



# THE FRIENDS OF HYDE PARK & KENSINGTON GARDENS

Reg Charity: 1168319

Annual Review 2023

Founded in 1991

## LOOKING GOOD

*Sue Price,  
Chairman of the Friends, writes:*

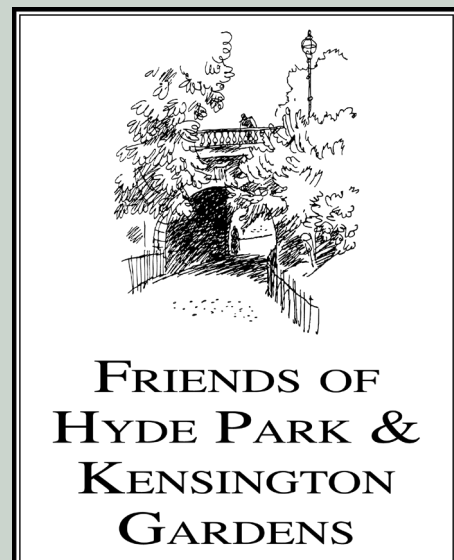
This is the most difficult page to cover. There's too little space and too much to write. But "Looking Good" says it all. Have a look at the bandstand in Kensington Gardens. The extraordinary detail and workmanship in the roof, the railings, and the stairs, are lovely. The tracts of grass which take such a bashing are also beautifully restored and, in October, are looking lush. The park meadows are mown by visiting shire horses with their drivers and lightweight mowing equipment, and are most effective in these ecologically sensitive areas.

Boating, now back "in house" and, despite a wet August, has been very popular and specially adapted boats for wheelchair-users are much appreciated by family groups. A memorial glade planted to remember Theresa Short will very soon be a lovely place to watch, as it settles and grows in its site at the east end of the South Flower Walk, close to Albert. Welcome back to an old friend, our original logo (spot it on this page) is now pristine and restored to its original 1920's look. It had become almost indecipherable after years of copying the copy. The trustees' decision was that it is special, is relevant to both parks and well worth saving.



It has made its first out of doors appearance on a new information board at the Bastion in Kensington Gardens, funded by you, the Friends, and close to the Cathcart benches partly funded by the Friends, a few years ago.

The boating operation is now back "in house".



FRIENDS OF  
HYDE PARK &  
KENSINGTON  
GARDENS



# KENSINGTON GARDENS

*Kensington Gardens Manager, Andy Williams, writes:*

**M**y report is overshadowed by the tragic loss of our dear friend and colleague Theresa Short who passed away on 16th June 2023.

Devoting much of her working life to the park, Theresa was able to express her passion for horticulture and was a supremely competent Assistant Park Manager. Through her work she developed many long-lasting friends, whose lives were enriched through working closely with her. We miss her deeply.

On 19th October we held a memorial planting day for Royal Parks staff, partners, contractors, and concession partners at 'Theresa's Glade', an area of the Gardens which Theresa had started to enhance.

## HORTICULTURE

The climate-resilient gravel garden, near the Italian Gardens Café, developed by Russell Stevens, our Head Gardener, has captured the essence of gardening using less water.



Blazing salvias in the North Flower Walk.



Daisy Ginsberg design.

Sub-tropical bedding was relocated from the Italian Gardens to the South Flower Walk where it integrates more successfully with existing shrubs. Plants have more shelter; and species such as tree ferns can now be grown successfully. We are excited by Russell's plans to plant English roses at the Italian Gardens this winter.

## VOLUNTEERS

Gardening volunteer sessions are up and running at the Peter Pan Enclosure and at the North and South Flower Walks. Conservation volunteers are meeting regularly, undertaking seasonal tasks such as coppicing, bulb planting and meadow enrichment.

Supporting these initiatives is Technical Officer Rachel Dowse. All volunteer opportunities are advertised on the Royal Parks website.



Japan comes to Kensington.

### GREEN FLAG

We retained Green Flag and Green Heritage awards, with thanks to colleagues from the Friends for their support on the day of the judging.

### PROJECTS

At the South Flower Walk the automated irrigation system has been extended and the gardeners' mess room upgraded.

We have repaired the roof of Queen Caroline's Temple, restoring damaged stonework and redecorating internally.

The bandstand refurbishment is now complete, the roof made water-tight, ceiling re-plastered and re-painted, deck timbers repaired, access widened, and decorative railings altered to improve safety. We look forward to hosting an increasing number of community events there.

New Interpretation Boards are being installed at key sites around the Gardens.

### EVENTS

Gorilla Circus (trapeze) and the Carousel roundabout ran through the summer. Scottish Country Dancers delivered three performances. Ian Nightingale (cover Assistant Park Manager) oversaw our operations for the Royal Parks Half Marathon which saw 16,000 runners safely navigate the 13-mile route; the park was a glorious setting for the later stages of the race.

### DIANA MEMORIAL PLAYGROUND

We are now well underway in our plans to invest over £2 million for the replacement of the pirate ship and tree house, the redesign of water play and landscape enhancements. Ryan (Playground Manager) is at the forefront of these plans. Work will take place next winter.



Pleased to see ewe in the playground.

My sincere thanks to the park team, our contractors and concession partners for their hard work, effort and support this year in presenting London's best Royal Park! It remains a privilege to manage Kensington Gardens.



# HYDE PARK

*Hyde Park Manager, Jason Taylor, writes:*



Early autumn at the Rangers' Lodge.

As the screens were being removed, the British Summer Time build started. BST's three weekends were bathed in sunshine; once again we witnessed some wonderful performances.

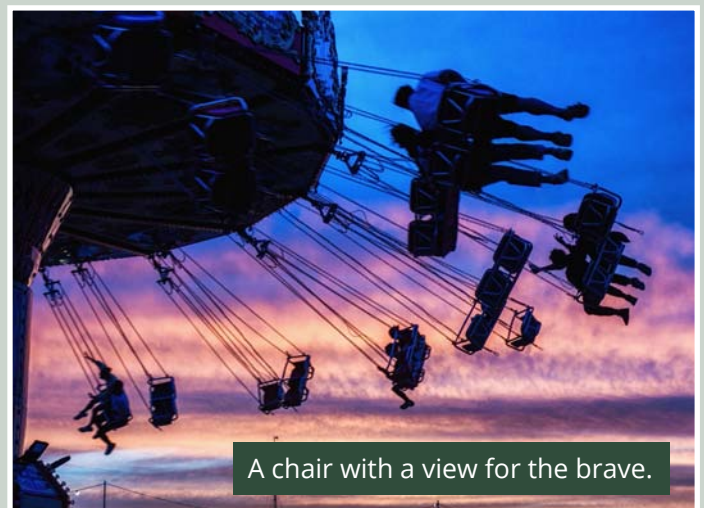
The Royal Parks Half Marathon has just left us and in a couple of weeks Winter Wonderland will materialise on the parade ground, rounding off another year.

August marked the first anniversary of the new grounds maintenance contractor, idverde, starting in Hyde Park. As part of the contract, we established a team of ten gardeners, purely focused on horticulture in the Park.

I write this on a beautiful summer day - in October! The leaves in Hyde Park are just starting to turn brown; we are going to get a late autumn.

I'm not quite sure where the last twelve months have gone; it seems only yesterday that I was updating on the Jubilee, and then the state funeral, of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

In May, the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla made for a very busy time in the central Royal Parks. While most of the action took place next door in Green and St James Parks, and despite the constant rain on the day, we had nearly 40,000 people watching four large screens in Hyde Park. I know that all of the team felt incredibly proud to be part of this once in a lifetime event.



A chair with a view for the brave.



Planters at Serpentine Bar and Kitchen are always stunning.

A personal highlight for me during the the year was spending a day with the management team in Central Park, New York. I met Roger Moisie, the Chief of Park Operations, and Betsy Smith, the President and CEO of the Central Park Charity. It was good to share experiences and to hear what they had learned over the years.

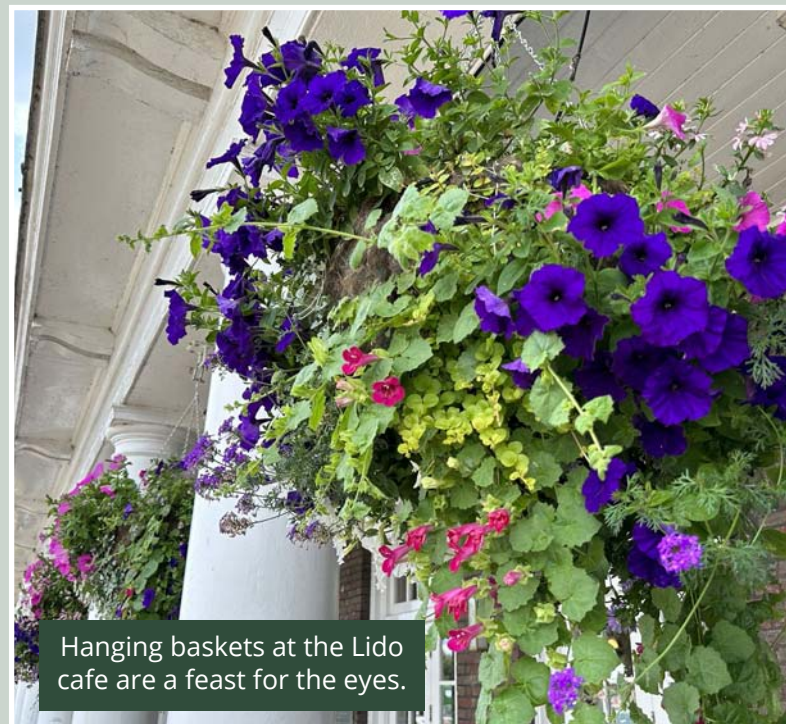
Finally, a huge thank you to all of the team that make Hyde Park what it is. It takes hundreds of people to maintain it and to put on events and concerts, all benefiting the millions of visitors that come to the Park. My thanks to them all.

The team is led by Beth and really has resulted in huge improvements in our horticulture. Currently, they are putting in the spring bedding. The biggest difference has been the area around Victoria Gate, where the planting has been given the theme of Plants for a Purpose, this time focusing on plants used for textiles and dyes; the winter theme is medicinal plants.

There are now opportunities for volunteers to work with the team, with current projects including planting up a winter garden next to the bandstand and putting in 40,000 bulbs along Serpentine Road.

The team's hard work has contributed to us achieving our highest ever Green Flag score.

In July the first Royal Parks Shop opened at the Boat House, selling an array of items themed for the park. The shop aims to offer something new to the park's many visitors.



Hanging baskets at the Lido cafe are a feast for the eyes.



# TWO HEAD GARDENERS ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Volunteers start work on bulb planting along the Serpentine Road.

The designs reflected the creative talents of several members of the gardening team, particularly Phil Newcombe (Assistant Park Manager) and Mark Davies (idverde Team Leader), who between them designed many of the beds, including the black and white beds at the eastern end of Rose Garden which drew a lot of attention and looked particularly stunning in the lower light of the early part of the day.



## IN HYDE PARK...

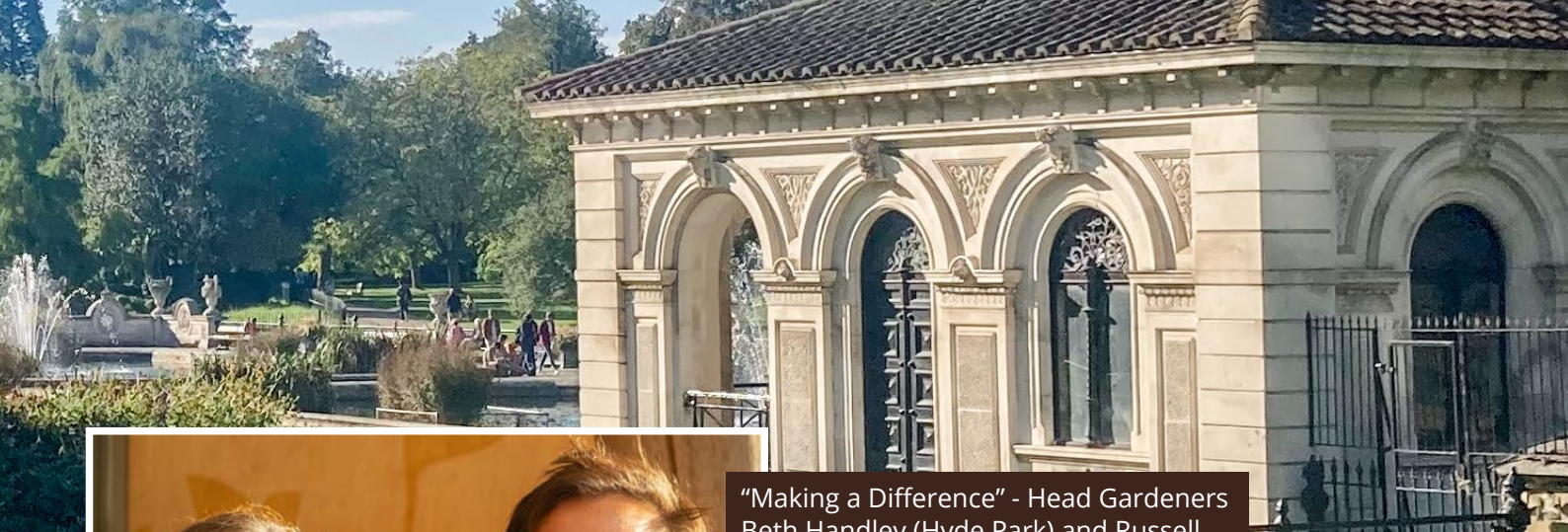
**W**e were so proud of our bedding displays in Hyde Park this summer. All the rain meant that the gardeners spent much less time hand watering and it was much easier to keep on top of the maintenance given how full the borders were with flourishing plants – less room for weeds to grow!

Again, we tried to ensure that there were plenty of flowers attractive to pollinators included in the designs, and we were pleased to see that at any time of day the beds were alive with happy buzzing bees. Around 60% of the plants used were perennial plants which have either returned to the nursery to be potted on for future years or will be planted out in permanent borders across Hyde Park this autumn, a great way to improve the sustainability of our seasonal bedding.

Visitors who take so much pleasure in the visual display may not be aware of how much thought and creativity has gone into designing them. This summer we also had a bed designed to look like clouds on a summer sky (Albert Gate) and the sunset (West Carriage Drive). We hope to promote these efforts more through social media in future, particularly as more and more of the gardening staff are taking an interest in designing.



A display board has now been placed at Victoria Gate where we will share information about all the different purposes plants fulfil in our lives, which will be the subject of themed displays. The central border at Victoria Gate featured plants used in textiles and dyeing this summer. The winter /spring display for this coming season features medicinal plants.



“Making a Difference” - Head Gardeners Beth Handley (Hyde Park) and Russell Stevens (Kensington Gardens)

### ... AND IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

Hopefully you’ve noticed some positive horticultural initiatives over the last year in Kensington Gardens.

The Med comes to Kensington Gardens.



The new planting in front of the Italian Gardens café will remind you of lazy Mediterranean holidays. The plants chosen are all drought-tolerant, and apart from watering for establishment will be left unirrigated, saving on precious resources. The planting palette is mostly from the original design when the café was opened with a few choice additions. The slope should no longer slump, rocks having been added, and the bow top fencing seems to be stopping dogs running through. Once the Rosemary hedge is fully established, I will test the theory that dogs are not fans of highly-scented foliage to pee on....gardening is all about experimentation, so watch this space. It has been a good year for summer bedding, but the weather conditions last autumn and winter were a real struggle for traditional spring bedding plants. It all pulled through in the end, but the added pressure of dogs and snow on the round bed, between the pump house and the Italian Gardens café, took its toll.

The nursery came up trumps and Rob provided me with stock for replanting, (twice!). With so much bedding, there is also a gap in floral interest from late April through to late June, so the next change to be seen will be the round bed living up to its original name ....The Rose Bed.

The South Flower Walk will continue going through a slow renaissance, including the removal of dead, over-mature and self-set shrubs, before replanting can start. FoHP&KG volunteers have been helping recently with lifting and dividing herbaceous perennials in the Albert beds. The weeds are relentless!



The Daisy Ginsberg beds in the North Flower Walk have settled in and the plants really gave a high summer hit. Careful editing will ensure that the most vigorous plants don’t over- dominate.

Peter Pan’s garden is slowly turning into a “Faerie woodland” using pollinator-friendly plants and waging war on invasive weeds.

Waging war on weeds in Peter Pan’s garden.



# BABES IN THE WOOD

by Dimity Spiller

Those who know about these things, will recognise the exotic little trees to the north of the Round Pond as Torbay Palms. But to most of us, they are 'What are those?' or more likely 'What are those doing there?'

Several years ago, a large mature tree developed dangerous tendencies and had to be removed, at which point two tiny trees were found which had been nestling against its roots. They really did look like orphans in a storm but they hung on; having each other for ~~comfort~~ support must have helped. They remained bedraggled and scruffy, not really Kensington Gardens material for around three or four years and then finally, one spring, as with the Ugly Duckling story, they developed into proper upstanding ~~characters~~ trees.

Cordyline Australis to give them their Latin name or the Cabbage tree, as the young leaves and crown are edible, is a native of New Zealand. The trees are found all over both islands and in a great number of variants, some of which are bright pink. As with the silver birch which featured last year, the Cordyline is the first to regenerate after disaster and positively thrives on fire clearance, as all other vegetal competition is removed.

The tree regenerates from rhizomes on the roots, protected from the fire as it burnt through the land. It also loves sunshine, but can tolerate cold down to -9 C. They grow up to 20 metres, ours are not that big but, with the potential growth of 10 feet in three years, they may be soon.

Flowering requires some maturity, so doesn't usually happen until around five or six years old. This fits with the time scale of our pair, which flowered for the first time last year, I think. The flowers are strongly scented and covered with bees and other insects in the summer. The berries are small, white, waxy and poisonous to cats and dogs. Once they have flowered, the single head branches



Where did you come from?

out into two. The effect can be seen in the tree at the head of Launceston Place.

They first came to Britain when collected by Joseph Banks, who was on Captain Cook's first voyage to the Antipodes, in 1769. Real fame, so the story goes, came in World War One. Many wounded New Zealand troops were sent to a hospital in Torquay to recover. A row of Cabbage Trees were planted to make the troops feel at home.

Whatever the truth, the trees loved the semi-tropical climate of Torbay and so developed their new name. As they loved Torquay, so Torquay loved them, recognising their unique selling point. Torquay United Football Club, whose motto is 'Resilience and Durability', even used them on their football shirts 2020-2022.

Resilience and Durability could be the motto of our pair of trees, once orphaned babes in the wood, now fully upstanding citizens of the Park.



## THANK YOU

Where would we be without all these generous people?

**The trustees** work very hard on all your behalves. We couldn't do half of what we do without them.

Our photographers for this Annual Review, **Rob Dowling, Paul Shelley, Ryan Gill.**

Our sub editor **Richard Price.**

**Adrian Barnes at Edox**, who helps us throughout the year with very good design advice and help with everything we produce for you.

And, for the masterful design of this little magazine, we have **Steve Olive** to thank, without whom we

wouldn't be nearly as eye-catching and pleasurable to read.

Sue Price  
Chairman

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# PLANNING APPLICATIONS

by Will Gray



Gas lamp glow in Hyde Park.

As a group, we are consulted by both Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea Councils about any planning applications that might have an impact on the Park. Surprisingly, little of the Park is actually in Kensington - the boundary is the Broadwalk in Kensington Gardens, and only the land to the west of that is actually in the Royal Borough. It's always interesting to see the applications for the temporary plinth beside the Serpentine Gallery. Recently installed is a massive and stunning Georg Baselitz bronze. For those of us

old enough to remember, it brings back memories of the huge Henry Moore exhibition in 1978.

Broadly speaking, we tend to take a neutral stance on most applications, particularly if they are outside the Park itself. The applications themselves are surprisingly wide-ranging, from technical to mundane to predictable. For example, the Serpentine South Gallery applied for a five-day extension of the permission for temporary solar panels on the roof,

the Hilton on Park Lane wants to change the lighting on the edge of the balconies, to LED. One of the more surprising was (yet another) application for the redevelopment of Newcombe House at the top of Kensington Church Street, which it turns out is just visible through a break in the treeline just southeast of the Round Pond. It did take a while to find the exact spot.

The undoubted highlight of the year however wasn't a planning application at all, but a consultation by Westminster Council about possibly replacing gas lamps. It was

technically fascinating - apparently light has a colour temperature, very impressive about how modern LED lighting can mimic almost exactly the look and feel of gas lighting, and quite amazing about what an extraordinarily contentious subject replacing gas lamps is. The memory of the poor man from Westminster Council being aggressively questioned by people with beards and berets, will stay with me for a long, long time.



Georg Baselitz stuns.



## TED TALKS

by Ted Taylor

I'm Ted Taylor, and I'm Jason's assistant in Hyde Park. I don't have to come to the office very often, only occasionally to get on top of what he hasn't done.

On the whole, he's well behaved and when I tell him to stand still, while I go off for the chase, he's mostly obedient. The chase is after the grey squirrels which I can't stand, nor the pigeons and I try to move the parakeets on. There are heaps of food flung about for them all, by even more

annoying people but although I look like a Labrador I'm actually half Springer so I'm not one to gobble my way through any food left around like my greedy Labrador cousins.

I went over to Kensington Gardens but I didn't like it much, they seem a rough lot and they walk around in huge packs accompanied by a single flunky. I feel happier in my own lovely park, if only I could rely on Jason to do the job without my having to check up on him.

# OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE FRIENDS



**A** hectic year with no Covid restrictions has resulted in a variety of activities for a large number of our members.

## WINTER WONDERLAND.

Director, Suzy Griffiths, treated us to a terrific afternoon at Winter Wonderland. We were whisked, as a group of VIPs, from one attraction to another only pausing for more drinks and popcorn, chocolate and other wicked treats.

## PRINCESS DIANA MEMORIAL PLAYGROUND.

Manager Ryan Gill, took us round early one cold, sunny spring morning. Only accessible to groups like us before opening time, we were able to rediscover our inner child. He talked us through the science of children's play and some of the plans afoot for major restoration.

## NURSERY VISIT.

Our regular spring visit, thanks to manager Rob Dowling, is always popular. He shows us round when the enormous glasshouses are stuffed with plants ready to go out to all the Royal Parks. The "going home" presents are much appreciated, and live far longer in their new homes than one would expect of a giant geranium.

## BOATING ON THE SERPENTINE.

Thanks to manager Tom Kiddey, a group of us enjoyed different forms of water-borne activities on a sunny, breezy, evening. Memories were shared of childhood bucket and spade holidays on boating lakes on the prom.

## PLANT SALE.

As always, with thanks to manager Rob Dowling and his colleagues, we are invited to buy "left over" plants at the end of bedding out. A large group of trustees and other members help, and even work the card machine. A very decent sum is handed over to the Royal Parks charity. It is immensely popular with our members and is always sociable and fun.



Another satisfied customer.

## AGM.

Once again, with thanks to an invitation from manager Graham Alderton, our members enjoyed an evening of informative presentations, with beautiful photos, from all our own parks' experts as well as from Kensington Palace. A reception followed in the garden on the warm summer evening. Several members were very grateful for the buggy transport.

## BANDSTAND CONCERTS.

August and September are big months for us. Much preparation goes into planning and organising the concerts on the large bandstand in Hyde Park. The team of trustees start work the minute the last one is over, booking for the following year. It's thanks to their hard work, that music and dancing is there for everybody to enjoy. No booking tickets, free for everybody, and comfortable chairs laid out.

Without our sponsors, too, these would not be possible, so for this year we have the volunteers from the information kiosk, member Carl Richardson, and the Marble Arch BID team to thank for their generosity. And with help from Nick Kwabi (park chairs), Benugo and Colicci, we had three very hot but enjoyable afternoons.

## KENSINGTON PALACE.

As I write, we are approaching our keenly anticipated visit to Kensington Palace at a time when it's not open to the public. Thanks to an invitation from Director Justine Locker, we'll be guided round the Crown to Couture show, and enjoy a talk from Justine over an elevenses in the pavilion.

None of these would be possible without generous invitations, and the hard work of the Friends HP&KG trustees who make sure as many members as possible can enjoy them.



Swinging along in the bandstand.

# PARKS PEOPLE

Sue Price writes



This is our chance to thank, congratulate, wish good luck and bon voyage to all those hard-working people who help run these beautiful spaces.

## STEVE EDWARDS

In July, Steve retired to enjoy some well-earned leisure in a beautiful spot on the Isle of Wight. I was able to talk to him over lunch there in August.

His career with the Royal Parks started straight from college in 1978, and has moved all round the organisation. He's managed Hyde Park, via several roles, in two different nurseries.

My thanks to Steve dates from when I first became chair of the Friends. I was desperate to find opportunities for members to learn more about how things work, what goes on behind the scenes, so feel more supportive. Steve promptly offered us a visit to the nursery, snapped at by us, of course, and ever since we've felt specially involved.

He helped us too, step by step, through the process of staging the bandstand concerts which now feature as a regular event in our calendar.

### Quick fire Q&A.

#### **Proudest achievement?**

His first loves were the nurseries, and he's proudest of the massive modern nursery which replaced the old crumbling edifice.

#### **Loved the most?**

Way back, he lived inside Richmond Park. After closing time he loved the wildlife, the stillness and quiet.

#### **Most recent thoughts?**

He really enjoyed working with the major events team and helping deliver world-class events.

We've all got a lot to thank him for, he's been a well-respected colleague and a good friend to us. We wish him a happy and healthy retirement on the Island.



Steve Edwards talks to us.

## IAN NIGHTINGALE

Steps in at Kensington Gardens.

As a floating assistant manager, Ian has taken over in a variety of situations.

After the very sad death of Theresa Short, Ian has been covering her position and has handled this sensitive situation with tact and diplomacy.

He was managing Brompton Cemetery for some time, and the Friends group there have said how much they'll miss him. Ian has worked in many of the Parks, and it's good to see him in Kensington.



Welcome, Ian, to Kensington Gardens.

## TOM JARVIS

Director of Royal Parks, Tom, has headed east. He accepted an offer to join the team which is to develop King Salman Park in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Tom came to his most recent Royal Parks role via managing Kensington Gardens and then Windsor Great Park.

Tom has been in touch and tells us he is excited by the challenges of developing a 16.7sq km site under such tough conditions. He and his family (and dogs) have survived their first summer and been welcomed. We look forward to further updates.

## DARREN SHARE

As Tom moved east, Darren will become the new director of parks and is moving south from Birmingham City Council.

I know that Birmingham CC never misses out on a gold medal at Chelsea Flower Show. Perhaps we'll see a Royal Parks presence at Chelsea soon?

I look forward to meeting Darren when he arrives.

## SOME GOODBYES

We were sorry to learn of the deaths of the following members during the year:

### SIR PETER WALTERS

Peter died in July aged 92. For 35 years, he was chairman and CEO of BP and through those years worked closely with the PMs of the day, including Margaret Thatcher. A stellar career with many international companies was followed



by commitment to many organisations including the Police Foundation (he was a policeman's son).

He loved the parks, where he regularly walked his three miniature dachshunds and was a member of the Friends for 22 years. He was proud of the 1300 trees he planted in Sussex in recent years.

### CORAL SAMUEL CBE

Coral died in January aged 95. She lived in Kensington for over 70 years and was a life member of, and generous donor to, the Friends for 27 years.

She was a trustee of many charitable organisations and a generous donor. She also founded friends'

groups, was a patron of several charities, and a school governor.

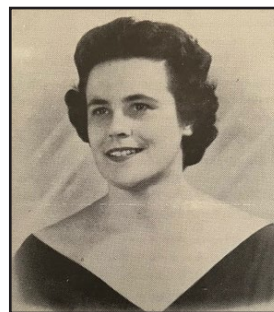
One of her greatest regrets was being sent down when an undergraduate, blaming it on having got into the wrong group of friends, notably one being a lady student who "wore very scanty underwear to parties"!



### NANCY DIBLEY

Nancy died aged 91 in May and had been a member for 20 years. She often wrote to us telling us how much she had loved the parks since 1958, and especially swimming in the Lido.

She was a talented viola player, a member of the BBC variety orchestras and gave recitals at the Wigmore Hall and Royal Festival Hall, as well as teaching music. Her instrument was a 1737 Landulphus.



She was also a member of The Hyde Park Estates.

## FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP

Do you receive our regularly emailed Newsletter?

If not, please contact our Membership Secretary, Lynden Easton [lynden@lydeneaston.co.uk](mailto:lynden@lydeneaston.co.uk) and she will add you to our lists.

	October 2022	October 2023
Life members	223	235
Annual members	605	634
Total	828	869



## Mountbatten Christmas Cards

Beautiful prints of original watercolour paintings, including Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park.

'The Friends' benefit by a donation from the sales of their cards to our members when they nominate us as their Charity. The full range of 'local' images can be viewed at:

The full range of 'local' images can be viewed at [www.mountbattencards.com/shop-3](http://www.mountbattencards.com/shop-3)

