



FRIENDS OF ST JAMES'S PARK
& THE GREEN PARK

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

We celebrated the start of the 2019-2020 year with The South Westminster Community Choir who entertained members and invited guests at the Christmas Party, with a recital of carols and a lively brass accompaniment. In January and February, the society launched the first two in a series of four short talks in the Archives on the subject of Christchurch Gardens and Ignatius Sancho, the polymath African buried in Christchurch Gardens. Our corporate partner the Blue Orchid Hotel Group/Integrity International supported this innovative programme and also allocated professional staff to begin the development of a new website and database for the Society.

The Spring/Summer Newsletter was produced and mailed in March but our diary of scheduled visits and walks was abruptly curtailed by Covid-19 and the lockdown which affected so many aspects of all our lives. We took the decision to defer the visits to 2021 and to set-up a skeleton series of virtual-educational talks for members to enjoy. The committee learned a great deal from this experience and we are grateful for the time and expertise of our contributors, all of whom are members of the Society. The support, encouragement and understanding of members sustained the committee during this period. One of the disappointments of the year was the cancellation of our T@35 birthday celebrations in St James's Park and the Cinnamon Club.

As part of the Society's planning role, we contributed to Westminster City Council's deliberations of a policy to retain or remove statues as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement and going forward we will be consulted as part of The Mayor of London's Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm. The Society initiated a planning group/hub comprising the amenity/resident groups in the south Westminster area and responded to over 60 planning applications including major building developments. We supported the Judicial Review taken by The London Parks Trust against the Government over the fact that the decision on the Planning Inquiry will be made by a member of the very Government that has promised to build the Holocaust Memorial come what may. The 5-week Planning Inquiry started in October with The Thorney Island Society as 'an interested party' opposing the application.

Our accounts for 2019-2020 reflect a significant shortfall in unrestricted income as a result of Covid-19. The coming year will be a challenge to maintain our financial position and focus on our delayed priorities. Our Treasurer, Gordon Slater retires this year after 15 years in the role and attendance at nearly every Thorney Island dinner, visit, party, sorting in the archives and envelope-stuffing since then! We are most encouraged by the nomination to the Committee of two new local residents in the roles of Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

Sue Ball
Chair