

*The Friends of
Regent's Park
& Primrose Hill*

SUMMER

Newsletter No. 104



2020

FROM THE CHAIR

Mark Elliott

Recently the news has been about only one topic. It's as if nothing else is going on in the world! So, this newsletter will not mention the "C19" word and will only talk about good things going on in Regent's Park and Primrose Hill.

WE SHALL SOON BE THE ONLY ROYAL PARK WITHOUT A KIOSK OR VISITOR CENTRE

First, our plans for a Friends information kiosk at the Clarence Gate entrance. In response to a request from our Park Manager, Nick Biddle, we prepared a fairly detailed "scoping report" that points out we shall soon be the only



Royal Park without a kiosk or visitor centre. We are fortunate to have a well-qualified study team amongst our Committee members, as Peter Darley is a civil engineer and Alison Kemp is a surveyor. The report addresses possible styles for the kiosk, its size and layout, internal features, utilities, rough costings and an implementation timetable. There are already two kiosks in our Park, but The Royal Parks (TRP) will decide the style appropriate for 21st century Regent's Park. The report was submitted to them on May 15th, and we hope to have it ready for Summer 2021.

As well as writing the first history of the Friends, founded in 1991, we have located copies of all 103 newsletters, and they will be archived on the website. Newsletter No. 1 (below) makes interesting reading as it explains how the Friends was founded following a study by the London

Business School. One of the main issues was that of dogs on leads and cleaning up after them. Happily, the latter issue has been largely changed by social practice, but the former is still contentious!

Another major project underway is a new website. We hope to have this ready in June, and that you will find it full of useful information to enhance your Park visits. You will find a quick source of information about all aspects of the Park, history, Friends, gardens, wildlife and birds, trees, houses, statues, sport, entertainment, and canals. There will also be a photo gallery that we hope you will help build. We have opened a dropbox link into which you can put wonderful photos you have. If you would like to contribute, please contact us and we will send you the link. The photo collection will be managed by our newsletter editor Anne-Marie Craven



The Friends of Regent's Park, Newsletter number 1, 1992

To improve our service and ensure that we are communicating with our members we will soon issue a survey. Please do fill it out and return it as we need your input and feedback!

and some of the photos will be selected as background to our website pages.

The new website will be our way of reporting news about the Park and driving our social media programmes, the primary information source for many people. We hope to update the website almost daily with news items of interest to our members. We already have an Instagram page but neither Facebook nor Twitter. These will be opened to keep you updated the 21st century way.

I have been issuing occasional updates which have had a good response from you. A popular item is the “are you curious” photographs. We all like to know why something is being done or repaired, is a new project, or simply being changed. If you have a question, please contact us and we will find the answer for you.

As I receive many e-mails complaining about cyclists, joggers, dogs and people breaking park regulations, I would like to comment on signage. The signs our Park manager is obliged to put on the gates were prepared by TRP and apply to all seven Parks. They are not necessarily appropriate for them all. But TRP has a duty to translate government policy to Park users – something that is not always easy to do!

Sadly, we have had to cancel June and July concerts on the Bandstand following instructions received from The Royal Parks. We hope it may be possible to begin our season in August and continue until late September.

In closing, I would like to thank Justin McKie, Chairman of the Regents Park Cyclists, for kindly offering the help of his members to carry out essential medical and food deliveries for our elderly and vulnerable members. The response has been terrific, and they have helped many of our members.

Well done!



The Readymoney fountain



The Boat House café

DRINKING FOUNTAINS — DO WE NEED MORE?

Mark Elliott

Other than in the toilets, there are currently only three places in The Regent’s Park, and none in Primrose Hill, where you will find a drinking fountain. That means there is one fountain per 150 acres! Currently none of the fountains, including these for drinking, are functioning due to the risk of spreading the virus.



The Hub

- The Readymoney fountain
- The Boat House café
- The Hub

The Friends have set a goal to improve the situation by installing one or two fountains per year for the next five years. To do so, we need to know where water pipes are situated, and roughly how much fountains cost. We hope to receive this information from The Royal Parks soon.

It would be interesting to hear the views of our members about:

- Where should the first fountain be?
A suggestion is the running track, for the parched athletes.
- What kind of fountain is best?

The answer to the second question depends upon who uses it most and how they use it? Is it to fill bottles and for dogs, or is it a spray for adults and children to drink from? If for the former, then more fountains like those at the Hub would be best, but if for the latter, then the one near the Readymoney fountain would be best.

Your views to the editor at: newsletter@friendsofregentspark.org



BICENTENARY OF OPENING THE REGENT'S CANAL

Peter Darley

PART 1: THE CANAL IN THE LANDSCAPE

Celebrations marking the bicentenary of the Regent's Canal are on hold. We will not be embarking on a pleasure boat at Hampstead Road Locks to cruise past the site of Gilbey's former gin distillery as we enjoy a gin cocktail in memory of one of the foremost canal-side industries.

The early history and birth of the canal was described in the summer Newsletter of 2016 (see website) marking the bicentenary of the opening of the canal to the Hampstead Road. In this newsletter, and in the next three, we will describe operations over the last 200 years

with an emphasis on the areas in or near Regent's Park. We start with how the canal alignment adapted to the changing landscape.

The canal opened officially on 1 August 1820, finally connecting the Grand Junction Canal at Paddington with the London Docks at Limehouse. Only then was the world's greatest port linked to the eighteenth-century canal network that connected with England's industrial heartlands. The Company marked the opening by embarking on a ceremonial barge at Horsfall's Basin (now Battlebridge Basin), immediately to the east of Maiden Lane bridge on York Way.

From Paddington Basin, the Regent's Canal descends 86 feet over 83/4 miles through 12 locks to Limehouse Basin, with its entrance lock from the tidal Thames. There are two tunnels on the canal – one at Maida Hill (272 yards) and the other at Islington (926 yards).

The extraordinary bend in the canal at King's Cross, around which the Coal Office is wrapped, owes its existence to the intransigence of

Counsellor Agar, who insisted that the Company skirt around his land, defending his perceived rights by mobilizing his agricultural workforce to attack the canal company's surveyors.

John Nash, senior architect to the Office of Woods and Forests, intended to take the canal through the centre of Regent's Park, but public protest pushed the alignment to the northern fringes, requiring a deeper cut. The Cumberland Arm branched to the Cumberland Basin on the east side of Regent's Park, where three markets were to be established to serve wealthy residents of the park.

R. B. Schnebbelie's watercolour of 1837 (Camden Local Studies and Archives) shows the Cumberland Arm viewed from Regent's Park. Beyond it, the newly constructed London & Birmingham Railway (L&BR) is on embankment, with the chimneys of the winding engines that hauled trains up the incline from Euston Station under construction beyond. To the right is the Stanhope Arms in Oval Road (now the site of Academic



House), expected to be the terminus hotel before the London terminus was moved to Euston from Camden. The view from this location would now be the car park for London Zoo were it not an HS2 construction camp.

Although competition from the railway grew, the Regent's Canal remained busy, serving the Port of London until the 1960s when the old docks closed. For a while the two transport systems worked side by side and many of the building materials for the new north London rail termini were carried by canal. But, although the Company reduced its tolls and profits, and strengthened its boat fleets to compete, it continued to lose trade to the railways.

Pickford & Co, the largest bulk carrier of goods on the canal network,



The Tug Service, Canal and River Trust

had read the economic signals and obtained rights of carriage and distribution on the L&BR. It built a large goods shed “twice the area of Westminster Hall” on the south side of the canal on Oval Road, which opened in December 1841 (London Canal Museum collection). Designed by Lewis Cubitt, it facilitated transfer of goods between road, rail and canal, the first such interchange warehouse. The shed had extensive stabling in the basement and a rail connection with the goods station on the north bank. The chimney in the image was that of the coke ovens; the white building was Camden Flour Mills, which later became Gilbey's gin distillery.

In 1826, a steam chain tug was introduced in Islington Tunnel to reduce bottlenecks caused by boatmen “legging” through it. The tug service continued until the 1930s (both images Canal and River Trust).

In 1847, towing on the canal became the responsibility of the Company, which provided its own horses and added a charge to its tolls for this service. There were three stages between Paddington and Limehouse. Horses would be changed at Hampstead Road Locks, where stables for 15 horses were built alongside the Lock-keeper's Cottage (Northside Archives).

The ‘Roving Bridge’, built in 1846, carried the new towpath, which till

then ran behind the three docks on the north bank, to the south side of the canal, to avoid bridging over the other two docks). Grooves in the cast iron parapet reveal the forces required to haul barges from the southern lock to the north bank.

Horse parades were a movement led by Sir Walter Gilbey and Baroness Burdett-Coutts with the aim of influencing public perceptions and improving morale and horse management. The Company's horses regularly won prizes at the London Van Horse Parades held on Easter Monday in the Inner Circle of Regent's Park. The picture shows barge horses in 1925 at the Van Horse Parade (Canal and River Trust). Ophelia on the right won first prize.

From 1953, narrow tractors started to replace horses on the canal towpath. The picture shows a 7 hp petrol driven tractor towing a barge above St Pancras Locks in July 1953 (Canal and River Trust). King's Cross Goods Yard is on the left bank with coal drops and gasholders on the right bank. Three years later, in 1956, the last horse-drawn cargo was carried on the canal. The decline of commercial use was further marked by the opening of St Pancras Yacht Basin in 1958.

In the next newsletter. we shall look at how the Regent's Canal supplied the metropolis.



VOLUNTEERING HAS BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL IN OTHER ROYAL PARKS, AND THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE THAT THOSE WHO VOLUNTEER DO BENEFIT THEMSELVES

Hooray to the park's volunteers!



MEET THE COMMITTEE – OUR CHAIRMAN

Born in Harrow, Mark Elliott attended Merchant Taylors School, read physics at university then studied accounting.

Working in the petroleum industry, he and his family spent the next twenty years living in Paris, Algiers, the USA (Chicago, Pittsburgh, Houston and San Francisco) and in Côte d'Ivoire, before he was

transferred to London and settled on the edge of Regent's Park.

Mark became a family member of the Friends of Regent's Park and Primrose Hill when his wife Margaret joined in the early 1990s, but did not become active in the Park until 2017 when he set out to restore regular music to the bandstand. He was not on the Friends' committee when asked to become Chairman, but having lived by the park for thirty years and served for fourteen years on the Crown Estate Paving Commission (CEPC), decided he had enough local experience to integrate the Summer Bandstand Festival with the Friends and manage both.

His initial priority is to develop in the Friends a culture of volunteering. Volunteering has been very successful in other royal parks, and there is strong evidence that those who volunteer do benefit themselves. He hopes soon to have an information kiosk in place for visitors, and perhaps one day a visitor centre. He is also keen to increase the number of drinking fountains available, and to update the constitution of the Friends

and ensure that every committee member has a role to play.

While determined to stop the Outer Circle being used as a velodrome, Mark sees cycling as important in a park that boasts England's busiest public sports grounds. He believes that eliminating through traffic, as proposed by the royal parks, will open the way to a much better balance between pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles. He states that the FRP & PH must be vigilant, firmly opposing anything that might be detrimental to the park.

Mark and Margaret have three children, and five grandchildren. As well as his interest in Regent's Park and Primrose Hill, Mark is an enthusiastic amateur musician, and plays the trumpet, euphonium, French horn, trombone or bass trombone in bands in London, and Switzerland where he has had a second home for nearly forty years. He has served on a board at the Royal Academy of Music, was a CEPC Commissioner from 2004 to 2018, and has served on the school boards of both College Beau Soleil and Aiglon College in Switzerland, the latter as Chairman from 2009 to 2012.



HUNTING FOR A TREE!

Judy Hillman

Above: Ernest Henry Wilson

Below:

– *Davidia involucrata* (the handkerchief tree)

– French missionary Père Armand David



It is easy in Regent's Park simply to be overwhelmed by the great green spaces, the reflective stretches of water, brilliantly coloured roses and shaded avenues.

But it is also worthwhile looking closely at individual plants and trees and exploring a little about their history. Boring? Not at all.

Take the handkerchief tree. Also known as the dove or ghost tree, it can be found in Queen Mary's Garden near the west end of the foot bridge by the reeds which close off the water at the northern end. Its white flower or bract is very distinctive and was first imported from China in the late nineteenth century. This was an extraordinary era when enthusiastic specialists set sail to explore wild areas and return with seeds with which later to tempt gardeners in Europe.

First discovered by a French missionary and naturalist, Père Armand David, (hence its latin name *Davidia involucrata*), the handkerchief tree was brought to England by a 23-year-old plant hunter, who had been working at Kew Botanical Gardens. He was

sponsored by a commercial nursery, which had done well by introducing new unusual species to this increasingly popular activity. The young man, Ernest Henry Wilson, spent the best part of a year - it was before the days of air travel - getting to the remote destination, only to find the original single tree had been cut down. Nevertheless he carried on to find another example of the tree on a cliff edge, having travelled by mule and camped in very rough mountainous country. But that was not the end of his travails. The ship on which he journeyed home was wrecked - yet somehow he held onto the seeds and completed the expedition successfully.

E.H. Wilson, also known as Chinese Wilson, went on to travel extensively in Asia, Africa and Australasia, write books and take photographs and introduced the kiwi fruit. On one trip his leg was badly damaged by a cascade of stones and had to be set with the tripod of his camera. He became keeper of the Arnold Arboretum near Boston but was killed in a car accident in 1930. Some sixty species of Chinese plants bear his name.

IN THE GARDENS

Nick Biddle, Park Manager

At the time of writing we are poised between the first stage of lockdown and the potential relaxation of some government requirements. Since measures were introduced to limit the severity of the pandemic The Royal Parks have been driven by government guidance and will continue to be so throughout the process of coming to a ‘new normal’, however long, and whatever measures that will take.

WE AWAIT THE DETAILED GUIDANCE AND ARE NATURALLY KEEN TO REINTRODUCE FUNCTIONS AS SOON AS IT IS DEEMED SAFE TO DO SO, WHICH WE ANTICIPATE WILL BE IN A GRADUAL AND MEASURED WAY

Many of our usual functions have had to close down for the time being including toilets, cafés and kiosks, car parking, The Hub (including all sports activities and exercise classes), the Trim Trail, the Running Track, all playgrounds, the Tennis Centre and all small and major events.

We await the detailed guidance and are naturally keen to reintroduce functions as soon as it is deemed safe to do so, which we anticipate will be in a gradual and measured way. The Open Air Theatre, Capel Manor College, Regent’s University London, and ZSL London Zoo are also closed. The Open Air Theatre

has just announced the postponement of their 2020 season until 2021.

The parks are running on a skeleton crew covering maintenance operations only. Projects started before lockdown have been completed only where they could be carried out safely and staff could travel safely, so the replacement of the irrigation in the Avenue Gardens and the planting of topiary in Queen Mary’s Gardens have been completed, but the reinstatement of Chester Road Gates has been put on hold as this has not been possible to deliver without workers breaching social distancing guidelines.

“STAY 2M APART – PROTECT THE NHS”

All staff, both directly employed and contractors, work from home wherever possible. Many staff both across The Royal Parks and commercial partners have been furloughed, and we have temporarily had to cease volunteering and educational activities.

Tough times teach us valuable lessons. For The Royal Parks as an organisation, we have worked together across the charity on a daily basis much more closely than we ever have before, ensuring that we respond to the changing situation consistently across the estate. We are totally committed to the principle that parks are essential for people’s physical and mental wellbeing, especially those without access to a garden.

Much of our work in the early phase was aimed to ensure not just that our visitors were safe, but that they were mindful of the restrictions on activities as we feared that if people abused their access to the parks there was a risk that we may be closed down. We have been working through signage and social media to get the message out, and with the police to engage, explain and encourage people who are not exercising to go home, with enforcement very much a last resort. The great majority

THESE HAVE BEEN VERY CHALLENGING TIMES AND THERE ARE MORE TO COME BUT I’M CONFIDENT THAT MORE THAN EVER PEOPLE VALUE THEIR PARKS, AND OURS IN PARTICULAR

of our visitors have been terrific, respectful of each other and followed the guidelines, so the fear of closure has now past. We’re hugely grateful for the work of the police. They have been supported both by officers from the boroughs and at weekends by the London Borough of Camden’s Parks Patrol Team.

One of the many ways, but definitely the most fun way in which we have sought to get the message out to our visitors, and to people more widely, was a joint project with the London Borough of Camden. Together we set up a giant inscription at the back of Primrose Hill: “STAY 2M APART – PROTECT THE NHS”. The photo, with the London skyline behind it, featured widely across the BBC and social media.

These have been very challenging times and there are more to come but I’m confident that more than ever people value their parks, and ours in particular. I would like to take this opportunity to thank The Friends for their continued support for the parks. Your Committee has been a great support to the Royal Parks team during this period, managing queries and correspondence with ideas and energy aplenty for the time to come when we can at last meet again.

A TRANSFORMATION IN QUEEN MARY'S GARDENS

Mark Rowe, Assistant Park Manager



THE PLANTS FINALLY ARRIVE!



NO GOING BACK NOW!



ALMOST FINISHED...



Will it be yew topiary or pleached limes? After two years of discussion the decision was made in favour of the former and another six months was spent examining photographs from half a dozen suppliers. There was enough money in the donations budget and so the plants finally arrive!

The planting needs to look right as well as leaving enough room for the mowers. And so the first new pit is dug, and drainage is going in. No going back now!

The topiary root balls span 1.5 m+ by 0.7m+ and weigh over a tonne causing significant compaction of the soil underneath. As they require good drainage a 'raft' of 100mm gravel with a geotextile material was put in the bottom of each pit, and a laser sight was used to ensure all the topiary were in line.

The "platypus" ground anchor system used to stabilise the topiary required a metal skid at the end of the wire driven into the ground. When the driving rod is removed and the wire is pulled on to the skid, it rotates through 90° and acts as a good anchor.

A pneumatic hammer was used to drive the anchors a metre into the soil and the root ball was held in place with straps attached to ground anchors.

To raise the root balls above the surrounding lawns, the soil level had to be built up above the geotextile. Called mound planting it helps plants to avoid sitting in water.

There was about 10cm of brown topsoil over 30cm of rubble sub soil, probably from the conservatory that used to be on this site. And in amongst this layer we found a significant quantity of oyster shells. Perhaps from working lunches in the early

20th century or maybe used to make lime for construction or plant compost?

Our thanks go to:

Local benefactors' for donations over the years; Kingsdown Nursery for the supply of plants; Mainstream Irrigation drainage for planting pits and irrigation points; Ruskins Trees & Landscapes Ltd for tree planting; Id Verde for arranging essential materials at short notice and mixing the soils.

IN AMONGST THIS LAYER WE FOUND A SIGNIFICANT QUANTITY OF OYSTER SHELLS. PERHAPS FROM WORKING LUNCHES IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY OR MAYBE USED TO MAKE LIME FOR CONSTRUCTION OR PLANT COMPOST?





Regent's Park zoo keepers social distancing

OPEN AIR THEATRE – WHOLE SEASON INCOME LOST

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,
TIMOTHY SHEADER WRITES:

Whilst obviously unavoidable, it is incredibly sad that we are unable to open our theatre this summer for the first time since 1961. Our thoughts are with all those who were due to work with us and you, our audience. We are so grateful for the messages of support we have received over the past weeks and I am delighted that we have been able to reschedule all of our productions in 2021.

We are a charity which receives no public subsidy and so, the loss of an entire means we need your support now more than ever. With your backing, we will be able to continue producing award-winning shows in the heart of Regent's Park, provide £10 preview tickets to 18-25 year olds and subsidise tickets to some 6,000 school children and champion access in all that we do.

openairtheatre.com/blog/how-can-i-support-the-theatre

THE ZOO – HOW TO KEEP FEEDING 20,000 ANIMALS?

DIRECTOR GENERAL,
DOMINIC JERMEY, CVO OBE WRITES:

In late March, alongside my family, colleagues, and the rest of the country, I watched as the coronavirus pandemic rapidly tightened its grip on the world. We pressed the button on Saturday 21 March, knowing that shutting our gates was the right and responsible thing to do to protect our staff, visitors and animals - and to support our NHS at this difficult time.

Yet ZSL – whose income relies on zoo visitors – now finds itself in a precarious position and its future hangs in the balance.

You can't simply mothball a zoo and furlough all the staff to save money - our 20,200 giraffes, tigers, lions, meerkats, penguins and other animals need us as much today as any other day.

Following complex negotiations with the bank, they recently told us they were unable to provide the kind of major loan we need, even under the Government's special coronavirus schemes ZSL London does not receive regular government funding so we are exploring all avenues to overcome these challenging times and support from you, our neighbours, could play an import role in our future.

donate.zsl.org/support-zsl-london-whipsnade-zoos

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Subscriptions

If anyone still has a standing order for the old subscription rate of £10, please remember either to cancel it and pay through our website, or if you cannot do that, please amend it to £20.

Police: 999

(if a crime is being or you believe is about to be committed) 101 (anti-social behaviour, Park Regulations offences or to report a crime already committed).

SADLY, WE HAVE HAD TO CANCEL JUNE AND JULY CONCERTS ON THE BANDSTAND FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS RECEIVED FROM THE ROYAL PARKS. WE HOPE IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO BEGIN OUR SEASON IN AUGUST AND CONTINUE UNTIL LATE SEPTEMBER.

TO IMPROVE OUR SERVICE AND ENSURE THAT WE ARE COMMUNICATING WITH OUR MEMBERS AND HAVE ISSUED A SURVEY WITH THIS NEWSLETTER, PLEASE DO FILL IT OUT USING THE FOLLOWING LINK:

www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/B9QF6JG

FOLLOWING OUR REQUEST FOR YOU TO PLACE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE DROPBOX WE ARE PLEASED TO REPORT THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED OVER 400. MANY OF THEM WILL FEATURE ON OUR NEW WEBSITE. WE THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH!



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THANK YOU TO THE ROYAL PARKS AND THE NHS

