



To commemorate the restoration of Poets Corner and its memorial dedicated to 18th-century poet James Thomson, the Friends organised a special event of poetry and prose associated with Richmond Park, read by well known local actors, at Pembroke Lodge on 17 June. Poets Corner and the memorial were restored mostly thanks to a private donation and additional funding from the Friends.



A small inauguration event (*pictured on the left*) at Poets Corner, with Sir David Attenborough unveiling the new board with the dedication to Thomson, was followed by an afternoon of readings in Pembroke Lodge by actors Julian Glover (*pictured far left in the photo above right*), Stella Gonet (*next left in the photo*), Julia Watson (*middle right in the photo*), and Anthony Calf (*on the right in the photo*). The Friends also commissioned a poem by T S Eliot-award-winner David Harsent (*pictured bottom right*), who premiered “A Dream of Richmond Park” to 140 invited guests.



Friends Patron Sir David Attenborough and Chairman Ron Crompton (*middle photos on the right*) addressed the audience on conservation measures set up in response to the threats to the wildlife and environment of Richmond Park, and Richard Gray introduced the texts and readers. The readings reflected the Park’s wildlife, beauty and history, and David Harsent’s new poem echoed the Friends’ conservation message: “Tread lightly and leave no mark in Richmond Park”. The poem is reproduced in full on the following pages.



See more details and photos on the website, and look out for videos of the events.

Richard Gray
Photos by Liz Coleman



A Dream of Richmond Park *David Harsent*

The trees
Pollarded veterans, the amputees, the
hollow oaks,
hornbeam and black
poplar, sing gently down the wind; lean
in to them

and you'll hear it, centuries old, song of
longing,
song of loss, kings come to dust,
crowds of shadows that follow where
you walk.

*

*Your feet go light on the ground
in your waking dream of the park
as if you were lost in green
as if you could somehow tread but
leave no mark.*

*

The birds
In flight they are lost to themselves.
A kestrel straddles the wind, a
sparrowhawk
goes between trees, goes low to the
ground, songbirds

are small machines who have
"songbird" by heart...
A heron stoops to the water, folded and
packed
back into itself, heron-as-hieroglyph.

*

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in your waking dream of the park
as if you were lost in green
as if you could somehow tread but
leave no mark.*

*

The butterflies
The gatekeeper is drawn to ragwort, to
bracken, to edgelands,
the large skipper is branded
if male, if female untouched, brimstone
and green-veined white

go to the bramble-flower, small blue to
the creeping thistle, the purple
hairstreak flies spirals... That churn



POETRY IN THE PARK

of wings in the air is a storm at sea, is
landslip, is seismic shift.

*

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in your waking dream of the park
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as if you could somehow tread but
leave no mark.*

*

The deer
Like us they die and replenish, like us
they seem
no different from those they replace
unless you get close, unless there's a
reason to know.

Like us they go by habit, like us by
need. They sculpt
each tree to the browse-line; they shed
their velvet, go head to head, bell to the
breaking dawn.

*

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in your waking dream of the park
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*

The beetles
So many that they outnumber all else,
so many that one in five
of all named creatures is one of these,
so many
that their crawling sets up an echo: dor
and minotaur,

image of Khepri god of the sunrise,
heart-scarab, death-scarab,
cut in bone, in stone, a living brooch
tethered to her breast, soupçon doused
in chocolate, doused in honey.

*

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*

The bats

No good reputation: creatures of the
night and hot for blood, they live
on the edge of hunger, hedged-in by light
from the urban badlands, getting
through their night-long haul

of three-thousand midges to hold their
flying-weight, soprano
pipistrelle, bandit pipistrelle, they come
to your window, they tap the glass, they
show their teeth.

*

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in your waking dream of the park
as if you were lost in green
as if you could somehow tread but
leave no mark.*

*

The flowers

Think of the risk in names, the way a
name
is capture, the way that name and
named
must possess each other, how calling a
name calls in

its shadow-sign, how name will bypass
name to summon up
some hidden meaning: Good Friday Grass,
Tormentil, Hawkbit, Goat's Beard,
Lady's Bed Straw.

*

*Your feet go light on the ground
in your waking dream of the park
as if you were lost in green
as if you could somehow tread but
leave no mark.*

*

The Park

Imagine it under rain when everything
slips to a blur,
in sunlight or snowlight, imagine
darkness coming in or darkness
lifting...imagine your feet

light on the ground as in a waking dream,
and the park now boundless, where you
fail to find yourself, go trackless in
trackless green.