



THE FRIENDS OF REGENT'S PARK

In the Spring of 1991 Peter Catto and Ben Whitaker commissioned The London Business School to assess the feasibility of establishing a non-profit making organisation "The Friends of Regent's Park"

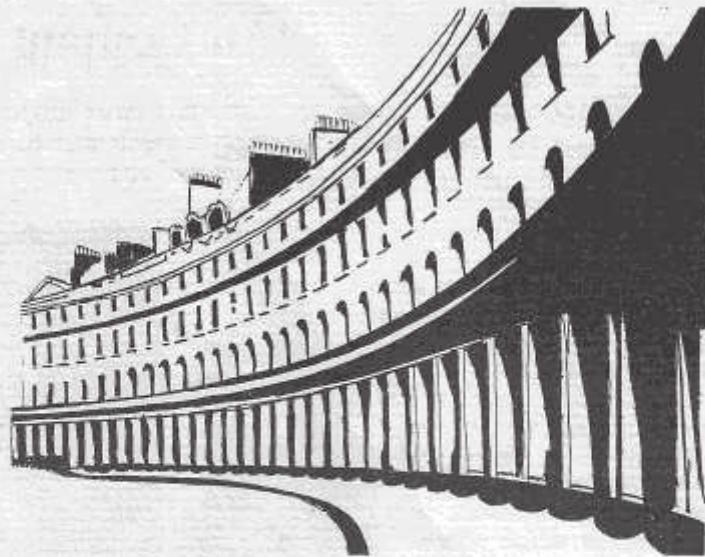
Regent's Park is a splendid and beautiful natural amenity in the middle of London and has been enjoyed as such since 1811 when Marylebone Park, leased to the Duke of Portland, reverted to the Crown, and the Prince Regent gave it to the people.

He appointed the architect John Nash to convert the enclosed fields and woods of Marylebone Park into a modern park with terraces of houses, circuses, a serpentine pond and villas, (See Pevsner, London, Volume 1, page 638)

The Park is now controlled for the Crown by the Department of the Environment.

Regent's Park is quite exceptional in its amenity. It contains features such as:

- * The London Zoo
- * The Open Air Theatre
- * Queen Mary's Garden
- * Regent's Canal
- * The Mosque
- * Regent's College



- * The London Business School
- * The Residence of the Ambassador of the United States and many other interesting organisations and institutions.

There is a real need to promote and protect the Park and the main purpose of this proposed organisation "The Friends of Regent's Park" was provisionally described as follows:

"The conservation and enhancement of Regent's Park for the people who live and work in the environs and enjoy its facilities"

The feasibility study conducted by the London Business School concluded that "Our results both qualitative and quantitative provides sufficient evidence to recommend that The Friends of Regent's Park should be launched, and a survey established that the tranquillity of the Park is its most valued feature."

A preliminary meeting was held in July 1991 attended by the local residents interested in the establishment of this organisation, and it was agreed to proceed.

A further meeting was called in September 1991 whose purpose was:

- a. to authorise the establishment of "The Friends of Regent's Park" and to

consider its constitution

b. to discuss the registration of "The Friends of Regent's Park" under the Charities Act 1960 and to determine who should be appointed Trustees

c. to decide upon the organisation and officers of the Association

d. to consider the proposed membership and subscriptions

It was then up to the newly-elected officers to determine the strategy and the immediate matters of concern which the Association should address, including:

- * the current situation of the Zoo
- * the intention to privatise some of the services inside Regent's Park
- * improvement of amenities

The publishing of this Newsletter now, and in the future, will keep everyone concerned about Regent's Park informed of the development and progress of this new Association, its involvement in current and future plans, and its concern in maintaining an exceptional environment. ◆

NEWSLETTER

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“Au Courant”

Nearly 100 people came to the third and largest-ever open public meeting organised by the Friends of Regent's Park, held by kind permission in the London Business School in November 1991.

The key speakers were Mrs Jennifer Adams, the Bailiff of the Royal Parks at the Department of the Environment (DOE), and Chief Inspector Ross of the Royal Parks Constabulary.

Mrs Adams said that the DOE welcomed groups such as the FORP with whom to communicate, since it was difficult for Ministers and officials to know the opinions of the users of the Parks and what they wanted. At present no regular system exists for communication between users and the Department, and she wished the FORP success.

She stated that the long term management planning for the Park had recently had to be shelved due to the political requirement to urgently contract out all of the gardening work. Standards of work were being specified in detail but how well the work would be done would depend on the contractor's performance.

One contract was placed for each park unit, such as Regent's Park plus Primrose Hill. This would be monitored by the Superintendent, who could withhold payment if dissatisfied. In reply to a question, she said there could be a major problem if a contractor performed badly and the contract were terminated (by 4 months' notice on either side) or if the contractor went into liquidation, because considerable untidiness or worse could result before a new contractor could be appointed.

There would not be, as there is at present, any back-up emergency cover. Mrs Adams admitted there had been no prior consultation with users or the public on the decision to privatise, because the Secretary of State had deemed this was an internal matter for him to decide. Some members of the audience queried why privatisation was



Michael Goldhill

being rushed through, instead of allowing Dame Jennifer Jenkins' Committee to pronounce on this.

Replying to questions, Mrs Adams said that:

- * Parks staff would in future have name-badges

- * the Crown Estates Paving Commission was responsible for cleaning and maintaining the properties adjoining the Outer Circle; whereas the Crown Estates Commissioners were responsible for the Holme (believed to belong to a foreign potentate), St John's Lodge (reportedly being let to a member of the Kuwaiti Royal Family), and Winfield House (let to the US Ambassador)

- * the Zoo's claim to a further 16 acres of the Park was still valid

- * the slowness of repairing the gates to Queen Mary's Garden was unsatisfactory

- * from April 1992, as an experiment, the maintenance of the Park's paths, fencing and buildings would be managed by a private firm

- * the landscaping between the Zoo and the Park was suffering from blight and was tatty because of the uncer-

tainty about the Zoo's future plans

- * the public's access to the public part of the garden of St John's Lodge (the secret garden) was likely to be altered as a result of the new Kuwaiti ownership

- * the DOE was reconsidering the present car parking arrangements in the Park and would welcome the views of the members of the FORP; also as to whether helicopters should be allowed to land in the Park

- * the Royal Parks were still owned by the Crown; their management was a function of the Government, and from early in 1992 most work would be put out to tender, under the control of the Superintendent of the Park

- * the Crown Estate still had the right to build more houses in some parts of the Park, but not in the centre which was a conservation area.

The meeting was told that the police today had 160 officers to cover St James' Park, Green Park, Kensington Gardens, Richmond, Bushy, Greenwich and Regent's Park; this compared with 240 Rangers twenty years ago. In shifts, they therefore had only four and a half officers at any one time to cover Regent's Park and Primrose Hill, with one officer manning the Police Station.

Members of the audience asked for public telephones in the park so that they could report crimes and summons the police for emergencies.

Peter Catto thanked the speakers on behalf of the Friends for the patience and frankness with which they spoke, and in answering a great number of questions. ◆

Guardian of the Park

An Interview with David Caselton, who for 12 years has been Superintendent of Regent's Park.

CONCERN

Of prime concern is the issue of contracting-out the maintenance and other services.

Positively this means access to services not available before, and there will be an annual budget for all the works in the Park.

David Caselton assured "The Friends" that work will only be undertaken by Tyler Environmental Services Ltd. when he requests it and monitored carefully.

45 out of 50 of the redundant staff have been offered posts.

Unemployment remains for experienced staff including the blacksmith and gardeners.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

David Caselton spoke about 200 restoration and improvement projects he wishes to implement and promised to keep "The Friends" informed.

PROJECTS UNDER WAY INCLUDE:

Queen Mary's Garden - With emphasis on the island rockery, a woodland garden on the Mound, and extension of the cascade.

Hanover Gate - the area to be re-landscaped and a new bridge to the island; a new bird-house clad with cedar tiles, with incubators for the waterfowl, occasionally for public view.

The Broad Walk flower gardens to be

restored to the splendour of Marcus Nesfield's designs of the 1850s.

St John's Lodge - a lack of finance means intended garden vistas will be lost but an enhanced side entrance and new garden with unusual plants is planned.

WORK BEING UNDERTAKEN BY THE CONTRACTORS

Signage - The design consultancy PEN-TAGRAM are considering a corporate



Moorhen
Julia Bastion

identity for the Parks. (Do readers have views to contribute to this?)

Catering - Kesslers the current caterers have again won the contract for seven years. (Please, your comments on the catering for "The Friends" to pass on to Kesslers)

Public Tennis Courts - under consideration, best methods for public booking.

Bandstand - A variety of concerts on 4 days per week in summer; holiday puppet shows will continue.

Theatre - Baroness Blatch, the then Minister of State, DoE, has ensured a further 9 years lease. David Caselton hopes to provide a new "Front of House" during the closed season next winter.

Parking - Within the next two years it is highly likely that Pay and Display parking will be introduced.

Litter - Regent's Park has been considered one of London's cleanest parks. Tylers are contracted to remove litter within the hour

Playgrounds - All have been overhauled since David Caselton took over, the equipment inspected and greased regularly and often. This is to be continued by the maintenance contractors.

The Rose Garden - Mr Caselton has been assured that the pink of the brick paving will weather and the bricks are not "wire-cut". Further works are to reinforce the effect of an outdoor room; crates must await completion before commenting on this strange addition. "The Friends" hope to be canvassed for views on future developments.

RECENT WORKS AND POSITIVE ACTIONS

All of the roses have been replaced over the past five years; the lakes cleaned out, boggy areas land-drained, the Outer Circle road resurfaced and new dog mess bins installed.

David Caselton has instructions to maximise income from the Park and fears that some of the improvements may depend on such income. He awaits the effects of the new regime with some trepidation but he is a man absolutely dedicated to the Park, concerned to listen and to satisfy as many of the users as possible. A true Guardian of the Park on behalf of us all. ◆



London Zoo A Progress Report

The newspaper publicity caused almost £2 million to be given to the "Save Our Zoo" Appeal. The intention of having a balanced budget during 1992 still leaves the massive amount of maintenance to many buildings as a major issue. The Mappin Terraces are the biggest single problem, although "listed", views differ on whether their destruction would matter.

One newcomer who seems to have universal approval is the new Treasurer, Peter Howell, Principal of London University.

A Reform Group caused a Special General Meeting to be held at the beginning of January and was allowed at the last moment to circulate a proposal for the "Future of the Zoo" to all

Fellows. This contained many positive suggestions with a strong emphasis on conservation breeding and included possible uses for the various dilapidated buildings.

At the Special General Meeting the Zoo announced that it intended to join together the proposals of the Zoo and of the Reform Group. This proposal caused much surprise but was not enough to prevent a massive vote of "No Con-

fidence" in the past management of the Zoo; many critical comments were made about the management of Zoo Operations Limited, since when it has been announced that David Jones' position as General Director of the Zoo goes. He may take over overseas conservation. The Zoo is about to advertise for a new chief executive.

Although we understand that both London and Whipsnade Zoos hope to "break even" this year, there is still no information about sponsorship which has been promised for many months. The number of staff and the number of animals have both been substantially reduced. There is now an air of realism about the future but there may well be more alarms yet.

Most of us hope the Zoo will survive. It is now very happy to discuss its plans with local amenity groups and perhaps if it abandoned claims to the "10 or 16 acres" it would gain much more positive and influential support from local people

Regent's Park Next for Scrutiny by Jenkins?

In March a meeting was held at Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre attended by 250 delegates (including four members of the Friends of Regent's Park Association), drawn from all sections of Westminster, and others with an interest in the future of the Royal Parks.

The consensus was that the Review document prepared by a committee under Dame Jennifer Jenkins is admirable and full of good ideas. It was also

enthusiastically praised by Sir George Young MP, the Junior Minister at the Department of the Environment.

Although it was primarily concerned with Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, many of their conclusions could equally apply to Regent's Park, and indeed there was a suggestion that Regent's Park would be the next one Dame Jennifer's Committee examines, which the FORP warmly welcome.

It emerged that at present there is no architect or landscape architect responsible for the buildings and overall design of Royal Parks. Mention was made of a previous good Parks plan of some ten years ago which has been ignored. This explains a lot of the

shabby, stopgap appearance of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens and, to a certain extent, Regent's Park.

The Review makes strong recommendations for these appointments, not only to improve the look of lavatories, restaurants, pathways, litter bins and benches, but also to remove eyesores like the coaches which line Park Lane. (The proposal is to put them underground although this is very costly)

Traffic, a menace in Regent's Park, is also addressed in the Review. Their solution is to close a carriageway and/or build cut-and-cover underground routes. (Can you imagine the Outer or Inner Circle being closed to traffic which has been sent underground?)

What joy for those who find it hard to cross the road on foot!

Peace and tranquillity were found to be the prime reasons for people using the Park and therefore paramount in future plans. It looks as though "Events", if any are permitted in the future, will be confined to Hyde Park, Regent's Park being amply served by the Open Air Theatre. Views at the Conference were mixed; some applaud, others dread, a repeat of the Pavarotti performance. (With luck Regent's Park will escape the attentions of the promoters. But we must be vigilant.)

Much to the annoyance of a minority the Review recommends that dogs should be kept on leads in Kensington Gardens. The day may dawn when we shall see the same applying to the whole of Regent's Park. (Organisations which would welcome it include the Crown Paving Commission whose gardens on the edge of the Park constantly attract the attendance of irresponsible dog-owners). Bicycle riders similarly attract strong comments both for and against: a possible compromise is to have cyclist-only routes around the edge of the Park.

An astounding omission from the Review is any comment on the contracting-out of horticultural and maintenance services, since tenders were being advertised as the investigation began. In other words, the changes were excluded from the Committee's remit by Mr Heseltine.

Some people thought the Review was set up to divert attention from this highly contentious issue, on which many people of all politics are divided - besides those who say "Wait and see". Consequently, the cynic at the Conference who thought all the good ideas and good intentions would be left on a shelf to gather dust, may, unfortunately, have a point, unless the Treasury, which was not at the Conference, commits the necessary funding; and there is also circumspect monitoring.

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"A Day in the Life of Regent's Park"

ITV's film about Regent's Park began well. It caught the mysterious mood of dawn, and voices were heard saying this was the one park in London that was really like the country. Of course that is an exaggeration; but there are parts of the Park, and times of the day, when it does feel really wild and peaceful - that rather paradoxical combination that real countryside gives.

Unfortunately, the film did not pursue this theme. It needed an imaginative cameraman to wait among the trees till the light brought out a magic in them or to catch a glimpse of the unusual wild birdlife of the Park - the tree-creepers, the lesser spotted woodpeckers, the goldcrests.

But it confined itself to the familiar inhabitants of any park - tame ducks and swans, the sparrows, the grey squirrels.

This was equally true of its portrait of the human presence in the Park. We caught glimpses of the great Nash lodges and terraces, but no really brilliant or beautiful shots of them, and only the most basic information about them. The eye of an architectural historian was needed here, just as a naturalist was required for the nature shots.

In the end, the film settled for a record of the things that go on in every park - agreeable, indolent things, but not arresting or unique: people licking ice-creams, joggers and roller-skaters, people sitting in deckchairs listening to the band, people feeding the birds (quite superfluously incidentally, on these summer days when birds have no problem finding food).

A good documentary, whether atmospheric or informative, should try to bring out what is special and distinctive about its subject.

This film made Regent's Park look much like any other city park - which it is not at all.

Put Harry & Spike on a Lead? Oh Poop!

by Emily Green, from an article in *The Independent* - 9 March, 1992

I had managed to swing one of the only 250 hot tickets for the public presentation of the Royal Parks Commission report.

I was there on behalf of hundreds of dog walkers who use the park each day, and for Harry and Spike, the two mongrels I adopted two years ago from the Dogs Home, Battersea.

Word had gone around the park that the Commission was to announce recommendations that would end a 150-year tradition. We would no longer be allowed to run our dogs off their leads. Rather, we were to be forced on to Hyde Park, too far to travel for many, and heavily trafficked by cars and horses.

Dog-walkers responded by urgently pressing petitions into one another's hands. Calling meetings. Deluging their MPs with letters. We all know that to keep dogs on leads means taking our pets for a run in the park impossible. And we love the parks.

Until then, few of us had been aware of a much wider set of changes sweeping the park. They began last summer, scarcely contested when Parliament was on the verge of recess. On 18 July, Michael Heseltine, the Environment Secretary, announced the privatisation of the maintenance services of Regent's Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, St James's Park, Green Park, Greenwich, Richmond and Bushy.

At the same time, he introduced a new committee to be led by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, a former National Trust chairman, to conduct a review of the parks. She chose initially to focus on Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park, both close to her London home.

And so, last week, I went as a pro-dog ambassador to learn of the 79 recommendations in her Committee's 130-page report.

Some were sensible, such as the repair of park furniture. Some were grandiose, such as the re-design of Speakers' Corner and Marble Arch. Some were priggish, such as moving children's playgrounds to more "discreet" locations. Some were sadly ironic, such as the re-landscaping in front of Kensington Palace.

Ironic because landscaping requires gardeners, and after Mr Heseltine's announcement, all of the royal parks' 367 gardeners were made redundant. Of

Frustration at poor civic policy about dog mess is to be taken out on the dogs

the 228 who applied for jobs with new contractors, 147 were re-hired.

The private contractors moved in last week. In Kensington Gardens, a small team of rubbish pickers turned out in stiff new jackets. They were morose. No wonder: the day after the DoE announced that Brophy plc had won the contract for the gardens, it was revealed the company had been sacked by Bexley council in 1990 for unsatisfactory work, and in 1991 was sacked again by Moseley Park School in Wolverhampton

While Dame Jennifer's effort is sincere, the recommendation to restrict dogs in Kensington Gardens plays on disgust for their faeces. But the report has been prepared on behalf of a government that has discouraged responsible dog owner-

ship. It has repeatedly opposed mandatory dog registration. It abolished the Greater London Council, which could have introduced much-needed city-wide poop-scooping laws, which are now left to the borough councils. This is hopeless: I cross three boroughs each day and would like to feel I am not quite so alone in poop-scooping.

Frustration at poor civic policy about dog mess is to be taken out on the dogs. Dame Jennifer summons as ammunition toxocariasis, a potentially blinding disease caught from ingesting roundworm larvae from dog faeces. Yet according to John Richens, of the London School of Hygiene, the disease is in a steep decline. "The risk from dogs is very low", he says. "The number is going down all the time because of preventative measures - people de-worming dogs and preventing fouling of play areas".

Dr Richens was aware of 300 cases in the UK in 1988. More recent figures from the Public Health Laboratory show as few as 29 cases last year. Clearly, this is still too high.

While I suspect more children are blinded by park swings than toxocariasis, I share Dame Jennifer's disgust at dog mess. So why not, for the moment, leave Marble Arch where it is and enforce poop-scooping? New York did it. ♦

Dame Jennifer Jenkins will be addressing a meeting of "the Friends" at 6:30pm, 28 April 1992, at the Zoo.
