



# The First 50 Years

*A History of the  
Friends of Richmond Park*



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**Front cover photographs (top to bottom):**

Col John Gueritz and Wendy Macaulay, 1961 and 2010

The Friends' 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, 1986

Placing of the Friends' plaque marking Two Storm Wood, 2003

Walking the Wall, 2003

Plaque commemorating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Lewis's successful court battle, 2008

**Back cover photograph:** Stag roaring by Steve Morgan

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Written by Mary Pollard and Ron Crompton, 2011.

With thanks to Michael Davison, Mary Thorpe and David Thorpe for their invaluable contributions.

## Foreword by HRH Princess Alexandra

I am delighted to write the foreword to this History of the Friends of Richmond Park. I have lived in the Park for the last fifty years, and have a great affection for it, as I imagine the members of the Friends do.

The Park is unique. Its wildlife, its ancient trees and its open grassland combine to provide a beauty, peace and tranquillity that is difficult to find anywhere else in this part of the country. It is a wonderful antidote to the pressures of modern life.

The fact that the Park has been protected and conserved over the last fifty years owes much to the work of the Friends and others like them. Without them the Park would undoubtedly have become more urbanised and less tranquil.

We should thank Mary Gueritz and Wendy Macaulay for the initiative they took to establish the Friends in 1961. We should also thank all of those who have given much time and effort since then to the Friends and the Park.

As I read through the History, I was reminded of many of the events of the past fifty years. No doubt the next fifty years in the Park will be equally eventful. I take comfort in knowing that the Friends will continue to campaign, inform and educate the public, organise volunteers, and support conservation of wildlife in the way they always have. I am in no doubt that their aim — to protect the peace and natural beauty of Richmond Park for future generations — will be as important over the next fifty years as it has been over the last fifty.



*Photo: Hugo Burnand*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexandra". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

**HRH Princess Alexandra**

NOTICE OF INAUGURAL MEETING

'THE FRIENDS OF RICHMOND PARK

Members of the Richmond Society (and others interested) are invited to attend

THE INAUGURAL MEETING  
OF  
THE FRIENDS OF RICHMOND PARK  
to be held at  
THE STATION HOTEL, RICHMOND  
on  
MONDAY, 27th MARCH at 8 p.m.

Lt. Col. John Gueritz will be in the Chair

Current developments at the eastern end of Hyde Park and the north-western tip of Green Park - both now totally sacrificed to the needs of motor traffic, and more still to come - show all too clearly that the Royal Parks are now regarded as 'fair game' for road improvement, and already there are ominous signs that Richmond Park is no longer safe from future extensive 'improvements'

The raising of the speed limit from the distinctive 20 mph and the opening of the Park to motor traffic for a few hours after dark, both perhaps fairly small changes in themselves, are seen as the first two steps in a series which, if not checked at the outset, will in the end spell ruin of Richmond Park as we know it.

Richmond Park must be kept out of the main road traffic system

It must be preserved for those (including motorists) who wish to enjoy its peace and beauty.

No concessions at all must be made to motorists who wish to use the roads of Richmond Park as a throughway.

Over the next five or ten years enormous pressures are likely to build up to use the Park for more and more through motor traffic. The first steps have already been taken. They must be reversed if possible. And each subsequent step must be resisted and contested to the full. Otherwise? There is no space here to paint the picture of an 'improved' Richmond Park. We shall try to do so at our Meeting on 27th March. If you are interested please come along. If you feel all this is 'a lot of fuss about nothing' then take a look at what has happened to the eastern end of Hyde Park before you make up your mind!

Joint Hon. Sec. Mrs. Wendy Macaulay  
52 Rosemont Road, Richmond.  
RICHmond 6845

# In The Beginning

## A Unique Space

Richmond Park is a unique space. Today it is recognised as a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Grade One Historic Landscape and a European Special Area of Conservation, but it has always been an oasis of peace in the frenetic urban setting that surrounds it. Its timeless beauty appeals to a whole variety of visitors, who come to enjoy it for many reasons.

Some people simply like to walk in the Park and view the host

of flora and fauna.

Others come to

participate in

sports, such as

running, cycling

and kite flying.

Dog owners and

horse riders enjoy

the huge spaces

for exercising their

animals.

Whatever their

interests, visitors

to the Park have an impact on it, and back in

1961 our everyday use of the Park began to

become a tangible threat to its fragile

environment.

## Threats to Richmond Park

In August 1960 the speed limit on Richmond Park roads had been raised from 20mph to 30mph, and despite its not being part of the national highway there was a growing tendency for motorists to use the Park as a cut-through. A recent bus strike had drawn attention to this alternative route to work, and the increase in traffic was significant, as were associated deaths to deer and other environmental issues. The very preservation of the Park as a peaceful place of public pleasure was endangered. The Minister of Works, Lord John Hope, ruled

that the Park gates should be opened after dark until 8pm, further increasing the risk of accidents.

Around the same time, part of Hyde Park had been assigned to the main highway system to improve the flow of traffic in central London, with detrimental environmental effects in terms of loss of trees and parkland, and increases in pollution and noise. It was feared that Richmond Park too would be threatened with such a sacrifice to create a new road

from Shepherds

Bush Common,

which would

join the

Kingston by-

pass by cutting

through the east

side of

Richmond Park

and form part of

the national

highway

network.

***“Richmond Park must be kept out of the main road traffic system. It must be preserved for those (including motorists) who wish to enjoy its peace and beauty.***

***No concession at all must be made to motorists who wish to use the roads of Richmond Park as a throughway”***

***Wendy Macaulay, 1961***

## The Formation of the Friends of Richmond Park

In a greengrocer’s shop in Friars Stile Road, Richmond, Mrs Mary Gueritz and Mrs Wendy Macaulay discussed the need to combat the gradual urbanisation of the Park, and to make the public conscious of what might happen if nothing were done. They decided that their concerns for the Park must be acted upon before the threats became reality. With some fellow supporters they set about alerting others, sending letters to the local and national press, and raising awareness by seeking help in lobbying MPs. Backing was strong, and it was soon clear that a formal support group for the Park should be formed.

The Friends of Richmond Park was officially established on Monday March 27 1961, when its inaugural meeting took place at the Station Hotel in Richmond. It was chaired by Colonel John Gueritz, who was Mary's husband and a Richmond councillor, and 112 people attended. Messages of encouragement came from far and wide, including from the poet John Betjeman, Sir Julian Huxley, and from several Members of Parliament. Representatives from twelve local bodies attended in support, including the Richmond Society, the Pedestrians Association for Road Safety, and the Cyclists' Touring Club.



*Lt Col John Gueritz,  
First Chairman*

The new society recognised that Richmond Park “served as an oasis of peace to which thousands went each week for pleasure and relaxation” and concerns were expressed that “the Park should not be looked upon as a

relief for the main traffic routes out of London”. The Friends committee resolved to press for the speed limit to be returned to 20mph, and also for a speedy removal of the old Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) camp near Kingston Gate, which covered 53 acres and had been released by the War Department for return to parkland, but with no action yet being taken.

Other concerns at this early stage were abuses to the Park by visitors, with worries ranging from use of air rifles to thefts from birds' nests, and the threatening encroachment from external development, such as the flats being built at the boundary. It was going to be necessary to raise the profile of the Park at a national level to increase awareness of the issues.

The committee decided that the subscription rate for members should be set at a very low sum — from only 2/6d (£2 at today's prices) — in order that no-one be discouraged from joining on the grounds of cost. It was hoped this would also maximise the numbers of supporters signing up.



*Steps near Kingston Gate marking the  
site of the former WRAC camp*

## Proposed Aims and Objects, 1961:

- To encourage the preservation of the Park for the enjoyment of the public for air and exercise, leisure and relaxation
- To maintain the right of access to the Park for pedestrians, equestrians, motorists and cyclists, and all others who wish to use it for the purposes set out above
- To encourage the preservation of the peace and natural beauties of the Park and the protection of trees, and plant, bird and animal life
- To resist measures inimical to the foregoing and, in particular, to resist the gradual urbanisation of the Park caused by encroachments of through motor traffic
- To encourage greater awareness by the public of the amenities of the Park and the need to respect them
- To secure the reversal of the decisions to open the Park to motor traffic after dark and to increase the speed limit to 30mph

These aims and objects remained essentially unchanged right up until the Friends became a charity in 2009, except for the final one, which was altered when the Park was closed to traffic after dark in 1963. A further object was added later, which read:

- To encourage a greater awareness by the public of the amenities of the Park and the need to respect them

### Wendy Macaulay

Of the small group of people who founded the Friends of Richmond Park fifty years ago only one survives in 2011; and she is one of those to whom the Friends owe the greatest debt. For it was Wendy Macaulay, a long-time resident of Richmond, who first suggested forming a group to mobilise local opinion against the recent raising of the speed limit in Richmond Park to 30mph and admission of traffic after dark.



Encouraged by discussions with other Park lovers, Wendy composed the letter that has become part of Friends — and Richmond Park — history. This invited interested parties to a ‘Friends of Richmond Park Inaugural Meeting’ in Richmond, and warned that the concessions to motorists “are the first steps in a series which, if not checked at the outset, will spell the ruin of Richmond Park as we know it”.

At 86 in the Friends’ 50th anniversary year, Wendy still lives in Richmond and remains active in local affairs. She enjoys reunions with a large and united family, whose visits usually include a walk in the Park. Wendy is full of admiration for the way her creation has developed over the decades. “The Friends are in good heart, and so well organised. The Park looks so clean and well cared for; it is obviously in the hands of people who love it and take expert advice on how best to safeguard it”.



## Early Years — the 1960s

### Action Against Traffic

Of all the threats to the Park, traffic was the main one. In the early 1960s, the abuse of the Park by vehicles had led to a variety of accidents. As an example, these are the police figures for incidents in the Park for six months given in the Friends' minutes of November 1961:

	April— June	July— Sept
Accidents involving personal injury	2	9
Prosecutions for speeding offences	15	41
Deer killed or injured	2	9

Lord John Hope was standing firm on his decision to keep the Park gates open after dark, despite the obvious danger caused by traffic speeding in a landscape of large, roaming animals. A simultaneous lack of police patrols meant that prosecutions were difficult to pursue, and there was little deterrent for offenders. On May 21 1962 several deer escaped from the Park, probably because a gate had been damaged by a car which had been trying to get out. Two were killed on the road outside, and one successfully returned to the Park.

### A Reluctance to Listen

The Friends, led by Col Gueritz, were encouraged to write to Lord Hope to express their concerns, and the Friends persisted in attempts to meet him personally, despite a clear reluctance on his part to review the speed limit and the gate opening hours. An eventual meeting with a junior Minister proved less than satisfactory, and the Friends pressed further to meet the Minister himself, supported by Members of Parliament Mr Will Griffiths and Mr Anthony Royle. When Lord Hope did finally agree to

meet he would only offer to see the Chairman alone, which the Friends deemed unacceptable, and the meeting never took place.

### Lord Hope Attends the AGM

Under further pressure from the Friends and others focussing attention on issues in the Park, Lord Hope was finally persuaded to speak at the first AGM of the Friends, which took place on March 19 1962. He was to be “answering questions regarding accidents, casualties to deer, speed limit, breaches of regulations and the work done by the Ministry of Works to maintain the character of Richmond Park as a national asset”.

Despite his reassurances at the meeting that he had the best interests of the Park at heart, his actions were contradictory, as he determinedly refused to budge on the issue of restoring the speed limit to 20mph. Instead he insisted that diligent policing of the situation would bring results and suggested that more severe penalties and increased staffing were the answer. Signs warning drivers of the danger of deer were his solution to collisions with animals on the roads, and increasing numbers of accidents were portrayed as concurrent with naturally increasing road usage. It was a disappointing result.

The Friends determined to increase support for their position, publicising their cause through contact with community groups, MPs and the press. They recognised the difficulties of enforcing Park rules due to its enormous size, and even at this early stage in their existence suggested that they could actively support the introduction of more staff and help to encourage public awareness of the need to respect the Park.

By the end of 1962 radar patrols were being tested by Park police, and the issue of radio communication across the Park was being examined. Additional staff were recruited



for weekends. Geoffrey Rippon was now Minister of Works; he was determined to strictly enforce the 30mph speed limit, increasing the numbers of police patrols to do so, but he was still not prepared to reduce it.

In spite of this the Friends had some success. The Park was now to close at dusk once more with the support of the Minister, following numerous collisions with deer. Work had also begun on clearing the WRAC camp. Relationships had improved to the extent that there was even discussion of holding an Exhibition regarding the Park in conjunction with the Ministry.

## Working With Others

By the time of the second AGM on April 1 1963, membership had increased to 512. The guest speaker at this event was the Earl of Euston, Chairman of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and a member of The Historic Buildings Council for England, amongst other positions. He talked about the conflict between the past and the present in the field of building, which drew a neat parallel with the plight of Richmond Park, and spoke of William Morris's principles, saying "ancient buildings are not just dear to us but are sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope".

The Friends also had a good relationship with the Park Superintendent, Mr George Thomson, inviting him to speak at their third AGM in 1964.

## Vigilance in Many Areas

Throughout the early 1960s, the Friends remained vigilant to the constant threat from traffic, and had a continual battle to get the public to understand the issues. Alongside this they began to extend their interest in other areas of Park life, and were becoming an acknowledged influence. By 1964 they were liaising with the Ministry to ensure adequate staffing of car parks.

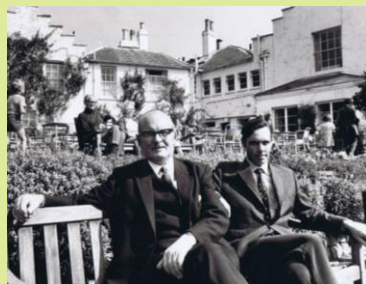
The Friends were also making representations to the London County Council to prevent further tower blocks being built in Roehampton, and were corresponding with the Noise Abatement Society about tackling noise issues from aircraft and, later on, problems from helicopter traffic.

## Park Superintendents

The Park Superintendent manages Richmond Park day-to-day, overseeing the maintenance of landscape, woodland, roads and buildings; managing the deer herds; servicing and clearing up after human users; and occasionally having time to start new projects. He currently has eight staff and oversees 140 contractors. The official title is now Park Manager, but most people still use 'Superintendent'.

Richmond Park has had only four Superintendents during the life of the Friends; clearly it is a job that its holders enjoy. The longevity and expertise built up by the Superintendents is vital in a Park where thinking has to be long term. The Friends have had good relations with all the Superintendents.

1951—1971	<b>George Thomson MVO</b>
1971—1990	<b>Michael Baxter Brown</b>
1990—1997	<b>Michael J Fitt OBE</b>
1997—today	<b>Simon Richards</b>



*George Thomson (left) with Michael Baxter Brown (right)*

As membership grew, so did their funds, which the committee started to put away, concerned that they might yet have to use the money as a 'fighting fund' against further threats.

Five years after its formation, it was with great delight that many members of the Friends attended a ceremony on July 20

1966 to celebrate the restoration of the site of the former WRAC camp near Kingston Gate to parkland, some 28 years on from its installation. A gift of a seat from the Friends was placed on the spot, commanding splendid views over the area, and later in the year three trees were planted nearby by the Mayor of Kingston.

## Notes from Committee Minutes of 1964:

### MOTOR TRAFFIC AFTER DARK

Suggestions that the roads in the Park should be opened to motor traffic after dark have been renewed recently in letters to the local Press. Mr. Derek Bond in a letter published in the Richmond and Twickenham Times dealt with this most effectively and we have his permission and that of the Editor to reproduce his letter:

"My friend John Paddy Carstairs and your last week's correspondent seem to have misunderstood the objections to opening the roads through Richmond Park at night. Let us suppose that they get their way and predict the consequences.

1964: Richmond Park is opened to traffic at night.

1965: Mr. Carstairs hits a deer at night, killing it (painlessly, of course), but his brand new car is badly damaged. He writes to you pointing out that he had suggested that the road be fenced in to protect the deer and the motorists.

1966: The road is fenced in. Mr. Carstairs is driving through the Park one dark winter's night and strikes the fence, badly damaging his brand new car. He writes to you to say how dangerously unlit the Richmond-Kingston road is.

1967: Street lighting is installed throughout the Park. Masses of new traffic is attracted to the road as motorists realise that they can get home ten minutes earlier to watch Mr. Carstairs' productions on television. Mr. Carstairs and other correspondents write to you pointing out the needless bottleneck on the Richmond-Kingston road and asking for a dual carriage-way.

1970: Lord Marples opens the Richmond-Kingston motorway.

1984 (approx.): The Minister of Housing announces that as the land between the Richmond-Kingston motorway and Petersham can no longer be seriously considered part of Richmond Park it is to be developed as a housing area.

Veteran film and television director John Paddy Carstairs, shocked to the core of his artistic soul, launches a "Save Richmond Park" campaign and is supported by veteran actor Derek Bond who, with great restraint, doesn't say "I told you so."

The Friends pursued further improvements in the Park, championing strategic tree planting to mask the ever-encroaching car parking spaces, planning lectures to spread the word amongst the local community, and reviewing plans for new paths and bridleways.

As a result of approaches to the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works from the Friends and others, in 1966 official surveys had been carried out to ascertain the effect of increased traffic upon the amenities of the Park. The Friends' struggle for recognition at a high level was bearing fruit.

However, as long as the Park speed limit remained at 30mph a high number of deer were still being killed in car accidents. Records for 1969 tell of 16 car-related deaths in the first quarter alone out of roughly 1,000 deer in the Park.

At this time the Ministry of Public Works began to keep more detailed records of



*Stags (by speedometer) have been clocked at 45 m.p.h.*

*Cartoon from Autocar Magazine, November 3 1961*

traffic accidents, and to watch for changes in figures.

The Friends achieved another success in 1969 when the Greater London Council's plans to assign the Park roads to the national highway were revealed by the Friends and subsequently withdrawn.

## The Social Side

The Friends of Richmond Park were, from the start, a sociable group. The feeling amongst members was that no-one should be excluded from joining due to financial reasons, and the membership cost was kept low to encourage more people to join.

Later, social events such as cheese and wine parties, talks and slide shows served to bring people together to share their thoughts on and knowledge of the Park. Mrs Callis (later Jameson-Green), the first membership secretary, also managed many social events, and was to handle the role right up until February 1986 — an astonishing achievement!

The Kingston Camera Club was instrumental in supplying sets of slides which enabled the Friends to start giving illustrated lectures.

From 1963 a regular newsletter was being issued, which remains an effective way of sharing information with members to this day.

## Well Established — the '70s

### Broadening Activities

Whilst the Friends remained concerned over traffic in the Park, they now turned their attention to other topics.

They reviewed refreshment facilities and toilets in the Park: a temporary kiosk at the Isabella Plantation was going well.

They explored, too, the possibilities of bringing school parties to the Park, and the Department of the Environment showed support for this. In 1971, a Nature Trail Booklet was created, with the cooperation of local education authorities and the Park Superintendent, and by 1972 a working party had been set up to initiate walking trails for children, which proved to be very popular. It would be 40 years before the next trails booklet in 2011.

The trees of the Park suffered terribly from pests in the 1970s, with many hundreds ravaged by Dutch Elm disease. The Friends supported the 'Plant a Tree in '73' campaign, and helped the Park authorities with replacing a number of damaged specimens.

***“Failure to act would be detrimental to the Park, whose roads were not planned or built to serve as public highways and to carry such a weight of traffic”***  
***Col Gueritz, Chairman 1961-1973***

## New Chairman

During 1973 Col Gueritz suffered from a period of ill health, which led to his passing the role of Chairman of the Friends to Gerald Jameson-Green. The committee unanimously elected Col Gueritz as an Honorary Member of the Friends in thanks for the groundbreaking work he had put in.

### Continuing Traffic Threats

Traffic reared its ugly head again: there were growing threats that a Petersham by-pass would be built through the Park from near Petersham Gate to Ham Gate and Ham Common, and it had even been suggested that a solution to the increase in local traffic was to construct a tunnel under the Park gates at Richmond Hill to emerge near Ham Common. The Friends remained opposed to such schemes which would destroy large parts of the Park and generate more traffic in the area.

In January 1973, the Department of the Environment drew up a scheme to restrict entrance and exit of traffic through certain Park gates, some of which would be on a one-way system. The Friends were happy to see such a trial in place. In July of that year Robin Hood Gate was closed to outgoing traffic, on the advice of the police, and it seemed clear that speeding traffic in the evenings was less evident.

In 1974, the Chairman himself was injured in a traffic accident at the Park gates when hit by a van ignoring a “stop” sign. Work to control traffic continued solidly: representations were made to the Ministry to prohibit commercial vehicles using the roads, and it was felt that signage alone was not adequate to prevent occurrences. The Friends welcomed an extensive survey of motor traffic in the Park carried out by Richmond Borough Council, which came to the conclusion that changes needed to be made to ease the flow of traffic.

## Tangible Improvements

Telephones had now been installed at all main gates to facilitate contact with the Superintendent's office. Slowly but surely various improvements were instituted in the Park, supported by the Friends. Road safety was a conspicuous priority, with white lines and a roundabout being installed.

## Success from Campaigning

The 1970s saw a number of changes in the fabric of the Park. In 1975, the footpath from Roehampton to Richmond was improved and was made into a joint pedestrian/cyclist route. With input from the Friends, car parks half way up Broomfield Hill and at Sheen Cross were closed and the land returned to parkland. Sheen Gate car park was enlarged and screened off, and further screening for Broomfield Hill took place. These reorganisations, which the Friends had campaigned for, were considered something of a success. Peg's Pond at the Isabella Plantation was enlarged and parking facilities for disabled drivers introduced both there and at Pen Ponds.

Importantly, a growth in awareness of Park traffic issues was being perceived at a wider level. The Chairman's spring newsletter of 1975 addressed the Department of the Environment's proposals for coping with traffic problems in the Park and commented that routes external to the Park needed to be improved to alleviate existing problems.

## Preservation and Conservation

In the battle to control traffic it was easy to forget the Friends' other objectives, but in the autumn of 1975 Gerald Jameson-Green drew attention to the fragility of birdlife in the Park and the need to be alert to preservation needs even at the cost of slight personal inconveniences. He stressed that "preservation and conservation" now had to

be watchwords for the authorities, despite any difficulties that might come.

## Subsidence in Petersham Road

At the end of the decade Richmond Park came under enormous pressure. In 1979, the main road at Petersham subsided, resulting in cars and motorcycles being diverted into the Park. The gates remained open 24 hours a day and casualties to deer caused by speeding vehicles increased.

Gerald Jameson-Green appeared on a special BBC Panorama programme to emphasise the threat to deer in the Park caused by the diversion of traffic.

At the same time, the Friends protested strongly against the idea, revived from the early 1970s, of building a tunnel under the Park giving a by-pass from the Park gates at Richmond Hill to Ham Common at the cost of scarring the landscape above.

A second incident of subsidence in Petersham occurred just two months later, with the Park again being open all night to aid traffic flow. There was great concern that the Park was virtually split in two by the diversion of main road traffic through it. Problems existed for animals and humans

## Tom Foley

Tom Foley was a founder member of the Friends of Richmond Park, and for many years the secretary of the Pedestrians Association for Road Safety.

He was made an Honorary Member in 1964 in recognition of his outstanding work for the Friends.

Tom Foley died in 1979. Wendy Macaulay remembered him, saying: "He was a fine man who worked selflessly all his life for others and he will be sadly missed"



trying to cross the frontier delineated by the Kingston Gate to Richmond Gate road, which was heavy with vehicles. Temporary traffic lights were installed to aid crossing outside Pembroke Lodge. The road itself was in danger of breaking up because of the extra strain.

A special resolution was called at the AGM to close Park roads from midnight to 6am, to facilitate movement of deer and other animal life, and to ease pressure on the Park security staff. This was supported by the Department of the Environment which promptly instigated the closure. By November 1979 39 deer had been killed in traffic accidents, which rose to 47 by the end of December. Almost ten deer a month had been killed since cars started being diverted through the Park.



*Photo from The Richmond & Twickenham Times  
November 16 1979*

## View of St Paul's

The view from King Henry's Mound to St Paul's Cathedral ten miles away was created soon after the Cathedral was completed in 1710 by planting an avenue of trees from the Mound leading the eye towards it. This vista, clear of tall buildings, was maintained over the years, but was obliterated by unchecked tree growth during the Second World War.

The view was re-created in 1976, and since then the chestnut trees along the line of sight have been kept carefully cut back. In the 1970s this view came under threat because of plans to develop Liverpool Street Station with the erection of a high-rise building. The Friends campaigned to stop the building and in 1992 the vista became a protected view.

The width of the protected view was halved in 2007 by the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, to allow more high-rise office blocks, to which the Friends strongly objected. In 2009, Boris Johnson, his successor, promised to reinstate the wider view, but not before approving a development at Victoria Station which will obscure its lower right-hand corner.



*Photo: Patrick Eager*

## Going Strong at 25 — the '80s

### In Good Shape

In the spring of 1980, after seven years in office, Gerald Jameson-Green was succeeded as Chairman by John Martin, who agreed to cover the role for the next year.

He inherited a society in good shape: membership had now reached the 1,000 mark; the Friends had a good working relationship with the Park Superintendent and a heightened profile in the public eye. They were contributing to Park life by organising walks for members, and slide presentations to the public. They were consulted on many issues and influenced Park policy and management, emphasising the unique qualities of Richmond Park. Members were encouraged to spread the word, and to widen support across all age groups. A review of membership fees pushed the cost of joining up to no further than 30p — approximately £1 in today's money — ensuring that it was still accessible to the majority of the public.

### Petersham Road Continued

The Petersham Road closure persisted into the first year of the decade, with the Park gates closed only from midnight to 6am. Accidents were rife: Richmond Gate had one of its piers demolished by an articulated vehicle; despite temporary traffic lights being in place, drivers continued to maintain excessive speeds, and casualties of deer were heavy. A lack of respect for Park wildlife from drivers was causing dangerous incidents, and Park staff were under strain from the extra responsibilities.

It was not until January 1981 — 18 months after the subsidence first occurred — that the roadworks were completed and the Park returned to normal with the gates closing at dusk.

### A Visit by the Pope?

A topic which took up a lot of the Friends' energy in 1981 was the planned visit to the UK by the Pope the following year, as it had been proposed that he celebrate a Mass in Richmond Park. This provoked great concern, with considerations of the extensive environmental damage the expected crowds could cause. Eventually the papal Mass was cancelled, but the situation had raised many questions as to how such an event could be handled.

After a very tough year John Martin stepped down as Chairman and Leslie Freeman was elected in spring 1981.

### Celebrating the Queen Mother's Birthday

An active programme was in place to deal with the devastation caused by Dutch Elm Disease, and the Friends further supported the 1981 National Tree Campaign. As part of this they donated two trees to Queen Mary Copse near White Lodge, in a tree-planting ceremony conducted by Princess Alexandra. This took place on November 15 1981 in honour of the 80th birthday of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

### The Deer Cull

In the early 1980s, public concern about culling of the deer was heightened. This event takes place twice a year and is necessary to keep the number of deer stable (otherwise it would increase by a third every year), and the herd healthy by removing weak and sick animals. There is only a limited amount of food available within the Park boundaries and, without natural predators, overpopulation would lead to deer starving to death. The Friends supported the Park Superintendent in responding to accusations in the press, and in informing the public of the reasons for



the culls, and public unease was reduced. In 1983, a new arrangement was introduced, closing the Park completely at night during the cull.

### **Park Documentary**

At the end of 1984, the Friends were invited to co-operate with the BBC in planning a documentary programme to be called "A Day in the Life of Richmond Park". This was a most enjoyable opportunity, although it was felt by a number of people that the finished product, aired in April 1985, did not reflect the full depth of the Park's community and its everyday life.

### **New Chairman**

Leslie Freeman handed over the chairmanship to Rodney Coyne in the spring of 1984, after three years in the role.

### **Organised Walks**

January 1985 saw the start of organised walks for the public in addition to members, which proved so popular that they continue to this day. The Friends walks are all organised and led by volunteers, and give opportunities for people to learn about the

Park, get to know one another, and perhaps recruit new members.

### **25th Anniversary**

The Friends of Richmond Park celebrated their Silver Jubilee in 1986, hosting a number of events, with guests including the Mayor and Mayoress of Kingston upon Thames, and the Park Superintendent. They also held a celebratory art competition for local schools entitled "The Spirit of Richmond Park" which was extremely well received, and had entries from schools in both Richmond and Kingston Boroughs. Additionally, they wrote a short history of their first 25 years, which was the inspiration for this history of the first 50 years.

Behind the celebrations, more threats to the Park arose, as the prospect of outsourcing of the Park's maintenance became a looming reality. Suggestions were being made that Pembroke Lodge be closed to the public and sold on a long lease as a private residence. In the coming years these topics were to occupy a lot of the Friends committee's time.



*The Friends' 25th anniversary with Chairman Rodney Coyne cutting the cake*

## Walking the Wall

The Friends celebrated the 350th anniversary of the walling-in of the Park with a walk around its boundary in May 1987. Nearly 150 people gathered to participate in the “Walk the Wall” event, and to celebrate the act that preserved this unique place for future generations. The walk was to be repeated on several future occasions.



*The Walk the Wall event repeated in 2003*

## The Tree Fund

In 1987 the Park was subjected to significant disruption due to a disastrous storm. With a thousand trees lost and many plants damaged, the members of the Friends were keen to give practical help. In consultation with Mr Baxter Brown, the Park Superintendent, it was decided to organise a Tree Fund, to which donations could be contributed. This proved very successful, raising in the region of £3,000 by December 1988. There were about 30 members at the first tree planting supplied from the Tree Fund, held near Roehampton Gate on Saturday 18 February 1989.

## Growth in Communications

Roy Smith took over as Chairman in 1988, and under his leadership the end of the decade saw the Friends in a strong position, with a steadily growing membership. The society’s relationship with the Royal Ballet School was enhanced by an invitation for the Friends to attend the School’s Summer

Fayre. Dame Merle Parke of the Ballet School was later to become a Vice President of the Friends. Communication with the public had been improved in conjunction with Richmond Tourist Board through the use of an information van, which was parked at Pembroke Lodge, and a questionnaire for members of the Friends had shown the need for the organisation to reach out to a younger audience. They endeavoured to do this with specifically designed walks and activities.

## Noise, Sleeping Policemen and Helicopters

Over the years many issues came the Friends’ way. Minutes from May 1989 show that the public were increasingly raising complaints over issues which we still face today — “random parking, noise and intrusive picnicking on fine weekends”. It was felt by some members of the committee that greater visibility of police would help to address these problems, but police staff shortages and an increasingly large number of visitors made it difficult to cover the Park effectively. There was some discussion of using sleeping policemen in the Park, to slow traffic and discourage visitors who were merely using the roads as a shortcut, but after review it was decided they would be neither safe nor practical, given the fragile construction of many of the road surfaces.

The likelihood of increased helicopter flights over the Park from Battersea heliport was a threat to be monitored, and there was also the possibility of an extra storey being constructed on Park Gate House at Ham Gate which would overlook the Park and cause light pollution. The Friends would have a lot of work to do in the years ahead.

## **The Friends Divided — the 1990s**

### **Col Gueritz Remembered**

The first Chairman of the Friends of Richmond Park, Col John Gueritz, died in late 1989. A tree was planted in his memory on March 3 1990 near the riding ring behind Bog Lodge, later called Holly Lodge. The ceremony was attended by 70 members.

### **Questionnaire and Education**

The Friends continued to uphold the principles on which Col Gueritz had helped create the society. They began the decade by sending a questionnaire to all members, seeking opinions on a variety of topics. A total of 226 members responded, with very positive comments on the newsletter, social events and organised walks. The latter were considered to be informative and enjoyable, and discussion arose as to the different types of walk that could be offered, such as history walks, walks for children etc, all of which were reviewed — and some attempted — in the coming months.

Talks had been given to 1,300 people over the past year. These continued to be a valuable way of educating the public in the unique aspects of Richmond Park, and in the requirement to balance its fragile ecology with the needs of visitors.

### **Concerns and Changes**

The Park was coming under increasing pressure from visitors and it was proving necessary to make changes to defend it. Restrictions to areas in which dogs were allowed were implemented, and the area around Peg's Pond was resurfaced, as it was badly eroded due to people coming to feed the birds.

One of the most significant issues raised in the questionnaire was the problem of nuisance cyclists, especially mountain

bikers, who were destroying the grassland and flora, and were very difficult to control. It was suggested that an increase in the number of cycle paths might deter them from riding off-track, and a preferred idea was to create a path around the perimeter, near the wall. The path became a reality with the creation of the Tamsin Trail seven years later.

### **Speeding and Parking**

There remained great concern about speeding cars. A four-day analysis of car traffic carried out by the police showed that many drivers were still exceeding the speed limit, some to a considerable extent. A growing number of visitors meant that the Park was suffering from people parking off the road and away from the car parks. Members of the Friends were encouraged to give ideas for a long term strategy for dealing with this issue.

The Royal Parks carried out a visitors' survey with regard to overflow parking at car parks, seeking a solution that might not involve increasing car park spaces at the expense of parkland.

Letters were received from a number of members of the public regarding problematic car parking, and such was the rising feeling of frustration that suggestions of pay and display charges, the use of Special Constables, clamping, and even the closing of the Park to through-traffic in summer all came under discussion.

One initiative adopted by Park Management was to increase the areas of the posts alongside the roads known as 'Thomson's Teeth' after Superintendent George Thomson who had first introduced them in 1961. They were now extended alongside Barn Wood and south of Pembroke Lodge car park. Additional signage and police cones were put in place to clarify where vehicle access was acceptable, and the Royal

Parks considered ditches along the sides of the roads in more vulnerable areas.

There was yet again discussion about how to reduce the speed of the traffic, and of ways to discourage people from entering the Park merely to drive straight through it. The idea of introducing speed bumps was raised once more, but these were decided to be a hazard for emergency vehicles, as well as prohibitively expensive to install.

## Working with the Royal Parks

In January 1990, the Royal Parks agreed to establish an annual meeting with the Friends, which was to prove a continuing and successful relationship. At the Friends' AGM in April that year the guest speaker was Mr J J Rendell, Head of the Royal Parks & Palaces Division of the Department of the Environment. He suggested that in the future the Park would be administered by an agency, which would give the Superintendent more independence — a glimpse of changes to come.

In 1991, the Royal Parks and the Friends decided to share an open day at Richmond Park. Regular meetings with the Park Superintendent gave opportunities to discuss topics such as the Tree Fund, cycling in the Park, car control, the deer, dog control and horse riders. They also discussed at length how to improve communication between the Department of the Environment, Park Management at Bog Lodge, the Friends of Richmond Park and the general public.

## Pembroke Lodge

There had been concern about the future of Pembroke Lodge for many years. The Royal Parks operated it as a cafe, but it was in a poor state. The lease on the building, held by The Crown Estate, was due for renewal in 1999. Despite its being a listed building and of great historical interest, The Crown Estate felt that the house was now in such a state



*Pembroke Lodge badly in need of renovation*

of dilapidation that they could not afford to undertake a restoration themselves.

Their initial suggestion was that it, together with half of the grounds, should be sold to a private buyer and there were plans for an additional dwelling on the nursery site. The Friends immediately raised concerns that this might mean public access to the Lodge could be withdrawn. Private purchase would create a precedent which might leave other buildings within the Park vulnerable to development plans. Clearly, whoever was to take on the renovation would have to be sympathetic both to the needs of the listed building and to the parkland within which it stood.

Throughout the early 1990s, there was a growing unease that insufficient information was available from The Crown Estate about the future of the Lodge site. At one stage the Friends wrote to the Queen herself expressing their worries, and it was only through a reply from her Secretary that they learned that the plans to build a new dwelling on the nursery site had been shelved. Plans at another point suggested that the upstairs rooms would include a museum celebrating the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell, who had lived there, but they were also shelved.

The issue of Pembroke Lodge spanned many years and consumed a lot of the Friends' time and energy. In September 1993,

architect's plans were drawn up at the expense of the Friends, putting the whole of Pembroke Lodge to use as a public facility, including an upgraded restaurant, seminar and public amenity rooms, as an alternative to a sale to a private buyer. These were well received by the Park Management, the general public and local businesses. It was felt that such a structure would encourage greater public awareness and usage of the site.

Then, in 1994, Michael Heseltine, the Secretary of State for the Environment at the time, visited the Park and upon seeing the dilapidated state of Pembroke Lodge made a direct intervention to The Crown Estate to stop their plans to sell it to a private developer. Later that year, confirmation finally came that the property would not be sold.

The Friends now felt that if a leaseholder could be found who would finance the upkeep and occupy the property, whilst allowing the restaurant to stay open, they would agree to that, and The Crown Estate agreed that this was the way forward.

The next two to three years saw The Crown Estate and the Royal Parks issuing a competitive tender for someone to take over the running of Pembroke Lodge, and funding and managing its refurbishment, a project finally concluded in 1997.

### **Friends Forum Established**

At the 1991 AGM the Chairman, Roy Smith, stated he "would not like Richmond Park to become like other parks; its wildlife and wilderness are its assets". It was he who initiated a meeting with other Friends of Royal Parks the following year, to communicate on issues of mutual interest and provide a lobbying group for all the Royal Parks. This proved very helpful and it was agreed that a "Friends of the Royal Parks Forum" would be established.

The Friends Forum continues to this day. It meets twice a year and also has regular meetings with the Royal Parks Agency, as it is now titled, with its Board, and with the responsible Minister. Over the years it has lobbied on issues as diverse as the continuing reduction in government funding of the Royal Parks, the lack of environmental objectives for the Agency, the increasing number of memorials in the Royal Parks, commercial dog walking, and fixed penalty notices. For some years in the late 1990s it produced an annual report on the state of each Royal Park.

***"I would not like Richmond Park to become like other parks; its wildlife and wilderness are its assets"***

***Roy Smith, Chairman 1988-1993***

### **Volunteers**

At the same AGM Gerald Eades was re-elected once again as treasurer and honoured with a personalised engraved whisky glass, in recognition of his 21 years in the position. The Friends were very lucky to have a growing number of dedicated volunteers supporting their practical efforts, as well as lobbying against traffic and more political matters. The information caravan which had been parked at Pembroke Lodge and manned by Friends volunteers was replaced with a stall within the Lodge, and the volunteers given assistance from the Richmond Tourist Office.

## A Royal Parks Agency and Outsourcing

In the early 1990s there was much talk that an agency would be formed to manage all the Royal Parks and that gardening and maintenance work would be contracted out, or outsourced, to private companies.

The Friends were concerned that a single management agency would not suit both a wildlife park like Richmond and a more formalised park such as Hyde Park, and the consequences of such changes could be damaging to the ecology.

They were also concerned that moving maintenance from the Royal Parks to non-specialist companies could mean that environmental concerns would not be met. If the outsourcing were to go ahead it was important that conditions of soil and grasses, for example, were monitored both before and after the change.

Members were encouraged to write to individual MPs such as Michael Heseltine and Sir George Young to emphasise the individuality of the Park staff's expertise, and to stress that this could not be retained after outsourcing. The Friends found that many of their letters and queries remained unanswered, and they poured much of their energy into doggedly seeking out information which seemed to be withheld.

The Friends endeavoured to show the strength of feeling against outsourcing and on December 7 1991 a protest walk was held — a "Step out for the Parks", in conjunction with the Friends of Bushy and Home Parks. Two hundred and fifty people attended.

But in spite of the protests, in September 1992 the Department of National Heritage announced a package of measures to "improve London's Royal Parks". These included the formation of the Royal Parks Executive Agency and confirmation that maintenance would be outsourced. It also included the creation of a team of specialist landscape architects and designers in the

### Roy Smith

Roy Smith (latterly known as Roy Conway-Smith) was Chairman of the Friends from 1988-1993, and prior to that had been Vice Chairman for five years. His wife, Audrey, was also membership secretary in the 1960s and 1970s. Having been born and brought up in Sheen, he remembers as a boy the adventure of Richmond Park in wartime, when areas were fenced off for secret operations, and POWs were held there.



Roy's time as Chairman covered several crucial topics. He fought to protect the dilapidated Pembroke Lodge from controversial plans to sell it to a private buyer, and led the Friends' battle to secure a satisfactory outcome from the outsourcing of Park maintenance. The Friends were influential in ensuring that management of the deer herd continued to be done by Royal Parks' employees, to retain the necessary skills. Roy also initiated the formation of the Friends Forum.

Nowadays, Roy and Audrey have deserted Richmond Park and live overlooking Bushy Park!

Agency and the proposal that the Parks should be used for occasional sponsored commercial events.

Additionally, concern was heightened because the Royal Parks Constabulary was already under scrutiny, with their numbers being reduced and due for review at the start of 1993. The Friends were to push for adequate resources, and were keen to see the introduction of mounted police.

## **Roy Smith Passes On the Chairmanship**

At the AGM of April 1993, there was a presentation to Roy Smith in recognition of his five years service as Chairman, during which time membership had risen from 1,700 to 2,500. He handed control to Douglas Reynolds, a former Mayor of Kingston, who was to be Chairman of the Friends for the next seven years.

## **Royal Parks Review**

The speaker at the 1993 AGM was Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Chairman of the Royal Parks Review. The Review had been set up in 1991 partly in response to criticism of the outsourcing of gardening and maintenance and partly out of concern over the staging of large events in the Royal Parks — both issues which the Friends had been tackling.

The guiding principles of the Review were:

- The physical integrity of the parks should be recognised and not whittled away
- The concept of historical design should be respected
- There should be no additional buildings or enclosures
- Standards of horticulture and maintenance should aim at excellence
- The prime use of the parks should be for physical enjoyment in the open air
- Pedestrians should have easy access into the parks

- Traditional events, celebrations, occasional concerts etc should continue provided there were no deleterious effects on the parks.

***“The Park is part of the national heritage and should be conserved and enhanced for succeeding generations”***

***Dame Jennifer Jenkins***

These were objectives sympathetic with those of the Friends, and input from the Friends was to prove invaluable in focussing on areas of concern within Richmond Park, which the Review was subsequently to highlight.

With regard to Richmond Park, the Department of National Heritage stated “The Park is part of the national heritage and should be conserved and enhanced for succeeding generations... The priority must surely be to maintain the historic open landscape of the park and to avoid any intrusion upon its natural aspect.”

The Review Group asked for contributions from the Friends regarding nature conservation, traffic and roads, special events, buildings, signage, catering and facilities for the disabled.

A letter was sent to all members in September 1994 asking for views on several topics, to assist with the Friends committee’s submission to the Review Group:

- What is the Park for?
- Facilities in the Park
- Development in the Park.



Comments were also welcomed on selective road closures at peak periods, and on whether the Friends' philosophy that it should "protect Richmond Park as a place of natural beauty and public pleasure" still summarised the views of the organisation.

In its subsequent submission to the Review Group the Friends expressed concerns about the proposed reduction in maintenance expenditure, and said that the majority of its members were not in favour of selected road closures.

The Royal Parks Review itself was to take three years before finalising its conclusions.

## Plantings at Two Storm Wood and Noticeboards at Isabella

Members of the Friends had given generously to the Tree Fund set up by the Park Superintendent after the storm of 1987. A further devastating storm in January 1990 meant that upwards of one thousand trees had now been lost, and the tree planting programme was increased, especially as some of the earlier, small-scale plantings had been less than successful. It was proposed that a large plantation of trees would be suitable to counter the losses, and to mark them in the history of the Park. By early 1991 Two Storm Wood, near Sheen Gate, was in its planning stages, supported strongly by the Friends. On February 6 1993 about 120 members attended a tree planting ceremony at the new enclosure.

New noticeboards were installed at the Isabella Plantation in 1993, which were designed to provide seasonal information to Park users. Members of the Friends donated £1,810 to the project. The noticeboards were replaced in 2010 because the wood had disintegrated and new boards were needed to provide a larger display



*Simon Richards, Park Superintendent, at the unveiling in 2003 of a Friends plaque marking Two Storm Wood*

area, which included updated maps of the Isabella Plantation.

## Cycle Path

For some time the creation of a new cycle path around the Park had been under discussion. The Friends were keen that the path should not be a convenient alternative to the road for cyclists using the Park as a cut-through, and proposed that it be kept indirect and as near as possible to the perimeter wall. Additionally, it was felt that priority should be given to pedestrians using the pathway, and they recommended prohibiting mountain bikes to emphasise this. They also advised caution with regard to any archaeological findings which might be damaged in laying the track over existing ancient pathways. Funding for the path came from a significant private donation, and The Richmond Park Charitable Trust was formed in 1993 to administer the funds and keep them exclusively for the Park.

The cycleway, called the Tamsin Trail, was under construction for a number of years and was officially opened in September 1997 by celebrity Jerry Hall and Peter Beckwith, Chairman of the Trust, after whose daughter the Trail is named. The

Friends remained concerned that a shared path was problematic, if not dangerous. However, although problems exist, the Tamsin Trail is a very successful addition to the Park. In particular, it has reduced off-track cycling in the area it covers.

## Holly Lodge

In 1993, Bog Lodge was renamed Holly Lodge, which was one of its many former names (Bog Gate did not change its name). The Mayor of Richmond officially opened the two stables and blacksmith's shop for the Park's two shire horses in September.

Later on that year, the Friends supported fundraising for the formation of the Holly Lodge Centre, an idea devised by the Park Superintendent, Mike Fitt, and developed into a partnership between the Royal Parks and Phab (Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied) that was to enable both children and adults, primarily those with disabilities, to participate in a wildlife experience from within the Park. A multipurpose classroom and other amenities were developed, a nature trail devised, and riding for the disabled offered. Rolf Harris, OBE, launched a fundraising campaign for Holly Lodge in 1995. The project became an independent charity later in the 1990s.



*Mike Fitt on right, with Sir David Attenborough, left*

***“If it were not for the stand made by the Friends 31 years ago and on other occasions since, changes would have been brought about that would have destroyed the uniqueness that is enjoyed today (by beetles and people). It is likely that a SSSI designation would not have been possible and 24 hour traffic use would have caused the loss of the deer herds”***

***Douglas Reynolds, Chairman 1993-2000***

## SSSI & Ecological Improvements

Richmond Park was officially designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest on March 4 1994 when Lord Cranbrook, Chairman of English Nature, presented Baroness Blatch, Heritage Minister from the Department of the Environment, with the SSSI designation papers at Pembroke Lodge. The Royal Parks Agency now had a statutory duty to manage the Park to include:

- Maintaining the ancient trees and quantities of dead wood
- Protecting the area and quality of the acid grasslands
- Maintaining a mixed herd of red and fallow deer
- Improving the nature conservation interest of other areas of the Park
- Providing facilities for the enjoyment of the Park's wildlife by visitors
- Monitoring and reviewing progress annually.

In keeping with the new focus on ecological concerns the recently formed Richmond Park Wildlife Group also planned an archive of the flora and fauna of the Park, to be established at Holly Lodge from 1994. A number of surveys were undertaken that

year by the Wildlife Group and Friends volunteers. In July, rare ants were found on some ancient oaks, and on another occasion elephant moths discovered. A survey of small mammals also provided data on the species present in the Park.

## Campaign Against Traffic in the Park

In the autumn of 1994, a splinter group from within the Friends had formed, organised by John Waller and Mary Thorpe — The Campaign Against Traffic in Richmond Park (CATIRP). They and their supporters felt that the threat to the ecology and peace of the Park from the increasingly heavy traffic had reached a point where something had to be done. They submitted a Rule and Constitution amendment for the AGM of April 1995 which was “to ensure that the Park is not opened to motor traffic after sunset, and it is closed to through motor traffic at weekends and Bank Holidays”. The amendment was not passed.

Douglas Reynolds, the Friends Chairman, proposed instead that the position of the Friends was, and always had been, that the main danger from traffic in the Park was its speed, and the many traffic reduction and calming measures undertaken over the years had been unsuccessful because the speed limit was still too high, with inadequate policing to enforce it. The situation became very divisive. Feeling ignored by the committee, CATIRP coordinated a petition at the gates of the Park which obtained 6,500 signatures in support of their aims.

By the next AGM in 1996, the relationship between CATIRP and the Friends committee had deteriorated further and the meeting resulted in a heated debate. The action group accused the Friends of not providing a forum for discussion regarding traffic. They felt that a questionnaire that had been

## Richmond Park Wildlife Group

The Richmond Park Wildlife Group (RPWG) was formed in the early 1990s by Mike Fitt, the newly appointed Park Superintendent, drawing together leading local conservationists to help him and his team with the management of the Park’s ecology. He had previously set up a similar group in Hyde Park.

Volunteer groups were formed to record various aspects of the wildlife in the Park. The most important were the Bird, Flora and Butterfly Groups, all of which continue to this day. The standard walks set up by the Bird and Butterfly Groups have enabled them to track species numbers in the Park accurately and contribute regularly to national statistics.

In recent years the RPWG has encouraged various practical initiatives in the management of the Park, including:

- the regeneration of scrub, providing gorse and hawthorn thickets for nest-building by birds, insects and small mammals;
- establishing dog-control areas for the protection of ground-nesting birds, which has increased the breeding population of such birds in the Park;
- opening out scrapes and new ponds on higher ground to encourage rain water to soak into the underlying aquifers, rather than to escape out of the Park;
- clearing of brambles and planting hazel coppice in Prince Charles Spinney to encourage native bluebells in spring.

Many RPWG members are also members of the Friends, and have contributed to the Friends walks, talks and courses. The Friends have also funded several conservation projects proposed by the RPWG.

## Changing Membership Figures

1961	112
1963	512
1980	1,000
1988	1,700
1995	2,703
2003	1,700
2006	1,550
2010	1,670

The fall from 1995 to 2003 was partly due to traffic issues and partly to less leeway over members not paying their subscriptions

issued to members to gauge their opinions on the subject had been inadequate and the results were therefore unrepresentative of general opinion. They further suggested that the committee was not truthfully representing the findings of the Jenkins Report (*see page 25*), which had supported some road closure. The group demanded a more open forum of discussion on the problem, and endeavoured to have a number of their supporters nominated to the committee in an effort to force the situation. There was a great deal of impassioned discussion in the press and between both sides. Under great pressure, Douglas Reynolds agreed that Mary Thorpe could speak on behalf of CATIRP for one minute at the AGM.

By the end of 1996 it was clear that this very public division was becoming detrimental to the position of the Friends. It was agreed by both sides that they should meet to try to

find a positive way forward. CATIRP was pleased to have been able to express its views formally through the meeting, and agreed to look more widely at the problem of traffic. They turned their attention instead to achieving practical traffic reduction measures. However, it was to be another 18 months, in summer 1998, before CATIRP members got onto the committee.

## Royal Parks Finance

In the second half of the 1990s, the Royal Parks Agency was under increasing pressure to generate commercial income from its Parks to offset reduced funding from the government. There was resistance from the Friends to the idea of concerts and special events being staged, and they were also uncomfortable with proposals in a Marketing Strategy for the Parks which suggested charging for car parking and visits to the Isabella Plantation. However, they were increasingly aware that private finance would be used to develop Pembroke Lodge, since the Royal Parks Agency could not afford to refurbish it from its stretched finances.

The Friends wrote extensively to MPs to voice their concerns over suggested budget cuts, but found communication difficult as their enquiries were not answered. The Royal Parks Agency itself was not forthcoming with support, failing to send a representative to the 1996 AGM, and not replying to correspondence.

The Friends were also assessing the role of the Royal Parks Agency, and there was some feeling that the unique ecological needs of

***“...the sense of unspoilt countryside with ancient forest trees, stretches of bracken and fine grassland, ponds and streams interspersed with exceptionally beautiful woodland gardens... (that is Richmond Park)”***

***Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Royal Parks Review 1996***

the Park might be better protected by a conservancy trust, which would not have the Agency's requirements to create income through use of the parkland for staged events, as was happening at other Royal Parks.

## Royal Parks Review Conclusions

Dame Jennifer Jenkins' Review published separate reports on each group of the Royal Parks, of which the last was that on Richmond and Bushy Parks, finally published in 1996. It stated that lack of funding for all Royal Parks was unacceptable, with Richmond and Bushy Parks the most under-resourced of all. Many buildings, including Pembroke Lodge and the wall around Richmond Park, were deemed to be in grave condition. It also expressed concerns regarding the impact of heavy traffic, saying "the growth of traffic has undermined the space, views and tranquillity of all the

parks". It referred to traffic as forming a "cordon of steel" which divided the central wilderness area from the remaining acres. Its report went on to say "this stretch of countryside, itself quite extraordinary within a world city, is undermined by noise, pollution, congestion and danger from cars, all aspects of the surrounding city which most park visitors have come to escape".

On traffic, it recommended an experimental ban on vehicles driving through at weekends for six months from early spring, so serious was the build up; the closure of Pen Ponds car park, except for disabled parking, to reduce visitor numbers and erosion of the landscape; better screening of all car parks; the introduction of flexible pay-and-display parking charges, at least at weekends and taking account of the needs of local residents; and the realignment of the road at Broomfield Hill car park to be nearer the

## Tree Dedications

Records at Holly Lodge tell of over 2,500 trees given to Richmond Park by generous donors, and the Friends have made significant contributions to this figure.

A number of trees are dedicated in appreciation of the work of members from our past. Three oaks were planted to mark the important role in the foundation of the Friends played by Mary Gueritz, who died in 1997, and her husband John, the first Chairman. Other Friends commemorated include Paul and Pam Nicholson, Bob Smith, Roy Smith, 'Mick', 'John' and 'Jean'. Nesta Smeaton was honoured with a planting in the Isabella Plantation for her years of work as membership secretary, and former Chairman Douglas Reynolds will be remembered for his many contributions to the Friends by the white cornus which is the centrepiece of the 'White Wood' there.

The Friends contributed generously to replace the 1,100 trees lost in the great storms of 1987 and 1990. Their donations to the Prince of Wales appeal and to their own Tree Fund led to the creation of Two Storm Wood, near Sheen Gate. More trees were contributed in 1981 to help establish Queen Mother's Copse, and a tree was planted in 2000 to commemorate the Millennium year.

The scope for individual tree dedications is lessened today, since the Park's emphasis now is on seeking public support for the restoration and maintenance of woodland areas, rather than adding to the number of 'stand-alone' trees. However, by their donations over past decades the Friends have left an enduring mark on our cherished woodlands.

wall, thus allowing access to the Isabella Plantation without having to cross the road. It also recommended improvement of areas immediately inside the gates to reinforce the “sense of entry into a different world”.

Among its recommendations on ecology were an increase in wetter areas in the Park to encourage more diversity in habitat, improvement of the water quality and flow of Beverley Brook, and monitoring of erosion and visitor pressure in ecologically-sensitive areas.

On visitor facilities, it recommended a study of the need for and style of children’s play areas; possible cycle hire; the possible creation of a second woodland garden as an alternative attraction to the Isabella Plantation; improved catering facilities, including a second cafe to that at Pembroke Lodge plus mobile kiosks; and “very occasionally” allowing major running competitions through the Park (although competitions starting and finishing in the Park were deemed inappropriate).

It recommended strict enforcement of the ban on mountain bikes, dogs worrying deer, dog waste and the 30mph speed limit, with public information, warnings and prosecution for repeat offences. Finally, it

recommended immediate repair of sections of the wall; no new building in the Park, except for public use, and containment of buildings within existing sites; and prohibition of building above tree level in the area immediately surrounding the Park.

The Friends committee sent a summary of the recommendations to all members, asking for their views, particularly on traffic. 750 members replied: 45% were in favour with 48% against closing roads to through-traffic on spring and summer weekends; 33% were in favour with 57% against closing Pen Ponds car park and charging for the others.

The Jenkins Review was to be the basis for much of the Royal Parks Agency policy and actions over the following ten years and, across all of the Royal Parks, about 80% of the recommendations have been implemented.

## **Pembroke Lodge**

In 1997, a contract was signed between the Royal Parks Agency and The Hearsam Family Ltd for the restoration of Pembroke Lodge along with the operation of a public catering and wedding facility. Although the plans for the Lodge now seemed to be largely in line with the views of the Friends, disagreement

## **Patrons of the Friends**

In 1996, the Friends of Richmond Park appointed two patrons: Chris Brasher and Lord (Brian) Rix.

Chris Brasher was an Olympic gold medal steeplechaser, a sports journalist and businessman, devoted to the outdoor life. A man of enormous determination, it was he who founded the London marathon, organising it from Richmond Gate Lodge, and raising millions for charity in so doing. He died in 2003.

Lord Rix is a renowned actor and impresario, famous for his farces. He retired from the theatre and campaigned tirelessly for children with learning disabilities, as Chairman and then President of the Royal Mencap Society, and later through the Rix Centre. Lord Rix lived next to Richmond Park at Roehampton Gate for over 50 years, and his association with the Friends is greatly valued. He is now President of the Friends.

arose once more between committee members. At the AGM of that year there was much debate regarding opposition to the commercial use of Pembroke Lodge for anything other than the existing purposes. With extended catering and evening events planned, concern was expressed that traffic after dark would increase due to late functions, and that nocturnal wildlife would be adversely affected by vehicles and light pollution.

It was clear, however, that Pembroke Lodge must be commercially viable and the Friends endeavoured to be involved in progressing the restoration. Daniel Hearsum was keen to discuss developments with the committee and arranged for them to attend a number of planning meetings. However, the Friends continued to press for restrictions on the use of the Lodge site, and they welcomed the conditions attached to the planning approval for Pembroke Lodge which limited access and lighting, and insisted the cafe be available to the public from 10am to 5.30pm or dusk.

## Kingston Gate Gardens

In early 1997, the original gardens at Kingston Gate had been redeveloped and landscaped to provide a children's play area. This, however, caused some irritation to local residents who were bothered by the ensuing noise. Letters of complaint were received by the Friends, who discussed the issue with Park Management. In 1999, following a petition with 517 signatures, the Royal Parks Agency decided to resite the play equipment nearer Kingston Gate car park, only 100 yards from the original site, across the road, thus solving the problem.

## Traffic

Taking over from Douglas Reynolds, Howard Stafford began a short period as Chairman in May 1999. At the time he took up the position the issue of traffic had again

## National Nature Reserve

Amid the political turmoil of traffic and planning regulations, there was some good news for the Park itself. In 2000, it was designated a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

NNRs were established to protect nationally important areas of wildlife habitat and geological formations in Britain, and as places for scientific research. The citation for Richmond Park named its acid grassland, ancient trees and stag beetles as of national importance.

become a very public concern. Following a general meeting on local traffic reduction, there was some hope that the tide was turning in favour of more controlled, if not reduced, through-traffic in the Park. The Peter Brett Associates traffic survey of 1998 had demonstrated that on week days 94-98% of traffic simply drove through the Park without stopping. Friends of the Earth supported traffic reduction, and Richmond Council seemed to be recognising the strength of argument in favour of reduction.

The Friends examined the possible introduction of an internal bus service to reduce circulatory traffic.

However, a great many people opposed the Friends' stance on the subject. External and also internal pressures on the Friends to clarify their position regarding traffic in the Park were high. It was felt that a review of the wording in the constitution would be beneficial to remove all ambiguity as to its aims — it stated that the Park should be kept out of the national highways, but not how this would be achieved. Amidst the pressured and hostile environment of the traffic debate, Howard Stafford stepped down as Chairman for personal reasons in September 1999 after only four months, and Douglas Reynolds was re-elected.



## Traffic and Beyond — the 2000s

### A Committee Further Divided

In early 2000, the issue of further planning applications for Pembroke Lodge caused division in the committee. Some members were happy to approve an application to convert the nearby Pembroke Cottage into a five bedroom residence for the operator of Pembroke Lodge and his family. Others felt that this was inappropriate in the Park, and some argued that funding for developing the Pembroke Lodge grounds should have come from The Crown Estate, instead of from a private source.

Further differences of opinion arose regarding the ability of sub-committees to speak on behalf of the full committee after one sub-committee had written a letter to the newspapers, to which some members of the full committee objected. Finally, there was more disagreement regarding the Friends' representations to the Royal Parks

Agency on the prominent issue of excessive traffic.

In March 2000, the then Chairman, Douglas Reynolds, finally reached the point where he felt his position to be untenable and handed in his resignation. Lady Susan Steyn agreed to cover the position until the next AGM, where voting could take place. Fortunately Mr Reynolds was to remain a member of the Friends. In his position as talks secretary he undertook an enormous amount of work in organising talks and presentations to thousands of interested parties over the years.

### Retirement of Key Figures

The new century saw the retirement of a number of other key figures from the Friends. John Feltham, the Friends' first walks leader, retired from contributing to the newsletter after twelve years. He had been forced to step down from leading walks due to ill health, but had gone on to share a vast amount of information about the Park through his regular diaries. He was

## The Friends Committee

The Friends is run by a committee of twelve people, headed by a Chairman. Each committee member has responsibility for an area of the Friends' activities — membership, treasurer, newsletter, Visitor Centre etc — or a particular project. Since 2009 they are also Trustees of the registered charity. In the past there were formal sub-committees, but in the last five to ten years these have been replaced by more informal groups working on particular tasks.

There is also a President (since 1996, Lord Rix) and a group of honorary Vice Presidents — people senior in the Friends in the past — who provide help and advice to the committee.

### Former Chairmen

Col John Gueritz	Sep 1961—Apr 1974
Gerald Jameson-Green	Apr 1974—Apr 1980
John Martin	Apr 1980—Apr 1981
Leslie Freeman	Apr 1981—Apr 1984
Rodney Coyne	Apr 1984—May 1988
Roy Smith	May 1988—Apr 1993
Douglas Reynolds	Apr 1993—May 1999
Howard Stafford	May 1999—Sep 1999
Douglas Reynolds	Sep 1999—Mar 2000
Lady Susan Steyn	Mar 2000—Apr 2000
Richard Carter	Apr 2000—May 2003
John Repsch	May 2003—Apr 2004
John Collier	Apr 2004—Apr 2007
Ron Crompton	Apr 2007 to present

subsequently made a Vice President of the Friends. The treasurer, Gerald Eades, finally took a break after no fewer than 30 years in the post, and former Chairman Roy Smith decided to step down as Vice President.

## **AGM April 2000**

These and other retirements created a number of significant vacancies on the committee, which were to be filled at the AGM of April 2000 by some of the members supporting CATIRP. John Waller was voted in as treasurer, Mary Thorpe became membership secretary, and her husband David Thorpe became honorary secretary. Richard Carter was now elected as the new Chairman, the third new leader in six months.

Lady Steyn, as retiring Chairman, spoke eloquently on the values of the Park. She said “Richmond Park does not belong to us. It is timeless. In its history the Park has offered within its walls a space of peace, tranquillity and beauty; a place of recreation for many generations. And these generations have cared for it. Now the Park has passed into the hands of our generation. We in our lifetime are trustees of it... Our hope must be that when our generation passes we will leave the Park stronger and healthier than it was at the beginning of our term. But at the least — at the very least — let us do nothing which will damage or degrade it”.

## **Traffic, Traffic, Traffic**

By 2000, the topic of traffic curtailment had again become a major issue. The Royal Parks Agency issued a consultation document regarding possible traffic restrictions within the Park, and it seemed that the time had finally come to make some changes to reduce commuter traffic. Topics in the air included better speed limit enforcement, gate closures, and the introduction of pedestrian crossings.

***“We Friends, by our constitution and name, have a responsibility to oppose traffic, to oppose damaging developments and to put the interests of the Park before our personal interests”***

***Mary Thorpe, 1997***

The local councils of Richmond, Kingston and Wandsworth vociferously opposed any gate or road closures in the Park, largely on the basis that it would cause chaos on surrounding roads. The councils formed The Richmond Park Forum, nominally a discussion group assessing the impact on the local environs of potential traffic changes, but in practice more of a pressure group for the councils’ views.

The Friends continued to be of the opinion that the conservation of the Park — now a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve, as well as a Grade One Historical Landscape — was of the foremost importance, and reiterated the point that the Park roads were private, and should therefore be no part of council traffic plans.

Additionally, the Friends highlighted the growing measures being taken nationally to control traffic in sensitive areas, including the introduction of bus services in several National Parks, such as the Peak District and Snowdonia, and of a car-free zone at Burnham Beeches.

At the end of 2000, Richmond Council announced that the speed limit on the public road through Petersham was to be reduced to 20mph. It seemed more

appropriate than ever that the speed limit on Park roads should also be 20mph.

The Royal Parks Agency finally issued its proposals on traffic changes in December 2001. These included the reduction of the speed limit to 20mph; the closure of Robin Hood Gate to incoming traffic (it had been closed to outgoing traffic since 1973); and improvements to car parks and to pedestrian road crossings. Although considered in some ways flawed, the document was welcomed by the Friends as a practical step towards protection. However, the battle was only just beginning.

### Decreasing Funding, Increasing Commercialisation

Government funding for the Royal Parks had reduced year by year for ten years. The Jenkins Review's comment that this was unacceptable was ignored and the establishment of the Royal Parks Agency had only accelerated it. By 2000, government funding accounted for only 77% of the Royal Parks Agency's budget, commercial income for 23%.

The Royal Parks Agency Annual Report for 1999-2000 stated that expenditure was to be frozen, but the Parks needed to increase revenues by 10% each year to offset further cuts in government funding. Parking charges were a possibility, along with the establishment of retail outlets. The Friends considered that an increased leaning towards commercialisation was in conflict with the aims of the Agency "to manage the Royal Parks so that they offer peaceful enjoyment, recreation, entertainment and delight to those who use them and are enhanced, protected and preserved for the benefit of this and future generations".

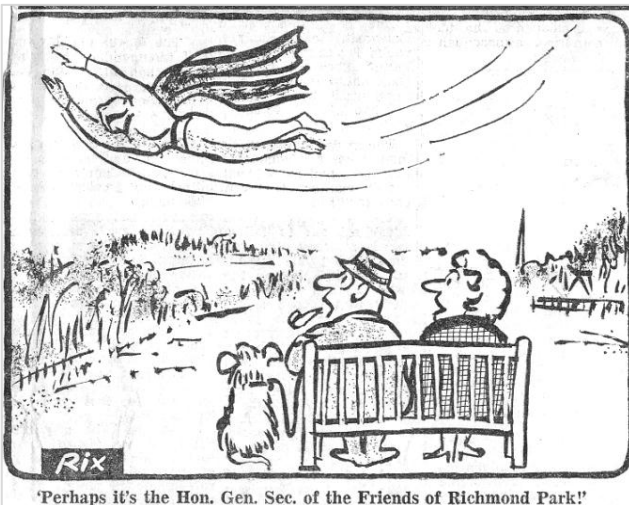
In 2001, the government proposed that the Royal Parks Agency become a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), independent of government, like English Heritage or Historic Royal Palaces. This status would help the Royal Parks Agency to enhance its fundraising potential, also making it better placed to achieve Lottery funding, and to have financial flexibility through achieving charitable status.

The Friends felt that the emphasis was becoming more on revenue generation than on ecological considerations: possible fundraising events would be entirely unsuitable for a wildlife park.

By mid 2002, it became clear that the NDPB was not going to be possible, due to miscalculations regarding VAT, but the push toward commercialisation seemed set.

### Foot and Mouth Disease

The outbreak of foot and mouth disease across Britain in early 2002 forced the Royal Parks Agency to close all the gates of the Park to traffic on March 1. The result was not complete



*From The Richmond & Twickenham Times ca. 1982*

gridlock of the surrounding roads, as some had predicted. Several roads remained congested in peak periods as they usually were, but others if anything flowed more freely: the A3 was not hindered by traffic moving slowly in order to turn left into the Park at Robin Hood Gate, and the traffic on the roundabout fed through smoothly. The Friends saw this as a good indication of what would happen if Robin Hood Gate, and other gates, were closed permanently. The gates were reopened once the crisis was considered over, and the traffic flow resumed once more.

## The Traffic Battle Heats Up

During 2002, little seemed to be happening about a decision on the Royal Parks Agency's traffic proposals. The Friends felt the Royal Parks were held back from making an independent decision by a legal obligation to liaise with the local councils, who were obstructing change. Expected improvements to public transport around the Park had not been progressed by the councils at any speed and the Friends felt the councils were whipping up public opposition. Public meetings to discuss changes had become confrontational. At a meeting in East Sheen when those attending

## The Friends Take to the Boards

Well, the Friends wanted to raise their profile and get public attention, so what better way to do it than with a musical?

On May 16 2003 *Celebration!* was performed at the Royal Star and Garter Home as a fundraising event, and deemed a great success. With sponsorship from local companies and the skills of producer Lindy Shaw, the Friends produced "a light-hearted look at Richmond Park in music, song, dance and verse" which entertained a 300 strong audience.

who were standing were invited to use space on the podium behind anti-traffic lobbyists, someone called out "and take a knife!"

The Friends wrote to Baroness Blackstone directly, as head of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, requesting that the Department step between the two camps and make it clear that it was for the government to decide upon future measures with regard to traffic in Richmond Park. The Friends called for trial measures to be put in place for at least a year before public comment was made.

## Pen Ponds Car Park and Robin Hood Gate

Much controversy also arose over the Royal Parks Agency proposal to close Pen Ponds car park, subject to the provision of alternative transport. It was to be replaced with a smaller parking area, suitable for elderly and disabled visitors. Local councillors accused the Royal Parks Agency of closing the car park merely as a step towards reducing traffic generally, and the pro-motorist lobby came out in force. The Royal Parks Agency was even accused of selecting a particular site nearby as a protected zone for breeding skylarks specifically to facilitate the reduction in the parking space. The Friends supported a reduction of traffic in an ecologically sensitive area, particularly since problems of landscape erosion there were increasing. In the end, as no alternative public transport was forthcoming, the car park remained open, although reduced in size.

Another Royal Parks Agency proposal was for the closure of Robin Hood Gate. From August 26 2003 it was closed for a twelve month trial period, with a review after three months. The Friends were delighted to hear of this very positive step towards traffic reduction. They were further impressed

that speed tables were to be built at both Pembroke Lodge and Broomfield Hill car parks, the objective being to reduce the speed of traffic at those locations, and to offer a focal point for pedestrians other than a pedestrian crossing.

### **New Chairman — New Focus**

In May 2003, John Repsch took over from Richard Carter as Chairman. Under his leadership the Friends set about refocussing on their membership and contacts within the community. The traffic dispute had been instrumental in reducing the Friends membership considerably. Initiatives to demonstrate that the Friends were active on a number of topics — not only traffic — were begun. Increased liaison with the various Park groups such as the Park Superintendent, the Royal Parks Constabulary and wildlife groups was given

priority, along with local organisations such as the Richmond Society, the Holly Lodge Centre, and the Richmond Park Green Voice.

### **Changes to Policing**

For some considerable time policing in the Park had been under-staffed and frequently officers were called away to help at an event in another Royal Park, so that cover would be reduced further.

Crime and social disorder in the Park are very low, but there is still a considerable job to do in policing Park regulations and in proceeding against motoring offences. In 2003, there was a trial to catch cyclists speeding on the Tamsin Trail. A total of 3,579 hours were spent policing the cycle path and 199 warnings issued in the first quarter of the year. Speeding cars were also a problem. The police targeted those

## **50 Years of the Isabella Plantation**

The year 2003 marked the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Isabella Plantation, and the Friends celebrated the occasion by donating a glade of white flowers and trees.

The honour of planting the first tree — a hybrid dogwood *Cornus* “Eddie’s White Wonder” — fell to former Chairman Douglas Reynolds in recognition of his long service to the Friends.



*Douglas Reynolds at the Isabella 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary planting*

travelling at 35 to 40mph. No fewer than 186 were caught in March trials, of which more than 50% were local residents.

Following lengthy reviews and negotiations, the Royal Parks Constabulary was absorbed into the Metropolitan Police on a trial basis in 2004. Visible police presence in the Park was boosted, and the general feeling of uncertainty regarding staffing was eased.

However, there was certainly no police officer available when, according to *The Richmond & Twickenham Times* of April 11 2004, a 500 year old tree was burned down, apparently by a family who had parked at Pen Ponds, started a barbecue and then thrown the embers into the ancient tree. The Fire Brigade arrived too late to save it. Barbecues were prohibited within the Park in 2004.

## More Commercialisation and Outsourcing

The publication in 2003 of the Royal Parks Corporate Plan for the years 2003-2006 showed a change in emphasis coming from the government. No longer were the specific aims for the Park focussed on “peaceful enjoyment” and the need to “protect and preserve” for generations to come. Instead there was “purpose” and “vision”, focussed more on raising money. The responsibility for conservation seemed compromised.

The appointment of a new Advisory Board whose members had expertise in marketing and general business but no knowledge of ecology, heritage and horticulture — or indeed many of the other skills required to understand Richmond Park — was a further sign of the shift.

A new “Royal Parks Foundation” was also formed as an independent charity to

raise voluntary donations for the Royal Parks. It aimed to raise £100 million over ten years — equivalent to half of the government’s funding of the Royal Parks.

For Richmond Park there was also to be a Public Private Partnership to redevelop the golf club and increase its financial contribution.

None of these addressed the requirements for restoration and renovation so badly needed in some areas of the Park. There was a decided sense that the Park was being driven further towards commercialisation.

## Closure on Traffic

In May 2004, amended regulations governing the Royal Parks were published. The speed limit was reduced from 30mph to 20mph in order to “increase visitor safety, protect the Park and its wildlife and improve the quality of visitors’ experience”. Furthermore, children up to the age of ten were now allowed to legally cycle on Park footpaths in safety. It also became an offence not to clean up after your dog anywhere in the Park, or to light or cause fires in the Park.

In June, the reduction to 20mph was debated in the House of Lords on two occasions. First it was proposed that the



*Robin Hood Gate, permanently closed to traffic*



reduction should require the prior approval of local authorities; second that the management of the roads within the Park should be transferred either to adjacent local authorities or to Transport for London. Fortunately both proposals were withdrawn, and the reduction in the speed limit went through.

At the end of 2004, the consultants reviewing the effect of the Robin Hood Gate closure recommended that it should remain closed. The report concluded that traffic flows on the east side of the Park reduced by up to 50% and peak hour traffic in the whole Park by 23%, well above the 10% target set by the Royal Parks Agency. The traffic unable to go through Robin Hood Gate had diverted through Kingston Gate or Roehampton Lane, but in both cases roads were able to cope. It was very satisfying to have the facts and figures laid out for all to see, and the Friends were vindicated that the local councils' predictions had proved unfounded.

The Friends vigorously defended the gate closure in the subsequent exchange of views in the local press, and against ministerial lobbying by local politicians in favour of its reopening, and it has remained closed. Around this time the improvements to Pen

***"The Friends are representative of all who love and care for the Park. We will only succeed in our campaigns if we help inform the world at large about the treasure on their doorsteps and help them enjoy it"***

***John Collier, Chairman 2004-2007***

Ponds car park were also completed, helping to reduce the impact of visitors on the rare acid grassland which surrounds it.

## **End of the Traffic Debate**

The traffic reduction measures implemented in 2003-4 marked the end of ten years of fierce debate and acrimony over traffic in the Park. The issue had divided the Friends, set them against much of the public and consumed a lot of time and energy. Public opinion was also strongly divided, and councils were at odds with the Royal Parks Agency. By 2004, all were exhausted, and the next five years saw little action on traffic. It remains a big problem, however, and is still central to the Friends' concerns about protecting the Park.

## **John Collier Steps In**

As John Repsch completed his year as Chairman of the Friends, John Collier took up the position.

John Collier led a comprehensive review of the Friend's strategy in the spring and summer of 2004, including a survey of the whole membership. The result was a decision to assert the core aim of the Friends as

being *for* the Park rather than mainly *anti*-traffic. Traffic concerns, however, remained a central concern, with opposition to through-traffic being as widely voiced then as it is today. The co-existence of cyclists and pedestrians on the Tamsin Trail was also a recurrent theme, with strong views being expressed on both sides.

The committee felt that it would reinvigorate the society if they were to expand activities for members —



*John Collier,  
Chairman 2004-2007*



particularly educational activities — and to engage more with the wider community. If people were better informed about why the Park is so special they would be more likely to support the Friends and appreciate the need to resist all manner of threats to its continued existence as beautiful, wild open space in a crowded urban area.

The message that “the Friends are not all about traffic” was reiterated by the Park Superintendent himself, Simon Richards, who was active in leading walks and talks for the general public.

### **Pembroke Lodge Reborn**

Pembroke Lodge was now much improved, renovated in a sympathetic manner by Daniel Hearsom, and with public access greatly increased. Plans were being drawn up to redesign the toilet block and kiosk outside by the car park, and in concert with the Friends and the Park Superintendent, displays and leaflets were to be made available to help Park visitors to appreciate the unique ecological importance and outstanding beauty of the Park.

Although some Friends were still against the increase in activity caused by Pembroke Lodge, particularly after dark, there was general recognition of the excellent public facility created.

### **Reaching Out**

Under John Collier the committee started various new initiatives for both members and the wider community. A website was launched, and the much lauded newsletter improved, with Alison Donaldson as editor. The year 2005 saw the introduction of a number of wildlife theme options to the regular walks programme, with a wildlife expert accompanying the regular walk to offer specialist knowledge. An education group was begun to promote the unique nature of the Park and the threats to it, to schools, colleges, community groups “and anyone else who will listen”. Early in 2006, a course entitled ‘An Introduction to Birdwatching’ was begun by Peter Burrows-Smith, which proved popular, and more courses were to be developed on related subjects.



*Our walks leaders, John Repsch, Michael Davison, Douglas Reynolds and Peter Burrows-Smith*

An annual photography competition for young people was started to encourage them to appreciate the Park and its wildlife.

### **Les Amis de la Forêt de Fontainebleau**

For many years Richmond has been twinned with Fontainebleau in France but there had been limited contact between the Friends and the Association des Amis de la Forêt de Fontainebleau. This was put to rights in November 2006 when a group of Friends went to France and were made most welcome by Les Amis, with a civic reception and a guided walk in la Forêt thrown in.

The challenges facing Les Amis are very similar to those facing Richmond Park although la Forêt is many times bigger than our Park. Another visit followed in September 2007 for the 100th anniversary of Les Amis and there may be more in the future.

Figures showed that the Friends were gaining more members, which was an encouraging trend, whilst at the same time ensuring that the role of an active pressure group for the Park was not forgotten. The constitutional status of the Park was reviewed to establish if it could become independent of all political pressure, whether through central or local government. In conjunction with the Friends groups of all the Royal Parks, the £65 million maintenance backlog across all the Parks was raised both with central government and in a letter published in *The Times* in March 2006.

### Petersham to Ham Path

In spring 2006, work commenced on building a cycle path between Petersham and Ham Gates. The Friends had objected to the path when the planning application came before Richmond Council. For one thing, although off-track cycling had increased ruts in that part of the Park it was still relatively unspoilt and wild, and would be opened up to new visitors and made vulnerable. For a second, people cycling on the upper part of the Tamsin Trail near to Pembroke Lodge would try to connect to the lower path by the most direct route, riding straight down the slope. The latter did increase when the Royal Parks Agency went ahead with the path, and subsequently barriers have had to be put in place to obstruct the descent and limit erosion.

### Information (Visitor) Centre

The year 2007 saw an important development for the Park and the Friends with the construction of the Richmond Park Information Centre at the gates of Pembroke Lodge, a joint effort between the Royal Parks Agency, the Hearsam Family and the Friends, led by Brian Baker and Sheila Hamilton.

The Friends were happy to support this venture, as it was a great opportunity to



*A volunteer signs up a new member at the Visitor Centre*

educate visitors about the Park, its uniqueness and the threats to it. They agreed to recruit members as volunteer staff and manage the Centre when it was open. Members were trained, and the Centre opened for the four days of the Easter weekend. It was a great success, and was soon open on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays all year round. Not only was it now possible to distribute information about the Park, but sales of books, postcards and other such goods could also be made. Today some 60-70 Friends members are involved in staffing the Centre.

Over the door of the Visitor Centre, as it has now been renamed, is a brass plaque, received from the Richmond Society when the improvements at Pembroke Lodge, of which it was a part, won top prize at the annual awards for best development in Richmond borough, 2007. This was a unique 'double' as the restoration of the main lodge was also awarded top prize in 2005.



## Three Years On

After three years of significant development and reshaping, John Collier passed the Chairman's role on to Ron Crompton in May 2007. He focussed on continuing to expand the range of activities undertaken by the Friends.

A consultation exercise with the public was launched in summer 2007, which indicated how people saw the Park. Younger members were welcomed, with the newsletter introducing pages for children, and a Nature Table developed, which was taken to local schools displaying specimens of fauna and flora.

## Policing

After a three-year trial, The Metropolitan Police had formally taken over policing in the Park in April 2007. There were some initial "hiccups" which come with employing a new system, such as the Met call centre at Hendon not knowing the main locations in the Park. More importantly, the Friends remained concerned that the "hard" crime-oriented, target-driven approach of the Met was not suitable for the softer enforcement of Park regulations, and considerable time was spent in getting to grips with this problem, through the Safer Parks Police Panel, on which the Friends of Richmond Park is represented.

However, progress was being made in enforcing the new speed limit. It was now possible to catch cyclists for speeding using machines sensitive enough to register the thin shape of a bicycle: one was caught doing 41mph! The number of reportable road accidents in the Park had reduced to 26 in the first quarter of 2008 from the equivalent of 60 for the same period the previous year. The number of deer killed by cars was reduced from around ten to twelve a year when there was a 30mph speed limit to five or six with a 20mph speed limit.

A prosecution had also been made after an uncontrolled dog had savaged a deer, which then had to be destroyed.

Restrictions were put in place on dogs around ponds

following the loss of most of the cygnets at Pen Ponds one year, and other incidents of dogs attacking wildfowl. The Royal Parks Agency and the police also took action, prompted by the Friends and the Wildlife Group, to control commercial dog walkers who walk up to ten dogs at a time, often off-lead.



## Construction Work — and Heathrow

There was a large amount of construction work — planned and actual — in 2008. The Royal Parks Agency and Glendale Golf submitted a planning application to completely refurbish the golf courses, upgrading and turning round the two eighteen-hole courses, building a new clubhouse, changing the entrance from Roehampton Gate to the A3, and creating new ponds. The Friends supported the development, particularly the ecological improvements and the removal of golf traffic from the Roehampton Gate area. In February, work was taking place to repair the access path to the Isabella Plantation when the contractor discovered an unexploded World War II bomb, which had to be defused and removed by bomb disposal experts!

The Ballet School was in the midst of constructing further accommodation for its pupils, which added to the bulk of the buildings on the site.

Simultaneously the Friends battled against the threat of aircraft noise due to the planned expansion at Heathrow Airport, which would quadruple the number of flights taking off over the Park. The expansion was eventually shelved by the new government in 2010.

## Communication

Regular communication with members is essential to the Friends, to gauge opinions and to share information. In 2008, in addition to the regular newsletters, monthly email bulletins were introduced which also attached the monthly Park Diary and Isabella Diary from the Royal Parks Agency. In 2010, the website was also refreshed and made easier to navigate.

## Remembering John Lewis

On May 16 2008 the Friends of Richmond Park marked to the day the 250th anniversary of Richmond brewer John Lewis's success in 1758 in re-establishing the rights of public access to the Park.

Around 80 people attended the ceremony, including representatives from many local societies and three mayors. A plaque was unveiled by Susan Kramer MP at Sheen Gate, the scene of the incident in 1755 when Lewis had been denied entry, which led to the court case at Surrey Assizes in Kingston three years later that Lewis won, and which ordered Princess Amelia to put in place a ladderstile to allow public access.



## Car Parking Charges

As part of its continuing push to raise money, in 2009 the Royal Parks Agency suggested further revisions to Park regulations, of which the most contentious was car parking charges in Richmond Park and Bushy Park.

The Friends decided to assess the views of their members through a consultation before making a response. Of 400 members responding 43% were in favour and 57% against the charges. The Friends' considered response opposed broad-ranging charges but supported charges at times of peak usage, when the car parks are full and there are queues of traffic. They also proposed a low-cost season ticket for frequent visitors.

In spite of opposition to the charges, the Department of Culture Media & Sport decided to press ahead but was met early in 2010 by a mass protest and opposition in the House of Lords. The proposals were passed by Parliament but a new Conservative/Liberal Democrat government in May 2010 quickly dropped them.

## Charitable Status

For some years the Friends had been looking into the benefits of becoming a charity to gain tax advantages, raise funds and generally improve their profile. The application was eventually approved in December 2009 after much effort and an EGM. In the process, the Friends were required by charity law to clarify the public benefit they provided and reduced their nine 1961 objectives to two simple ones, as follows:

### The Friends' Objectives 2010

- (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
- (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
  - (ii) generally in relation to the conservation, protection and improvement of the Park.

## Conservation & Ecology Group

Strange as it may seem, it took until 2009 for the Friends to set up their own Conservation and Ecology Group. They had done much work over the years alongside other bodies, such as the Richmond Park Wildlife Group, but now they set up their own group. One of the first activities was to

consider conservation projects for the Friends to fund in the Park. The first project was to create small enclosures to protect shrubs and trees from deer and dogs, thereby providing sites for nesting birds and wildlife. The Group also started practical conservation work involving volunteers, to give members the opportunity to contribute directly to the Park and to practise what the Friends preach: to conserve the Park.

## Guide Book & Family Trails

In 2009, the Friends decided that there was no definitive guide to Richmond Park, and they would write one themselves. It was to take two years of effort, being finally published in March 2011 in time for their 50th anniversary. All proceeds after covering costs were to go to conservation projects in the Park.

Each chapter was written by someone involved with the Park: Park Management contributed chapters on ecology, deer and trees; the Wildlife Group on birds, butterflies and flowers; and members of the Friends on history, buildings and 'dos and don'ts'. Half the book was devoted to the flora and fauna, with a foreword by Sir David Attenborough. A big problem was finding good photographs, but fifteen photographers gave their work free, and in the end the book had 270 colour pictures.

Not content with that first foray into publishing, the Friends also started on a book of six family trails. It was written and photographed by Susanna Ramsey, who had developed the Nature Table to take around schools. It was 40 years exactly since the Friends had last published a set of family trails, and they hoped it would be much less time before the next set would be published.



## Douglas Reynolds

No member of the Friends can have done more to increase public knowledge of the special quality of Richmond Park than former Chairman Douglas Reynolds. When the Friends started offering guided walks Douglas was one of the pioneer walk leaders, and later, when giving talks to local groups, he had the opportunity to spread his love and knowledge of the history and wildlife of the Park to an even wider audience.

By the time Douglas retired from 'walks and talks' in 2010 he calculated that he had led over 250 walks and given no fewer than 485 talks, over more than 15 years. His presentations, based on an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Park, were illustrated with striking images from his own large collection of colour slides.

Born and bred in Tolworth, Douglas saw wartime service abroad with the RAF, became a councillor for Surbiton and then for Kingston, and with his wife Doris became the borough's first Labour Mayor and Mayoress from 1974-75. It was through hearing a talk by Gerald Jameson-Green, a founder member and Chairman of the Friends, that Douglas became involved 30 years ago. He himself served as Chairman from 1993-2000.

At 90, in the Friends' 50th anniversary year, Douglas remains active in Friends affairs as a contributor to the newsletter and a volunteer at the Visitor Centre at Pembroke Lodge.





## Walks, Talks and Courses

Douglas Reynolds retired in 2010 from giving talks to local groups about the Park and leading walks in the Park; he had done 485 talks in total over more than 15 years. While the Friends had difficulty finding a replacement for the talks, the walks continued to take place, led by a group of half a dozen volunteers. The 2011 programme had 17 walks planned, half general and half on a wildlife theme. The most popular walks were the Boxing Day walk (over 100 people in some years) and the Summer Evening walk, complete with bat detectors. The programme also included eight courses — a half-hour talk followed by a two-hour walk linked to the topics in the talk — on birds, trees, butterflies etc, given by experts in the field. Of these, the one on birds was the most popular.

## Cuts in Royal Parks Agency Funding

Government funding of the Royal Parks Agency continued to fall throughout the 2000s; in 2000 it was 77% of the Royal Parks Agency's income, but by 2009 it was only 63%. The remainder came from steadily increasing commercial activities — concerts and Winter Wonderland in Hyde Park, parking charges in central and Greenwich parks, catering, concessions and so on. In 2009/2010 government funding was cut further, by over 35% over the following five years.

No increase in commercial income could make up for this and the Royal Parks Agency was forced to draw up plans to cut its staff by a third, and to reduce severely its maintenance of horticulture, landscape, roads and buildings. All the Royal Parks' Friends protested and called for maintenance of green spaces — “the defining characteristic” of the Royal Parks — to be preserved as far as possible; in the end

this maintenance suffered the smallest — but still significant — cuts.

Equally important were proposed cuts to the ecology provision and wildlife officers, and the merger of Richmond and Bushy Parks' management teams. All of these the Friends opposed.

## Transfer of the Royal Parks to the Mayor of London

The incoming coalition government announced in June 2010 that they would transfer management of the Royal Parks to the Mayor of London, as part of their policy of decentralisation; the refusal of the previous government to listen to local objections to parking charges in Richmond and Bushy Parks was said to have stimulated the idea. However, the Friends had strong concerns about the plan and were keen to see protection for the ecology of the Park and limits on further commercialisation.

They and the Friends of Bushy Park brought together over 30 other local stakeholders in the two Parks as the Richmond and Bushy Parks Forum, which in December 2010 adopted a seven point programme to be included in the transfer arrangements. It included a central Board, a local statutory consultative Board, SSSI status for Bushy Park, limits on concerts and sporting events, and ring-fencing of funding so that the Mayor could not use it for other activities.



## Revised Listing for Richmond Gate

The Friends were instrumental in amending an English Heritage Listing for Richmond Gate Lodge and the Gate itself in September 2010. Dated 1798, these are works of significant national interest, and it was with great pride that the Friends were to submit research by local historian John Cloake which more correctly attributed the design of the Gate and Lodge to Sir John Soane, rather than to Lancelot 'Capability' Brown.



*Postcard from the Hearsum Collection*

## The History Project

From July 2009 a group of Friends volunteers began to sort and catalogue the collection of material regarding the history of Richmond Park collected over many years by Daniel Hearsum, operator of Pembroke Lodge. Eventually the project will 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.

## Volunteers

With the History Project, the conservation work, the Visitor Centre and the other work of the Friends, more than 100 members were now volunteering for some activity that supported the Park, about 7% of the total membership. The Royal Parks Agency recognised the valuable work being done, and in both 2009 and 2010, two of the volunteers were given awards by the Royal Parks Agency for their contributions.

## Losses in the Park in 50 Years

Over the last 50 years, the wildlife in the Park has declined measurably. The brown hare was last seen in 1972, driven away by increasing dog numbers (the hare lives entirely above ground, unlike the rabbit), and hedgehogs and water shrews have also disappeared. We have also lost sheep, which grazed alongside deer, but that was a deliberate decision by Park Management, who are now experimenting with introducing cattle.

The Bird Group's annual bird counts show the complete loss of breeding pheasants, the grey partridge, woodlark, tree pipit, redstart, house and tree sparrow, linnet, bullfinch and yellowhammer and the major decline of the willow warbler, spotted flycatcher and meadow pipit. Some have been gained as breeding species, most of them 'urban' birds—mandarin duck, red crested pochard, egyptian goose, common tern, collared dove and, of course, the ring-necked parakeet.

## The Friends' 50th Anniversary

As the Friends' 50th anniversary in 2011 drew near, the committee's initial view was that the celebrations should be low key. However, that view changed as offers of help came in, particularly from Pembroke Lodge and the Ballet School, and people let their imaginations wander about what could be done. A group of three committee members — the 3 Musketeers or 3M — was formed, and developed plans for:

- Three events: a daytime celebration on March 27 (the anniversary of the Friends' inaugural meeting in 1961), for those associated with the Friends over the years; a special visit to the Royal Ballet School in May for members; and a summer party for members in June.

- This 50th anniversary history of the Friends, a special anniversary newsletter, and the launch of the Guide at the March 27 event.
- Anniversary conservation projects including planting species of native tree that the Park does not have, and a sand martin bank for Pen Ponds.
- A poetry competition, for children and adults celebrating the special nature of Richmond Park.
- Features on the Friends in the free Richmond and Kingston magazines, distributed to 5000 people locally

As this History went to press, the effort required to achieve these plans was clear to all, but the enthusiasm of all those involved boded well for their success.



*Photo: Andrew Wilson*

## Afterword — the Next 50 Years

Reading this History, three themes have dominated the Friends' time and energy over our first 50 years — setting up the society as an effective and influential group, resisting urbanisation of the Park in all its forms; and, of course, traffic which at one stage completely divided the Friends, internally and from the public.

What will be the themes of the next 50 years? I think the first will be the ever-increasing visitor numbers and the increasing intensity of how they use the Park. People have more leisure and spend it in the Park, running, cycling, kiting, dog walking, playing informal games and so on — all high-impact activities for the ecology. If your concern is public access that is a good thing; if, like the Friends, your concern is for balancing that with conserving the Park, it is a problem. The Friends will have an important role in combating these pressures through public education and lobbying.



The second is the decline in public funding for the Royal Parks. In 1961 it was 95% of income, now it is below 50%; by 2061 it could well be zero. Some of the decline could be made up by philanthropy but the majority will have to come from commercialisation (concerts, restaurants, toll charges, shops, sports, parking charges — take your pick). The Friends will spend a lot of time fighting against commercialisation when it affects the Park's ecology and its unique character. But they could also help stimulate local philanthropy, as Friends organisations do in other places such as Kew or the British Museum.

The third is changes in Richmond Park's ecology and wildlife. We need to prevent the same decline in species that has happened in the last 50 years — in fact we need to reverse it. Climate change will affect the Park's ecology, eliminating some species, favouring others and causing new diseases to fauna and flora. While Park Management has the main responsibility for dealing with these threats, the Friends can contribute volunteers, funding, and even management help.

Above all, over the next 50 years our aim will be as it is now and was in 1961 — to protect and conserve our unique Park for future generations.

**Ron Crompton**  
*Chairman 2007-present*



*“Richmond Park does not belong to us. It is timeless. In its history the Park has offered within its walls a space of peace, tranquillity and beauty; a place of recreation for many generations. And these generations have cared for it. Now the Park has passed into the hands of our generation. We in our lifetime are trustees of it... Our hope must be that when our generation passes we will leave the Park stronger and healthier than it was at the beginning of our term. But at the least — at the very least — let us do nothing which will damage or degrade it”*

*Lady Steyn, Chairman of the Friends 2000*

*Photo: Steve Morgan*



Protecting Richmond Park’s peace and natural beauty for future generations

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