

CHAIR'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2020

It was another busy year for the Committee and I hope you were able to enjoy the Park, attend activities and read our Newsletters.

Firstly I will report on work within the Park:

During the year, trustees encouraged and oversaw a considerable amount of **maintenance work** throughout the park by a growing group of volunteers. Again they have bashed brambles, pulled bracken, pruned shrubs, created planting areas in the woods, purchased and planted Snowdrops, maintained the Iris Garden and Herb Garden, kept the sculptures clean, planted and maintained the roses and shrubs in the Italian Garden, cleared the Cascade and improved the viewing areas of the Azalea Dell. There was even a *Strictly Come Mulching* event! The volunteers also cleared the area by the Aviary and erected the new noticeboard (see below).



If you fancy helping in future then do contact Anne Peacock through the **Volunteer** section of our website or simply turn up at the Aviary at 10am on a Tuesday.



We worked with Merton Council and IdVerde, the Council's contractor, on several issues relating to maintenance and projects. However, due to the extremely high rainfall this winter, much of our time related to drainage and flooding. A lot of work is still needed and the advent of Covid-19 has delayed a lot of this but we are continuing to press for its completion.

The continued development of seasonal **Tree Trails** has proved a great success, both with visitors and other organisations who have been very interested in our initiatives.

We have continued our support of the **Aviary** through repairs to the fabric, regular health checks and have formed a group to feed and water the birds and to clean the floor and nesting ledges to prevent diseases.

Projects mentioned at our 2019 AGM

The old worn-out beds on the **Front Drive** have been removed and grassed over creating a clear area. With this basic start we are now reviewing the whole aspect including further bed removals and replanting in a more sustainable and less maintenance demanding style.

We have started work on the **Tennis Court Garden**, the area near the Aviary where there is a bust of Haile Selassie, and have moved many Foxglove plants within the area. The plan is to clear the area of dead plants and general weed growth and replant using Rhododendrons and other plants with special characteristics such as scent, habit or colour. This was a joint

effort project between the Friends and IdVerde but, as a consequence of Covid-19, all work by the volunteers has stopped and without them the project is on hold.

Having studied the approach to the Park from the main drive it was clear the noticeboard by the gate was not viewed by many visitors but the map at the end of the drive was well used. Following further investigation and discussion we agreed that another **information board sited in the Aviary area** directly opposite the end of the drive would allow us to pass on much more information about the Friends and what is happening in the Park. Observation since has confirmed this.



Other Projects on the Horizon

We are looking to create a **Bog Garden** in the area behind the pond, tapping into the water from the spring in the Keir Garden which flows down the Valley path. This will expand the range of habitats available for many new plants and for many insect species as well as amphibians.

The **Mediterranean Garden** extends from Lady Jane's Wood up to the Belvedere. We intend to plot the trees on site, continue to control the weeds and to plan a series of views from the Belvedere by removing some poor condition trees and removing some branch work. This will allow the original purpose for the structure as a viewing platform.



More work on the **Tree Project** is planned which will further identify the collection of rare and unusual trees in the Park to supply and install tree identification labels. This will include the production of an approved Policy on tree planting which will allow us to expand and improve the Park's collection in a more rational and focussed manner.

We are compiling a **Photo Library** of the Park, its trees, shrubs and Rhododendrons its setting and landscapes. This will be an interactive library and will be linked to other records such as Champion Trees and other plant lists.

During the year the Trustees also considered many less tangible aspects:

Public Awareness. We are keen to understand how the public see the Park and the Friends as we are aware that many people assume the Park is owned by the hotel and despite the noticeboards and our website are unaware of the Friends and the importance of our work. We are developing a project to address these issues.

Funding We are assessing options to meet the considerable future costs of restoring important areas of the Park, some of which are described above. Part of this will involve broadening and deepening our membership activity, while also exploring other initiatives such as corporate support and sponsorship. We would be delighted to talk further with any members and local businesses who feel able to contribute in this area.

External Support We are looking at proposals by the Greater London Authority and organisations such as the Royal Horticultural Society and IdVerde to help with activity events and education projects.

Membership Based on feedback, we identified a need to provide a better administrative service to our Friends and we mentioned at the 2019 AGM that a new membership system was being developed. This is being introduced, together with updated membership categories, via notification to each member in May 2020.

Events and Acknowledgements

Our **Spring Talks** “A World in One Room” (April 2019) on the work of Marianne North was given by Jack Andrews, a guide at Kew Gardens, and “Going for Gold” (March 2020) by Mark Gregory, 2018 and 2019 Gold medal winner at the Chelsea Flower Show. Both were very well attended and raised valuable funds; we are grateful to both excellent speakers for donating their time. Our guided walks were well attended. The annual Bridge afternoon, a very important fund-raising activity, was held in November at the Hotel du Vin. Thanks to Den Anderson's superb organisation, it was once again a huge success, raising £1,780. Two of our volunteers created a calendar for this year which raised over £200 and we plan to produce a new edition for 2021, so please do consider buying one.

A celebration of the park's **70th birthday**, in collaboration with the arts studios, saw us welcome many visitors who participated in park trails and children's activities. These included a trail for children to follow clues, with a prize at the end, and we had a miniature pony from the Wimbledon Stables which attracted a lot of attention. We also gained some new members.

We are indebted to the Friends for their subscriptions and generous donations enabling our work to take place. We are grateful to the Hotel Du Vin for all their support during the year.



I would like to thank all the Trustees who gave up their precious free time and energy in support of the Friends. Long-serving Trustee Stuart Vere stepped down in February of this year and our thanks go to him for all of his hard work. We welcomed Catherine Nelson and Pit Rink as new Trustees during the year, bringing valuable expertise. All of the current Trustees are willing to stand for re-election at the AGM for another year.