission Invertebrate" project trained volunteers to do a regular butterfly survey in the Park. The information gathered will help us monitor the effectiveness of the biodiversity improvements planned through GPR – planting for pollinators and new mowing regimes for the Park's wild acid grassland areas.

In May, we partnered with Greenwich and Lewisham Youth Theatre (recently renamed Tramshed) to hold a World Music Bandstand concert and giant puppet interactive theatre performance. We also started new health walks in partnership with Greenwich Get Walking and Lewisham Healthy Walks and trialled a horticultural work placement.

In June, young actors and directors from Tramshed performed a specially commissioned, interactive piece about Britain's first black voter, Ignatius Sancho, who lived next to the Park. The performance ran for four days and brought history to life through music, dance theatre and nature art.

July saw the start of the Volunteer Community Ranger scheme at Greenwich. This Royal Parks initiative aims to encourage positive behaviour by engaging visitors with the Park's heritage, particularly its wildlife. The volunteers will be in the Park once a week until November and be recognised by their orange uniforms. We are also conducting a community archaeology dig on the Queen's Field, investigating mysterious green marks revealed on aerial photographs taken during last summer's drought. Email *greenwichparkrevealed@royalparks.org.uk* if you want to get involved. In addition to all this, we are offering volunteering on the Herbaceous Border and a rose bed design project for our apprentices in partnership with the Royal Parks Guild.

Park People

Andrew Abbott – Police Officer

Andy Abbott is "our" police officer. His official title within the Metropolitan Police is "Designated Park Officer" – which means that he is the focal point for all enquiries and issues involving the police in Greenwich Park. It also means that, except in the most exceptional, emergency circumstances, he will not be pulled out of the Park for duties elsewhere in the Met.

Andy and five other police officers form the Greenwich Park team. The others are also full-time, but they may from time to time be taken out of the Park temporarily, for instance to help with major events elsewhere in the Met area. The team reports to a sergeant based at Hyde Park, who is responsible for the "outer" Royal Parks and visits Greenwich Park one day each week.

Andy joined the Met in 2001, serving initially at Bromley and then at a number of other locations including Westminster, where he received public order training. He moved to Greenwich Park in 2010. It's a sign of the times, and the squeeze on police resources, that there were then 18 police officers assigned to the Park. However, Andy points out that we do benefit from other police activity within the Park. "Following the closure of the police station in Greenwich town centre, the four members of the Greenwich West Policing Team have relocated to share our police office at the Blackheath Gate, and you will have seen other police cars, from surrounding forces, in addition to our own vehicle, moving through the Park. The Park is also a popular route for the Lewisham Mounted Branch exercising their horses. All this adds to police visibility within our Park."

Andy and his colleagues cover the Park from 7am until closing time. They aim to have three officers on duty each day, working various shifts from opening to closing, patrolling by car, by bicycle and on foot. Their priorities are set quarterly, and are informed by their own experience of what is happening in the Park and consultations with the park management and park users. For example, he has monthly meetings with Assistant Manager Michael Loughnane and Alan Young, who heads the contractor's team. And he very much welcomes the regular meetings he has with the Safer Parks Group, which consists of representatives from local organisations including Tony Butler, one of our committee members, who represents the Friends.

What are the current priorities? Andy is very clear on this. "Traffic management – which includes speeding and trade vehicles – crime prevention - which covers theft and robbery – and anti-social behaviour – such as graffiti, the playing of loud music and youngsters performing wheelies on the paths."

Have the types of crime changed? "Yes. The number of more serious incidents, including robbery, drug offences, gang problems and serious anti-social behaviour, has gone down and has been replaced by more minor offences."

Any messages for our members? "I hold monthly drop-in surgeries in the Pavilion Café, when I am available to listen to suggestions and problems and offer advice. If you have something to discuss, I would be delighted to meet you."

Finally, what is Andy's favourite part of the Park? "The Flower Garden, with its peace and colour." And his favourite times? "The community events, such as the marathon and the bandstand concerts, with everyone having a good time. My colleagues and I are at our happiest when we can help people and make the Park as safe and enjoyable as possible."

Andy's forthcoming surgeries at the Pavilion Café are listed on the police noticeboard at the Blackheath Gate.

A visit to Severndroog Castle

This Grade II* listed building, set in Oxleas Wood on Shooters Hill, was built in 1874 as a memorial to Sir William James, once the Director of the East India Company, by his widow Lady Anne James. It celebrates his most famous exploit, the capturing of the island fortress of Suvarnadurg. In recent years it has been renovated by a community group, the Severndroog Castle Building Preservation Trust, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and reopened to the public. This year, with additional funding, the Trust has been able to improve the facilities and to offer guided group tours. The tour provides the opportunity to learn about the history of the castle and to see one of the most spectacular views across London from the viewing platform at the top of the building.

After the tour, either before or after visiting the tearoom for refreshments, there is the option of following a self-guided woodland trail from the castle to the Victorian walled garden and back. The woodland area is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. A small warning: the castle has a spiral staircase with 86 steps up to the top of the building and so is not fully accessible.

The tour will take place on 5 September at 2.30pm. The cost is £5, to be donated to the Trust. Numbers are limited so please book early. A booking form is enclosed. Booking is also available online at *www.friendsofgreenwichpark.org.uk*

Have you any old photographs of Greenwich Park?

The new manager of the Pavilion Café, Ibrahim Razzak, is very keen to make the decoration of the café more interesting. Many tourists ask about the history of the building and the Park in general. Previously he was involved in a project in Barcelona which transformed a bar with nearly 500 black and white photographs of old Barcelona. We obviously don't have room for such a large venture but the Friends would like to help. So, if you have any photos (they would be copied and returned) which you think may be of interest, please get in touch with Brian Starkey *(grenparkpast@gmail.com)*. And don't forget that Friends get 25% off all food and drink when they show their membership cards at park cafés.

The Friends thank Anne Andrews

As mentioned in the last newsletter, after many years Anne Andrews has decided to stop guiding Fungus Forays. The Friends committee wished to acknowledge her long service and on 30 May she was presented with a copy of Anthony Quiney's book "A year in the Life of Greenwich Park" and a card signed by all its members.

We have not as yet fixed a date for a Foray this October. Once this has been agreed the details will be on our website and on a poster on the notice board outside the Park Office.

Press statement from The Royal Parks

"The Royal Parks was asked by the government and the GLA to look at the possibility of creating a Fan Zone to screen key Euro 2020 football matches in one of our parks. Having completed a site feasibility study and taking into account the major events and ceremonial occasions already taking place in the parks in June and July next year, we can confirm that we will be hosting the screening in Greenwich Park, in The Queens Field."
See *www.friendsofgreenwichpark.org.uk* for more about this in a letter from the GLA to local Greenwich residents. This is not detailed and we intend to find out more about what is involved as soon as possible.

Friends of Greenwich Park

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Annual subscription: UK £5; overseas £10. Cheques made out to Friends of Greenwich Park with sae please, and sent to the Membership Secretary.

Dates for Your Diary

'Drop in' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 27 July *1pm – 4pm*

Bird Walk: meet at the Blackheath Gate
Sun 28 July *8.30am*

Bandstand concerts
Sun 28 July
South London Jazz Orchestra and Live Lindy Band

Sun 4 August
Silver Ghosts

Sun 11 August
Shadey Scandals

Sun 18 August
The Old Jelly Rollers

Sun 25 August
Greenwich Concert Band

Mon 26 August
Galaxy Big Band

'Drop in' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 31 August *1pm – 4pm*

History Group meeting in the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 7 September 11am
Parking permits available if ordered in advance from *grenparkpast@gmail.com*

'Drop in' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 28 September 1pm – 4pm

Greenwich Park 10 and 5K Run
Sun 20 October 10am

'Drop in' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 26 October 1pm – 4pm

Bandstand concerts start at 3pm and end around 5pm.

*** 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.

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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