

Parklife



The Friends of Kennington Park Newsletter • Working together to make the park better

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A day in the life of a fine park keeper

Reece Turner, Kennington Park's only full-time member of staff, has worked here for eight years. And he'll soon be moving on, to take up a new role in Archbishop's Park. So we asked FoKP co-founder Rob Pateman to follow Reece around the park - to give us an insight into a typical day

Reece, 30, is part of a team of three – including a gardener who works three days a week, and one temporary employee – who look after the park.

Kennington Park gets more popular – and busier – every year. Which means Reece spends most of his time picking up litter left behind by park users, and trying to keep the park tidy. It can feel like a never-ending task but, it seems, not a thankless one.

'Most people are regulars,' he says, as I join him on the daily litter run in late September. '80% of them I see every day and they are generally really

lovely. They'll stop for a chat and make suggestions, pointing out things I might have missed. And they'll say thank you. It's only something small but it's important. It's just one of the reasons I love this job.'

True to form, people stop and chat as we make our way around. He's on first name terms with many – and their dogs. One dog, Nobby, scamp-



ers up excitedly for a belly rub before bounding on, oblivious to the effort it takes to keep the park clean. Which could be said of most park users too.

The park hadn't been busy the previous day. Even so, litter has piled up. Reece's day began at 6.45, when he arrived to load the electric truck with black bin liners and litter grabbers before setting out to open the gates.

We ride together, stopping at each of the small, green litter bins. Some are overflowing, the grass around them splattered with bottles, newspapers and fast-food boxes. One

of the things Reece would like to see changed quickly becomes clear: finding a way to manage the large boxes that hold the park café's ever-popular pizzas: just one or two boxes will block a small bin and prevent other people using it.

There are several much larger bins in the park, but people don't realise that the big bins are for them to use too. ... continued on p.8

“ People stop for a chat. And they'll say thank you. It's only something small, but it's important. It's just one of the reasons I love this job ”

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Playground pleasure for local kids

Our super new Kennington Park playground opened officially at lunchtime on the 19th of July 2023, a beautifully warm day.

The red ribbon was cut by Councillor Rezina Chowdhury (Deputy Leader of Lambeth Council),



It was a big thumbs up for the new playground (above), after Councillor Chowdhury cut the red ribbon in July

accompanied by Councillors Donatus Anyanwu and David Amos, and project manager Caroline Streeks. And all the Year 4 children from Henry Fawcett Primary School, who rushed in as soon as the speeches were over.

The new playground is a huge gift for the 21st birthday of the Friends of Kennington Park. Part of our Capital Programme shopping list, it's financed by the money Lambeth received for the Northern Line Extension work in the park.

Lambeth Parks and the Friends of Kennington Park worked closely together to deliver this wonderful new play space. It's another significant step in the Friends' mission to make the park the

best it can be – for all of our community.

Designed by Kompan, the playground offers brand new play equipment for toddlers to 12-year-olds, including equipment for children with disabilities, making it a fully inclusive space. There are quiet zones, nature zones and picnic tables as well as spaces to play, with slides, swings and a zip wire. Everything to give children hours of play and fun. We want children to build friendships and further strengthen our community.

After the closures of the pandemic, it was long overdue, with equipment for a different generation. It's a precious space, especially for children who don't have access to the outdoors at home.

We hope adults will encourage children to pick up their litter and put it in the bins or take it home. This is our play space and we want everyone to take care of it. Now all we need is some wild flowers (hopefully to be planted this autumn), the toilet block sorted, and the railings repainted.

FoKP committee member Alison Liepmann contributed many hours – from procurement meetings to on-site visits – to see this project come to life. 'I'm used to leaving my front door and hearing the distant rumble of traffic. Now I hear children playing,' she says. 'It's a real pleasure to know how much this new space contributes to the well-being of all the children.'



In and around the park

Time up for our tatty toilets?

That was in 2016.

And still at the top of the list of **complaints** about Kennington Park is the state of the two red-brick toilet blocks. They are pretty **unpleasant** and frequently **vandalised**. As a consequence, they are **rarely used**, and **costly to maintain**. The cost of completely renovating them would be **considerable**.

The Friends want the

park to have toilets suitable for the **21st century**. We like Lambeth Parks' plan for a new, **modern** unisex toilet block on the footprint of the children's toilet building, with separate entrances from the playground and the picnic area by the park café. The block would include a **disabled toilet** and **baby-changing** facilities, and would be **automatically locked** overnight.

Lambeth's planning department and Conservation Officer are currently unwilling to agree to this proposed change. They are debating **renovation versus replacement**; their concerns are the **heritage** value as opposed to a modern, accessible, **purpose-built** facility. Some local objectors, who want to retain both of

these buildings for **aesthetic** reasons, agree.

With the backing of Lambeth Parks, the Friends are **undeterred**, and will continue to campaign to get **decent toilets** for the park. The plans have been **amended** and will be re-submitted, and would involve the demolition of at least one of the old blocks.

"I don't feel I've found London's worst toilet but this is a damn good starting point to begin comparisons"

Burberry bash brings benefits

All the glitz and glamour of London Fashion Week came to Kennington Park in February. International stars like Stormzy and Naomi Campbell were strutting their stuff in London's most fashionable leisure location!

We don't want the park to be used for too many large scale commercial events – that's not its purpose. Some previous badly-managed events have taught us hard lessons about damage to the grass and disruption for park users. But budget realities for Lambeth Council mean there has to be a balance. They need events and other commercial sponsorship ventures, to generate income.

This event was unusual: for invited guests only, and for just one evening. But it was in February, when park usage is low. Best of all, Lambeth promised this would be the only commercial event in the park for the whole of 2023. And they promised an additional £13k investment from the event for improvements in the park.

There was a range of views from members; the committee's decision not to oppose the event was unpopular with some. Major downside? A large part of the park would be out of use for a month; there would be extra traffic, and construction noise. We received some strongly worded objections.

The FoKP committee worked closely with the Lambeth Council Events manager, Santiago Genochio. Most of the south field was fenced off

for four weeks while Burberry's contractors built a large temporary structure. We made suggestions about access, and protecting the field. Complaints, including site rubbish and road signs being dumped in St Agnes Place and a local garden,

were referred to Lambeth Council. Getting lots of VIPs into the venue did cause traffic hold-ups. But Santiago worked long hours to ensure that things went as smoothly as possible. And the contractors were professional and responsive to concerns.

By all accounts, the show was a great success. Kennington Park got international press coverage, and Burberry was voted best show of the week – no doubt because of its glamorous location!

Lambeth's Parks team

had plans and machinery in place to deal with damage to the grass after four weeks undercover. The ground was seeded and aerated, and top-soil added. It wasn't too long before things were almost back to normal.

After the event, we had a surprise call from Burberry. They asked about park events and projects we had coming up. They loved the idea of our free Kennington Park Festival in July, and the planned Youth Zone, and made a £5k donation directly to the Friends to support those projects. It made a big impact on our income for the year.



Photo © Jeff Moore - PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo

A few fashionista facts ...

the show was Daniel Lee's first as Burberry's Chief Creative Officer, and one of the most anticipated shows of the season. The show space, also designed by Lee, was inspired by Burberry tents from the late 19th and early 20th century. Guests were served vegan hot chocolate and hot toddies in stainless steel mugs – as befits a night of 'branded glamping' under the stars.

One FoKP member said 'It was pretty cool to have Stormzy and Naomi in Kennington Park – and for the park to get some national profile! Even if not everyone agreed!'

Dog area still defective

How excited we were when TfL finally returned most, but sadly not all, of the dog exercise area to the park, when the work on the Northern Line Extension ended.

But our delight turned to dismay as the central area flooded, apparently due to the large concrete plate which now sits just below the grassed area. The swampy space was unusable for months. Little did we realise that the flooding was only part of the problem, as we

looked for ways to improve the situation.

Happily, the dog area is now fully open. But for its first few years, it's under TfL's control – Lambeth Council has no authorisation (or allocated budget) to operate in that area. Grass cutting, tree planting and watering, litter collection and repairs are all the responsibility of TfL and their contractors.

That's where the problems start. The contractors' schedule seems to fall short

– as the dead trees, build-up of rubbish, and holes dug by foxes, rats and/or dogs testify. There are fewer gates than before and only one bench, despite clear evidence of more in our photos taken before the NLE works.

We've had many meetings and discussions with senior Lambeth Parks managers about the problems. And we've raised the issue with Councillors. The maintenance agreement set up with Lambeth Planning at the begin-



ning of the NLE project has not been enforced.

We're hoping to see some real improvement (through planning enforcement measures, if necessary) in 2024. FoKP are keeping up the pressure!

Remedial drainage works

(above) were carried out by TfL's contractors in November 2022. We'd hoped this would mean no more floods. But after heavy rains in Autumn 2023, parts of the area were looking soggy again

What a year for a walk in the park

Author and poet Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem whose refrain was '**Boots, boots, boots** – movin' up and down again!'

Thankfully, for most of the year you don't need boots to walk in our wonderful park. And what a year it's been for walks!

Dawn Chorus Walk

Picture this: a dozen intrepid people, wandering around the park at **5am** on a chilly, damp morning in **late April**.

Expertly led by FoKP member **Erica Wells**, we saw and heard the park's winged residents waking and tuning up.

We learned that birds with large eyes, such as **blackbirds**, are among the **earliest risers**. And Erica's expertise helped us to identify the **great tit** (above left) – its two notes of different pitch sound a bit like 'teacher, teacher.'

And we startled a group of **fox cubs** playing in the park – they were very surprised to see humans at such an early hour!

Tree Walks

Did you know? There are 75 species of trees in the park, of which just 15% are native to Europe.

Lambeth Parks' environment officer and tree expert, **Dr Iain Boulton**, and FoKP Chair Marietta led a large, fascinated crowd on each of our December and June (below) tree walks.

We saw the two **Judas trees** by the St Agnes Place entrance to the Flower Garden; the **black mulberry** (which has a fascinating example of grafting) near the café; the large 70-year-old **cedar**, with its blue-green needles, near the park depot, and the **Indian horse chestnut** at the gate near the Air Raid Memorial – it originates from the Himalayas.

Iain explained the important role mature trees play in **removing pollution**, and how older trees are much better off than young saplings in our increasingly dry summers – with their deeper roots they are **better** at coping with **drought**.

Bat Hunt

We had a record turnout – an incredible **80 people**, of all ages – for our September bat hunt!

And happily, the dozen or so tiny **pipistrelles** who roost in the park put on a noisy display when they emerged at dusk for their insect feast. But we could only hear them through the cool **sonic bat detectors** (below) that Iain had brought along to share.

We found out that bats are **not blind** and can see perfectly well – they won't get tangled up in your

hair. But they were flying quite low near the Flower Garden!

Bats hunt **with their ears** – not their eyes. Their excellent 'radar,' called **echolocation**, helps them to catch insects in the near-dark. They entertained us with their **aerobatics** as they stocked up on food. In late autumn, they go into **hibernation**, until the spring.

Black History Month Walk

In October, FoKP Chair and local historian Marietta led a BHM walk entitled "The Black Man and his Party": **William Cuffay**, Kennington and the Chartists.

Cuffay, the son of a freed slave, was born in Chatham. He became a prominent leader of the **Chartist movement** who gave fiery speeches on Kennington Common.

Marietta also told the stories of **William "Black" Davidson**, a resident of nearby Manor Place, who was executed in 1820 after the Cato Street Conspiracy.

And of **Robert Wedderburn**, the Jamaican-born anti-slavery lobbyist and radical preacher who once addressed the crowds on the Common.

One of the people on the walk said "I had no idea the park had **so much history!**"



Robert Wedderburn



Skatebowl slabs slow progress

2023 was to be the year the park's iconic 1970s skatebowl 'Kenny' was restored. But luck was not on our side.

We were full of enthusiasm for a speedy restoration of the bowl. We knew the challenges: to remove the cracked concrete surface layer, in the hope that it would extend the life of the bowl. This part of the project went well.

Next, we wanted to remove sections of the bowl to assess the condition underneath. And that's where it all started to get difficult.

After 50 years, the complex adjustable supports were jammed solid. The only reasonable alternative was underpinning to support the bowl. But you only have to glance at the bowl to see there's no space underneath to work. So that means removing the huge concrete slabs which form the skating surface. But finding the right equipment to lift them – and getting it into the park without major damage to the trees near the

bowl – would be pretty well impossible. New slabs will be needed.

This is specialist work with significant challenges. Unsurprisingly, the contract for works issued by Lambeth Council received no formal quotes. But some companies expressed interest and contributed ideas. After extensive discussions, a way forward was agreed. Sadly, the cost would be £150k - £200k over budget.

We need to find ways to secure this funding. Very few grants are available in these times of financial constraint. Maybe we can get commercial sponsorship – or a wealthy benefactor!

Do you have any ideas about how we can find funding and move forward? If you do, please email us at friends@kenningtonpark.org

If we can get the new bowl in place in time for the Paris Olympics in 2024, the expertise of our UK skateboarders will inspire others to get skating!

'Kenny' has been the go-to practice bowl for many south London skateboarders. Here's Savannah (below) doing a Boneless, before the work to restore the bowl began



Photo of Savannah © Henry Kingford

Youth zone yell-out

We've got an exciting capital development investment plan for the park. The next priority project is the Youth Zone – an area in the park specifically designed for young people to socialise. We want to put it alongside the table tennis tables.

There are plenty of sports facilities already in the park – but not everybody enjoys sport. What we are looking for here is a space for recreation and somewhere to meet up and chat. National initiatives such as Make Space for Girls say we must make sure the space appeals to as many people as possible.

As a starter for ten, Lambeth Council's Parks department drew up some ideas for the first phase. We displayed them at our July Festival, and got lots of feedback and suggestions, from young people and parents. Lambeth ran an online consultation, but only a small percentage of the responses were from the target teen age range.

We very much hope that more young people will get involved in planning this space. If you have ideas or want to help, contact Alison Liepmann, the FoKP lead on this project: email youthzone@kenningtonpark.org

Farewell to our good Friend, Gordon Johnston

The Friends of Kennington Park were very sorry to hear of the recent death of Gordon Johnston, just days short of his 90th birthday.

Gordon was Chairman of the Friends from 2006 until 2016 and played a pivotal role in securing major improvements in the park, culminating in the park's first Green Flag Award in 2011.

Although the committee had achieved some success before Gordon

took over as Chair, things certainly **took off** under his stewardship.

His **skill, discipline** and **attention to detail** – acquired during his career as a civil servant in Whitehall – paid dividends. His meticulous **note-taking** ensured nothing was missed, and his **diligence** in following up action points pushed projects forward.

'The first few years of the Friends of Kennington Park were about finding a way to **bring about change**,' said co-founder Rob Pateman.

'Gordon got everyone **on board** and gave it the legs it needed to sustain **momentum**. Of all he brought, probably the most important thing was **credibility**; first Lambeth Council, then external funding bodies, knew we were organised and well-governed – a **safe pair of hands** for delivering major capital projects.'

Some of the key achievements during Gordon's tenure included the renovation of the **Flower**

Garden, the relocation and upgrading of the **children's playground**, and the installation of the **fitness trail** and **table tennis tables**.

In 2012, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, a **bench** was installed in the Flower Garden. Carved on it were some very apt words:

'Gordon Johnston – a **good friend** to Kennington Park.'

Gordon's local residents' association, the Friends of Durning Library, FoKP, and other friends and neighbours have all contributed to a **new bench**, dedicated to Gordon.

His widow, Jill, has chosen its location (left), with a **view across the park**, and we hope it will be installed in the New Year. It will be a fitting **tribute** to Gordon and will, like the improvements he oversaw, stand the test of time.

We offer our **condolences** to Jill, and to the rest of his family, as well as our thanks for putting up with the **demands** the park and FoKP made on Gordon's time and energy.



Festival fun!

A fabulous day was had by all at our third free summer festival in the park on July 16th, 2023.

There was music and drumming, singing and dancing, food and fun. Children and grown-ups made flowers from upcycled plastic bottles, and fabulous crowns from real flowers. They watched Punch & Judy and did the limbo. They learned about bees, had their faces painted, played games and won prizes.

We and our organising partner **Melanin Health & Wellness** say a big thank you to everybody who took part, and to everyone who came along.

And to sponsors **Berkeley Homes, Kings Health Partners** and **Thriving North Lambeth, Southwark College, Marsh & Parsons** and **Iconic Media**.

Thank you to all the amazing **volunteers** who turned up to help out on the day.

And of course, to all our **FoKP members**, whose contributions help to support this and many other events in the park.

Finally, thanks to Lambeth Parks, and especially to Reece, whose support on the day made everything go smoothly.



In and around the park

Cool new water fountains

Thirsty park users were delighted in November '22. Why? Because Lambeth Council, after **years of badgering** by the Friends, installed three fabulous new **drinking water fountains** – and in the locations we'd suggested!

We hope you've spotted them. One is at the **top of the park**, near the war memorial and dog area, and the second, by the

path on the **park extension**. The third is at the **changing rooms** over by the all-weather astro pitch. The first two are **dog-friendly**, also at our request.

Park users – especially runners – had been complaining for years about the **lack** of water fountains in the park. There was just the one, often **out of order**, near the children's playground. They were on the list of park

improvements that started our capital development programme.

The new fountains are proving **very popular**. And we hope that, as well as refreshing park users, they'll reduce the number of single-use **plastic bottles** dumped in the park. Cheers!



Here's an interesting approach – not recommended for anyone over 3!



Photos by Michael Harding



Sign of the times

Did you see the new signs on the park gates in November 2023? The gates have always been closed at dusk, so what's new?

Well – as of 13 November, although the park is officially closed after dusk, the gates will no longer be locked.

This is something we are not at all happy about. And it's not the first time!

When this was last proposed by Lambeth, we made our objections clear, and won the argument. But this time, our

concerns are not sufficient to overcome the need for the Council to save money, and a 3-month trial of leaving the gates open has begun.

We know from past experience that some people will enter the park after it's 'closed'. And we know there are a few people who think vandalising the park and its features is good sport – they will see this as an opportunity to extend their activities. Like the recent vandalism to the roof of the children's

toilets, and previous incidents of fires in the playground and its old red bus.

We understand the Council needs to save money. But we think this decision is ill-judged. Especially as they've just spent lots of money on the new playground!

If you become aware of any overnight use, please email Parks@lambeth.gov.uk and copy us in: friends@kenningtonpark.org

Lambeth's new Park Enforcement team will

check in the park from time to time. But it's a small team with a borough-wide remit. The park has no CCTV, and overnight is only lit along the Midnight Path.

If you agree with us that the gates to Kennington Park should continue to be locked at night, please let your local Councillors know as soon as possible and ask them to take action.



... continued from p1

‘If they used them, rather than folding pizza boxes into the smaller bins,’ Reece explains, ‘the park would look so much nicer.’

‘If people were more mindful of the litter, and understood how long it takes one person to clear up after hundreds of people, especially in the summer, they’d use the larger bins.’ he says. ‘Some days, I can’t get around to do it all. I leave at 3pm and sometimes the park’s not even clean. All that time is time I can’t spend looking after the gardens.’

Reece and Rob share the litter-picking, as Rob hears about the pleasures – and the perils – of a day in the life of a Kennington Park-keeper



Photo © Suzanne Jansen

He points out an area near the Northern Line ventilation shaft where he and his colleagues had found some time to clear overgrown trees and shrubs, allowing other plants to get the light they need to thrive. ‘I got a lot of satisfaction from that, because you see the difference. So do other people. And it lasts. You get a feeling of accomplishment.’

Three hours. Twenty bags of litter. And there’s still the Orchard and the park extension to do. ‘On a Monday, if the weather’s been good over the weekend, I can collect 300-400 bags of rubbish,’ he says.

Does he dread sunny weather – because of the litter? Reece says he loves to see the park being used. Despite his endless battle with litter, he remains cheerful and positive.

‘I do have job satisfaction. The community around here is polite and involved.’

‘My favourite day is when the Friends put on their summer Festival. It brings a sense of community. The park is more lively and I really like it. It lasts afterwards too; everyone is in higher spirits.’

Given his enthusiasm for the job – and for Kennington Park – why is he moving on?

‘It’s a complete change. Purely gardening-

Gardening group going great guns

Ruth Morgan, our lead gardener, tells us what’s been happening in the Flower Garden this year

The new clematis (below) on the pergola are thriving



The volunteer gardening group continues to make a major contribution to the upkeep of the Flower Garden, and beyond. Happily, we achieved another Gold from London in Bloom this year!

Many volunteers come with gardening experience, but general enthusiasm is always brilliant. There are tasks for everyone: watering, weeding and tidying flower beds, pruning and mulching.

The garden survived last summer’s drought pretty well. Some of the bush hebes died; here and in other parks too. So some have been removed,

and others continue to provide some shape and shelter. It’s always a decision to be made: Tidy up the garden? Or leave the often architectural seed heads and stalks for wildlife? We aim to achieve a balance.

A plant that did really well this year was the persicaria, aka polygonum, with its tall, dark-pink spires. The roses gave a good show around the sundial beds: new roses ‘Bathsheba’ (an apricot colour) and ‘Claire Austin’ (with creamy white flowers) – both chosen for their strong fragrance, did well. Other new plants are the ‘Iceberg’ rose, ‘Mermaid’ (lemon-yellow), and ‘William’ (magenta), all growing now amongst older climbers. Some have struggled, but with further mulching and feeding, we remain optimistic! We have a jasminum nudiflorum and a trachelospermum jasminoides, to add interest in autumn and winter. The new clematis are a cirrhosa ‘Jingle Bells’, flowering from December to February, and a beautiful clematis armandii.

The Guys Gold rose bed, in front of Prince Consort Lodge, has continued to bloom, despite

based. Being on my own a lot of the time in Kennington gets a bit ... lonely. It's a bigger team at Archbishop's. And I'll get trained in using machinery, like ride-on mowers. I've had training on the job, but nothing leading to a formal qualification.

'There are experienced, qualified gardeners and horticulturists in Lambeth's parks ... It would be good if there was time to learn from them. That would benefit the Parks department as a whole quite drastically.'

Reece understands the challenges Council parks managers face, especially as budgets are much tighter now. 'Most of the team have been working here for twenty years or longer – they're as dedicated to public parks as I am. So they get frustrated too.'

Unfortunately, there is some anti-social behaviour in the park too. It's only a few people, but it has an impact. Some is particularly unpleasant: abandoned syringes and needles, toilet walls smeared and wet paper thrown about. Not tasks that a park gardener should expect to have to deal with.

So what could be done to help make the job more fulfilling? Some of the solutions Reece suggests are relatively straightforward:

- Adding extra bins in those areas where people routinely leave rubbish – not only in the park but just outside it too. For example, if there's no bin on the roadside near the bus stops, litter just gets pushed through the railings into the park
- Discussion between Council and café to try to solve the problems caused by pizza boxes
- Larger, differently-shaped bins, to better cope with increased levels of rubbish

Losing such an engaging – and engaged – presence in Kennington Park is a real blow. Marietta Crichton Stuart, chair of FoKP, says 'We will all miss Reece. He's been a real friend to the park – always cheerful, always busy. And he's always kept us in touch with what's going on in the park. The move is a good career step for him, and he'll get proper training.'

And the litter solutions Reece suggests? 'They sound great! We're already talking to our contacts at Lambeth about new approaches – and better bins.'

Reece has been an asset to the park for eight years, and we're very sorry to see him go. He leaves with nothing but thanks and best wishes for the future from the Friends and park users.

And Nobby will miss his daily belly rub too.

This grot spot for litter is near the bus stop, along the fence by Camberwell New Road. If there's no bin handy, people just chuck their rubbish into the park



Happy helpers in the garden gather bindweed (left), and enjoy a warming cuppa (right)

a bad case of rose rust: thanks to Sue at Peter Beales Rose Nursery for her helpful advice on this.

We had no olives in 2023, but the fig tree was laden with fruit in November!

We now have a hose with connector, which makes life much easier; thanks to Lambeth Council and the watering crew. Park staff Reece and Martin have done a lot of work in the limited time available. Many thanks also to Roots & Shoots, Bee Urban and Tony Danford from Myatts Fields Community garden. And special thanks to Anne and Julie for caring for the planting around the war memorial.

Please come and join us! Sessions are on the second Sunday each month (apart from January and August) from noon until 4pm. Amongst all the work to be done, we always find time for a cuppa and a catch-up, discovering more about our brilliant volunteers. The garden would look very different without their helping hands.

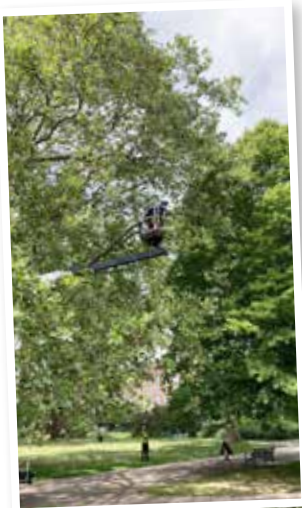


Ruth shows Alex and Mikey (above) how to clip trimmings for the compost heap

Trees team muscle in on Massaria

Since 2019, Lambeth Parks' Arboricultural Team (aka the Trees Team) have been based right here, in Kennington Park. They look after the hundreds of amazing trees, including many magnificent London planes, in the park.

You'll have noticed the guys out there this summer. You couldn't miss them – they were the ones wearing safety harnesses and ropes, high up amongst the branches in their cherry-picker, looking for signs of Massaria.



Never heard of it? Massaria is a disease that affects London plane trees. It's caused by a fungus – *Splanchnonema platani* – which causes branches to die back and puts them at risk of breaking off and falling.

There are plane trees all over London, and this disease is a significant public safety issue for the people who own and manage them – often local authorities. They must ensure dead wood is removed before the affected branches become a hazard.

We spoke to Albert Seivwright, Crew Leader of the Trees Team, who said they were working through their long list of Kennington Park planes that needed a Massaria check-up – 79 trees in all!

Albert said there are tell-tale signs that help them to spot suspect branches: a bare branch on the upper side, high up, with small side-shoots, is something they look out for. Then, once they're up there in the cherry-picker, they check for any bark that flakes off easily at the junction with the tree – that's an indication that Massaria is present. Infected branches are bare only on the upper side. So it's very difficult to spot the disease from the ground.

It took the Team a whole week to make their way around the park. We're very grateful to them for keeping all our beautiful old trees – and us – safe.

Albert Seivwright (second from right, above) and his colleagues in Lambeth's Trees Team flex their muscles before taking to the cherry-picker (top), to tackle the Massaria that's been troubling the park's planes

In and around the park

Easter Egg Hunt

In April, we had our second, very popular FoKP Easter Egg Hunt, a **free event** for children aged 3 to 11.

Lots of local families, who had reserved their places, turned up and took part in the trail.

Over the course of an hour in the Flower Garden, the children had fabulous fun hunting for brightly-coloured plastic eggs in

the edges of the flower beds. Once they'd collected enough, they could trade them in for a **real, chocolate egg**. Older children did a quiz about the history of the park too, and won more mini eggs!

It was a delightful day. Forty children got chocolate eggs, and everyone had a **lovely, chocolatey time**. Thanks to all the parents who

filled in feedback forms – it was great to hear how much fun you all had.

Committee member Alison organised the event, and Sylvie, Margarita, Martin, Marnie and Hugh all helped.

It was beautiful to see the Flower Garden waking up again after the winter, and to witness the excitement of the day. Here's to **2024**, for our third instalment!



Arise astroturf!

Kennington Park's **all-weather astro pitch** didn't re-open after the Covid lockdown, and was looking very **sad and neglected** for a couple of years.

Happily, as of September '23, it's back in business after a **major refurbishment**.

So get those **boots on** and book your slots by email at parkssportsbooking@lambeth.gov.uk



Walk the Chartist Trail, where history was made

In April 2023, we launched a park audio trail, to mark the 175th anniversary of the Monster Chartist rally on Kennington Common, and to bring it to life for park visitors. The script, written by our Chair, historian Marietta Crichton Stuart, was beautifully narrated by committee member Alison Liepmann. Mark Engel, also on the committee, produced it.

The trail starts by the war memorial at the top of the park. To hear what happened on the day, use the QR codes on the posters, marking five key locations. The recording lasts 30 minutes. Armchair listeners can listen via our website: www.kenningtonpark.org/chartist-walk

People who like to moan about politicians but can't be bothered to go out and vote are forgetting the strenuous efforts made nearly 200 years ago to win the rights we have today.

The Chartist movement was a working class organisation campaigning for political rights and reform and improved working conditions. It got its name from their formal petition – The People's Charter – with six main aims: votes for men over 21; electoral districts of equal size; no land-owning requirement for MPs; annual Parliaments; voting by secret ballot; and MPs to be paid.

From all over the country, petitions with millions of signatures poured in. The Chartists presented them to

Parliament in 1839 and 1842, but no success: landowning shire MPs didn't want change.

In April 1848, a big rally was planned on Kennington Common, and a march to Parliament to present a huge third petition. Fearing revolution, the government panicked. They packed the Queen off to the Isle of Wight and put thousands of soldiers and special constables on the London streets.

After the rally, the charter, with millions



Hand-tinted photo courtesy of Dave Steele

of signatures, was delivered to the Commons by cab. Sadly, it was ignored. It took another 60 years for the reforms to come about.

The only one that was never passed was annual parliaments – probably a good thing!

Thousands of workers – men and women – marched from all over London to Kennington Common in April 1848 (above) to hear the speeches from activists like William Cuffay



And Kennington cricketers were very happy to see their **new cricket nets**, installed by Lambeth on the park extension in November '22. They replaced the shabby old nets, which dated from way back in 2016.

Kool runnings for Kennington kids

Ready to run? Well, get set! Because Kennington junior parkrun, for ages 4 to 14, is up and running – and you can be part of it.

They've staged a staggering **86 events** in the park since they started in 2022, with up to 50 fabulous runners every week. That means a massive total of **334 children** have run, skipped and walked around the park's pretty paths. These speedy kids have achieved a personal best time on no fewer than 476 occasions, and nearly 60 have won marathon or half marathon wristbands.

Kennington junior parkrun is a **celebration** of our community: everyone can meet

up and enjoy Sunday mornings together, in a positive and healthy way. Kids can meet up and get fit in a **safe and welcoming space**.

This couldn't happen without the help of their **amazing volunteers**, who've been bringing their inexhaustible energy to the event. They

have a pool of 137, and fifteen of them have done more than 100 sessions at Kennington juniors!

You can help local kids **keep fit** – just turn up on the day (Sunday, 9am) or contact parkrun.org.uk/kenningtonpark-juniors. Now, go!





JOIN HERE!

Just scan the code to go straight to our sign-up page

Members make a massive difference

We've all seen the huge improvements that have been made in Kennington Park. The focus of the **Friends of Kennington Park** is to make the park the best it can be; to protect and improve the park, its features and facilities.

FoKP members and supporters are at the heart of this and what we can achieve: individuals and groups, who are active in **shaping ideas** and volunteering their **time and energy** to create **change** and bring the ideas to life. We're now a registered charity, so are eligible for a wider range of grants and funds. But the key to future success is always our **marvellous members**.

The more members FoKP have, the more we can do! Please help us to do more to **improve** Kennington Park and **strengthen** its role in supporting the health and wellbeing of the local community.

I want to be an FoKP member. What can I do?

- **Make a difference:** be part of the team and help run our events – the very popular annual summer Festival, the Easter Egg Hunt, and regular nature and history walks
- **Improve the park** and have fun via our volunteer gardening: the park is a multi-award-winner, and our members support Lambeth's gardening team in this achievement
- **Be sociable:** make new friends and help design and develop more initiatives like the History Hut and the Chartist Audio Trail

- **Get creative** and develop new activities and events – maybe things of special interest to your family or your community. Celebrate your heritage!
- Get regular **members' bulletins** with news about the park, its activities and events, and what our local and London-wide park partners are doing
- **Support our partnership** with Lambeth Council's Parks department which gives us early influence on projects and ideas, like the major capital development programme

Our strong **membership** base is **vital** – it strengthens the Friends' **21-year record** of making the park the best it can be.

You can **support** the work of the Friends by becoming a member for a small annual fee – just **£6**, or **£10** for a household. Or maybe you know somebody who might like to join but is too shy to ask! You can give a one-off **donation** for a project close to your heart. Or you can get more involved in our work through **volunteering**.

We need more Friends, to improve the park, and protect it as a much-loved community asset.

It's easy to join online, at www.kenningtonpark.org/join. Or you can make a one-off donation, at www.kenningtonpark.org/donate.

Interested in discussing how you can get more involved? Please contact us at friends@kenningtonpark.org – we'd love to hear from you.

Meet the Committee

Vilde Aagaenaes

Digital Transformation leader for national organisation. Dog owner, FoKP treasurer



Marietta Crichton Stuart

FoKP chair, historian & researcher, long-time Lambeth resident. History walker, organiser of volunteer gardening



Mark Engel

Has lived by the park for 10 years. Works in climate & nature policy, looks after FoKP website, tech & communications



Alison Liepmann

Kennington resident. Interests include culture, environment, horticulture. Involved in annual Easter Egg Hunt and new kids' playground

Rita Sammons

Kennington resident for over 10 years, FoKP secretary since 2016. Runner, early supporter of Kennington



Junior parkrun. Working hard to get the skatebowl restored!

Marnie Searchwell

Graphic & book designer, FoKP publications & marketing. Long-time Oval resident, park runner, cake-maker



Sonia Wilson

Finance Director by day. Kennington resident for over 10 years, but new to FoKP committee & temporary treasurer



We hope you've enjoyed reading this issue of Parklife. If you love Kennington Park, and want to help the Friends make a difference, please join us! Or make a donation:

www.kenningtonpark.org/join
www.kenningtonpark.org/donate

*Designer Marnie Searchwell
Editor Frank Kindred*

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WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE THE PARK BETTER

www.kenningtonpark.org



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