

Protecting the Park
Chairman's Letter, Summer 2010

The Friends has a new motto: "Protecting Richmond Park's peace and natural beauty for future generations". The words are taken from our new objectives as a charity. What do they mean and why those particular words?

They reflect our belief that we have a responsibility to future generations to pass Richmond Park on in at least as good a state as we inherited it. Richmond Park is a unique natural asset – a large slice of nature in the midst of a crowded urban area, with a landscape that has evolved gradually over the centuries. For Londoners it provides an escape to peace and tranquillity. For the wildlife, including some very rare species, it is home.

Natural assets are special. We did not create them, yet we are depleting them rapidly; at the present rate there will be little left for future generations. The future will be awash with man-made assets – all sorts of devices for entertainment, transport, health, looking good and so on - but it will be perilously short of natural assets and Richmond Park will be even more valuable then. If we do not preserve it, future generations may well look back at us and ask how we could have squandered such an inheritance.

"A culture is no better than its woods", said the poet W.H. Auden, bemoaning man's destruction of forests and woodlands. If that is true, Richmond Park's 500 acres of woodlands and plantations, with their 100,000 trees, ought to provide a rich and glorious basis for our culture.

But we tend to be complacent about nature. We have tamed it, so it cannot have much effect on us anymore. However, every so often it disrupts our nice, ordered lives, as the Icelandic volcano showed, or destroys something we hold dear but take for granted. Let us hope that the threats to the Park's trees do not go that far.