



The Kew Society Newsletter • Spring 2026

Welcome....

to our spring newsletter, I hope you're all enjoying the spring-like weather and the return of the delightful blossoms that are so prolific in Kew. We have a great deal to look forward to this summer, including the Kew Fair in July, the many events coming up at Kew Gardens (I'm particularly looking forward to seeing the Henry Moore sculptures, see below) and those taking place on the river.



Henry Moore comes to Kew Gardens

We are promised 30 sculptures and artworks both large and small by Henry Moore, one of Britain's most renowned artists, in the Henry Moore: Monumental Nature exhibition running from 9th May to 31st January 2027, so you can't possibly miss them. Billed as the largest ever outdoor exhibition of Henry Moore works, 30 monumental sculptures will be displayed in the 320-acre site and 90 major, rarely seen works will be on exhibition in the Shirley Sherwood Gallery. The exhibition is presented in partnership with the Henry Moore Foundation.

Nature was a constant theme throughout Henry Moore's work and he felt that landscapes provided a perfect setting for his sculptures – so Kew Gardens will provide the perfect setting.

Although the exhibition starts on 9th May, many pieces are already in place (see back page for second sculpture).

New to the team...

The Kew Society is always delighted to welcome new volunteers to support the work we are doing. We would like to introduce you to two people who have joined since the last newsletter was published and hope you will be seeing more of them and the work they are doing soon.

Rachel Kent, co-chair

I am absolutely delighted to have joined the Kew Society this year as (acting) co-chair, working in equal partnership with Shiona. I will be standing for election to become co-chair at the AGM in October. I am grateful to my fellow trustees for giving me such a warm welcome.

It is especially exciting to join as this year is the 125th anniversary of the Society. We hope to be celebrating in a number of ways during the coming months. Preparations are already underway, and we are actively looking for volunteers to help us.

I have lived in Kew for coming up to 35 years, living first in Chilton Road and since 1998 moving closer to the village. Robin and I were married in the Barn Church, and our children were at school in Kew. Our youngest son left home at the end of last year. That coincided with me retiring from the law firm Hogan Lovells, where I became a partner in 1997. Although

I have also been the Financial Regulators Complaints Commissioner for the last two years (and will continue in that role), standing down fully from Hogan Lovells has, for the first time, given me more time to do other things. As is so often the case, I had no time to consider what to do until it was right upon me.

I was very keen to get more involved in local issues within Kew given that I now spend so much more time



here but also to use some of my experience as a lawyer. Just before Christmas, I read the inaugural 'Kew Life' magazine and saw Shiona's request for a co-chair of the Kew Society. Becoming co-chair (Governance and Management) perfectly hit the brief. Having focused on governance issues in my legal practice, I am looking forward to chairing Executive and Operations Committee Meetings and continuing to help develop and implement The Kew Society's strategy. Equally important, if not always quite as exciting, is the oversight of the Society's legal and regulatory responsibilities. The Honorary Secretary and I have already kicked off the process of undertaking a rolling review of all the Society's documentation and processes to ensure that they do what we need them to do. This will involve a concerted effort from all the trustees and other participants. As always, we will need to plan for our Annual Report and AGM; again, all familiar concepts for me.

Strategy is key; and overseeing its implementation and continued development will be a key focus for me as we go forward. There are a lot of initiatives already under way but we are always keen to hear from you if you think we should be looking at other issues. I am taking this responsibility very seriously – you may already have spotted me taking photos of the very large puddle that keeps emerging in the village when it rains heavily! I am very much looking forward to the challenges and opportunities presented to the Kew Society as we work together for the benefit of people in Kew.

I must pass on my thanks to Trevor Whittaker for being acting co-chair for the last six months whilst the search for a permanent co-chair was under way. I have big boots to fill but I am hugely looking forward to getting stuck in. Shiona and I have wasted no time in beginning to lay plans for the months ahead, and I am very confident that we will move The Kew Society forward with pace in 2026. I look forward to working with all the members of the team, several of whom are, like me, new to the role. I am also looking forward to meeting many of you, not least at the Society's anniversary celebrations later in the year. In the meantime, please get in touch if you would like to discuss anything. Better still, please join us and get involved!



Damian Connolly, Planning Lead

Joining the Kew Society as the planning trustee is undertaken with great enthusiasm. With three decades of experience in architecture and urban design, my work has spanned a broad range of commercial and residential projects, each guided by a commitment to thoughtful design, respect for heritage, and the long-term wellbeing of local communities.

I have a deep appreciation for Kew's unique character, built and unbuilt environment. I am hoping to bring valuable insight, technical expertise and a passion for improving and protecting Kew's architectural legacy. The Kew Society is always receptive to hearing about what our members would like to see in our newsletter with regard to planning and local development.

Please contact me at damian.connolly@kewsociety.org if you have any questions or comments regarding anything related to planning.

News about Katja Staple – our new Gardening Lead – appears under **Connecting our Community** on Page 14.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Heathrow update

The Kew Society continues to have a presence on the Richmond Heathrow Campaign (RHC), and we meet regularly – sometimes as often as bi-weekly – to monitor Heathrow's expansion proposals and the various responses to them from the government, the public and private sectors and the general local public.

Many factors govern Heathrow's plans to expand by creating a third runway to the north of the two existing ones; but perhaps the most important is "H8 – The Economic Regulation of Heathrow Airport". The complexity is perhaps illustrated by the fact that the official Summary runs to 28 pages!! However, in essence Heathrow believes that there is a demand for increased capacity and hence there is a need for a third runway; and as early as 25th June 2018, the Government agreed, with Chancellor Rachel Reeves reaffirming Government support in January 2025. However, there is considerable dissent, not least given the uncertainty both as to the costs themselves and the willingness and ability of both public and private sectors to meet them.

First, consider the construction of the runway and supporting new terminal itself. Heathrow seems to believe that this will be completely funded by the private sector even though airlines and the public will be using the facilities. But this would involve considerable extra costs to the airlines in increased landing fees and similar increases in costs to the travelling public, while the options for increased investment from shareholders is in doubt.

Second, consider the required infrastructure costs. More passengers will require more roads and more rail links: who will pay for that?

Then, there is the economic effect on both the local community and those of competing airports in the UK. Gatwick has just got a second runway: how will their revenues and overall business plans be affected by a third runway at Heathrow?

Finally – the elephant in the room: what about all the extra noise a third runway will generate? With increasing national concerns about mental health in general and noise in particular – to say nothing of the general disturbance in otherwise quiet areas such as Kew Gardens and Richmond Park – this aspect is receiving very scant attention from all pro-Heathrow interested parties. And, of course, one particularly irritating aspect of aircraft noise occurs sometimes in the very early mornings. During the past year, RHC has made progress opening the door to progressive deferral of night flights to the day. The DfT commissioned a study on the economics of night flights, taking account of the initiatives of RHC and others, and the results are expected shortly, along with results from a night noise study and a noise/annoyance study. There is currently an ongoing debate concerning the paths that aircraft will take on both landing and take-off, known as Airspace Modernisation. One risk could be night arrivals curving over Richmond and Kew from the south and north onto the final descent: however, new design options are more than a year away.

Despite RHC having regular meeting with Heathrow authorities, these aspects have not been addressed to our satisfaction. Indeed, there is a growing feeling in some quarters that the third runway is little more than a vanity project, lacking in support from both the many airlines involved and the general public. RHC will continue to be actively involved in all aspects of this proposal, and we will continue to keep you updated on events as they unfold.

Paul Bethel, TKS representative on RHC

Decarbonise your home!

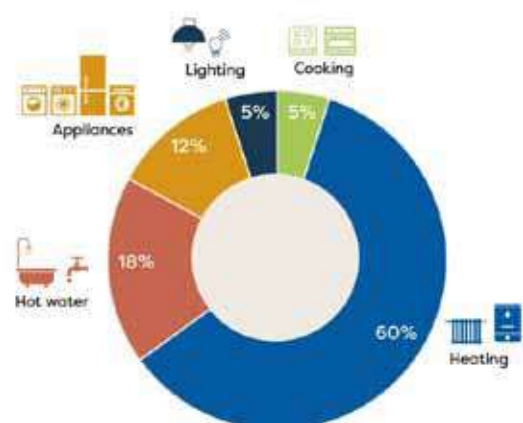
The seventh meeting of Richmond Council's Sustainability Forum on 10th March 2026 was dedicated to advising Richmond residents on how to make their homes more comfortable, greener and cheaper to run. It also launched the Council's 'Smarter Homes Handbook', a comprehensive account of how to modify our homes by improving insulation and retro-fitting devices such as heat pumps, solar panels and batteries (see <https://tinyurl.com/Smarter-Homes> and the two diagrams).

Cllr. Julia Neden-Watts – Chair of the Environment Committee – welcomed those present. She reminded us that the Council's ambition was to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2043 for the Borough, and net zero for their own estate by 2030. It has already achieved a 70% carbon reduction for the latter by focusing on reduction at six major emitter sites, for example: Pools on the Park. However, our homes – the single largest source of greenhouse gases locally – account for 45.5% of the borough's carbon emissions. Domestic heating is a major contributor, as more than 80% of our homes are heated with gas boilers. Hence significant changes in domestic emissions will be needed to achieve net zero in the borough.

The aim of the Forum was to inform residents about how these could be realised, and the Council had brought together a group of experts to address this.

Cllr. Richard Warren introduced the meeting to the 'Richmond Smarter Homes Hub'. This website guides residents through the steps involved in creating a smarter, healthier home and provides information about the latest technologies and best practice in fitting them (<https://richmondsmarterhomeshub.commonplace.is/en-GB/>). For example, the section on heat pumps informs us that they can be installed in almost any type of home, although they perform best in those that are well-insulated, properly ventilated and airtight. Changing from a gas boiler to a heat pump is the most effective way to decarbonise your home.

Typical home energy use



A government grant scheme helps to support this change if you own the property and you are applying for and changing from fossil fuel heating. The Hub describes the three types of heat pump (air source, ground source and air to air) and the approximate cost of installing one. The Smarter Homes Hub should be used in conjunction with the Smarter Homes Handbook. A video case study followed of a Richmond resident who had 'greened' her four-bedroom 1960s house by fitting solar panels, batteries and a heat pump. She had also insulated her outside walls after using a thermal imaging camera (available to borrow from The Library of Things, Twickenham) to assess her house for heat loss spots! Interviewed by Catherine Bright (Senior Communications Officer at LBRuT) the resident expressed great enthusiasm for her project and "busted some myths" about air pumps. She said they are not noisy; that it's not true that they only work with underfloor heating (she had replaced only three radiators), or that they don't work when outside temperatures are very low, or that only gas boilers can provide very hot water for a bath! She would not want to move to a house which did not have these improvements.



Roger & Maggie (centre) at the conference

Adam Hutchings from Richmond Council discussed retrofitting* with reference to planning permission. The Council wants to find ways to remove barriers to retrofitting and to dispel myths of perceived barriers. Most retrofit projects do not even require planning permission and are covered by national permitted development rights. These should allow most projects to go ahead. Even in conservation areas, most retrofit projects can be designed so that they do not require planning permission. The exception is if your home is listed. The Smarter Homes

Hub and the Smarter Homes Handbook provide a useful overview of which improvements require permission. Moreover, the Council provides free advice for pre-retrofit projects. The Smarter Homes Hub and Handbook will soon be joined by the Council's new Retrofit Planning Guide. It will compare different retrofit options to help residents make the best choices for their home, give visual examples of what does and does not require planning permission, and advise on design and installation. It will take a 'whole house approach', recognising, for example, that upgrading insulation might increase the risk of mould without first upgrading ventilation. Residents should consult the Council or an accredited retrofit co-ordinator for advice on planning the best sequence to upgrade their property. EcoFurb, described on the Hub and introduced to the Forum by Russell Smith, is a free online tool to help make your home more energy efficient. After entering details about your property, it generates an energy efficiency plan showing potential upgrades, costs and energy savings. It also offers paid-for whole home retrofit assessments and can help co-ordinate installation of retrofit measures. Questions at the end of the Forum raised an important issue – 54% of Londoners live in blocks of flats where retrofit becomes more complex. 'Repowering London', set up by the GLA, is giving attention to this. Recent development of air-to-air heat pumps may provide a solution for upgrading some flats.

* Retrofitting is the addition of new technologies or features to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and enhance climate resilience.

Roger and Maggie Mason

New traffic management scheme in the north of Kew



A205 Advance Warning Sign

An informal residents' association was established covering the area north of the Mortlake Road, west of the railway line from Gunnersbury to Kew Gardens, south of the River Thames and east of Kew Gardens. This was initially set up to address the issue of illegal Travellers' encampments on the east side of Kew Green.

After that the Kew Green Residents' Association (KGRA) took on the further challenge of traffic rat-running through the area. Traffic issues include both heavy congestion and speeding vehicles, along with aggressive and insulting behaviour from some drivers, and all of the consequential impacts.



Warning Signs in Forest Road



Warning Signs in Gloucester Road

The traffic issues were complicated, frequently arising from issues in the neighbouring borough. The stakeholder group covering all of the source issues was large and complex and one where KGRA, or the residents it represents, didn't have a voice. Efforts therefore focused on raising the issue with LBRuT to find a solution.

After a period stretching back over seven years, including a concerted programme of action over the last four years, a new traffic management scheme has been implemented in the north of Kew by LBRuT.

The new scheme came into place with a soft launch on 30th March 2026. Enforcement will be initially by way of warning letters from Tuesday 7th April and then, three weeks later, the issuance of penalty notices. It works in the same area as covered by the KGRA.

There are three cameras to prevent northbound rat-running traffic and a short one way section on Gloucester Road between Kew Green and Cambridge Road. Critically, residents and local businesses can register for exemptions using the relevant online facility for themselves and employees or regular service providers (e.g. carers etc.).

Also, every address in the KGRA area can be arrived at, or departed from, without passing through any restricted roads. This means relatives and friends don't have their ability to visit constrained. The same applies to Ubers, deliveries etc. London taxis have exempt vehicle status in the same way as locals who register their vehicles.

Prior attempts to have issues addressed, and early discussions with local councillors, indicated that any solution had to be on an area-wide basis rather than an individual thoroughfare basis to avoid the risk of simply moving the problem or replacing one problem with another.

The issues posed by the traffic to local residents included: not being able to access or leave their properties during periods of congestion; damage to residents' parked vehicles due to congested traffic trying to fight its way through; concerns over the health impacts of large numbers of vehicles standing for extended periods with idling engines, especially on young children; the ability of emergency service vehicles to access residents' properties if needed; frustrated drivers mounting pavements to avoid traffic posing risks to local residents and particularly their children; taxis and Ubers not being able to get to addresses to pick residents up etc. The critical part of getting what the residents wanted was coming together and acting as a cohesive group. This is a key lesson.

The way the system has been implemented means there is a statutory requirement for it to be reviewed to ensure it is achieving what was intended and also not causing unintended consequences. There is a specific time period within which that review must be conducted, which the Council states is six months from the introduction of the scheme. However, we have been told LBRuT will ask for earlier feedback, and conduct more traffic counts much sooner than required. This will enable them to make any changes needed to iron out any wrinkles before the statutorily required review.

The traffic counts will also encompass the adjacent area as did the pre-implementation benchmark counts. It is very early days, and the first week of soft operation isn't a valid basis for assessing the outcome. This is partly because the Easter fortnight is, on the A205, a relatively light traffic period which results in lower than normal rat-running traffic. Also, and contrary to expectation, key navigational apps such as Google Maps and Waze were not fully reflecting the new scheme, resulting in some understandable driver confusion in the early days. The expectation is that, without inconveniencing residents, their visitors or service providers, the new scheme will significantly reduce the previously unacceptable level of traffic using the narrow residential streets as a short cut. As a constituency, residents expect that all of the issues resulting from heavy congestion, which had become a blight on their lives, will be substantially mitigated if not eradicated. This will have a positive impact on the quality of life for the 760 households in the KGRA area.

Ian Schneider, Kew Green Residents' Association



The restriction to entering Kew Green

IMPROVING OUR GREEN SPACES

How should the landscape of Kew Gardens develop over the next 25 years?

Raoul Curtis-Machin, who was Director of Horticulture at Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, moved to Kew Gardens last June to take up the post of Executive Director of Gardens. His career background – an unusual mix of horticulture, heritage management and the provision of ‘visitor experience’ – is highly relevant to Kew.

To celebrate his arrival, a fascinating workshop was arranged. Entitled *Is Kew's Landscape Effective at Meeting its Current Needs?*, a diversity of guests were invited to participate in the event, which was held at Cambridge Cottage on 12th March. Delegates from a range of directly and indirectly relevant organisations – including other botanic gardens, heritage organisations, and local councils – attended, alongside the Director of RBGK – Richard Deverell – and the Curator of Living Collections at RBGK. A number of current diploma students were present and, importantly, were charged with taking notes about the discussions at different tables. The Kew Society was invited to represent the local community and the many season-ticket holders.



Entrance to Cambridge Cottage

Raoul introduced himself to the group and set the scene for the workshop... his aim was to develop and implement a plan for the development of the Kew landscape over the next 25 years that would work well for all, including the botanic collection conservationists, scientists, visitors to the gardens, and people attending events: all have to be considered...and the plan would need to be regularly reviewed and would evolve.

Traditional conservation management has been ‘driven by history’ often doing ‘more of the same’ but modern gardens are different...and any plan has to be relevant to the current and future purpose of the space. Climate change will affect everything we do: many horticultural specialists consider that, by 2050, our area may experience temperatures similar to Barcelona. Kew will need plants and trees that can cope with extremes.

Water management and conservation will be critical, and green spaces like Kew are likely to attract even more visitors than they do today. Last year around 2.3 million people entered the gardens, a huge increase when compared to a decade ago. It will be important to understand the fragility of all parts of the landscape and to consider, for example, how some areas can be damaged by the holding of events.

Kew is not just a botanic garden, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, containing many historic buildings that also need to be taken into consideration. This is already happening, as the Palm House will be transformed into a ‘carbon neutral’ environment in the near future. At the moment, the – much smaller – Water Lily House is providing a ‘trial run’ to test how the theory works in practice.

Throughout its history, Kew has evolved: every stage of its development has left its mark on the landscape. The foundation of the botanic collection stems from Princess Augusta’s Physic and Exotic Garden, and subsequent royal residents introduced many elements that are still visible. In 1764, ‘Capability’ Brown reorganised sections of the landscape (the Rhododendron Walk is the most visible reminder of this) and – something that would inform some of our discussions – used the river and its banks as an important part of the landscape.

Ownership of the gardens had changed from royal to public ownership in 1840; and many changes, including much landscaping to create vistas, had taken place after that. Any modern plan would be built upon ‘many layers of history and experience’.

To plan for the future, we need to understand how the area has developed: for example, the river frontage so valued by Capability Brown became far less attractive during the Victorian period when the Brentford bank was dominated by unsightly industry, but things have now changed, and the proximity to the river could be exploited in a number of ways. It was an absolutely fascinating day. We were all invited to take a seat



at a table to brainstorm around the following three questions:

1. Is Kew's landscape effective at meeting its current needs?
2. How should Kew's landscape change?
3. If you were visiting Kew in 2050, what would 'good management' of the landscape look like?

I was very fortunate in my choice of table – not only was Raoul part of the group, but the other seats were taken by the Head of Nature-based Solutions at the Botanic Garden Edinburgh, the Sustainability Manager from the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club, the Ecology Officer from Richmond Council and the President of the Kew Students, who made a great job of documenting our ideas and thoughts.

Each question was discussed and then the 'note taker' from each table shared an overview of the discussion s/he had heard: it was really interesting to hear different 'takes' on the three topics. Needless to say, the day produced a great many ideas – many based on experience – that are likely to inform Raoul's plan. First steps will be to work with all the relevant teams at Kew to agree a plan that can be designed and implemented, adequately resourced and measured at every stage. Risk factors need to be acknowledged, and the plan will need to be adaptable. Nobody can predict the future, but, if there is a clear idea about how to achieve increased biodiversity within a landscape that needs to serve a diversity of purposes, it is much more likely to be successful.

No doubt a full report will be published at some stage, but some of the ideas that I noted included:

- Extensive use of 'water sensors' around trees to enable appropriate watering and signal any trees in distress. In a botanic garden, there are many 'non-native' trees that require more (or less) hydration than native trees. Understanding which trees require watering and which are coping can help to conserve a great deal of water.
- Sophisticated 'visitor mapping'...understanding how different parts of the gardens are used and – possibly by reopening gates that are currently not in use – encouraging people (probably with season tickets) to enter at different locations.
- Exploring new sources of funding – currently Defra provides around 40% of income, but this could reduce with a change of government. Ideas such as 'virtual friends' who would not visit but could 'belong' to the Gardens and be kept in touch with what happens on a daily basis were suggested.
- 'Water mapping' after heavy rainfall – this already happens at Edinburgh, and the information gathered has proved very helpful; for example in constructing storage tanks, planning event locations and choosing appropriate pathing materials.
- Planning for flooding in some areas...informing appropriate planting and pathways/hard structures that are resilient.
- Providing more 'education' for first time visitors...engaging people through 'storytelling' and encouraging them to visit less-frequented parts of the gardens. Demonstrating that, wherever possible, planting is informed by science: the Carbon Garden is a good example of this.
- Consider restoring some historic views – this would involve the removal of 'inappropriate' trees of little botanical interest.
- Planning for less 'mown' green spaces and more 'wildflower' areas, with pathways to facilitate access. Using different mixes of lawn seeds, some of which would better tolerate drought.
- Generally be seen as leading in horticulture and increasing biodiversity. Proactively working to increase the diversity of birds and butterflies.
- Capitalising on the river location – maybe a riverside garden and terrace? A footbridge to Syon House? Boats stopping at the Brentford Gate?

We will watch progress with interest! Raoul thanked everyone for their contributions and promised that – quite soon – a 'broad vision' would be agreed. After that, the leaders representing all the different interest groups would need to work together to begin to implement the plan. Communication and mutual understanding would be key to success.

Be aware: reduced speed limits on the A316

No doubt many of you will have seen the recent coverage in local media of the reduced speed limits along the A316 between St. Margaret's Roundabout and Richmond Circus that came into force on 20th March. Apart from questioning the need for TfL's decision to drop the speed limit from 40mph to 30mph, many local people and the Council have voiced their concern about the lack of warning signs drawing attention to the change.

Whilst there may be unanimity about the importance of road safety, the Council – who support the changes in the speed limit – has made it clear that more needs to be done to ensure

that road users are made aware of the reduction to avoid incurring penalties. The suggested measures include new 30mph signs along that stretch of road, road markings painted on to the carriageway (similar to those we have in the new 20mph zones), and lamp post banners to highlight the reduction. Local residents have signed a petition asking TfL for clearer signage, and the Council has asked TfL for a meeting to allow residents the opportunity to receive an update on safety measures and to raise questions. The meeting is expected to take place in May: watch this space – and your speed!



STOP PRESS: Since writing the above, TfL have now erected some new signs

Claire Bethel

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

Community Group links

Cambrian Community Centre: A small local charity makes a big impact

We thought you would be interested to know about a charity based in Richmond that provides services across the borough.



**Our three lovely gym instructors
Becky, Vicki and Sarah**

Do you quail at the sound of the word “gym”? Are you eager for exercise but put off by the thought of lycra-clad athletes? If so, the friendly Cambrian Community Gym in Richmond is for you.

Our professionally-trained gym instructors – Vicki, Sarah and Becky – offer guidance in the use of our specialist equipment. Participants relax and blossom under their sympathetic individual attention. Gym users tell me with joy how stiff joints become flexible, how self-confidence – dented by health conditions or accidents – returns in a welcoming and supportive atmosphere.

The Centre is open to everyone at affordable rates. There is a health referral scheme to provide support for people to exercise following illness or surgery. And we can offer financial help through a bursary scheme.

Many activities are pay-as-you-feel, including the Choir on Mondays, Table Tennis on Tuesdays, Stay and Play toddler group on Thursdays and the Wednesday Lunch Café pioneered by the borough-wide Real Junk Food Project.

The popularity of the lunch café has soared since the installation of a smart new kitchen in 2024. Skilled volunteer cooks produce hot, healthy meals from donated produce that would otherwise go to landfill. You may also take home fruit, vegetables and pastries – and sometimes

flowers – from our food hub.

The café is more than a weekly rendezvous for local residents. In these difficult times it's a cheery haven for anyone vulnerable to financial pressures, or loneliness: it reveals how a small charity like ours makes a vital contribution to the community.

Centre trustees and supporters have linked up with Manor Road Allotments, by North Sheen station, to supply seasonal fruit and veg to the café. In our 'Plot to Pot' scheme, allotment-holders deliver pumpkins, courgettes, tomatoes and apples to the café's kitchen. Rhubarb is especially appreciated, and quince crumble is a rare treat. It's an exercise in community engagement that brings us closer together.

We offer classes in Yoga, Pilates, Weights, and Drawing. If, like one private hirer, you need space to practise operatic arias, we have rooms for hire. There's bound to be an activity that tempts you. Many users take up one activity and add more. Fiona, who uses crutches, exercises at the gym then lunches at the café: "That's my Wednesday sorted". Yvonne meets her friend Glenys at the café for lunch, and stays for Richmond Good Neighbours' monthly talk. "It's lovely. I might not go out otherwise."



Elizabeth Nash, Trustee; Sue Pendle – Chair of Trustees of the CCC, and James Millar – Chair of the Manor Road Allotment Committee, linked to the Centre through our Plot to Pot scheme

Elizabeth Nash, Trustee of the Cambrian Community Centre

Contact the Centre to join in or volunteer on 0208 948 3351

Caplan Court, 1 Grove Road Richmond TW10 6SN

Centre Manager David Lemon on manager@combriancentre.org

Charity Director Karen King on karen@cambriancentre.org

Website www.cambriancentre.org

Take the 371 bus from Richmond to the Cambrian Community Centre stop on Queens Road. There is parking nearby. Or just drop in.

Dose of Nature – Pensford Field

In our last newsletter, we included an update on the future environmental management of Pensford Field now that the lease has been formally transferred to Dose of Nature (DoN) – a decision that you may recall aroused some controversy and not a little upset amongst those who have been involved with Pensford Field over many years. As advertised in our previous newsletter, a drop-in coffee morning was held on Wednesday 11th February to provide an opportunity to meet the DoN team and to find out more about the work of the charity and how they are fulfilling their role as caretakers of this space.

A few members of The Kew Society were amongst the attendees. It was great to have the opportunity to find out more about the work that DoN are doing, not only to further the aims of the charity by encouraging people with mental health problems to connect with nature to improve their mental wellbeing, but also in terms of conserving the rich biodiversity of Pensford Field. We were also able to raise with Alison Greenwood – CEO and Founder – and her colleagues several of the questions aired on social media about their future plans and to dispel quite a few myths.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the way that the transfer of the lease was handled by the Council (see final letter from the outgoing Chair of trustees to the community listing several unanswered questions at <https://tinyurl.com/Pensford-Field-Update>), DoN are clearly committed to continuing to maintain public access to this much-loved community space and to maintaining the increasingly rare unspoilt wildlife habitats. A part-time horticultural specialist has been appointed to oversee the work that is needed to maintain the site. Speaking to their clinical staff, including trainees, provided insight into the undeniable benefits that a DoN referral can bring. Their website (<https://www.doseofnature.org.uk/>) cites strong and compelling evidence that exposure to nature can significantly improve mental health and wellbeing.



Despite being one of the most affluent boroughs in London, the mental health of our young people in particular remains problematic, with one of the highest rates of referral to specialist services compared with surrounding boroughs and high rates of self-harm. As someone who runs a charity promoting young people's health and has spent much of my career working in this space, I for one am pleased to see that young people

aged 16-25 can be referred or self-refer to the DoN psychological programme, overseen by someone with extensive experience of working with young people (a real benefit given the length of NHS waiting lists). We hope that residents of Kew will continue to visit Pensford Field and to volunteer for the activities which will help it to preserve its 'Green Flag' accreditation.

Claire Bethel

Westerly Ware Association

As Westerly Ware Association's website proudly states, Westerly Ware stands on land that was used by 15th century fishermen to pull up and dry their nets and sort their catch. The name apparently stems from the netting weirs that were used to trap fish (who knew?). A far cry from the way in which this beautiful space by the river is used today. It is valued by the local community as a community asset, where you'll find flower beds, three tennis courts, a pétanque court, beehives and an excellent children's playground. The Association was set up in 1997, enabling local residents to work with the Council to improve and maintain the small park and to ensure that it can be used by all.

On Easter Sunday, the Association organised their annual Easter egg hunt for local children, attended by the Easter Bunny (aka Alfie from The Greyhound)! Children were able to hunt throughout the park for paper eggs, which they swapped for chocolate eggs. The event was well attended and hopefully helped to bring in some much-needed funds which can be used to support their work in the park. Judging by the excitement of the children (and quite a few dogs), a good time was had by all.



Claire Bethel

The Easter Bunny

Recent Kew Society Highlights

Many of you enjoyed the events we have held so far this year. For those of you who weren't there, we thought you might be interested to find out what you missed.....

New members and volunteers evening

As part of our 125th anniversary celebrations, a party was held for volunteers and new members on 20th February in the Marwood Room at St. Luke's. The event was well-attended and provided a welcome opportunity to discuss the work done by the Society and to meet fellow members.



Family history – a beginner's guide to sources

As part of our 125th anniversary celebrations, a workshop was arranged exclusively for our members at The National Archives (TNA) on 5th March, led by Dr. Jessamy Carlson, Principal Records Specialist for family, local and community history at The National Archives. She provided us with a fascinating morning packed with information about how to go about the sometimes daunting task of investigating our own family histories.

One of the great advantages of using the Archives rather than starting at home on your own PC is that you can use the facilities provided there for free including some of the commercial websites such as www.ancestry.com and www.findmypast.co.uk. You can download records and use the helpful guides on the website (see <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/>) as well as finding someone around to help you with your queries or if you get stuck. Jessamy also showed us how to use websites such as <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/> (which provides access to free transcribed records of births, marriages and deaths records in England and Wales).

Jessamy brought her talk to life with some examples of discoveries and invited attendees to give her names of relatives they would like to search for, demonstrating what was possible as well as some of the limitations.

As someone who would love to have a go at finding out a little more about my family history (though only the 50% who originated in the UK) but not knowing where to begin, I felt inspired to use the facilities to at least make a start.

Claire Bethel

Lady Isabel Burton and the Burton Mausoleum



On 25th February, we were treated to a talk by Dr Helen Brown on the remarkable life of Lady Isabel Burton, a Victorian author and explorer and the extraordinary story of the Burton Mausoleum, a highly distinctive monument. This Grade II listed Mausoleum was commissioned by Lady Isabel following the death of her husband, the renowned explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton. Dr Brown is a Heritage Project Officer at Habitats & Heritage who has led the conservation and interpretation programme for Burton: Exploring Without Boundaries. She is currently working on Habitats & Heritage's latest National Lottery Heritage Fund project, Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Great Stink of London. Habitats & Heritage work closely with

partners including Historic England and local authorities to care for and conserve important local buildings in the community including this mausoleum in Mortlake.

Poetry evening



Enticed by the lovely poster created by Karen Fung for the Kew Society's first Poetry Open Mic at Trindle Stores, around 40 plus people came into the teepee to read either their own poems or those from well-known poets such as Browning, Larkin and Wordsworth. Those reading ranged from an eight-year-old reading her own poem and telling us about the Persian New Year to 97-year-old Jack Andrews. There were moving poems about a grandfather's fig tree, a grandmother in a home, the experience of losing a dog, the sadness of illness, among many others including rap poems

and a wonderful song from local journalist, Alan Franks, based on John Clare's poetry of the countryside. There was a magical atmosphere where everyone, whether a Kew Society member, local, or those who just happened to be in the area and popped in, enjoyed coming together to listen to poetry. The Kew Society was delighted that there was so much interest in poetry and are arranging another evening on Saturday 27th June.

Helen Whitten



Audience and a performer at the Poetry reading evening in Trindle Store's teepee

And now – An interview with Helen Whitten herself

The above event at Trindle Stores was inspired by Helen's love of poetry. Many of you will recognise her name as the author of some really interesting and insightful interviews and articles in our newsletters but did you know that she is also an award-winning poet? People who were lucky enough to experience the early evening event, held in a teepee illuminated by fairy lights, have described the experience as 'quite magical'...followed by requests for us to organise regular events!

We have to thank Helen for masterminding the format of the event, and Christine Gordon for being such a wonderful 'compere'...and other members of our events team for ensuring that the evening was such a success. Our co-chair – Shiona Williams – asked Helen about how her love of poetry had developed.

"I always enjoyed both reading and writing poetry at school and was first published in the school magazine in 1966...buoyed by this success, I sent a collection of my teenage poems to (at the time quite famous, poet) Vernon Scannell asking him for advice...and, incredibly, he responded...encouraging me to continue and giving me lots of ideas. I left school and came to London in the swinging 60s...and, unsurprisingly, did not devote much of my time to poetry! But, in 1990 I had an amazing trip to Russia, meeting lots of people who loved Russian literature and poetry...and, on my return, started to focus upon writing – and reading – my own poetry. I became a regular fixture at The Poetry Cafe in Covent Garden and was hugely encouraged by Agnes Meadows who, in 2015, suggested she publish my first collection, 'The Alchemist's Box', under her imprint of Morgan's Eye Press.

"When I was living in Hampshire, I was a regular attendee at 'open mic' events in Petersfield and Winchester ... something that I really missed when I moved to Kew. I thought that many people in Kew could enjoy something similar and persuaded The Kew Society to help me develop my idea. I was really gratified to see such a diversity of

people, ages ranged from 8 to 97, at our first event. The atmosphere was wonderful...really supportive and encouraging...and the feedback has convinced us that we should do more. Cam and Scott at Trindles were such generous hosts and Trindle's position in the heart of the village made it easy for people to get to. "The most important lesson that I learned, as an aspiring poet, was that you need to be brave...submit your work to poetry journals and competitions. It's so exciting when someone else appreciates and publishes your poems."

This approach has led to a number of prestigious awards for Helen, including the Elmbridge Sherriff Trust Poetry Prize, and first prize at the Winchester Writers' Festival...we are very lucky to have her as part of our team!



Helen with her award



Shiona Williams

Reading Poetry

“Keep up the good work”: An interview with Giles Dixon

This is the second in our series of interviews which look back at, and celebrate the history of The Kew Society. Helen spoke to one of our past chairs – Giles Dixon, who co-chaired the Society from 2012-2013 – and his co-chair, Juliet Thompson.

Giles Dixon moved to Kew in July 1992 following several years of working abroad in Cyprus, Abu Dhabi and Dubai in various roles as a legal adviser and solicitor before returning to work in a City firm, and later on working from the summerhouse in his garden. He and his wife Angela, who became a volunteer guide in Kew Gardens, bought a house on Kew Green that had views of greenery front and back and was close to the river. “It was a lovely spot” he told me. “The garden was quiet and peaceful. We joined with four of our neighbours each year to open our gardens under the National Gardens Scheme.” After 31 years in Kew they downsized and now live in Ashdown Forest in Sussex, near their son and family, with occasional deer in the grounds and a view of the South Downs. Giles became involved with The Kew Society when there was a proposal to demolish the building next door to theirs – the Mycological Institute. He was impressed with the then Chair – Sue Cole – and the influence and help of The Kew Society ensured that the building remains standing; now as a prep school. Giles attended the meeting at the Steam Museum mentioned in the interview with Nick Thompson in our autumn newsletter, where no-one wanted to put their names forward to sit on the Committee. Invited with others by Nick to discuss the situation, he joined the Committee along with Mike Glazebrook who became Chairman five years later: Giles and Juliet Thompson agreed to co-chair. When I asked Giles about the challenges that faced



Giles Dixon

Kew, he mentioned Kew Gardens – while a great asset, it could have consulted more with local residents. In 2003, there was a problem when it applied for late licences at several venues, and over the years there were concerns with the increasing frequency and numbers of attendees at events in the Gardens.

The Kew Society was also not enthusiastic about the application to build a new Herbarium at a cost of £60 million, as it was at risk of flooding in future years, and the large modern structure was wholly out of keeping with its 18th century location. The application was initially turned down by the Richmond Planning Committee on the casting vote of the Chairman, but a slightly revised application was passed three months later with a new chair and minimal discussion. “And now, after ten years, the Director has decided he wants to move the Herbarium to Reading!”

The application to build Brentford Football Stadium brought much resistance from both The Kew Society and local residents. Zac Goldsmith – MP at the time – arranged a meeting in the St. Anne’s Church Hall. In the end, so many people attended that they had to find someone with the key and move the meeting into the Church itself. To finance the Stadium, the Council allowed the development of some unsightly new blocks of flats, but there has been little adverse impact on Kew from the new stadium.

A key part of the role of Chair was to keep fighting for the interests of the Kew community even if one didn’t always win. “Kew is a delightful place,

and people want to live there. But if too much development is allowed, it is in danger of losing its charm.” A current challenge is the build-up of traffic on the South Circular and Kew Bridge owing to the continued closure of Hammersmith Bridge.

During his time at The Kew Society they collaborated with the traders in Kew Village, addressing local planning problems, introducing a campaign to ‘Bring your shopping bag’ in the days before shoppers had to pay for plastic bags, and finding ways to maintain the village atmosphere.

Giles enjoyed his time as co-chair. “They were a great team of people. We met often and it was a good alternative to reading legal documents. It felt good to contribute to the local society.” He is still a member of The Kew Society and has occasional input into current issues, such as the recent issues around Pensford Field.

When I asked Giles what advice he would give to the Chair today, his main message would be “Keep up the good work and find ways to get people interested in the Kew Society.” The membership was only 500 when he was Chair and now it is 800, but he recognises that there is a need to persist attracting new members, especially younger people. In this context, he says the newsletter is better today than it was then, so his advice is for the Chair and trustees to appreciate the improvements they have managed to achieve and recognise that the role is an important one for the local community.

Juliet Thompson was joint Chair with Giles and still lives in Kew, finding it a great place for her family to live, with access to the Gardens, culture and transport. Trained as a Chartered Accountant, she later worked in the travel industry and had various volunteering roles. She was delighted to be asked to become Treasurer of The Kew Society in 2008 and enjoyed the company of her fellow trustees. It gave her the opportunity to learn more about Kew, participate in the events programme and influence the Heathrow campaign, as their home was directly under the flightpath!

At that time, she became aware that some residents found The Kew Society too interfering regarding single dwelling planning applications, but during her six years on the Committee the emphasis turned towards monitoring the impact of the larger developments in Kew. Juliet enjoyed being interim co-chair with Giles until Caroline Brock came forward to take over. Like

Giles, she feels that The Kew Society plays a vital role both in celebrating what is great about Kew and providing a robust and balanced response to new developments and planning applications.



Juliet Thompson

Helen Whitten

Our new Gardening Lead

Hello, I'm Katja - the new gardening lead for the Kew Society.

I moved to Kew three years ago with my husband Ned and our two sons, Otto and Leo, and we've loved being part of this community ever since. One of the first things I noticed when we arrived was the station – surely one of the prettiest in London. When I learned that it's maintained by Kew Society volunteers in partnership with Energy Gardens, I was keen to get involved.

Before moving to Kew, I opened my garden to the public for five years as part of the National Garden Scheme. These days, I have a bit less time (work and two young boys keep me busy), but I still enjoy gardening whenever I can, along with reading and photography. And you'll often find me in Richmond Park on a Saturday morning Parkrun.



I'm very conscious that I'm stepping into something that has been brilliantly built up over time. Energy Gardens has been instrumental in establishing the beds, and it's a privilege to now work alongside them. I'm also working closely with our fantastic lead gardeners – Geoff, Adam and Joyce – who are doing an excellent job keeping everything running smoothly and ensuring the station continues to look its best.

Looking ahead, my priorities are to strengthen our collaboration with Energy Gardens, support the team on the ground, and build on what's already there. I'm particularly excited about an initiative with Kew Gardens students to explore how we can evolve the planting as we approach the 10-year anniversary – making sure it remains both beautiful and resilient to changing climate conditions.

If you see any of the gardeners on the platforms, do come and say hello.

Katja Staple, Gardening Lead

Restoration of the Furnished Rooms at Kew Palace – a reflection

We were delighted to welcome Annabel Westman MBE, FSA, a member of The Kew Society, to speak to us on 16th April at The National Archives about the work that she had done on the restoration of the furnished rooms at Kew Palace in the early 2000s with Historic Royal Palaces. Annabel has worked as a textile historian and consultant for many years, receiving an MBE in the New Year's Honours for her services to heritage, in particular The Attingham Trust and to historic textiles. She is an expert in historic interiors and was the Executive Director of The Attingham Trust (for the study of historic houses and collections) until her retirement in 2021. She has written a comprehensive book *Fringe Frog and Tassel* about the art of the trimmings-maker in interior decoration. The projects she has worked on have included the furnished rooms at Kew Palace, the saloon at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton as well as rooms at Hampton Court Palace, Chatsworth and Dumfries House.

Annabel's talk started with a photograph of the dining room in Kew Palace in which the late Queen Elizabeth II and family celebrated her 80th birthday, soon after its completion. She outlined the fascinating history of Kew Palace, which was built in 1631 for a London merchant but taken over in 1728 by Queen Caroline. The royal family used 'Dear Little Kew' as a place to relax, using the nearby White House as their base and only later using Kew Palace after King George III's decision to dismantle the White House. King George's bouts of what is now recognised as bipolar disorder (so well portrayed in the 1994 film *The Madness of King George III* with Nigel Hawthorne) meant that he was confined to the service wing of the palace whilst Queen Charlotte and some of their children stayed in Kew Palace. Queen Charlotte continued to use the Palace until her death in 1818. By the 1890s it was considered uninhabitable, and was opened to the public in 1898. The Palace was closed for refurbishment by Historic Royal Palace in 1996, secured Lottery funding in 2004 and reopened in 2006.



The room used for Queen Elizabeth's 80th Party

Among those whom Annabel worked alongside was the historian and curator at Royal Palaces – Susanne Groom (who some of you will remember, as she lived in Kew for many years until her death in 2023) – to restore the rooms to their former glory. The palace was interpreted in three stages: the ground floor to house a museum about King George III and his family; the first floor to show how the rooms may have been furnished for the royal family and the second floor left more or less as it was with its original panelling and paintwork. Annabel described how painstaking research was carried out using a number of sources in addition to the archaeological evidence, including The National Archives, contemporary collections, textile archives and various pattern books from the time. Although there was insufficient information to say exactly how the rooms would have looked, Annabel was able to use her expertise and the information she uncovered to replicate the type of decorations and furnishing which would have been used at the time – curtains, cornices, trimmings and carpets. Much of the furniture and paintings are on loan from The Royal Collection.

We were immensely grateful to Annabel for a fascinating talk and all agreed that we would view Kew Palace in a very different light on our next visit.



Annabel Westman, MBE



Kew Palace (© Ethan Doyle White)

KEW DIARY 2026

24th April	Kew Supper Club	kewsupperclub102@gmail.com
25th April	Kew Plant House renovation, by Professor Bill Baker	St. Anne's Parish Church
2nd May	Coffee morning at Café Torelli: everyone welcome	Kew Rotary Club
3rd May	Kew Village Market	Various
6th May	Talk on growing Bonsai at the Coach & Horses	Kew Horticultural Society
9th May	Start of <i>Henry Moore</i> exhibition	Kew Gardens
17th May	Short Lots Allotment Open Day	Kew Horticultural Society
19th May	Chris Ruffle: Castle & Wine in China at The National Archives	The Kew Society
27th-30th May	Exploring Art & Faith – Imagining the Story	St. Anne's Parish Church
31st May	Summer Recital: Ensemble Iris, Brahms, LeFanu, Ligeti	St. Anne's Parish Church
7th June	Kew Village Market: Joint stall with Energy Gardens to celebrate 10 year partnership	The Kew Society
7th June	Summer Recital: Philharmonia Chamber Players	St. Anne's Parish Church
14th June	Summer Recital: The English Piano Trio	St. Anne's Parish Church
20th June	Kew Summer Fete	Various
27th June	Poetry event at Trindle Stores	The Kew Society
5th July	Kew Village Market	Various
5th July	Summer Recital: The Singing Viola (Viola/Voice & Piano)	St. Anne's Parish Church
10th July	Routemaster trip, with a final stop at Syon House	The Kew Society
29th August	The Summer Show	Kew Horticultural Society



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