

## **CRANFORD PARK FRIENDS**

### **Annual Report 2015-16**

We held eight Sunday morning volunteer sessions based around the Secret Garden, producing another wonderful display of wild flowers and vegetables and the vine was given extra attention. When volunteer numbers have allowed, we have used these sessions to go into the wider park to do jobs like litter-picking and cutting back vegetation around the Ha-Ha. In addition, three volunteer sessions have been held jointly with Thames 21 and these have focussed on clearance of Frog's Ditch in January and October and a community litter-pick in February.

Membership has increased to 95 and we have held four quarterly meetings attracting very healthy attendances.

Regular Riverfly and phosphate monitoring has been carried out by a small band of volunteers who have fed the collected data into the Citizen Crane Project which has recently published its year 2 report. In Cranford Park we maintain one of a dozen monitoring stations along the Crane catchment – the monthly kick-sampling is creating a picture of the water quality along the whole Crane catchment serves as early warning of pollution incidents. Member Wendy Marks has taken on the job of completing a weekly Butterfly Transect of Cranford for the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, feeding data into its national database.

We have led more guided walks than previous years – the Secretary led the popular bluebell walk in April and the Knights Earls & Ghosts walk in September; Ian May led the same walk in May. More walk leaders would be welcome. Other volunteer events we have run with great success this year are the Family Day, our best so far with more than 400 people attending and 45 volunteers assisting; both days of the London Open House weekend in September, attended by more than 150 people with 10 volunteers manning it. This event included a detailed exhibition about the park's history (prepared by Christopher Luetchford.) An open-air theatre performance was staged by Outline Theatre in the stable courtyard in July. Thanks to everyone who helped with these events and to the London Borough of Hillingdon (LBH) Green Spaces who supported us throughout.

In July, several members assisted the Countryside & Conservation Officer running a day clearing Himalayan Balsam from the riverbank with a dozen young volunteers (aged 16-17) with National Citizen Service. We then gave them a 'treasure hunt' style quiz of the park's history and geography. So inspired were they by the park and our ambitions for it that they also fundraised more than £450 for us.

Our work towards a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid for the park and its buildings continued, with meetings of the sub-steering group in March and October, the full steering group met at the Civic Centre in July. Volunteers spent three days in June conducting the first ever count of park visitors, the results of which will be included in the HLF Feasibility/Conservation Study. Jointly with LBH, we are aiming to put our bid to the HLF in 2017. The fire that occurred in the eastern wing of the stables on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016

underlines the urgency with which we need to restore and bring back into use the park's historic buildings (i.e. the stables and cellars).

The work of the History & Conservation group continued, this again will be useful in our HLF bid; particularly Christopher's history of Cranford Park ('A Hidden History Revealed') which is in an early draft stage. We have developed closer ties with Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire (Cranford Park's history is closely linked). Two visits to the castle have taken place – first a research mission by the H&C group in July and then a members' day out in October. Both were blessed with glorious weather and assisted by Reg Clarke. In March we held our first Quiz night, with Gowan Clews as quizmaster, a fun evening which raised morale as well as funds.

The group's continuing success, supporting the work of LBH Green Spaces, is down to the work of all the volunteers who work in lots of different capacities – digging the garden, clearing the waterways, rooting out invasive species, researching in libraries and archives; doing admin, helping run stalls and being welcoming and informative to park visitors. It is clear that Cranford Park inspires people in many ways but its lack of facilities and investment is making our work difficult and stifling users' enjoyment of a great natural and historical resource. We are continuing to work with LBH to address these issues. Thank you to everyone who helped this year, especially our regular volunteers - including our Committee. We particularly thank our retiring Committee members Lorraine Barton, Billy Coburn and Andy Wilmore for their hard work and commitment.

Bob Barton  
Secretary  
November 2016