



CHISWICK HOUSE FRIENDS

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2012

Charity No 289907

Patron: Lord Burlington

A Royal Visit for Chiswick

In a year chock full of events and garden exhibitions, a visit by His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent on 18th July provided the highlight. The Duke's visit was marked by the planting of a Black Poplar tree in celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress of Hounslow... (more inside)



Chiswick House and Gardens Trust News

...Whilst at Chiswick the Duke of Kent chatted to many Chiswick House and Gardens Trust volunteers who do so much to ensure the gardens are beautifully presented. The Duke's visit was made all the more memorable as it was his father Prince George who opened the gardens to the public in July 1929. Trust Director Sarah Finch-Crisp presented the Duke with a facsimile copy of the Brentford and Chiswick Times illustrated report of that earlier occasion, in which he took a keen interest.

Volunteering Achievements

The Volunteer Service continues to flourish and this year a new team of Garden Guides have begun delivering regular tours for visiting groups and free drop-in tours for local people on weekends. Uptake has been good with the guides providing an enjoyable and engaging way of learning about the garden's rich history. We are delighted that the achievements of the kitchen garden project have attracted a further grant from the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund. The additional money will help support the continuation of this important community project.

The service as a whole is quite remarkable. 160 volunteers between the ages of 20 and 70 have given a total of 4799 hours of their personal time since April this year alone! Kim & Colin Heath (pictured below with the Duke) have volunteered since 2003. Colin says of his help "It is magic to be here. The Goosefoots are a wonderful group; not only to work with here but we have also made some super friends that we see socially. Chiswick House & Gardens is a wonderful place to work, we just love it!"



For green fingered Friends interested in joining the longstanding Goosefoot Volunteers in the wider gardens please do contact Volunteer Manager Louise Randall at: louise.randall@chgt.org.uk.

Farewell to Fiona

Many of the Friends will be sorry to learn that Head Gardener Fiona Crumley (below) is retiring this September. Fiona, who has been at Chiswick for 5 years, was the Trust's first employee and the gardens, not least the Camellia Collection, have greatly benefited from her deep knowledge of horticulture, wisdom and dedication. In the meantime we look forward to welcoming Fiona's replacement Peter Oates. Peter, a former Head Gardener to Lord Sainsbury, brings a wealth of horticultural and estate management experience in both the public and private sector.



Car Park Due to Charge

Perhaps not the most inspiring subject, but car park charges have been topical locally. In partnership with the Council, The Trust is expecting daily charges to commence before Christmas. Full details www.chgt.org.uk. This is a long overdue scheme to free the car park from use by commuters and ensure that genuine visitors can find a car parking space. It will also provide a modest amount of income to help maintain the car park which was significantly upgraded as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund restoration of the gardens in 2010.

Thank you Friends

Finally, on behalf of everyone at Chiswick House and Gardens Trust we would like to say a huge thank you to the Friends for the support you have given us recently, most notably the match-funding of a trainee gardener under the Historic & Botanical Gardens Bursary Scheme. Once again the fundraising efforts of the Friend's Opera Committee have been tremendous and it remains a pleasure to be working so closely with Chiswick House Friends.

For details about forthcoming events including the Pumpkin Party and Chiswick House Camellia Festival 2013 please visit www.chgt.org.uk.

Swan Story by Richard Sales

Oh! Frabjous Day!!

I was working with another Goosefoot Volunteer by the Swans' nest at the Feeding Station at 10.00 am on the 9th May when we noticed one cygnet. By 11 o'clock we saw another cygnet being hatched. By the end of the day we heard there were 4 cygnets.

By next morning a total of seven cygnets had arrived who took to the water about 2 days later. In fact there were eight eggs of which one was infertile. My Bird Book says eight is the maximum.



The story started almost a year previously, in May 2011. The sun was out, the sky was blue, not a cloud to spoil the view, but then I saw and heard the folorn call of the female swan (pen) plaintively calling for her lost cygnets and so it started 'raining in my heart'. (Buddy Holly)

It had all started so well. The previous afternoon I had been alerted by text from one of our swan feeding dog walkers, Carol Dass, that two cygnets had just hatched.

I quickly cycled down to the nest site on the lake at Chiswick House and there they were – a beautiful sight.

Even though the swans had been seen mating (romantically enough on St. Valentine's Day) I was not sure that the female was sexually mature as she was under 5 years old, which I knew from her ring number. Previously egg-laying from young pens had produced infertile eggs so, until hatching, I had no certainty there would be cygnets.

This particular pair of swans had a somewhat unusual history. The new male swan (cob) was seduced by our original female (pen) on semi-ice covered lake in February 2009 after her cob had died by flying into the Classic bridge. This original pair of swans had been brought in from the Swan Sanctuary in October 2003.

The current cob flew in with his pen and a single cygnet. Our pen saw off the cygnet and pen and paired up with the new cob.

The pen and cob then successfully hatched four cygnets on a new nest site (each cob builds the nest in a different place). On 20 May 2009 one died before getting on to the water and one went missing a month later, presumably taken by a fox.

The pen was observed to be very weak during early 2010 and was eventually taken to Riverside Animal Centre where she died in June. She was only 10 years old. So there were no cygnets in 2010 and our current female flew in in June and paired up with our cob. As we know, she had two cygnets a year ago which died within 18 hours of hatching. What happened to them? Who knows. As a very young mother maybe she allowed them to stay in the nest while she went into the water, or vice versa, and a predator took them. I have seen a carrion crow take a mallard chick two days earlier or maybe a fox took them. Thirty six hours later I found two piles of white downy feathers about 50 meters from the nest.

So on to this May when seven healthy cygnets were born. Our cob and pen pair at 6 years old would now be at their most reproductive: they were both hatched in 2006, the cob in King George's Park, Wandsworth.

One of the seven cygnets was killed near the Amphitheatre Pond, almost certainly by a sparrow hawk, when it was three weeks old.

We have been told that to achieve four to maturity would be exceptional. As of today (28 August) we still have six very healthy, large cygnets.



They should be flying by October – the training flights should be interesting and amusing.

All things being equal, which they never are, they should stay on our lake till March/April when they will be, somewhat cruelly, kicked out by their parents to make their own way in life.

The cygnets were ringed on 28 June 2012.

If you would like to see them take their first swim, "Springtime@chiswickhouse" on Youtube was filmed by Julie Ritson.

The 2012 Opera

The summer of 2012 will be remembered for a number of wonderful historic events – the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Olympics and Para-Olympics, the Football Euros, and of course for our own two very different evenings of Opera at Chiswick House. One will be remembered as a glorious summer's evening, the other for probably the worst weather in the 8-year history of the event.....biblical comes to mind.....



It did show, however, that the best of British Spirit is alive and well in West London as a large part of the audience remained to see Madam Butterfly take her own life in extremely atmospheric conditions!



Planning for the 2013 Chiswick House Event has already started - and has every member of the committee extremely excited. A new Opera company – Focus Opera will be performing - they are young, enthusiastic and excited to be involved with the Event. For the first evening Keith Cheetham their artistic director is compiling a piece especially for us. For the second evening we will be transported to 1950's Spain for Bizet's Carmen.

This June was not at its 'flaming' best, so for 2013 we have moved the date to the first week of July... please put the 3rd and 4th July in your diary for the 9th year of The Chiswick House Opera Event.

The 2012 Dog Show

Summer 2012 wasn't finished yet. The 15th Friends Dog Show started in overcast conditions but by lunchtime the rain was pouring down and by 2.30pm the cricket ground was so water-logged that the show had to be abandoned.



In spite of the downpour, large numbers (?) of people came and a record number of stands were put up (?). Our thanks to....



CHISWICK HOUSE FRIENDS EVENTS 2012

26 Sept, 7pm House, Concert (Jane Clark) CHF/CHGT

Published by the Chiswick House Friends

57 Thames Village, Hartington Rd, London W4 3UF

secretary@chfriends.org.uk

www.chfriends.org.uk