



# THE FRIENDS OF HYDE PARK & KENSINGTON GARDENS

Reg Charity: 1168319

Annual Review 2024

Founded in 1991

## RELAX, REFRESH, REVIVE,

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

and you could add Stressbusting to this list, which our wonderful parks help us with on a daily basis. Life seems full of anxiety and increasing worry. Somehow, getting out of doors to walk the dogs (lots of Covid pups now in middle age), jog or run, walk and think quietly, or admire and enjoy the fabulous planting which our two parks deliver, helps. The millions of visitors, and all of us who are lucky enough to live in striking distance, are the beneficiaries.



Andy, Sue and Jason at the AGM.



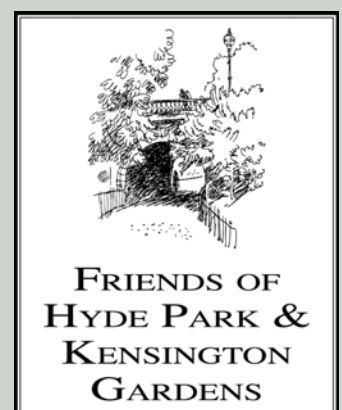
Walkies!  
In Kensington Gardens.

Parks) who was due to arrive when we last appeared in print, is also keen on delivering colour and impact in our planting.

There's plenty of information and news about what's going on inside this review and supplements the presentations which we enjoyed at our summer AGM. I hope that most of you are also keeping pace with park news via our regular emailed newsletter.

A very large feather in all our trustees' cap is well deserved. We can barely scratch the surface in these pages of everything they achieve. Our thanks and appreciation go to them.

The head gardeners are now supported by Matthew Pottage (Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy), who has newly arrived from the RHS. He is a great advocate of high horticulture and is keen to see the WOW factor in various appropriate places across all the Royal Parks. Darren Share (Director Royal





# HYDE PARK

*Hyde Park Manager, Jason Taylor, writes:*

## FRIENDS!!!

In 2021 to 2023, Hyde Park was at the centre of major events surrounding our Royal Family. We moved from a celebration of the Queen’s Jubilee to her death and funeral with all its pomp and ceremony, heralding a time of great change for the country. King Charles III’s coronation brought in a new era and our Royal Parks patron is now on the throne.

2024 has been a quieter time and a time of house (or park) keeping, and we looked at running our own estate to as high a standard as possible. New contractors for facilities and landscaping took a little time to bed in, and we worked hard to get them up to speed as quickly as possible.



How big can a flowerpot be?

We have tried not to start too many new projects this year while we consolidate.

The team has been incredibly busy and here are some of the highlights.

We had the usual major events taking place on the parade ground, starting with **Winter Wonderland**, an important part of many people’s Christmas, and then



Funfair at **British Summer Time**.

the three weekends of **British Summer Time’s** ever-popular concerts starting at the end of June.

**Swim Serpentine** had ideal weather in September, and the **Royal Parks Half Marathon** takes place in mid-October.

As well as putting on their series of bandstand concerts, the Friends of the Parks have played a huge part in one of the biggest successes of the year, when they helped with the trial to relocate The Hyde Park Information Kiosk. A temporary kiosk was brought in for the summer months to the eastern end of the Serpentine Road, with the hope of providing information to a larger number and wider range of visitors. This was certainly achieved, and the volunteers helped more than 13,000 people over the summer.



The Mercian Regiment's band and supporters in August.

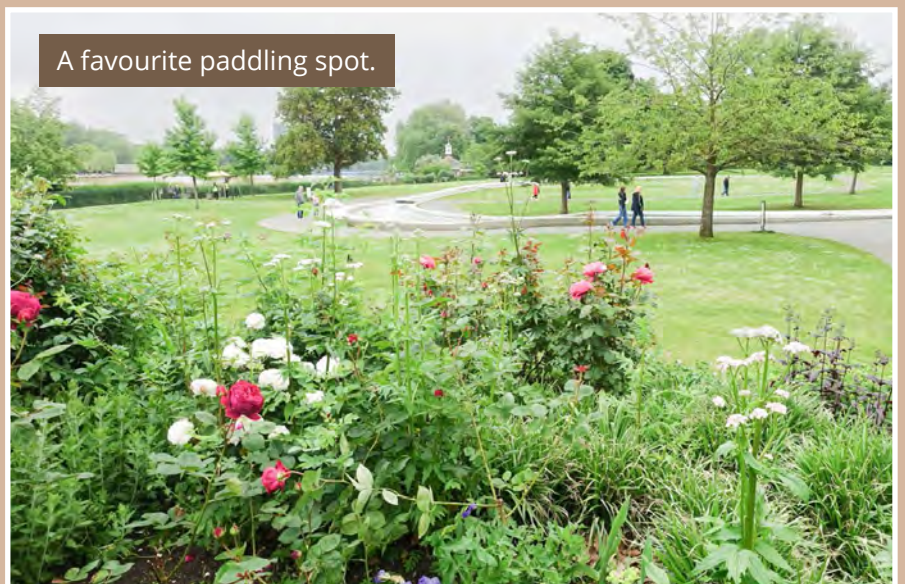
Shrubberies, next to the bandstand. Beth, and her regular group of volunteers, have removed over-mature shrubs and established a winter garden.

Once again, the Rose Garden looked a picture this summer, and I'm sure that the schemes that have been planted in the last few weeks will look wonderful going into the spring. I'd like to finish by thanking everyone, including the Friends of the Park, for everything they do to

make Hyde Park the wonderful place it is. I'd like to thank especially my team Dave, Joanna, Phil, Adam and Beth, who have all pulled together as one this year.

On behalf of all The Hyde Park Management Team, I'd like to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers who have given their time over the summer. I'd particularly like to thank Will Gray who, right from the first suggestion of relocating the kiosk, worked tirelessly recruiting and organising volunteers and making sure everything was ready for them when they did their shifts. The project has been more successful than I could have imagined, and we are currently working on how we can build on it next summer.

Our head gardener Beth's dedicated horticultural team have now been together for two years, and the level of horticulture in the park continues to improve. One particular area that she has worked on in the last year is the



A favourite paddling spot.



# KENSINGTON GARDENS

*Kensington Gardens Manager, Andy Williams, writes:*

Entering my 11th year as Park Manager I am delighted to highlight continual improvements across Kensington Gardens, delivered by my exceptional team of staff and contractors, all contributing greatly to our visitor experience.

Our Head Gardener, Russell Stevens, re-designed and re-planted the Albert Memorial borders enhancing the range of plants used, extending flowering season and creating a cohesive design using colour, texture and form. Many colours from the Memorial are reflected in the planting.



Ambitious planting at the Albert Memorial.

Immortalised as the tree where Peter Pan slept in the Baby Walk, look out for the re-planting of the Weeping Beech in the South Flower Walk this Autumn. Russell has selected a fine semi-mature specimen to re-plant in the spot where the previous tree unfortunately failed last year.



Weaving at Peter Pan.

Pat Kelly, Assistant Park Manager, specified and oversaw the successful planting of the first 15 Sessile Oak trees along the Broad Walk with a further 15 being planted this Winter. Metal tree guards add stature and protection during the trees establishment phase in this high-profile location.

We have enjoyed having artist Yayoi Kusama's largest ever external Pumpkin at the Round Pond. At 6 metres tall and 5 ½ metres wide, this fun and impressive piece of public art has drawn many new visitors to the park. Pat made a major contribution to its installation working closely with the Serpentine Gallery team who led the project. It will be harvested in early November!



Kusama's pumpkin ripe for picking.

A 'first' for the park saw a trial of 'barley straw sausages' installed into the bowls at the Italian Gardens to reduce filamentous blanket weed; they have been a huge success. Hats off to our Technical Officer, Rachel Dowse, who did all the planning and implementing almost single handedly, but supported by Orla Mohammed, our Parks Support Officer, when crafting the actual straw sausages.

Across parkland we have continued to plant thousands of bulbs. Pheasants Eye Narcissus and Crocus looked terrific across Buck Hill this Spring and more Bluebells and Wild Daffodil, along with Wild Primrose have adorned the North Walk.

The bandstand, restored in 2023, now stands proudly as a focal point in the park. Extremely popular and used well this year by the local community, visitors and organised groups alike, I was delighted that the Friends hosted the Epsom and Ewell Silver Band in September, the first of many Friends events we hope to support in the future.

A relaxing way to listen to the band .

We have continued to develop the project that will see the renewal of the Diana, Princess of Wales' Memorial Playground. Our Playground Manager, Ryan Gill, sits at the heart of the project team. This £3m project will see site wide renewal including a new more accessible and inclusive Galleon, a new Tree House Encampment offering play value at height and the creation of sociable places that foster health and well-being for the children who visit.

A special thank you to Sue, the Trustees and members of the Friends for your continued support and encouragement.



# THE NURSERY

## At the Heart of Everything We Do

*Rob Dowling - Nursery Manager, Hyde Park*



Rob Dowling - Nursery Manager.

### Review of the year.

Since the nursery was taken inhouse, we have been on a learning journey. My background is not commercial horticulture, so I have needed to learn so much in the last two and a half years. Thankfully, I am supported by a team with a wealth of experience in nursery production. Insourcing the service has allowed us to look at the nursery with fresh eyes, and to implement so many positive changes such as volunteering, educational groups and new sustainability initiatives. The core of what we do is growing plants and we take great pride with the quality of crop that we produce.

### Bedding ordering and where it is used.

Twice a year, the park teams order the displays for their parks. These are the spring and summer displays. The parks order them almost a year in advance and the nursery sources and grows those plants. If you come to the guided tour next spring, I will talk through the summer production process.



Heuchera patchwork.



The early life of Buckingham Palace's geraniums.

### Britain in Bloom.

I have been a judge for London in Bloom for many years and was excited to go national this year. I was allocated the "Small Cities" category, and this August I went travelling around the country to assess the entries with my co-judge. It was so rewarding to see what other cities and their in-bloom groups are achieving. The Britain in Bloom finalist awards are announced in Manchester on the 21st October.



Volunteers Elizabeth and Karen.

### The Volunteers' View.

Elizabeth Mansbridge and Karen Higgs.

#### What have you learnt?

*We have enjoyed seeing the process from seed propagation to planting out the bedding plants into the parks. Working with the plants has provided the opportunity for a better understanding of plants, of pests and diseases.*

#### What do you enjoy most?

*The team work with the nursery staff and other volunteers. Meeting new people along the way and forming new friendships.*

### Rob Dowling.

Rob's new assistant manager, Kasia, features on our Parks People page.



Britain in bloom entrant



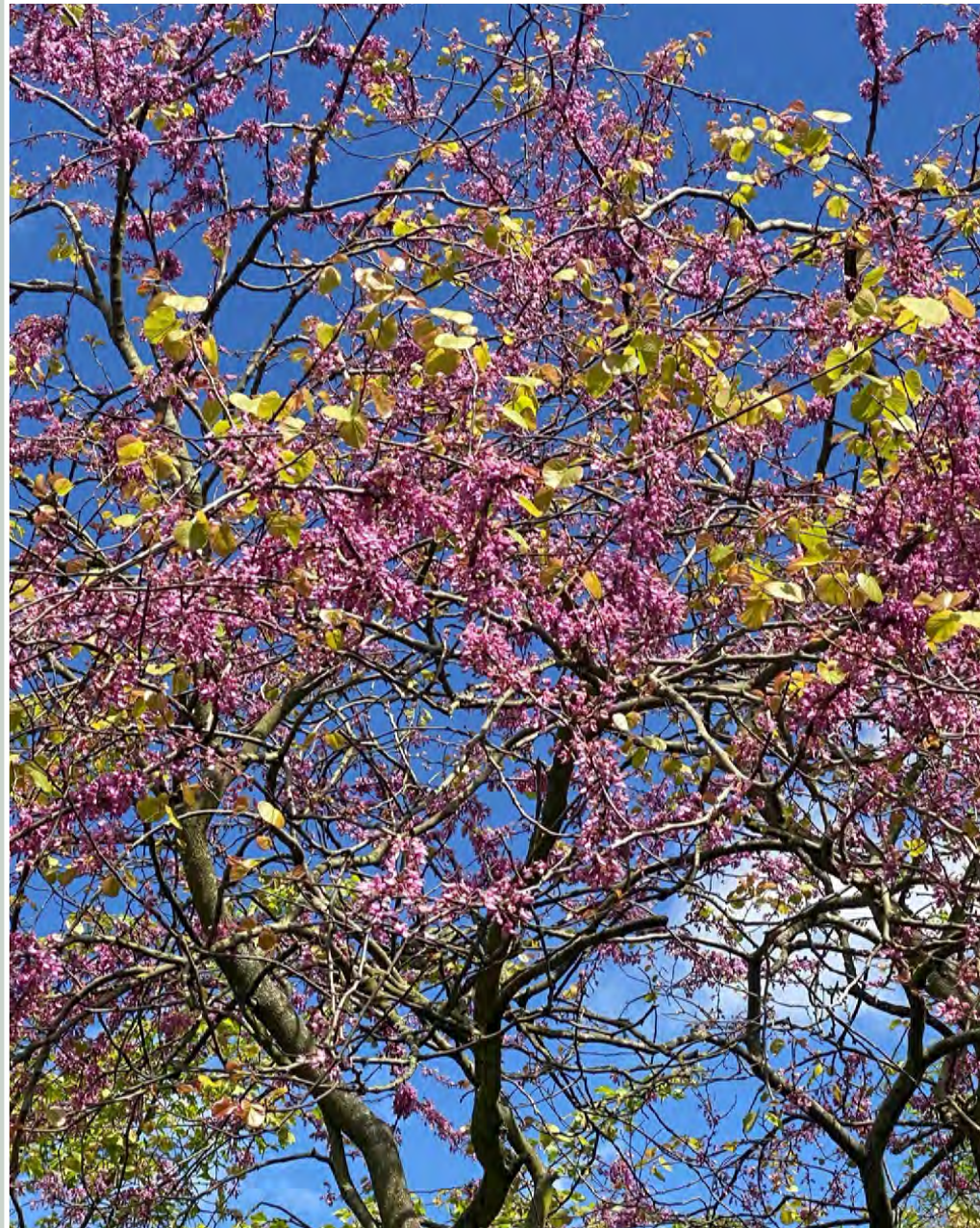
A well organised crop.

# CERCIS SILIQUASTRUM

By Dimity Spiller

This beautiful little tree, the most vibrant of our Spring blossoms, in English has the unfortunate common name of Judas Tree and, by extension, is said to be the one on which Judas Iscariot hanged himself in remorse for his betrayal of Jesus. The flowers were then white and blushed in embarrassment. Well, a look at the tree itself would dispel that idea, it is a small delicately branched tree, not at all suitable for bearing a man's weight. The name is clearly a careless anglicisation of the French name, which is simply geo-local, l'arbre de Judea, tree of Judea, where they have a protected status. I'm afraid we do have a reputation for casualness with other languages.

The tree is native all-over Southern Europe and West Asia, making its first appearance in Britain in the C17th along with tea, coffee and chocolate. It is particularly beloved in Turkey, **'if there is a flower that is celebrated in the land, after the rose, it is the Redbud'** remarked a poet. Redbud is one of their colloquial names, most of which derive from the ancient Akkadian word for purple. There, the tale of its pink-purple hued flowers involves a King's daughter, whose lover was burnt alive for a minor transgression. She ran to the Palace fountain for water for him, and her tears stained the water and the nearby Cercis purple. The Cercis is the emblem of Bursa, across the Sea of Marmara from Istanbul, once famous for its silk trade. From the C14th to the late C19th, Bursa was the centre of the Redbud Festival and dervishes from all over Anatolia came to dance at a particular shrine and enjoy the Spring blossom.



Cercis at Nanny's lawn in Hyde Park.

Cercis Siliquastrum is a small deciduous tree, of the Fabaceae, or bean, family, with a joyous uplift to its branches. The colour is particularly effective as, most years, the tree blossoms before the leaves sprout. Last year the leaves came at the same time, and you can see their heart-like shape, which probably accounts for its alternate name of Love Tree, Turkish mythology not being widely known in England. The flowers, which are edible, are unusual in growing straight out from the branches, this enables pollination by mice and other little animals running along the branch as well as insects.

The seed pods are long, flat and dangle, another reason for its unfortunate name as they do look like little bodies. In fact, they are the origin of the scientific name as they resemble the weaver's shuttle, a long flat tool which is called a cercis in Greek. Further, when Linnaeus catalogued the tree in 1757, he gave the name silicustrum, as siliqua means 'pod'. So, it's basically called podpod but we won't hold that against it. Perhaps next April, we can organise our own Redbud Festival with dancing and Turkish snacks.

# BIRDY SINGS

by Birdy Hydeparker



*"Tell me again how lovely I look".*

**I'm Birdy Hydeparker, 18 months old. I live with Mummy, Blue, and sister, Harper.**

We're endangered, you see. English Setters. After 16 puppies, Him&Her say Blue's single-handedly saving the breed.

Kensington Gardens is my favourite birdwatching place. And, where I find the industrious Dave. I do also cavort with the fiendish crows on Speaker's Corner field. They used to peck Mummy's backside

so they're fair game. I don't get close. But I'm not a quitter.

Him&Her recently spotted Great Tits, a Wren and even a Grey Wagtail, which they say is tremendous. They've had enough of those pesky Parakeets. A decade ago, you'd hear, but barely glimpse them. Not anymore. They practically queue barge at the Serpentine Café.

I'm a regular there. Her loves a bargain with her Friend's Discount Card. Natch! Then we pop along to inspect Her hedge – running up from Victoria Gate - one of Her volunteering escapades. I don't think HER did it single-handedly, but honestly, the way she carries on, you'd think she did.

My sister Pepper, (she's from the posh side of KG) was *"the-pick-of-the-litter"*. So why, might you ask, did Him&Her keep me?

I'm just that damn adorable. Please say hello. Treats welcome.

## NEW HYDE PARK INFORMATION KIOSK

by Will Gray

**W**e were asked by TRP back in February this year to see if we could help make the Hyde Park Information service a little bit more robust and see whether a new location would improve visitor numbers.

The initial plan was for a two-month experiment in June and July operating from a new kiosk at the Hyde Park Corner end of Serpentine Road operating a Mon to Friday service with two shifts (AM & PM) with two volunteers on each shift.

The seven long established volunteers were happy to continue, and we recruited seven new volunteers from the much-missed buggy service, and two further volunteers came from a members mailshot appeal in May.

The visitor numbers have been massively higher in the new location compared with the South Carriage Drive. The old kiosk was helping about 30 visitors per day, the new one is helping between 300 and 500 per day.

The project was originally scheduled to finish on the 2nd of August, but, because of how successful it has been, it will now finish on October 11th and re-open just after Easter next year.



Volunteers Jean and Mary joined by trustees Will and Patricia .

I think we can be proud of this Friends' initiative and would like to thank all the volunteers for their hard work over the summer in making the new kiosk such a success. We would also like to thank Jason Taylor and all the Hyde Park team, but especially Assistant Manager Jo Grant for all the support, and vast supplies of maps, she has given the volunteers.

We will be looking for additional volunteers for next year, so if you are interested in finding out more do get in touch with us.



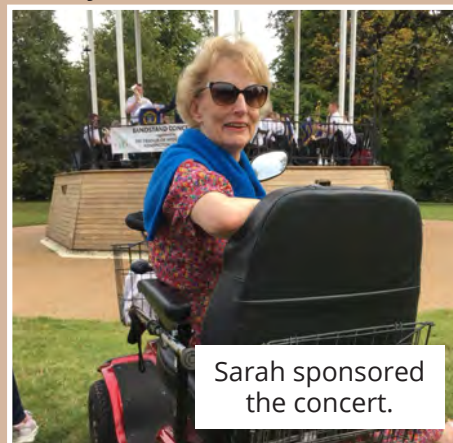
Sue Price writes...

# GETTING AROUND WITH THE FRIENDS

For all these events, we have Royal Parks' staff members, generous sponsors (all Friends' members), Serpentine Gallery, and Winter Wonderland to thank.

High on the list also to thank are our trustees who plan, organise and help out at every event.

We've just finished our bandstand series with a first... in September, Epsom and Ewell Silver Band performed on the newly restored Kensington Gardens bandstand. Kindly sponsored by member Sarah Joiner.



Sarah sponsored the concert.

Another first was the Mercian Regimental band performing in Hyde Park in August. Thanks to member Carl Richardson for arranging and funding this. A salsa



Salsa toe tapping dancers.

band concert and 1930/40's swing band were much enjoyed with plenty of toe-tapping and dancing. Our generous sponsors are much appreciated.

About 150 chairs were heaved around both parks by Park Deck Chairs Nick Kwabi and new manager Feyi Fowosere. They made a very big difference to everybody's enjoyment.



Feyi made sure we were sitting comfortably.

The Nursery has been the scene of three visits this year and the plant sales are keenly anticipated.

A walk and talk about trees, plants and future plans in Hyde Park with head gardener Beth Handley and tree expert, Greg Packman was popular. A visit to the Italian Gardens and Pump House in Kensington Gardens with Head Gardener, Russell Stephens, was educational. Planting, pumping systems and pets (the cemetery was included) were fascinating.

Luscious planting, crumbling memorials, touching tributes, a magical dell and drinks in the sunshine were all part of the treats. Every year, as a pre-Christmas warm-up Suzy Griffiths, IMG Vice President, escorts us round Winter Wonderland for a VIP treat. This year, we are definitely getting bolder



Popular plant sale purchases.

and going in the evening when we will take on something a little more edgy. We've had many years building up to this brave move.

We meet lots of you at our AGM and the sun has always shone which makes the presentations, followed by drinks and snacks, a pleasant way to spend a summer evening. We even get a bit of entertainment second-hand from the mid-week events at the British Summer Time ground.



Alexa showed us the Pavilion.

Finally, a select group had the pleasure of an early morning visit to this year's Serpentine Gallery Summer Pavilion with Project Curator, Alexa Chow. We know a little more about the arrangements in a traditional Korean house and loved it. And again, the sun shone!

# PARKS PEOPLE

This is where we introduce you to some members of staff who have joined us in the last year. We hope that they will all be able to meet us or let us know how they are getting on in the next year.

**MATTHEW POTTAGE** has come from the RHS at Wisley and has taken up the new role of Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy. He transfixed our members and guests at the AGM in the summer, with an uplifting and inspiring short presentation. His voice was familiar, and it only took a moment to recognise it from Gardeners Question Time on BBC radio 4. He tells us:



Matthew Pottage

*"Now several months into my role, I'm gaining a full understanding of all the parks, the horticulture, its identities and themes, and how we can improve it. We have some great plantings already but huge opportunities for more!"*

Together with head gardener Beth (Hyde Park), schemes are being planned and hopefully we can let you all know about these soon.

**PAT KELLY** has joined the Kensington Gardens team as assistant manager.

Pat, having volunteered and been employed by the National Trust at Ham House, set up his own garden maintenance business and did some design and hard landscaping.



Pat Kelly

By now, many of you will have been amazed by the giant Kusama Pumpkin at the Round Pond, about which installation he tells us was probably his most challenging project to date.

**DARREN SHARE** became Director of Parks nearly a year ago. He was responsible in Birmingham for a massive job spec involving all open spaces as well as streets and I believe refuse. A far cry from his Britain in Bloom experience and gold medal winning displays at Chelsea Flower Show.



Darren Share

He says:

*"To work in the Royal Parks has been a real privilege. There will be some challenges ahead to tackle issues such as climate change, but I am confident that working together we can enhance these already glorious parks for the next generation."*

We photographed him, very shortly after his arrival, in the nursery, his chosen location for the shoot.

**KASIA SWIDERSKA** tells us *"After many years of working in the nursery, when the position of Assistant Nursery Manager became vacant, I applied as I thought it was the perfect opportunity for me with the backing of my supportive team."*



Kasia Swiderska

*I was worried that I would miss the hands-on experience of working with plants, but that isn't the case. I spend much of my time outdoors and ensure that our plants are top quality, and free from pests and diseases.*

*I organise work for my team and our dedicated group of volunteers. My office time is spent on ensuring the dispatch and deliveries of seasonal plants goes seamlessly, and I am in constant contact with the head gardeners. I'm fortunate to have a job I love."*

We wish them all well.

## Mountbatten Christmas Cards

*25% to the Friends would be welcome.*

Beautiful prints of original watercolour paintings, including Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park.

This is an opportunity to support The Friends as a nominated Charity where 25% of the net proceeds will benefit us.

The range of images that feature our Parks can be viewed at: [www.mountbattencards.com/shop-3](http://www.mountbattencards.com/shop-3)



# SOME GOODBYES

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

## Anne Mallinson OBE

Anne was born in 1930, and her family were told that she learnt to speak with her clear voice to her father who had lost his hearing while serving in the war. He was awarded an MC.

She served for over 30 years as a local councillor on Westminster City Council, and a year as Lord Mayor of Westminster. She held chairmanships, trusteeships and committee roles for well over 40 charities and organisations.

Until her 80's, she served as Deputy High Steward and then Honorary Steward of Westminster Abbey. Her family rudely called it her "usherette job"!

She was also involved with many London hospitals, schools and colleges.

A family home, Mallinson Park, is now the Haven House Children's Hospice.

Anne and Terence, her late husband, were life presidents.

Sue Price writes:

*I particularly appreciated Anne and Terence's support when I first took over as chair of the Friends. Always willing to turn up to any event we organised (and we had very small numbers in those days) they were full of*

*enthusiasm. Anne was the first to stand up and raise a vote of thanks at every opportunity. I'll never forget them both at our first escorted visit to Winter Wonderland!*

## Jacky Hyer

We were sorry to learn of the death of Jacky Hyer in May. She was 91 and retained a great interest in the Parks for as long as she was able.

Jacky was Chairman of the Friends for nine years, seven of them jointly with Lady (Jennie) Cleaver, and she retired in 2013.

She was introduced to the Friends by an old friend of hers, Philip Joseph, who had founded the organisation in 1991.

She was very concerned with maintaining standards when there was pressure from funding which, in those days, was entirely from central government and then DCMS, and she felt very strongly that standards were dropping because of the reductions. She wrote about buildings being neglected and she was against them being privately rented. She also urged those of us who followed her, to resist increasing commercialisation.

Above all, she was a great supporter of those who worked in the parks, both managers and gardeners and the parks themselves, was a knowledgeable plants person and a keen member of the RHS.

## FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP

Do you receive our regularly emailed Newsletter? If not please contact our Membership Secretary, Lynden Easton: [lynden@lydeneaston.co.uk](mailto:lynden@lydeneaston.co.uk) and she will add you to our lists.

	October 2023	October 2024
Life members	235	251
Annual members	634	682
Total	869	933



Above: Enjoying a Friends event and right, the delights of a tree walk.



## THANK YOU!

Where would we be without all these generous people?

Our photographers:

Paul Shelley | Rob Dowling | Kim Howell  
Sue Price | John Foldes | Tina Higginson

Adrian Barnes at Edox helps us throughout the year with good design advice for everything we produce for you.

And, above all, to Steve Olive, who works his magic on a pile of pieces and photos and turns them into

this eye-catching little magazine which we hope is a pleasure to read at leisure.

The trustees all work very hard, we couldn't do half of what we do without them.

Sue Price  
Editor

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