

## CHAIR'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2019

The year has been another busy one for the Committee discussing Park matters and the work of the volunteers, and arranging talks, walks and other events. I have summarised below what has been achieved and I hope you have been able to read about our activities via our newsletters and website. We have also dealt with diverse administrative issues such as data protection, management of the website, financial controls, membership matters, publicity and insurance.



We reviewed the projects planned within the Park and had to concentrate on the Aviary following comments of the RSPCA regarding overcrowding and suitability of the building during the winter. We are in discussion with the Bird Keepers Association, experts in housing and managing birds in aviaries, and they are continuing their support in partnership with Alison Young, the trustee who has volunteered to manage the Aviary.

Of primary importance was the installation of electric and water supplies to the building. Volunteer Joe Ruston very kindly came forward to manage the project and arranged for all necessary professional certification. He also oversaw the practical work including operating the ditch-digging machine. We were very grateful to have had the project sponsored through an anonymous donation. We are also looking at the fabric of the building, including work to repair the rotten areas of wood (which took place in the summer) and changing the mesh in the windows to a more suitable size.



A significant issue brought to our attention by the Bird Keepers Association was the need to manage the numbers of some of the birds, in particular the Zebra Finches and the Cockatiels due to their rapid breeding rate. This has been achieved by rehoming

some birds and removing some of the nesting boxes.

Trustee Anne Peacock organises our dedicated and enthusiastic volunteer team in the Park. The volunteers have delivered a number of projects during the year which have a significant benefit to the Park and have involved all of the regulars, supplemented by the “irregulars”.

Clearing, pruning and mulching the Rose Garden has provided very visible improvement, as has work on the steps and the border adjoining the Pond. This project involved clearance of

many trailer-loads of scrub and the surface of creeping Ivy which revealed the original design of the steps and the low walls. The clearance has highlighted the trees such as the Paper Handkerchief, the small weeping Scottish Elm and the fine specimens of Swamp Cypress, Japanese Chestnut and Black Birch.

Following the clearance, the volunteers planted 20 Azaleas and two Rhododendrons. These new plantings will recreate the border that had previously existed for many years. Further work will be undertaken to maintain the newly created area.



Another notable project has been the development of the tree trails, which involved four of our volunteers who produced maps and, using technology, will allow the use of your smartphone to learn about the tree you are looking at. There is also a dedicated area of the website where information on the special trees of the Park is available.

In addition, we have bashed brambles, pulled bracken, pruned shrubs, created planting areas in the woods, purchased and planted Snowdrops, maintained the Iris

Garden and Herb Garden, reinstated the trench for the electric and water supplies to the Aviary, kept the sculptures clean, watered the new Cherry trees, maintained the roses and shrubs in the Italian Garden, cleared the Cascade and improved the viewing areas of the Azalea Dell.

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

Over the year we worked with Merton Council and *idverde*, the Council's contractor, on several issues relating to maintenance and projects. These included fixing: the Fountain, its pumps and the filters that keep the water clean; the deterioration of the Pond's brick edging; and tree problems near the Hotel and at the rear of Chester Road. Also we discussed the staffing of toilets and, as a result, *idverde* agreed to arrange their opening and closing during the summer at weekends and on Bank Holidays.



Our Spring Talk entitled 'Life and Times of a Modern Head Gardener' and our Spring and Autumn Walks were all well attended. The Bridge afternoon, our main annual 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 £1,445.

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

As we look forward, the Committee is assessing options to meet the considerable future costs of restoring important areas of the Park. 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 who feel able to contribute in this area.

I would like to thank all the trustees who gave up their precious free time and energy in support of the Friends. Jeremy Lumbers, Anne Peacock, Stuart Vere, Juliet Willis and Alison Young served alongside me throughout the year. Caroline Newsholme was elected at the last AGM and, at this year's meeting, we would ask you to elect more recent appointments Simon Ingall, who has volunteered as our Treasurer, and Catherine Nelson, who is providing help with marketing and external relations. We still have a vacancy for a Secretary.

**Chris Mountford**

August 2019