



Friends of Priory Park

Spring 2008 Newsletter

Meet Our New Park Officer



Hi my name is Peter Jones and I have been appointed the Priory Park Officer responsible for managing the newly restored Priory Park.

I live in South Nutfield having moved there around 15 years ago with my wife and two step daughters. I enjoy motor sport but am now an armchair enthusiast; Other interests are travelling and reading. Born in Dartford in Kent I moved to Portsmouth in my teens. My horticultural career started whilst living there. I have migrated around the southeast over the intervening years. The trail is as follows:

Portsmouth City Council: Responsible for the horticultural management of an area north of the city.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council: Managed an area of the borough, responsible for the development and maintenance of parks, open spaces and children's play areas

Tandridge District Council: Parks and Countryside Manager responsible for the maintenance of Parks, Countryside and Woodland throughout the district

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council: Responsible for improvements to the infrastructure in Parks across the borough, including the play area refurbishment programme

Achievements of note

- Project managed the construction of a 9 hole golf course, designed by Charles Hawtree renowned golf architect, outside of Portsmouth
- Undertook extensive consultation with local residents to establish a wildlife area. Lingfield Wildlife Area is a community project converting fields into a nature reserve.
- Worked with parents action group to provide a joint funded play area in a park in Caterham incorporating maximum play value and improved safety features

Tree Update From Peter Gerosa

My work on the arboretum began with an examination of the contract documents to find out precisely what tree planting was specified. I considered that the specification ought to be modified to make the new planting more consistent with the concept of an arboretum and with the trees already growing in and around the site. My ideas were accepted by the Committee and it was agreed that the contract should be amended to allow the planting of a number of suitable trees.

I pressed for more new trees to be planted than we now have, in view of the amount of space available, but this was not accepted by the Council for fear of eventual overcrowding when the trees reach maturity.

I assisted in the selection of varieties to be planted and attended the planting to help ensure that the trees were satisfactorily located.

The new trees are listed below:

- 2 x *Fagus sylvatica* 'Asplenifolia' (cut-leaved beech);
- 2 x *Tilia platyphyllos* 'Laniciata' (cut-leaved lime);
- 1 x *Zelkova serrata* (no popular name);
- 1 x *Fagus sylvatica* 'Dawick' (Dawick beech);
- 1 x *Cedrus atlantica glauca* (blue cedar).

At an early stage in my work I discovered that an attractive existing disease-resistant elm (*Ulmus hollandica x Dampieri aurea*) was intended to be removed to make way for the new E-W footpath across the northern end of the arboretum. My plea for its retention failed, but in view of my concern it was agreed to plant a replacement elsewhere in the Park. This has now been done, the site being on the grass south of the arboretum and to the west of the tree belt flanking Bell Street.

Do you have a comment, question or contribution for the FPP newsletter?

Contact us at

friendspriory@hotmail.co.uk

or call John Adams on

07787 105171

New Visitors are Welcome! By an anonymous friend!

In the dark cold days, memories of summer are flooded with warmth and light, none more so than recollections of the Priory Pond when it reopened.

Tails wag their way through the images, flexibly attached to excited dogs and also – birds? Wagtails of course.

These tails were not the familiar black and white of pied wagtails, but yellow, meaning they belonged either to yellow or grey wagtails. Yellows prefer slow lowland water whereas greys are birds of fast-flowing upland streams. So clearly, these must have been yellows...but wait! Greys are elegant birds with the longest tails which they constantly flick. These were long as a ballerina's legs and bobbing like billy-o.

The pond has got some faster water at the inflow and the outflow and greys are known to content themselves sometimes with lowland fast water, in mill streams for example. So, on reflection, these were surely.....well anyway, they are beautiful memories.

Even experienced readers who knew them instantly will agree that these exhilarating birds provided a fitting welcome for the new Pond. Although the Egyptian goose is thinking, I'm ornamental, I'm loyal and I'm easily identifiable, is there no gratitude? And the coots and moorhens and gulls and ducks and swans can't understand how they could have been missed. Their turn will come.

A Stable Future?

Contributed by Julia Thomas

A couple of weekends ago, three members of the committee paced the perimeter of the abandoned piece of land lying to the right of Priory Way as you enter the Park from Park Lane.

For some time the FPP have been concerned about the future of this area which is owned by Surrey County Council and was once rented out as a riding stables. The stables themselves are in complete disrepair, littered with debris left by "visitors", and the fields surrounding are neglected and full of brambles.

What plans, if any, does the Council have for this surprisingly large plot of land? I am sure many of us could make useful suggestions, not least that of giving it

back to Priory Park so that we may all enjoy it. This makes all the more sense when we remember that some years ago the public was denied access to a chunk of land which was fenced and hedged off and handed over to Priory School for its exclusive use as playing fields.

What we need now is information. So as a first step we have made a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to Surrey County Council and Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and have asked them both to send us copies of documentation, papers, letters etc relating to the Old Stables Site.

We should have a reply within twenty working days so we'll keep you posted!

Twelve Swans a-Swimming!

By Julia Thomas

Has anyone ever seen twelve swans on Priory Pond? ...I did...

This morning!

It was sunny, and the lake did look attractive, but even so.....This must beat all records. Last year, sadly, we lost our regular pair as one of them was attacked by a dog and together with their three eggs; they were taken by Swan Rescue to recuperate at a bird sanctuary. So now these newcomers are vying for space, lured in by the clean water, and whatever vegetation, small fish and insects lurk beneath. They all seem content apart from one couple who are on the offensive and spend their lives pounding through the water, wings puffed up like the sails on a battle ship, in hot pursuit of any other swan who might be daring to usurp their territory.

The one remaining Egyptian Goose was there today. His mate was found dead in the autumn but this one keeps goingand how! He seems angry and bitter as he pursues mainly the swans, launching himself at them for no real reason, pecking and harassing.

The coots and moorhens are still around although in lesser numbers than before the lake improvements. Last October some baby moorhens appeared from nowhere and survived for about four weeks while the weather was still warm. Then they disappeared as quietly as they had come. It must have been the cold or perhaps the lack of protective natural cover while the lake was empty of water. Today, I noticed two new coots' nests – so Spring must be on the way.

The herring gulls have made a dramatic entrance since the improvements. Sometimes every single post, encircling the two submerged islands in the middle of the lake, is occupied by a single bird. The Canada geese keep on returning, though not every day. Sometimes there are fifty and sometimes none at all. December was the exciting month when around dusk each evening the geese would begin to stir, hooting, cackling and creating a general hubbub which gradually increased until they took off in unified flight. Then, silence.

The lake is looking good, wildlife is returning and as this newsletter goes to

press, a greater crested grebe has been spotted! The Council has responded to our request to remove some of the plant protective netting along the banks and around the islands and has opened up a channel across the middle of the submerged island at the East end. This should provide more nesting and feeding opportunities for the wildfowl and will help to ensure the existence of future generations to come. This time last year the lake was no more than a bowlful of mud, home to mechanical diggers and machinery. Today it is transformed and the wildlife has been rewarded for many months of patience.

I Name This Ship...

A recent competition was held by the Council to name the ship 'wrecked' in Priory Park Playground. Over 100 entries were received with a huge variety of names reflecting the history, heritage, wildlife and tales associated with the park, wildlife and Priory. Reigate Youth Council, The Mayor and the friends of Priory Park Management committee were asked to judge the name. And the winner is...

"The Grey Lady".

This name was suggested by 2 entrants and refers to the ghost of a former lady of the priory who is rumoured to walk the corridors of the priory.

The naming event (with unveiling of a plaque) will be held around the end of March.

Competition winners will get to host their own tea party for a group of their friends in the ship. Let's hope they leave a chair free for the Grey Lady!

Prizes for "Park Life"

This month the Council launched a competition to win a Digital SLR Camera in the Canon Priory Park Competition. The prize is a great Canon camera with double zoom lens kit.

This competition is just part of the celebrations that mark the £6.6 million restoration of the Park, of which Canon is a corporate patron.

To enter the fantastic competition, all you need to do is to snap an image that represents your interpretation of 'Park Life' together with a suitable caption. You may be inspired by the brand new skate park, or the majestic wooden galleon. Maybe it's the gardens and the rolling parkland and trees that for you encapsulate 'Park Life'.

Whatever your inspiration, send in your image and you could win the first prize of a Canon EOS 400D SLR camera with double zoom lens kit plus afternoon tea for four people in the Priory Park Pavilion

and a Canon goody bag – a prize worth over £1,000! 10 lucky runners up will win a Canon goody bag.

The winning image will be exhibited as part of the first display in the Priory Park Pavilion which is due to open in late spring.

For full details of all terms and conditions email: canoncompetition@reigate-banstead.gov.uk or visit the council website at www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk

Closing date for entries is Friday 9th May 2008.

Winners will be notified in June – so if you want to be in with a chance of winning this great prize, get yourself down to Priory Park and get snapping!

Minutes and Meetings

Since the last newsletter there have been 2 meetings of the friends of Priory Park Management Committee.

For full copies of minutes, previous newsletters etc please contact any member of the Friends management committee, or email us via the website. Some of the subjects we have been discussing on your behalf: -

- Reviewing the Council's Park Management plan with Robin Davies.
- Reviewing feedback from last year's member survey to respond to your views.
- Continuing to monitor progress of the park works with Nina Porter, project Manager for the Renovation.
- Working with the council to ensure we are involved in the opening launch celebrations in summer this year.

The next meeting of the committee is on Wednesday 12th March at 7.30pm in Nutley Hall, Reigate.

Are you a member of a group, sporting club or association that uses the park.?

We offer group membership of the Friends of Priory Park as well as individual membership and we could help promote your activities to a wider audience.

For all membership details and any other questions visit us at www.friendsofpriory.co.uk