



# THE FRIENDS OF HYDE PARK & KENSINGTON GARDENS

Reg Charity: 1168319

Annual Review 2025

Founded in 1991

## HOW CAN WE HELP?

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

**A**ll charities must look at themselves to think how and if they are achieving their aims.

My often-repeated mantra is to remind that the clue which is in the name "Friends" means just that. We are supporters not complainers. The parks, and their wonderful staff, give us so much that it's hard to know what we can do for them. Look inside the following pages and you'll see several examples of us attempting to repay their care and generosity. At the very least I hope that through you, the ever-increasing band of members, enhanced understanding is spread into the larger community.



A canine welcome to the south flower walk.

We have appreciated the sharing of information, the suggestions for tucked-away places to visit, and the encouragement given to our trustees to get involved.



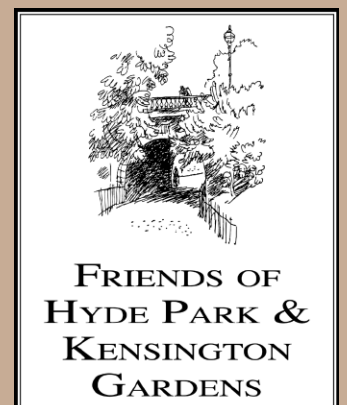
At the 2025 AGM.

I'm writing on behalf of all our hard-working trustees and thank all of you, the members, and especially the Royal Parks staff, for their warmth and support.

We can only do it with you!



Spring comes to Hyde Park.





# KENSINGTON GARDENS

*Andrew Williams, Park Manager*

It is a pleasure for me to write this update reflecting on highlights from the year as we continue to improve the park.

We were delighted to receive high ranking scores in Green Flag and Green Heritage assessments when judging took place in May, our scores over time remain in the highest band.

Pat Kelly (Assistant Park Manager) and Russell Stevens (Head Gardener) have been working closely with Matthew Pottage (Head of Horticulture Strategy) to redefine our horticultural focus, initiated by an inspiring 'ideas day' at RHS Wisley, in March.

Russell has invested further in climate resilient planting at the Italian Gardens Café, and planted a range of slow-growing, drought-tolerant, hardy architectural plants in the stone urns at the Italian Gardens. He has also sown a carefully considered range of self-seeding annuals (e.g. Mexican Fleabane) into the flagstone joints; these are establishing well and offering something new.



The Mediterranean Garden.

Pat has removed the island shrubberies near the Diana Memorial Playground and Orangery, and will replace them with a curated collection of mulberry trees and other flowering and fruiting specimens.



Plants for the winter months.



Refreshing treats at the Italian Gardens.



Giuseppe Penone's bronze tree at the Serpentine Gallery.



The South Flower Walk in early autumn.

Pat has again led our replanting efforts at the Broad Walk tree avenue with a further 15 sessile oaks planted. He has also started decompaction works to the tulip tree avenue at the Dials, tree circles have been formed using compost made from park green waste, and the area will soon be decompacted further using an air injection system.

Richard Nimmo (Park Officer) has been actively supporting biodiversity and conservation staff. Marginals and aquatics have established well at the Front Walk wetland, native woodland, including wild cherry and common pear were planted at the leaf pen boundary, and we have adopted a 7-year coppice regime for bramble and scrub. We have made changes to the timing of some grass-cutting, and we have sown more yellow rattle across Buck Hill to reduce competitive grasses in favour of a richer and more floristic sward.

Wetland Planting supports biodiversity.

Richard is part-way through a project to restore our Victorian benches, replacing worn painted slats with new hardwood ones. The Round Pond area is complete, and he is moving on to Lancaster Walk.

Ryan Gill (Playground Manager) has continued to drive the restoration project to renew the Diana Memorial Playground this winter. Our designs for the new Galleon, Treehouse Encampment and Mermaid Rock feature are complete. At the time of writing,

Ryan and his team had welcomed an astonishing 1.1 million visitors to the playground this year.

I would like to publicly thank my team, our contractors, partners and the Friends for the contribution you all make to Kensington Gardens.





# HYDE PARK

*Jason Taylor, Park Manager*

I cannot believe that it's Autumn again, and time for my annual update; where have the last twelve months gone?

It feels as though our feet haven't touched the ground, but there's never an opportunity to be bored in Hyde Park.

This year started with Winter Wonderland leaving the park, signalling the end of the Christmas Holidays and the start of quiet, darker days in the park. Despite re-turfing in what should be the wettest months of the year, the rain stayed away, and we were having to water in February.



Winter Wonderland - A yearly fixture in Hyde Park.

I must admit that when the headline artists were announced for the British Summertime concerts, I hadn't heard of most of them and thought the

organisers had made a big mistake. As it turns out, the concerts sold out in record time, with the highest ticket sales ever. I've decided it's probably best to leave artist selection to the experts and focus on looking after the park!

On Monday 7th July, we hosted a ceremony attended by a number of VIPs at the 7/7 Memorial, marking the 20th Anniversary of one of the darkest days in London's history, when 52 people were killed by a series of bomb attacks in central London.

Head Gardener Beth's dedicated horticulture team continue to make improvements in the park, the two biggest being the introduction of a dry garden in front of Old Police House and the restoration of the Dell Garden, by clearing low value shrubs and removing deadwood to make space for new planting. These look great and will improve further as the planting matures. The team also have plans to introduce a new Autumn Garden in the coming months.



Beth is pleased with the dry garden.



The British Summer Time concerts sold out in record time.

The Friends Group continues to have a huge impact on the park. As well as the well-attended summer bandstand series, for the second year the group operated the information kiosk. Over the summer, the dedicated group of volunteers has assisted over 24,000 park visitors. Additionally, a new Mobility Buggy was introduced in the summer, making the park accessible to visitors who wouldn't otherwise be able to visit.

I would like to thank Tina, Patricia and Will and their committed band of Friends, for all that they do for visitors to the Royal Parks.

The most difficult news of the year has been the disbanding of the Royal Parks Police, the impact of which we will only properly see over the next year.

I'd like to finish by saying a huge thank you to everyone that works to make Hyde Park what it is, which, during the summer, can be well over 200 people each day. I'd like to give a special thanks to my Hyde Park Management Team, Dave, Phil, Jo and Beth, the Friends Volunteers and, of course, the Royal Parks Police.



Spring planting and the Rose Garden look splendid





*Rob Dowling  
Nursery Manager, Hyde Park*

# THE NURSERY

## At the Heart of Everything We Do

A pot to impress.



It has been a busy year at the nursery, growing two seasons of bedding plants for the Royal Parks displays. The focus this year has been on learning about, providing facilities for and developing new skills on growing for propagation.

This spring we installed three propagation units which have shown good results.

Our seed propagation has been successful and this autumn the result was 52,000 wallflowers grown from seed, which minimises our environmental impact and allows us to share seed-sowing skills with our volunteers.

A small wildlife pond and hibernaculum is an exciting project this winter. We are finding many newts, frogs and toads amongst our plants. They carry out an important job, eating pests, so we want to create a permanent home for them with an area for shelter,

hibernation and breeding. This free pest control compliments our bio control of insects and reduces the need for chemicals.

We continue to welcome a large number of groups of visitors (including, of course, the Friends for their annual tour and spring and autumn plant sales) with corporate volunteers, our own nursery volunteers, stakeholder visits, nursery experience educational visits, and plants for communities' groups. This latter is really uplifting, at the end of the season charities, schools and community groups collect surplus plants for their own outdoor spaces. We have great feedback and some inspiring photos.





English Asparagus time.

## KEEN TO HELP...

by Will Gray



Maps to take home.

Our information kiosk at the Hyde Park Corner end of the Serpentine Road has had another highly successful season, with new volunteers joining the well-established team.

This year the volunteers helped nearly 25,000 visitors from all over the world. The enquiries ranged from the predictable - Where are the nearest toilets? How do I get to Buckingham Palace? How do I get to Harrods, to the rather more esoteric question from a couple of groups of Chinese visitors looking for Karl Marx's tomb! The succès fou again this year has been the very popular maps of both Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, which all seem to be being taken home by the visitors.

We have finally seen a return to a buggy service in the Park and are taking part in a pilot trial with TRP

to work out how best to establish it. The aim is for a "Free Accessibility Buggy Service which will enable people who would otherwise not be able to access the Park to do so".

At the moment, it just runs on a loop following the Serpentine and beginning and ending at Hyde Park Corner or our information kiosk. We hope, in the near future, it will also be perfect for those of us who need a bit of help getting around.

Both the buggy team and the kiosk team do morning and afternoon shifts on weekdays, from around Easter to mid-October. Volunteers numbers are a little down at the end of the season and if you are interested in doing shifts with either next year, please get in touch by email: [contact@friendshpkg.org.uk](mailto:contact@friendshpkg.org.uk).



A helpful buggy ride to the AGM.

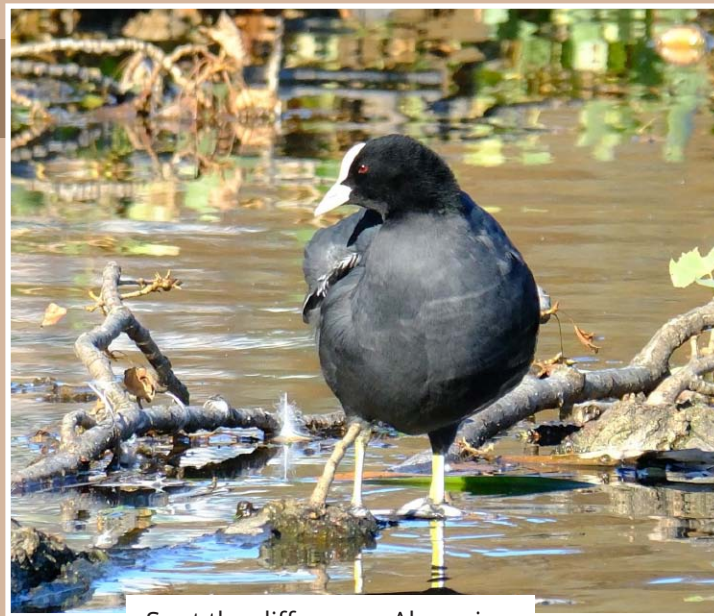
# COOTS OR MOORHENS?

By Dimity Spiller

Coots and Moorhens are close cousins, both dark, medium-small, rotund birds found all over the world. Coots are the larger, with a white frontal shield on the face. 'Bala' an old word for white, explains the phrase 'bald as a coot'. Basically herbivore, they do graze on land but the water is their element, having huge, partly webbed feet. Coots are virtuous couples, monogamous, sharing nest building and hatching duties. The cootlings or cooties are up, out of the nest and into the water soon after hatching. The parents take care of half the brood each. Despite this, coots are not altogether pleasant birds. If food is scarce and cooties importunate, the parents will bite them, sometimes to death. This isn't really a surprise; you do not have to watch them for long to see how aggressive they are. Appropriately, 'commotion' is one of their group names. This, together with their jerky movements, accounts for 'queer as a coot', a phrase in use long ago when 'queer' simply meant odd or different.

Moorhens are smaller than coots, with a red frontal shield. 'Moor' meaning marsh reflects the bird's natural habitat, where they will eat anything they come across. The long, non-webbed feet are good for negotiating boggy ground, and they can even climb trees to roost. They are fair-weather monogamous and live in sociable groups, with the group name of 'plump'.

So, if it is sweetly bumbling about, it is a moorhen and if it is kicking up rumpus it is a coot.



Spot the difference. Above is a Coot and below, a Moorhen.



## ROYAL PARKS POLICE - GOODBYE AND THANK YOU

How we'll miss our dedicated officers. Vinny Kinsler (Kensington Gardens) and Simon Hackworth (Hyde Park) together with a team of colleagues are familiar faces, welcome and appreciated by us all.

Since 1872, the parks have had their own force. Only police can enforce the regulations. Their duties in the Parks will come to an end on November 1st, and we will be reporting before too long in our newsletter as to how the new arrangements are working.

We wish them all the very best of luck for the future, whichever path they'll be treading.

Officers Vinny Kinsler and Simon Hackworth will be sadly missed.

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# A PLACE TO REMEMBER

Member, Margaret Exley, decided that a bench facing south in the sun close to Prince Albert on his memorial, was the perfect place to remember her late husband, Malcolm.

She and her family have enjoyed gathering there and she's been able to tell them how important the Great Exhibition was to her family. Her great, great grandfather was a Sheffield silversmith and came to London to receive his prize for his beautifully decorated scissors.

She chose Brompton Cemetery for Malcolm's ashes to be interred. "He's amongst the Polish airmen" she said, "he would have loved that".



Margaret and Malcolm's family enjoy gathering here.

## LIFE ON THE ROUND POND WAVE... LONDON MODEL YACHT CLUB

### Yes, you can sail a yacht in central London!

The historic LMYC meets most Sunday mornings at about 10.30 at the Round Pond. They launch their two channel radio controlled yachts with ( amongst others ) a large fleet of International One Meters. They make a spectacular sight racing close-hauled across the chop..

Their club house is tucked away in Perks Field, and they are a friendly bunch of sailors waiting for the weather to improve enough to get their (normal sized) yachts out on the Solent. Do join them in London. Their youngest member is 6, their oldest over 80. They will provide instruction and help with choice of vessel and kit.

We will write about water weed, and the benefits or not of fish, in a newsletter and meet their members. In the meantime, have a look at their website: [www.lmyc.org.uk](http://www.lmyc.org.uk)  
Thanks to LMYC Hon. Sec. Charles Clarke .



Sailing on the Round Pond, the London Model Yacht Club.





Sue Price writes...

## OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE FRIENDS

Enjoying a mini-music festival in the sun.

It's a pleasure to look back over the year on this page. Our members from being a rather shy, hanging-back kind of bunch, now fully book events within hours. Thanks to Winter Wonderland director Suzy Griffiths. Our members VIP visit in the early evening is always quite a thrill.

Matt Pottage (below - Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy) and Beth Handley (head gardener Hyde Park) gave us a view of their vision for an improving landscape. Work at the Dell was impressive and we enjoyed a very pleasant time there at the end of the evening. Many thanks to them both for their hard work organising it all.



VIP fun at Winter Wonderland.

In the spring, we have Rob Dowling to thank for a fabulous nursery tour, followed by members Spring and Autumn plant sales which are responsible for beautiful gardens and planters all over London.



Matthew Pottage,  
Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy.



Difficult decisions at the plant sales.

Our AGM, our largest "event" has members and VIP guests able to ask questions to our managers and police officers after they've given their presentations. The brand-new buggy helped ferry members. The Serpentine Gallery gives us so much to enjoy throughout the year, and a curator (Chris Bayley) led an early morning tour of the summer pavilion proved to be very popular.

Our mini music festival on The Hyde Park bandstand performed beautifully for appreciative audiences. Three bands, the Mercian regiment military band plus musician colleagues from London regiments were superb. Dancing to both the Salsa band and the jazz swing band followed. Sadly, wind and rain cancelled the Kensington Gardens silver band concert. We look forward to them returning in 2026.

Royal Parks staff are generous with their time and efforts to put on this programme. The trustees are almost never without their sleeves rolled up!

We enjoy meeting you all.

Thanks go to our trustees who all work so hard for you: Joanna Clark, Simon Cox, Lynden Easton, Will Gray, Tina Higginson, Carol Joseph, Patricia Ladkin and Christina Shiatis

Helped by: Paula Dyche who looks after our website, Paul Shelley our accredited photographer and Kathy Spanos our experienced and able secretarial help.

# PARKS PEOPLE

It's nice not to have anyone leaving .... just congratulations and celebrations for old friends in new roles.

## Charlie

### *The Pelargonium King*

Congratulations on his award given by the Royal Parks Guild for his Contribution to Horticulture.

He has worked at the nursery for 28 years, and for 3 years before that at the Regents Park nursery. I remember he told me he was originally a theatre set builder. In a way what he's doing now is quite theatrical. The plants he breeds are very showy.



## Aaron

Aaron devotes his life to pelargoniums for the state beds at Buckingham Palace.

He grows 1200 plants in three heights to give the impression they are planted on a bank (tall at the back) many members have taken home a gift of one and some are still going strong some years later in sheltered gardens round the park.

## Niki Duignan

Niki has been at the Royal Parks for 21 years. First, straight from uni as an event officer, then filming manager (commercial filming ops), then senior event manager and now head of events and filming.

She has countless special memories over the years, including Daft Punk and Pink Floyd, and she loves that hundreds of people gather on the grass with picnics and enjoy the BST free music. Congratulations to her.

## Alun Mainwaring

Alun has left Niki in charge in his old role. After many years managing everything to do with the smooth running of special and major events, he is now a Royal Parks Director with all Commercial Activity his remit.

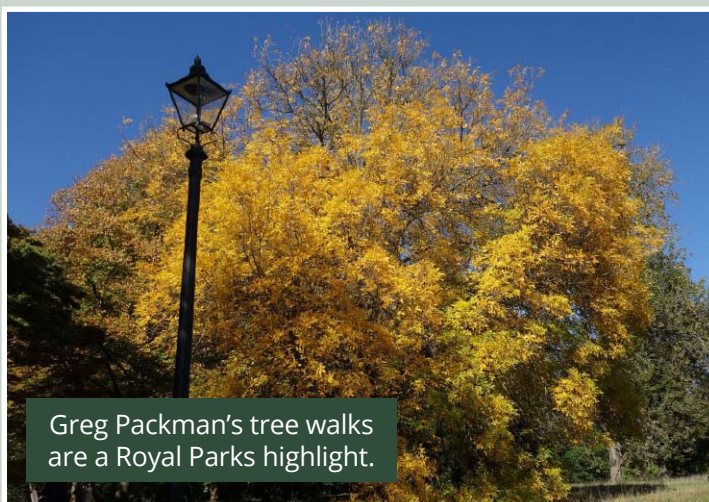
That's quite a hefty portfolio; we wish him luck.

## Greg Packman

Greg was Arboricultural Officer. We have just heard he has been appointed to a new position as the Royal Parks first Treescape Curator.

To give more information, we need more space and when we can tie Greg down for a photo, we'll give you all a clearer picture of what his new role entails.

Greg will be well known to many members as he has led wonderful tree walks for us over many years and well deserves this new position.



Greg Packman's tree walks are a Royal Parks highlight.

# SOME GOODBYES

**We are sorry to learn of the deaths of some of our members during the year.**

## Sir Anthony Cleaver

Impressive obituaries have appeared in the Times, Telegraph and numerous other publications. Here we focus on Anthony, the Friends, Hyde Park, and swimming.

Jennie Cleaver was our chairman from 2006 to 2013. Anthony was a great support to her and, as they live close to Hyde Park Corner, was a frequent visitor either walking their two grey whippets or taking his daily swim (sidestroke) as a member of the Serpentine Swimming Club.

He was a successful competitive swimmer, joining in the Christmas Day race and a veterans team cross Channel swim.

Sue Price writes: Tony was always very enthusiastic and encouraging, especially when I first became chairman. He was kind and looked me out to say that he was impressed with the various changes we were trying out. Considering he chaired dozens of organisations, I thought that was generous of him.



## Peter Keat, 1946-2024

Peter's son David writes:

The Parks were close to Peter's heart as he enjoyed holidays staying with his grandfather, Harry J Duke, who was Park Keeper living in the Lodge at Hyde Park Corner. Peter remembered Harry climbing up to the big clock which was surrounded by lightbulbs and rather naughtily using an extension to supply his own electricity!



Peter was often taken to the parks by his father, and on one occasion they were invited into the lodge where he was given a photo of his grandfather which he treasured.

Later on, Peter became a well-respected local historian and published several books on Gosport and Portsmouth where he lived.

## Bob Jessett, 1948 -2025

Bob's wife Sandy writes:

A life member, Bob loved the parks enjoying both walking and cycling through to Westminster. More recently, he couldn't walk far but could find a bench where he could sit and read. We have no garden, so this glorious open space virtually on our doorstep is a haven.

Our thanks go to membership secretary, Lynden Easton, for assembling these brief remembrances of our members.

## FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP

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

	October 2024	October 2025
Life members	251	259
Annual members	682	713
Total	933	972



All smiles at a Friends event and The Albert Memorial through cherry blossom.



## THANK YOU!

Where would we be without these generous people who work so hard to get this little publication out to you?

### Our photographers:

Paul Shelley | Rob Dowling | Richard Chow  
Adrian Barnes (recently of Edox) helps us throughout the year with all our printing, [adriangerardbarnes@gmail.com](mailto:adriangerardbarnes@gmail.com)

And most importantly, Steve Olive, who turns these wonderful photos and pieces of inspired writing into this great-looking, small (but perfectly formed) magazine. We have a lot to thank him for.

Sue Price: Editor  
Will Gray: Assistant Editor

