

The Friends of Regent's Park & Primrose Hill

AGM

Tuesday, 31 March 1998.
6 pm for 6.30 pm
at the Zoo Meeting Rooms
on the Inner Circle.

Please send any matter for the main agenda to the *Hon. Secretary*, Valerie St. Johnston, 30 Fitzroy Road, London NW1 8TY. There will of course be a floor discussion.

David Welch, David Caselton and Inspector David Humphries have all been invited to the AGM.

A specially designed Friends' badge will be given to each family member who attends the AGM. Please come and collect yours.

Diarydates

see details on page 3

Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture
Wednesday, 25 February 1998, 11am

Rose Pruning Tuesday, 3 March 1998, 2 pm

Annual General Meeting
Tuesday, 31 March 1998, 6.00 for 6.30pm

Spring Bulb Walk Tuesday, 7 April 1998, 11am & 2 pm

Park Watch
Tuesday, 7 April, 7pm

The King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery
Wednesday 29 April & Friday, 1 May 1998, 10.30 am
Cumberland Green

Hanging baskets
Saturday, 16 May 1998

Parkland Planning
Wednesday, 27 May 1998

Barbecue Tuesday, 21 July 1998. *for details see next newsletter or contact Ann Müller telephone 0171 935 3498*

Meeting the Minister

The Friends Forum met the new Minister with responsibility for Royal Parks on 20 October 1997. The Minister, Mr Tom Clarke, saw representatives of the Royal Parks Forum at the House of Commons with a member of his private office and David Welch, the Head of the Royal Parks Agency.

Mr Clarke was extremely affable and said that he valued the role the various Friends Groups played. However, he stressed that spending limits established for each government department in the last budget must be rigorously adhered

to. Representatives of all the seven Royal Parks explained to the Minister how budgetary cuts, particularly in the last 3 or 4 years, had caused a fall in manpower at the Royal Parks Agency, and postponement of all but the most pressing maintenance activities. It was also stressed that the various Friends Groups would oppose vigorously any attempts by government to bridge the hungry gap, as it were, by commercialisation in the Royal Parks.

The early signs are that the Minister, while personally sympathetic, will be just as tough as

his Conservative predecessors in drawing up financial plans for the Royal Parks.

A positive development from the meeting with the Minister was that he has agreed that the Department of Culture Media and Sport should co-operate with the Friends Forum in arranging a seminar later this year. The theme of the seminar will be to re-examine the various recommendations Dame Jennifer Jenkins' Committee made about the Royal Parks to assess which of those recommendations have been acted upon, and as to the others which should be given the greatest priority taking a realistic view about the financial resources available.

Membership

Our membership continues to increase, but we still need members to deliver our leaflets in their neighbourhood. If you can help, please call Margaret Elliott on 0171 935 8936. Also, don't forget to mention the Friends to new people moving into your neighbourhood.

Cycle paths?

We are investigating the possibility of designated cycle paths in the park. The suggestion is for responsible cyclists to apply for discs which would be attached to their bicycles. Cyclists would be issued with a safety code of conduct.

On spot fines for disregarding code is also being considered.

Please let us have your comments, positive as well as negative!

Responses to questions from Friends

Many Friends have asked about the deaths of some of the waterfowl in Regent's Park last summer. David Caselton, the Park Manager, reports that there was an outbreak of botulism, the bacterial disease, which did affect some of the wild waterfowl. This bacteria is endemic to most, if not all water bodies in the south east and becomes active with anaerobic conditions. The outbreak probably started with infected waterfowl, particularly mallards, flying into the area from elsewhere. None of the birds were affected at Hanover Island or the Longbridge, where the water is mechanically aerated. David Caselton acknowledges that the disease will recur with hot

summers, when water oxygen levels are lowest. The incidence of botulism in Regent's Park has been very low compared to other water bodies throughout London.

In reply to complaints about the garish colour of the Hanover Island bridges, the Park Manager states that there can be no change to the colour until the bridges need repainting.

The future use of the metal-works on the Inner Circle is still under consideration by the Royal Parks' Agency. After the death of Princess Diana, the buildings were used for the sorting, conservation treatment and temporary storage of the several hundred thousand written tributes and artefacts.

Michael Goldhill retired as Treasurer at the end of 1997 and we thank him for his hard work and valued wisdom over the years.

We are delighted that he will remain on the Committee.

Malcolm Kafetz is now the Treasurer and all payments and inquiries concerning membership should be addressed to him at: 10 Chalfont Court, 236 Baker Street, London NW1 5RS
Tel: 0171 935 1143
Fax: 0171 486 3437

Horticultural Diplomacy

Stephen Crisp gave Friends a wonderfully comprehensive and entertaining view of Winfield House and gardens in his slide lecture on 12 November.

Using old plans, maps and photographs, he presented a brief history of the twelve and a half acre site from its origin as part of the Park, through the building of homes by the Marquis of Hertford and Barbara Hutton, to today, when it is the official residence of the American Ambassador. His knowledge and interest in both house and garden quickly became apparent to us all.

Stephen has been at Winfield House for over ten years, and through a magnificent set of slide photographs he was able to take us on a tour of the garden throughout the seasons. We saw the rose garden, the secret garden, the woodland trail, the new terrace rose garden, flower borders, beautiful trees, the 300sq.meters of glass houses, a variety of spring bulbs, and the cutting garden, and throughout Stephen entertained us with stories and anecdotes about what we were seeing. How many people know that

all the yew clippings are saved to process into a new cancer drug, or that the statue of Barbara Hutton in the garden was discovered quite by chance by an Ambassador's wife visiting Italy? We learned of the many changes Stephen has made over the years, some to improve and develop what was a rather neglected garden, and some forced by the need for economy and efficiency.

Stephen's knowledge and skills are not limited to the garden. He has a vast knowledge of the house and its furnishings, and is also responsible for the floral decorations. This latter term is hardly adequate to describe what he does. His decorations, ranging from table centrepieces to entire rooms, and incorporating almost any object that catches his eye, provoked gasps of admiration from his audience, and no doubt a few resolutions to try harder ourselves!

We are most grateful to Stephen Crisp for such an entertaining evening, and are very pleased that he has agreed that we should arrange for a tree to be planted in Regent's Park honoring him as a special Friend.

Royal Academy of Music

A large group of friends enjoyed a concert by the Academy String Orchestra in the Duke's Hall, followed by a buffet supper organised by the Friends of the Royal Academy of Music.

The programme began with the orchestra, under their director and conductor David Strange, playing the Grieg "Holberg Suite" in which the leader of the orchestra and the leader of the cello section were particularly impressive. This was followed by the light and tuneful Mozart Flute Concerto in D major, with a 23 year old German girl, a fifth year student at the Academy, as the competent soloist. After the interval a French postgraduate student conducted the orchestra in Elgar's Serenade in E minor, and the concert concluded with a performance of Janacek's Suite for Strings.

For further details and bookings for all the events below please telephone Ann Müller 0171 935 3498.

Institute of Architecture

The Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture at Gloucester Gate is the venue for a talk by Dr Richard John on Tuesday 25 February. Dr John, who is the Director of the American Programme will explain the work of the Institute and show us round the building.

There is a restaurant on-site and, if you would like to stay on for lunch afterwards, we are promised a 'hearty meal' for £2.40 with pudding 60p extra!

Tickets are limited and are for members only, and cost £2.

Pruning Roses

The rose-pruning programme in Regent's Park lasts from September until Easter. On Tuesday 3 March at 2 pm, P.J., who is the Training Officer for the Services Team has agreed to show a very small group of members some of the techniques used.

Tickets are very limited and cost £2.

Spring bulb walk

The Training Officer has also agreed to take two small groups of members on a walk round Regent's Park on Tuesday 7 April specifically to look at spring bulbs. Depending on the weather between now and then we should see the end of the crocuses and hyacinths, the middle of the daffodil range and at least where the tulips will come up. P.J. will tell us how many and how and when the bulbs are planted in the Park and perhaps give us some tips for our own gardens.

There will be two

groups one at 11am and another at 2 pm. Tickets are very limited and are for members only, and cost £2.

Hanging baskets, tubs & window boxes

Planned for Saturday, 16 May 1998, in time for Summer planting, is a talk and demonstration by Regent's Park's Mark Wasilewski on hanging baskets, tubs and window boxes, and suitable plants for them.

Parkland planning & management

A joint meeting with the St. Marylebone Society will be held in the crypt of the St. Marylebone Church on Wednesday, 27 May 1998 at 6.30pm. Emeritus Prof. John Poynter will talk about Parkland Planning and Management - a bio-geographer's view, with particular reference to Regent's Park.

Barbecue

The barbeque, postponed due to the death of the Princess of Wales, will now be held on Tuesday, 21 July 1998.

Ecological Survey

Members will recall that we are co-operating the the Institute of Zoology so that an ecological survey may be carried out in Regent's Park and Primrose Hill. The project is being led at the Institute by Dr Peter Cotgreave who is a Conservation Biologist.

Phase 1 of the project involved carrying out a preliminary review of previous literature dealing with wild life in the park. We are now moving on to the second phase which will involve compiling a list of wild species occurring in the park; and comparing the biodiversity value of the park under different management regimes. It is proposed that surveying will be carried out through a 12 month period and volunteers from the Friends are most welcome to accompany Peter Cotgreave and his team when they are carrying out surveys. Details of the sort of survey work to be done month by month will be available at the AGM and if members wish to speak to Peter Cotgreave directly his telephone number is 0171-449 6686.

The Friends of Regent's Park & Primrose Hill

The society is a non-political body. Our aims are to help conserve, defend and, where necessary, urge the improvement of all the area within the Park boundary and the adjoining Primrose Hill

Annual subscription £10
To join please contact the Treasurer

Tragedy on the Ice

In the winter months when the lake in Regent's Park freezes, it is perhaps appropriate to remember the dreadful accident which happened on 15 January 1867. Both the Times newspaper and the London Illustrated News gave long and graphic reports. "On Tuesday afternoon an accident involving a serious loss of life occurred through the breaking of the ice on the ornamental water in Regent's Park. The scene of the terrible event was that portion of the lake extending along the side of the pleasure-ground in front of Sussex-place, and is about 800 yards in length by 130 in breadth". Several thousand people had been skating on this ice in the morning, "although the ice was looked upon by the experienced icemen on duty as very unsafe, from its being principally snow ice".

500 skaters

At half-past three in the afternoon there were about 500 skaters on this stretch of ice, including many ladies. On the banks stood between 2000 and 3000 spectators. "The excitement and fun were at their highest. Select circles were surrounding the more skilled skaters, men of all ages and classes were darting across in each direction, the park was resounding with sounds of merriment and life, when without warning the scene was terribly changed. The entire expanse of ice, covering an acre of water, gave way." Those nearer the banks scrambled to safety, but about 200 skaters were left in the water which was 12 feet deep. "A few with great presence of mind, threw themselves flat upon the surface of the pieces of ice and were thus instrumental in saving the lives of many of those in the water as well as preserving their own until assistance came to them. Most of the icemen did all that was possible in the circumstances and three of them narrowly escaped drowning, having when in the water helping the people out, been seized by others drowning and pulled under the ice. Several of the park-keepers and spectators rendered great aid and more than one hundred persons

within a few minutes of the accident were got on shore, the great number of whom were so much exhausted that they had to be taken to the Humane Society's tent and placed under medical treatment." This was soon overflowing, but by a stroke of luck Mr and Mrs Douglas, the master and mistress of the Marylebone workhouse were among the spectators. It was their presence of mind which saved many of those taken from the water. Mr Douglas immediately sent for the police, for blankets and brandy, while Mrs Douglas hurried back to the workhouse to call doctors and prepare to receive the injured. Fifteen men and boys were sent there in cabs and were promptly treated. "Residents of local terraces, Sussex-terrace especially, sent out abundant supplies of stimulants and clothing." The gardeners from South Villa pulled some victims from the lake.

At the scene there were many acts of coolness and gallantry. "A gentleman who fell so that his head and chest rested on a large block of ice, while his feet were in the water, lay smoking his pipe for a long time while the boats were farther out picking up as fast as possible those in a worse position. He began, however, to realise his position and, removing the pipe from his mouth, he called out 'Fifty pounds to anyone who will fetch me out!' Several abortive attempts were made to reach him with ropes, poles and ladders. A man at the end of a ladder, reached a small piece of ice and endeavoured to throw a rope to him, but it fell short. He then managed to push the ladder on to a piece of ice farther out and, standing on the former, he again threw the rope. In doing so, he fell, and, in clinging to the ladder he hurt himself, and was drawn ashore. A gentleman then got into an escape, fitted up with barrels at the end. When pushed out as far as possible, he got into the water and endeavoured to push the escape along, but he did not succeed. Eventually, a man stripped to his shirt and trousers and, a rope having been fixed to his waist, he desperately fought his way through the ice and seizing the skater round the

body, they were both dragged to land amid tremendous cheers." There is no record of who received the reward. In another reported case "A man, apparently a mechanic, was shrieking for help about 50 yards out, when his cries attracted the attention of a gentleman in the crowd. Without a moment's hesitation, he sprang into the water, battered a passage through the ice with his naked fist, and made for the now sinking man, who immediately threw his arms around his neck and locked him in a perilous embrace. To the horror of those who were watching, both disappeared for the instant, but they both returned safe, amidst the plaudits of the bystanders. The gentleman, giving his companion into the charge of several willing persons, disappeared before anyone could speak to him." On Wednesday, when the ice was frozen so hard that it was difficult to imagine that it could break, the search for bodies began, watched by crowds estimated in thousands. "Strong men and little boys - the artisan, the itinerant fruit vendor and the poor little blue-coat boy - were fished up one after the other on those awful hooks. As soon as they were landed, they were laid upon the grass to be identified."

Man's best friend

A poignant report notes that "A large Newfoundland black dog, which accompanied its master on the ice and managed to get back on the shore, has since Tuesday afternoon never quitted the ground, nor have the police been able to drive it away. Sergeant Neal, 9D, has on three occasions brought food for it, but the dog has refused it"

The aftermath

The Middlesex coroner was busy in the aftermath. In all forty men and boys drowned or died of hypothermia. Fourteen of the dead were under sixteen, the youngest being nine year old Edward Jukes. Many were fashionably dressed young men with watches and sums of money in their pockets and skates on their feet. The level of

the lake was lowered to four feet and skating has been banned ever since.

A street ballad related the tragedy:

They clung to the ice, until benumbed with cold
The ice in their grasp broke asunder.

One lady on the shore in grief did behold

Her husband exhausted go under;

Two sisters were screaming and calling for aid,

Their sorrow, poor girls, could not smother,

In anguish rang their hands and frantically said,

For God sake save our poor brother.

The most mournful part remains to be told,

As the bodies to the dead house were taken,

At the workhouse gate two thousand young and old,

The scene it was truly heart-breaking;

One body was owned by an old gentleman,

'My son can't be dead' he said when crying.

'He left me but two hours, was strong and cheerful then,

For a father so old it's very trying.'

This must have been one of the last street ballads before their decline after 1870. Such penny or half-penny ballads were the work of local people who chronicled hard times and disasters. The proceeds often went to the relief of the families involved. Charles Dickens was familiar with the popular ballad trade; Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) had such ballads displayed for sale on an unfolded clothes horse.

What if...?

One of the survivors of this terrible disaster was sixteen year old Frederick Courteney Selous, who, when he grew up, become not only a game-hunter and dealer in African ivory, but, in his role as an accomplice of Cecil Rhodes, a thoroughly 'politically incorrect imperialist'. What if...?

Conservation Centre *for the next century*

In 1995, The Zoological Society of London applied to the Millennium Commission for a substantial (£2.2 million) grant towards the cost of a new 'Conservation Education Centre' at London Zoo. This was to be highly interactive, state-of-the-art exhibition space, explaining (with some animals, but largely through the use of electronic media) the extraordinarily diverse nature of life on our planet and efforts that are being made to conserve it.

Our project was one of the early successful applications to the Millennium Commission, at a time when no-one was very clear about how these projects would run.

Last June we got a bit stuck with our negotiations with them over the Deed of Grant, and although we had planning permission from Westminster City Council, our landlords (the Royal Parks Agency) had some problems with the large size of the building, and its visibility from Regent's Park, and so felt unable, at that stage, to give us 'permission to build'; we also had the not insignificant task of securing the matching funds (the Millennium Commission only gives 50% of the project costs).

I'm delighted to report that all these matters were successfully resolved during 1997. We were given permission to build, subject to certain conditions being met

(including some modifications to the landscaping scheme between the new building and the Broadwalk), the Deed of Grant was signed and, perhaps the best news of all, in one way or another, the matching funds were secured. This last included an extremely favourable arrangement with Kajima (UK) Engineering Ltd, both to manage the project and to do the construction.

There was an additional and extremely valuable side-effect to the rather unexpected pause that was imposed upon us; we took the opportunity to re-evaluate, not only the building, but more particularly the exhibition contents. Instead of a very technical exhibition with

some animals in it, we have decided to do it the other way round, with plenty of animal exhibits (mostly pretty small and hence almost exclusively; invertebrates), associated with some very exciting interpretation. The stories to be told remain the same, namely the wonders of biological diversity and how we, and others, are seeking to conserve it around the world. Apart from being a brilliant exposition of conservation matters for all our visitors, it will be one of the biggest and best invertebrate houses in the world.

We moved on site (in the yard surrounded by the Broadwalk and the Wolf Wood, the back of the Bird House and the back of the Lion

Terraces) in December, and the project will be complete (if all goes according to schedule) by January 1999, opening to visitors the following Easter. It will have the distinction of being one of the Millennium projects in London to be ready and open by the Millennium, and will be (we have absolutely no doubt about this whatsoever) the best exhibition experience to be had anywhere in 1999!

*Dr Jo Gipps,
Director, London Zoo*

PS The wolves are currently in London Zoo's Animal Hospital, pending their movement to a new enclosure at our sister zoo, Whipsnade Wild Animal Park.



Royal Parks *Visitor Survey 1997*

In the spring and summer of last year 965 interviews were carried out in Regent's Park and Primrose Hill to assess the degree of visitor satisfaction. These show that Regent's Park received the highest overall quality rating, while Primrose Hill scored less well in the company of Greenwich and Green Parks.

The figures below report the percentages awarded on cleanliness:

	<i>Regent's Park</i>	<i>Primrose Hill</i>
Free of graffiti	97	89
Free of litter	95	93
Footpaths	97	83
Clean seating	96	84
Clean toilets	97	95
Litter bins emptied	85	68
Number of litter bins	87	76
Free of dog mess	85	39
Number of mess bins	75	41

Over 20% of visitors to Primrose Hill have dogs with them, and this number rises in bad weather.

A comparatively high number of respondents commented about non-motorised traffic, such as cyclists, rollerbladers and skateboards affecting their enjoyment, 44% in Regent's Park and 36% on Primrose Hill, and complained about contractors' vehicles, 21% in Regent's Park and 27% on Primrose Hill.

More people interviewed in Regent's Park and Primrose Hill could name the Royal Parks Agency as being responsible for the Royal Parks than in any other Park.

Friends' card *sells out!*

We were over-whelmed with orders for our blank card and sold over 3500. Several Friends have asked if they can order further cards. In order for us to be able to do this we need to print a reasonable number.

For further information please contact Ivor Kamlisch, telephone 0171 911 0701 before the end of February.

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