



# THE FRIENDS OF HYDE PARK & KENSINGTON GARDENS

Reg Charity: 1168319

Annual Review 2022

Founded in 1991

## OUR PARKS TOOK CENTRE STAGE

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



Sue Price with managers Andy Williams (L) (Kensington Gardens), and Jason Taylor (R) Hyde Park

Since our last Annual Review (October 2021) we have had so much to enjoy, to celebrate and then, in the last weeks, to mourn.

And through it all we have our skilled and dedicated teams to thank for all their hard work at a time when the eyes of the world were upon us.

### WINTER WONDERLAND

'WW' came back and, in a different form with ticketing only and reduced numbers, turned out to be a great success. I thought it had transformed into a grandparents' charter; treating grandchildren was fun without the massive crowds and endless queuing. I put one more scary ride under my belt, which turned out not to be as bad as I was expecting, and appreciated several visits.

British Summer Time Concerts were back, too, with a slightly different concert pattern. Without BBC Proms in the Park in September there could be three weekends of BST concerts and midweek activities in June and July.

Weather stayed kind, performers all had their different fan groups, and the increased programme of free midweek events were appreciated by large numbers.

My family group loved Eagles and sang along (shows our age) but I think the Stones fans claim to be

the elite, especially those who have been to all the concerts over the years. One member was at the first unofficial one in the Cockpit area (no arrangements or permission at all) when hundreds of poor half-dead butterflies were released. There are probably more of you out there who remember it.

### STATE OCCASIONS

More celebrations of the Platinum Jubilee took place on the Parade Ground with a gun salute. Hyde Park was ready to look after crowds who might have become too crushed in the Mall and St James Park.

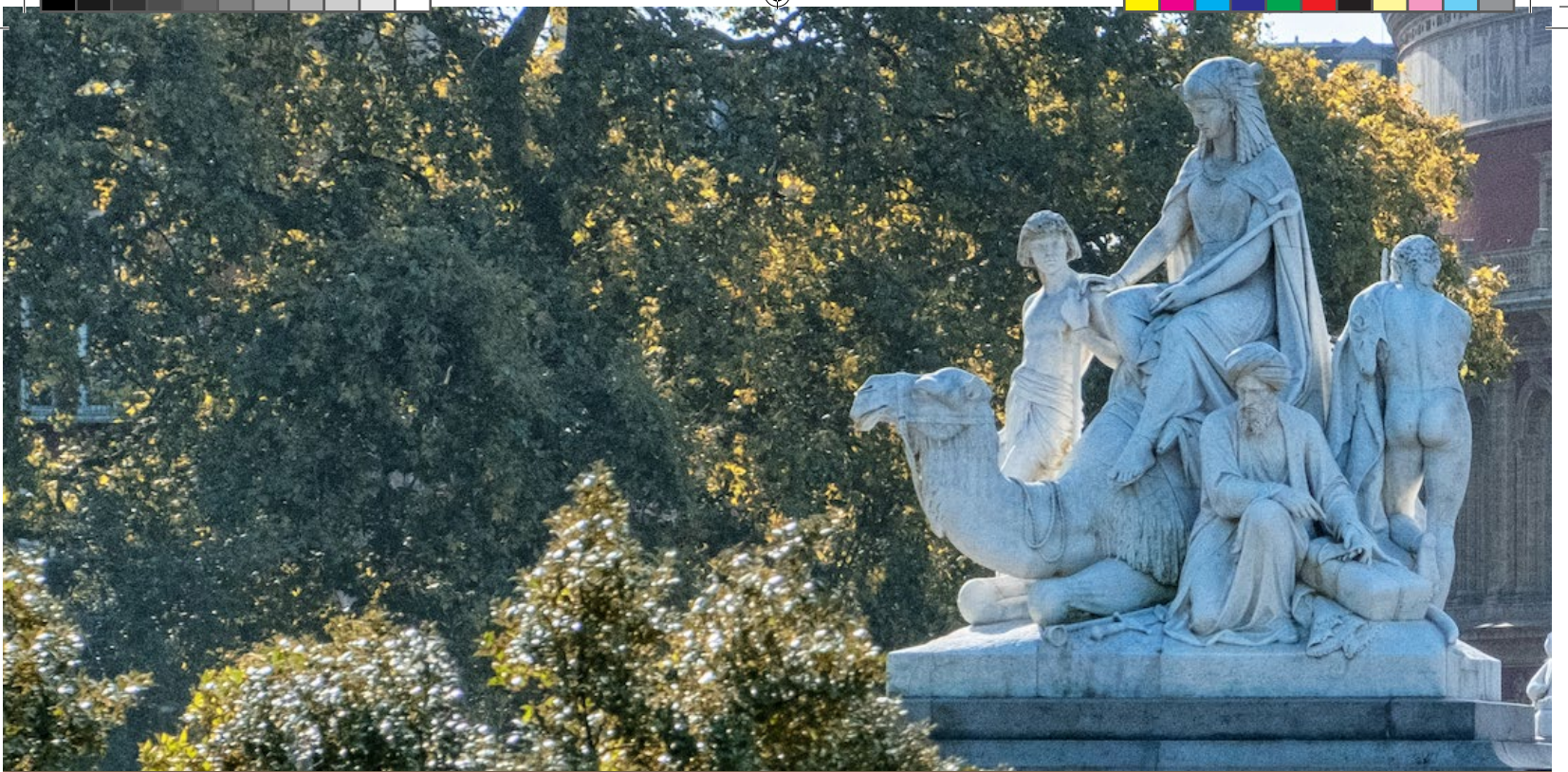
Then, on September 8, with the death of Queen Elizabeth II, the Royal Parks took their place in history.

With the death of our Queen the years of planning, hard work, huge effort and goodwill from everybody came to the fore. It was a period which we will all have special memories of and I'm not sure us ordinary people could have imagined would be so affecting.



Hyde Park hosted gun salutes, giant screens and sound systems, cannon fire to match marching feet, and so many flowers. And then, at the very end, the hearse with the coffin and crown, diamonds flashing in the sunshine, passed through the Decimus Burton Screen along South Carriage Drive, through to Kensington Gardens, past the Albert Memorial and out on to the road to Windsor.

What a time to have witnessed!



# KENSINGTON GARDENS

*Kensington Gardens Manager, Andy Williams, writes:*

## NATIONAL MOURNING

Following the recent sad death of HM The Queen the years we had spent on Operation London Bridge were put into action. We knew that the plan had taken account of the Queen's wishes.

In Kensington Gardens we immediately set about tidying the route the hearse would take on its final journey to Windsor. It would pass through Coalbrookdale Gate, past the Albert Memorial and leave the park through Queens Gate.

My thanks go to idverde, Vinci and Colicci as well as to our own major events team for all their work during this time.

## FLORAL TRIBUTES

At the end of the period of mourning the thousands of floral tributes were taken by Richmond Park shire

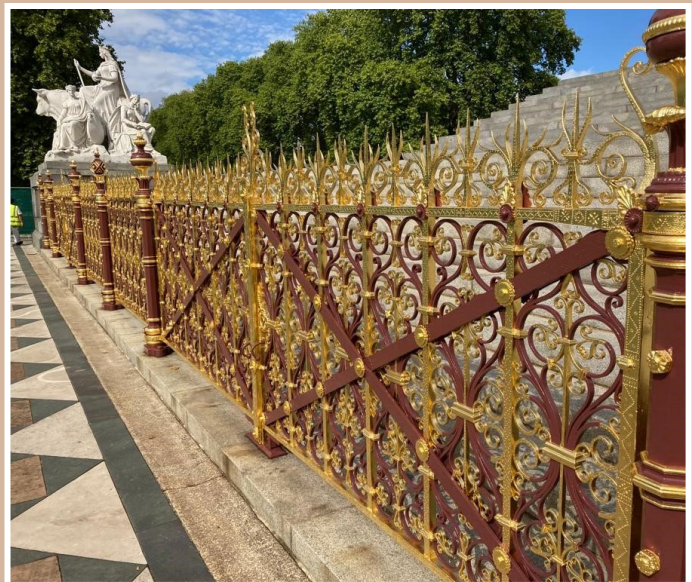


Shire horses Heath and Nobby taking floral tributes to the KG leaf pen for composting

horses to our composting area in Kensington Gardens. Here, the flowers and plants were blended with other green waste before shredding. The compost will be used as a mulch and to enrich the soil in our flowerbeds and parkland grass.

## ALBERT MEMORIAL

At the Albert Memorial maintenance and repair of the ornamental gates and railings nears completion. All locks and hinges have been improved. The gold leaf re-gilding is the real showstopper.



## HELP NATURE THRIVE

The Help Nature Thrive campaign is funded by the People's Postcode Lottery. As part of this initiative we are creating a new refuge at the Round Pond, providing respite for waterfowl from the pressures of dogs and



people. We are monitoring pollinators in the North Flower Walk. We will continue to retain standing and fallen deadwood.

We will be creating an ecological scrape in our northern meadows involving the removal of surface vegetation and topsoil, exposing nutrient poor acidic subsoils and allowing dormant wildflower seed banks to emerge. Yellow Rattle will be sown into Buck Hill Meadow.

### **HORTICULTURAL AND TREE PLANTING**

Autumn planting at the Italian Gardens will be in shades of apricot, peach, pink and white. Nearby, in a hot, dry spot, silver-grey leaved Mediterranean plants will be used. Planting at the Peter Pan garden will be improved.

In Kensington Gardens Indian Horse Chestnut, Small Leaved Lime, Common Walnut, Black Walnut, Common Alder and the Freeman's Maple will be planted. We have a dozen or so replacements for the London Plane and Sweet Chestnut trees that have failed to establish at the Dials and at Lancaster Walk.

We hope to complete all planting by December and will continue to use tree water-bags.

### **BANDSTAND**

We are finalising plans for the restoration of Kensington Gardens bandstand. Alongside general redecoration we will be improving access,

redesigning the stair and railings, and replacing the surrounding paving materials. Our fundraising team is seeking sponsorship for a summer programme.

### **DROUGHT AND HEAT**

During the summer of intense drought and heat young and old trees showed signs of stress leading to dropped leaves. Recent autumn rain produced spring flowering. The long term impact of this harsh weather is yet to be assessed. Our irrigation comes from a borehole. We are extending this system to the South Flower Walk this winter.

### **THE ALLOTMENT**

A big thank-you to all the volunteers who helped out at the harvest festival on 11 September. We had an excellent response from the public who came to learn about organic food growing, to take part in games, and to purchase local produce.

Noticeboards, maps, interpretation panels and Queen Caroline's Temple, are all on the list for renewal or updating.

As you can probably tell, it has been another busy year in Kensington Gardens....



# HYDE PARK

*Hyde Park Manager, Jason Taylor, writes:*



## IT WAS A GOOD YEAR

**A**fter the recent periods so badly affected by the pandemic, 2022 has been a good year. We have, of course, had high temperatures and a lack of rain. The last twelve months have felt much more like the Hyde Park we would expect, with lots of visitors, incredible events, and non-stop activity. New contractors, idverde, have taken over maintenance in both parks and is focusing on horticulture, with a team of skilled gardeners. Victoria border, with funding by Help Nature Thrive, has new plants and shrubs. In 2023 the central part of the border will have plants used for textiles and dyeing. Over the last few years, we have planted tens of thousands of bulbs across Hyde Park. We are machine-planting bulbs on Apsley Arch Lawns and extending the bulb and summer meadows in the Rose Garden and next to the bowling green.

With the help of volunteers, there will be more daffodils on Serpentine Road, snowdrops at the Holocaust Memorial and bluebells in the Victoria border. Rejuvenating the beds at the bowling green is underway and will continue in the future at the Old Police House, the Bandstand and Lido shrubberies. Our borehole produced water but even with that and the late season rain there is likely to be a longer-term effect from the long dry summer, particularly on the chestnut and younger trees. During the winter the management of the Hyde Park Nursery, the public swimming at the Lido and the boating have all been brought back in house.

Tom Kiddey manages boating and other leisure facilities in the Royal Parks





Watching and sharing

On 8 September we heard the sad news that the Queen had passed away; clearly a shock even though we had been planning for 'Operation London Bridge' for years.

In Hyde Park, we hosted three gun-salutes, and a floral tribute site. We were part of the procession route that saw the monarch's hearse leave London. All of this was shown on six large screens to around 200,000 people.

Other than my sadness at the Queen's death after a lifetime of service to the country, which didn't really hit me until after the funeral itself, the thing that I most remember is being part of such an incredible team who came together to put on an amazing event which did the Queen, and the nation, proud.

Pawel, our Technical Officer, who left to join Regents Park as Assistant Manager, is being replaced by Jo Hayward. We welcome her to our team.

I'd like to finish with a huge thank-you to all the teams and organisations who work in Hyde Park and make it such an incredible place to be in.



Time to reflect



# THE NURSERY

*Rob Dowling - Nursery Manager, Hyde Park*



volunteering programme at the nursery. We started small on a Tuesday morning. Three of the first volunteers were members of the Friends of Hyde Park & Kensington Gardens (and they are still with us). From that first session we have now grown to ten volunteer sessions each week, with over forty regular volunteers, and more signing up. The volunteers have been invaluable in assisting with those tasks that the core team would otherwise not have the time to do. These are those tasks that are the difference between good quality plants, and excellent quality plants.

Sustainability has been key to what we do at the nursery. We have looked at all areas of production to determine if there is a more sustainable way of doing them. We have successfully moved to peat-free compost and are ahead of many in the nursery industry for doing this. Hanging baskets are traditionally lined with sphagnum moss which is harvested from vulnerable habitats.

We sourced a product made of recycled wool and this has performed well over the summer. Pests and diseases are treated using bio-controls. These are insects that prey on pests such as aphids, whitefly and thrips. This reduces the need for insecticides and other chemicals. Finally, our plant feed is made from a seaweed-based product. After it has been applied the glasshouses have the scent of seaside.

It feels as though a considerable time has passed since the management of the Hyde Park Plant Nursery passed to TRP. I was on holiday in Tenerife at the time and was asked if I had availability in my work schedule to take on a really interesting project.

Almost nine months later I am now the permanent Nursery Manager, and we are in the process of despatching our second plant production. These are the plants for the spring displays across all the Royal Parks. The insourcing of the nursery service has been a busy time but also really rewarding as there has been the opportunity to introduce some positive changes and create a vibrant nursery service that reflect the charitable objects of The Royal Parks.

One of the changes I am proudest of has been the creation and subsequent establishment of a



Jo takes a well-earned break



The hot weather in the summer might seem like a positive for growing well-watered plants, but this came at a time when we were trying to propagate spring plants such as primulas. These require cold periods to germinate, so the heat was the opposite of what they needed. Our propagation expert Jo was moving her trolleys of primula seedlings between glasshouse and shaded barn to try and protect them from the worst of the summer heat. The heat slowed them down, but we do have methods at our disposal to help them catch up. As we commence the planning of the summer displays for 2023, we can now look back on what worked and what might need some more attention. One area is propagating a greater volume of plants from in-house stock as this is more sustainable and makes use of our nursery skills. Over the years we have amassed a good selection of stock plants and we have added to that this year with more salvias and fuchsia.

Those of you that have visited the nursery will have likely seen the collection of scented pelargoniums that we have, with many varieties that are not commercially available.



A few 'extras' saved from the floral tributes

Growing plants from seed is also a more sustainable and cost-effective method of propagation. As it is sometimes fiddly and time consuming, having an enthusiastic team of volunteers has meant we can produce more in this way.

There is only so much I can articulate here so I would encourage you to attend one of the Friends of Hyde Park & Kensington Gardens nursery tours. We also work with volunteers from the Friends on two nursery plant sales each year. This is an opportunity to purchase some of the surplus plant stock from the nursery, with the Buckingham Palace red pelargonium being the star purchase each summer.



# WHITE BIRCH/SILVER BIRCH/BETULA PENDULA

By Dimity Spiller

This most graceful, ghostly tree is immediately identifiable by the flaky white bark. As the Latin name suggests it has a mild weeping habit, which differentiates it from its cousin, the downy birch.

Of the same family as hornbeams, hazel and alder, it is thought to have originated in China during the Cretaceous period and would have known T Rex and his friends the Triceratops. It now grows in all temperate regions of the world, sometimes hotter than temperate but there at a higher altitude. The only place it is not native is, oddly, North America but once introduced there it has flourished to such an extent that it is regarded as an invasive species in parts of both USA and Canada.

It is a pioneer tree, the first to appear once the Ice Age cover began to thaw and even now it is the first to colonise fire-ravaged areas. It is deciduous, the leaves turning yellow before dropping. In the spring there are catkins, long yellowy male ones and short upright green female ones. Once pollinated by the wind, the female ones redden and release thousands of tiny seeds in the autumn. The light shade cast by the trees allows a thick undergrowth, which supports a huge range of wildlife.

The trees are full of benefits for humans; the wood is heavy and dense, good for furniture and the bobbins etc for the C19 Lancashire cotton mills. The bark was used in the tanning industry but can also be turned into shoes, boxes, bowls or even canoes, while the inner bark was ground into flour in times of famine. The sap can be made into a range of drinks, both cordials and alcoholic.



It is probably the pioneer aspect, that led to the silver birch's association with new beginnings and the association with the Celtic goddess Brigid, lover of poets. It is the first tree to come into leaf in the spring and provided the maypoles for dancing around at the pre-Christian Beltane Feast, the Festival of New Beginnings, held on 1 May. The bark is excellent kindling and starts the main fire at the festival. All domestic fires were put out and then rekindled from this.

Due to the medicinal properties of the bark and leaves, brooms made with birch twigs didn't just sweep and clear but can add a protective element. Beating yourself with birch twigs after a sauna, is seen as healthy. It was thought that herding a barren cow with a birch pole encouraged conception and ensured a healthy calf from a pregnant one. Of course, this purifying aspect is powerfully suggested by the colour of the bark. For all these reasons it is apposite that the quiet Holocaust Memorial stone to the east of the Serpentine should be accompanied by a small grove of silver birch.

So put away the noisy leaf-blower and give your garden paths the ring of confidence with a good birch besom.

## Mountbatten Christmas Cards

*A donation to the Friends would be welcome.*

This company produces snowy prints of original watercolour paintings of London, her parks and open spaces, including Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park.

There is an opportunity to support the Friends as a nominated charity, where a share of the net proceeds will benefit us. Last year, we were fortunate in receiving a cheque for £90.

The link [www.mountbattencards.com/shop-3](http://www.mountbattencards.com/shop-3) shows the cards that feature our parks.





# MEMBERS' NEWS ROUND-UP

What a year! Not always as we expected, but still a busy one.

## THE HYDE PARK NURSERY

With Rob Dowling in charge, we have been invited into the nursery quite often. Some of us have been planting and replanting according to the seasons entirely from the nursery plant sales. Our gardens and window boxes must look like Royal Park clones, and it's quite fun to spot something planted in the parks beds which we feel are really ours. All the takings go to the Royal Parks charity which is satisfactory and it's a great occasion to meet each other in the process of lining up trays of pots.



Since we were not discreetly struggling to buy the best plants, we also enjoyed our nursery tour on a long summer evening. The Pimms at the end went down well, but before that we did learn a lot (honestly) from Rob - and members were delighted with their going-home presents of enormous Buckingham Palace geraniums which, from all accounts, are still thriving.



## WINTER WONDERLAND

Just before Christmas there was another fierce warning about Covid, so the numbers of members who enjoyed our VIP experience was reduced. However, Suzy Griffiths, who is the director of WW, laid on a great afternoon, all of us much restored and revived at various locations with mulled wine - and we were whisked through like royalty. We ended watching a show in the circus tent sitting in tiny little boxes with velvet curtains. Our very grateful thanks to Suzy and her team.

by Sue Price

## BUTTERFLY AND INVERTEBRATE WALK

This always depends on a reasonably sunny and windless day. This year the heat and drought were an issue and the population of butterflies had struggled. Our photo shows May, who was the best communicator we could have wished for, and her colleague swishing butterfly nets. The walk started and finished in Rangers Lodge garden which is beautifully planted with a pool - and a heaven for invertebrates. Cool drinks at lunchtime were pretty heavenly for the members as well.



## OUR JULY AGM AT THE LOOKOUT

We were so grateful also to The Royal Parks team at the LookOut for inviting us to hold our AGM in this special eco-friendly building, tucked away in the centre of Hyde Park. It was built to develop and deliver an education programme for children and is a great example of sympathetic materials use in a modern building.



The pretty gardens and pool - and the sunny and shady decks surrounding the building - made it the perfect venue. There were presentations, a lively Q&A session and then we finished with a breakout into the garden for drinks and conversation. Nobody seemed in a hurry to leave and the British Summer Time music festival mid-week activities taking place on the parade ground area next to us gave us some interesting background music. Special thanks to Graham Alderton who manages the centre - and who made us so welcome. We are already planning activities for next year, so watch out for emails with details as the year progresses. Hopefully with no stops and starts for Covid we can make arrangements and know that they'll be able to go ahead.

[www.friendshpkg.org.uk](http://www.friendshpkg.org.uk)

# HORSES PLAYED THEIR PART

by Sue Price:

During the days between her Majesty the Queen's death and her state funeral her horses became an important element in the ceremonial proceedings.

Early on the morning after the announcement, the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery were warming up by riding round Hyde Park looking solemn and immaculate and dragging gun carriages in preparation for a 96 gun salute at 1pm. The Death Gun Salute is only fired for a monarch and marks the number of years of their life, so this is a very rare occurrence. I was told that these days, half of the King's Troop riders of these comparatively small horses are women officers. The pairs of black horses were rarer than the other colours and during this period were naturally much in demand.

Our own Household Cavalry (the Life Guards and the Blues and Royals) are at home in their barracks in Hyde Park and are like old friends as we see them training daily in their manège on Rotten Row and for early morning rides on the streets all around the parks.

The most mighty of the horses are the police horses which live in the stables at the Old Police House in Hyde Park. Dave Oliver is in charge of these mounts and knows all their idiosyncrasies. He looks after the ones which are sickly, trains and tries out new arrivals and is always proud of their achievements. A few years ago the Friends, armed with apples and carrots, were able to visit them in their stables during the horses' lunchtime.

On the day of the solemn procession the coffin was walked from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Hall to the booming of Big Ben and a Hyde Park cannon salute which perfectly synchronised every minute of the route. Police horses escorted the military horses at various places en route.



I came across Dave Oliver standing on the grass on South Carriage Drive with a row of buckets of water in front of him, a folding rigid plastic mounting block and equipment for cleaning and polishing hooves. Some of his horses had come from farther afield and it was a hot day. He was ready with tlc, though he thought some of them would just 'mess around' with the water and he expected that both horses and riders would need to stretch their backs while dismounted. Later he told me how proud he had been of them, and how none of them 'had shown any silly behaviour' despite the noise from the cannon-fire and the shaking ground. They all got top marks from their boss, and I think that applied to both the riders and the horses.

And then to the final days at the end of the official mourning period and it was time to move the floral tributes. The mightiest horses of them all, 18.3 hands-high Shire horses, Heath and Nobby, came from their stables in Richmond Park to move the flowers on a flat dray from The Green Park to the composting enclosure in Kensington Gardens. They were steady in everything they did, standing, waiting, moving purposefully across three parks, standing again while noisy machinery moved round them in the leaf pen - and they were clearly in a reverie while their noses were being stroked. Their attendants were turned out in dark formal overcoats and bowler hats.

What a treat to see so many horses in the middle of London and how appropriate when you remember how much the Queen loved horses and was so knowledgeable about them all her life.





# WILMA'S TAIL

by Wilma:

suited to a small place, and I'm not much good for a mum who wants to do hair styling. But I have lovely melting brown eyes.

So, when I was taken into the school hall to meet Carolyn and Tony I just fell on to my back; I couldn't help myself. They looked into my eyes and at my tummy and took me home straight away to meet Peter Rabbit. I got on very well with him for another eight years, but I am on my own now.

I have favourite places, apart from the parks. The first is on a runway I've managed to create all along the back of the plants in my dad's flower beds. There I have made some nice dusty earthy areas which I cool down on. Secondly, I like to take up a whole sofa and, with my very, very long legs sticking out, I manage to slow all passers-by down and they give me a few pats as they edge round me.

I've had too long this summer walking round with the cone of shame on my head - to stop me scratching a tick-bite which I got on a country visit.

But now I'm looking beautiful, in my unusual way, once again.

**M**y early memories are of being taken to a boarding school. It's called Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and was very smart. But I'd been waiting for end of term and going-home time. Apparently, my new mum and dad, Carolyn and Tony, were desperate for a tall girl like me and I, too, was desperate to go home. I appreciate that, as I'm a grey, wire-haired lurcher, I'm not well

## TAP YOUR FEET AND DANCE TO THE BEAT!

by Sue Price:

In August our concert series on the Hyde Park bandstand kicked off again after a long Covid break. The South London Dance Orchestra (SLJO), plus dancing teacher, were the first to draw in a large crowd. Several hundred learnt the steps in the warm-up and then danced away the afternoon. The ice cream van was busy and the trustees, partners and helpers were also busy setting up and reloading hundreds of chairs.

Later in August the Melodians Steel Orchestra came along to play performing their cool version of steel band music, a lot of it specially arranged for their pans line-up. More toes tapped as they struck up with a Beatles medley.

Sadly, our two planned September concerts were postponed until 2023 as they were due to take place during the time of mourning for the death of the Queen. So, look forward next year to the return of Orqesta Mambarito and the Snowdown Welfare Colliery Band from East Kent.

Without all the support from generous donors we wouldn't have been able to fund this ambitious programme. And the other parks organisations, who were able to help us with the logistics, have been generous with their time and energy.



### Thanks to the following:

Chairs: Nick Kwabi of Park Deck Chairs

Jessica Nelson: from the Hyde Park events team for all the organisation.

Colicci: for hydrating the performers.

And to this generous group for their donations:

Carl Richardson, Tom Newman, Colicci, The volunteers form the information kiosk, SEBRA, The Victoria, Paddington, Ozuko Sushi and Pan Asian Cuisine, Lancaster Gate, Taormina Restaurant Lancaster Gate, Peter and Dimity Spiller, Lorraine Buckland, The Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens (us!) ...and a member who wishes to remain anonymous.

We would love to see you all in the summer 2023. So get those dancing shoes on.

[www.friendshpkg.org.uk](http://www.friendshpkg.org.uk)



## SOME GOODBYES

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

### **PATRICIA HITHERSAY**

Patricia had been a Friends member and a volunteer at the information kiosk for eight years. Her good friend, Sheila Houghton, tells us that she enjoyed meeting people when she was on duty in the kiosk and loved walking her labradors in Hyde Park. Sheila says her friends were always fascinated by the tales she had to tell of her days volunteering.

### **ANN KNOWLES**

FHPKG member, and another kiosk volunteer, Ann died on 14th October. Heather Beckwith, who

volunteered with her, described her as a feisty American lady whose company she very much enjoyed, and together they put the world to rights. Ann's daughter, Josephine Defty, says her mother loved walking her Parson Russell terrier Poric in both parks. Josephine tells us that her mother encouraged her to join the Friends and looks on her membership with affection and gratitude.

### **MRS BETHEL**

She had been a member for 25 years. Her niece tells us she loved Kensington Gardens, especially in the springtime.

Thanks to Lynden Easton for gathering together these memories of our Friends.

## FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP

Our membership secretary is trustee Lynden Easton, a talented and energetic colleague. She reports that our membership numbers continue to grow.

### **How do new members hear about us?**

Those who have told us report :

- 28 recommendations from friends and family
- 19 from the parks notice boards
- 5 directly from the website
- 3 from events

	October 2021	October 2022
Life members	199	223
Annual members	586	605
Total	785	828

As well as looking after our membership Lynden also sends out our regular Newsletters by email (Mailchimp). To see how this form of contact goes, well or otherwise, she tracks and records statistics.

The Newsletter reaches 772 members and 55 parks contacts. Mailchimp reports that 75% of the emails carrying our Newsletters are opened – a high percentage, apparently. The editions with the highest opening rates were our issues on Cavalry Sunday and on the Royal Memory.

Our thanks to Lynden for painstaking work on keeping in touch with our membership.

## IT'S A TEAM EFFORT

Behind the scenes and supporting everything we do are your trustees. Your chance to meet them and thank them personally is at our AGM. They work very hard and are a talented and highly skilled bunch of volunteers. Helped as we are by many others as well, we are a lucky organisation.

To produce this Annual Review, we have others to whom we are extremely grateful. Paul Shelley is our accredited photographer whose work you will also have seen in our email newsletters. He is also our picture editor. Other photos were supplied by Rob and Andrew Dowling (and me).

Richard Price is our technical editor, getting everything tied up neatly ready for Steve Olive. Steve is the magician who makes it all look so professional and attractive to read. His business is as

a professional designer, so we are lucky to have him. Adrian Barnes, from printers Edox, looks after us as well and has been helpful all through the year. Then there's me, I chivvy and chase, do a bit of editing and, when cornered, write a bit too.

Sue Price  
Chairman

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