

## THE FRIENDS OF RICHMOND PARK

### CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT – 2009

During 2009 the Friends of Richmond Park became a charity. Our charitable status requires that we are conscious of the public benefit we provide. We now have two simple objectives, reduced from the nine we had before:

(1) to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the natural and physical environment of Richmond Park (the “Park”) and its peace and natural beauty for the benefit of the public and future generations, including by seeking to limit the adverse effects on the Park of policies, developments and activities which may damage the attributes of the Park set out in (2) below; and

(2) to advance the education of the public (i) in relation to the Park’s status as a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Area of Conservation and a Conservation Area and (ii) generally in relation to the conservation, protection and improvement of the Park.”

I would like to highlight some areas where I think we made particular progress in 2009 in achieving our objectives and providing public benefit.

**Conservation and Ecology.** We established a formal working group, led by Peter Burrows-Smith one of our Vice-Chairmen, to promote conservation activities. Through it, we have funded two conservation projects in the Park, the first to create small enclosures which protect ground level growth from deer and dogs and provide shrub for nesting birds and wildlife, the second to replace a raft on Pen Ponds for tern to nest. The group has also started a programme of volunteers doing practical conservation work in the Park, including rhododendron clearance and planting young trees. Our thanks to all the members of the group for the excellent work they have done.

**History Project.** A group of Friends volunteers has started to sort and catalogue the collection of material about the history of Richmond Park collected over many years by Daniel Hearsom, who runs Pembroke Lodge. The objective is to provide public access to the collection via a special website, and extract from it material that can be used for displays at the Visitor Centre, publications for schools, the Friends newsletter and so on. We owe a big thanks to the volunteers for their valuable work.

**Guidebook.** There is no good guidebook to Richmond Park and its natural and man-made delights. Therefore we are writing one ourselves. It will be about 100 pages A5 size (so it can be kept in a large pocket) and full colour. The chapters have been written by various experts, and include pieces on Park ecology, trees, deer, grassland, the main buildings, park management etc. The work started in spring 2009 and we expect to publish it in mid-2010. Our thanks go to John Karter who is co-ordinating it, and to all the writers who have devoted a lot of time to helping us.

The big public debate during 2009 was about parking charges. The government introduced its proposal in January 2009, and, given its importance, we decided that we had to consult our 1500 members on their views. Of the 400 members who responded, 43% were in favour of charges and 57% against. Based on the many detailed comments from members, we developed a formal Friends' response which opposed broad-ranging charges but supported charges at times of peak usage, when the car parks are full and there are queues of traffic. We also proposed a low-cost season ticket for frequent visitors.

Our nuanced response was lost in the subsequent vociferous anti-charges campaign which gathered momentum during the second half of the year; given our split membership, we did not take part, for which we received some criticism. In the end, early in 2010 the government announced it was going ahead with its original proposal (with one minor change). Since then, a House of Lords debate has failed to prevent it, and it will become law in mid-March, to be implemented in October – although the intervening general election may well stop it, since both Tories and Lib Dems (who may hold the balance of power) have promised to rescind it.

Our other activities continued in 2009, particularly:

- Walks, talks and courses had a full programme with attendance generally on the increase. Douglas Reynolds, one of our Vice-Presidents and a past Chairman, is close to giving his 500<sup>th</sup> talk about Richmond Park to local societies, a remarkable record. He also continues to lead walks.
- The Visitor Centre continues to extend its days of opening and range of information available. It is staffed by Friends' volunteers, and we (and the general public) are very grateful to all of them for the time they give.
- Our Education activities stalled during the year when Karen Rockell, who led them, moved to the West Country. We now have an excellent replacement in Teresa Grafton. Karen made a great contribution to the Friends, and we will miss her vitality and organising ability.
- Policing. We are very involved as a “stakeholder” in policing of the Park. Peter Burrows-Smith, our Vice-Chairman, is Chairman of the Safer Parks Panel and I sit on a Royal Parks-wide policing committee. The experience is frustrating. Police powers are inadequate; the Met (who took over policing in 2004 from the old Royal Parks Police) has taken a long time to understand that the problem in the Park is not law and social disorder but breach of Park regulations; signage is variable; and public observance of the regulations is often not good. Some progress is being made but it is slow.

In addition, we continue with our newsletter (three excellent issues, edited by Marilyn Mason) and monthly e-mails to members, our website (which won an award), monitoring planning applications (which were few this year), the Photography Competition (2009 was its third year), and PR (we were quoted in local newspapers on parking charges and other issues). And our internal administration ticks over in the very capable hands of Jack Maunders (Treasurer), Max Lankester (Secretary) and

Sheila Hamilton and Barbara Cotton (membership). Our membership continues to be around 1500, although we detect a small but steady increase.

We also have some changes to the Committee, or Trustees as we are after becoming a charity, which are being put forward to the AGM for its approval:

- Nick Coleman is currently responsible for the website but will be handing this over. He will become more involved in campaigning and also lead a group we plan to establish which will seek to find common ground in the debate about dogs in the Park (see the newsletter for more detail about the group).
- Teresa Grafton will take over the Education role from Karen Rockell. She is already working on a series of family trail leaflets with Susanna Ramsey, who developed the nature table which many members will have seen.
- Richard Gray will take over the Marketing role. He is a marketing consultant by profession, and is currently leading the development of our new logo and marketing materials.
- PJ Greeves is currently organising our contribution to the Richmond Park Open Day in September, and very much involved in the conservation volunteering.

In addition, Karen Rockell and Alison Donaldson are standing down as Trustees, although we plan to have them attend Committee meetings so that we can continue to draw on their skill and initiative. I have mentioned Karen above. Alison has also made an outstanding contribution to the Friends; she was editor of the newsletter for a number of years and was responsible for its current excellent design and content; she is also a passionate supporter of the Park.

Our accounts show that we have a substantial bank balance, which has been accumulated over many years, primarily to fund any large-scale campaign we might want to undertake. We feel that the amount is becoming too high, and we plan to reduce it slowly but steadily over a number of years; we say slowly because we want to make sure that we get value for money for any spending and also because we have limited human resources to manage any good ideas we may have.

What is our focus for 2010? I see five priorities:

- Volunteering. We need to ensure our new conservation volunteer programme is a success, and we are also talking to park management about another group focused on horticulture in Isabella. Both provide enormous opportunities for our members to contribute to the Park, but are major undertakings.
- Publication of the Guidebook, the family trails leaflets and maybe other leaflets. These will be of lasting benefit to the public, but also involve a lot of effort to ensure they are of a high standard.
- Campaigning. We have started a small group concerned with campaigning on issues where we feel that we can make a difference to the Park and the

public's experience of it. We hope to have this well established by the end of the year, with some achievements to its credit!

- Logo and website. We are upgrading our “marketing materials”, starting with the development of a logo (which is described in our Spring newsletter) which will then be used in various applications, and then our website. We are very fortunate to have two firms – Colin Porter and the Brand Foundry for the logo and Stuart Valentine and SAV for the website – who are doing the work pro bono. We are very grateful to both.
- Friends 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The inaugural meeting of the Friends was on March 27 1961, so we have our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations early in 2011, for which we will need to do the organising in 2010. We have not yet decided what to do, but we feel it inappropriate to spend a lot of money that would be better spent on conservation. Any ideas would be welcome!

All our activities are open to anyone to contribute – you do not need expertise, just enthusiasm, a willingness to help and some time. We also continue to be open to new volunteers for the Visitor Centre, the History Project and our new Conservation programme. If you would like to help, we would be delighted to see you!

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