



Friends of St James's Park  
and The Green Park

Sharing and protecting the heritage of old  
Westminster village

**NEWSLETTER**

**Autumn/Winter 2019**

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Above: One of the proposals for the temporary re-housing of Parliament in Horseguards Parade (p. 6)

Below: The new and old pelicans in St James's Park (p. 10)



[www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk](http://www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk)

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The Thorney Island Society celebrates a special anniversary next year. In 2020 we will have contributed 35 years of action to protect and promote the unique cultural and historic heritage of the old Westminster village. We are calling our celebrations T@35 so look out for these on the 2020 programme of talks, walks and visits. This year alone members of the committee contributed over 2,300 hours of voluntary service in running the society, responding to planning applications, organising visits, participating in organisations of which we are members including the Royal Parks, the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies and the Westminster Amenity Society Forum, responding to media requests and collaborating with different groups on various projects, the most notable with Chelsea College of Arts (see page 4). And so much more.

Over the past few years the society has held Summer and Christmas Parties and our AGM at the Rochester Hotel in Vincent Square and I'm delighted to announce a more formal corporate partnership has been agreed thanks to Tony Matharu, Chairman of The Blue Orchid Group of hotels, who have donated a scanner to the archives so we can start digitalising our materials and will provide hotel group staff to volunteer and



A model of the Archives made by a Chelsea College of Arts student (see p.4)

kick-start the process. We are delighted that our precious materials and artefacts will be more widely available for further interest and study. In addition Tony's staff have already started on the redesign of our website and he has offered to share a new computer system with us so that our communications with you, our members, will be easier for us to organise. These developments are certainly adding to the committee's volunteer hours and I'm confident members will appreciate the improvements.

We are looking forward to celebrating T@35 next year and continuing to offer new things to members this year, so **please join me at The Christmas Party on the 10th December and enjoy members of the local South Westminster Community Choir singing a special programme of carols for us.** ●



Ann Carlton, author, journalist and widow of the former Llanelli MP Denzil Davies, died this year, a few months after her husband. Denzil was MP from 1970 to 2005 and a Treasury Minister in the Callaghan Government in the 1970s. He and Ann married in 1989.

'She was a real live-wire and not afraid to speak her mind'. This expression of Ann's character sums up the engaging and committed person many members will remember from the formative days of The Thorney Island Society. This was a tribute paid by Nia Griffith, the MP who replaced Denzil Davies in his Welsh seat of Llanelli.

A veteran activist, Ann was remembered by family, friends, neighbours, and Welsh Labour at her funeral in the Tabernacle Chapel at Burry Port, close to the village where she and Denzil lived. The local station master remembered the couple arriving in style in a Rolls Royce to catch the Monday morning train to London, always checking first that the croissants had been delivered for their breakfast on board!

Ann held various roles as a Labour Party activist including Labour Party Local Government Officer. She was Ralph Miliband's assistant and also cre-



ated an Archive Collection of papers and correspondence covering the work of the Labour Party, the Fabian Society, and the role of women in politics between 1965 and 2004. The material is held at the LSE Library of Archives and Special Collections.

Born and raised in Liverpool in the 1940s and 50s, Ann published a book drawing on her experiences growing up in the city where her father was Town Clerk and later Chief Executive of Merseyside County Council. It is a rich study of people's lives and the housing issues which affected their life chances. Ann was writing another book, about her life in Westminster, when she died, and we hope to see it published. Meanwhile we have her entertaining account of how she and June Stubbs founded The Thorney Island Society, which featured in the Autumn 2018 Newsletter.

Sue Ball represented the Society at the Service of Thanksgiving to celebrate Ann's life on 30 March 2019. It was deeply moving, and the Welsh male voice choir lifted spirits and touched deep emotions with their choral contribution of hymns sung at international rugby matches. Rarely can someone have been remembered so fondly in both Wales and Westminster. ●



Their archives alive with students' voices discussing how to take accurate measurements is something that any amenity society would be delighted to hear. In the second year of the Society's collaboration with Chelsea College of Arts we welcomed over eighty students from the BA (Hons) Interior and Spatial Design course. See the article 'From our Chair' in the Spring/Summer Newsletter 2019.

In June this year we were particularly pleased to work with Shibboleth Shechter, senior lecturer on the course, to put on a small exhibition of students' work and produce an associated publication. A Society first! We took down prints and paintings from the walls, replacing them with framed Cabinets of Curiosities in which the students were asked to reflect on the protocols of display and then design a cabinet for selected archive material.

In the publication, entitled 'Re-designing Thorney Island Archives', students responded to the question of how to rethink the design of our archives while considering the wider questions of the cultural role and spatial form of archives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Every student wrote a short text summarising their approach and the book includes many illustrations, drawings and designs showing the importance of understanding the past in order to create a vibrant future for a local community.



A student's design for stacking display cases - they all realised that space is an issue!

We have had many questions to answer as we followed how students responded:

**Why** do we need archives and The Thorney Island Society archives in particular?

**What** should The Thorney Island Society archives contain?

**What** narratives should it progress?

**Who** should design the archives and decide its contents?

**Who** should the audiences be and how can we engage them?

**How** can the space be better organised to allow users to engage with archive material and artefacts?

It is a challenge that preoccupies the committee as we grapple with the scale of the material accumulated over the years. ●



### Victoria Tower Gardens

The main planning issue at the moment is still the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens. The Society is still active in supporting the Save VTG campaign and we hope that members have written their own individual comments. This is not difficult to do, either online or by post to David Dorward at Development Planning, Westminster City Council, PO Box 732, Redhill, RH1 9FL.

Elizabeth Witts, one of our members, has written the following poem in praise of the gardens:

*This Royal Park beside the River Thames  
is an oasis full of shady trees  
within the sound of Big Ben's steady chimes.  
Young people have their picnics on the grass  
or sit on benches by the Embankment wall  
to watch the gulls and cormorants fly by.  
A fountain honours anti-slavery,  
the children have a playground to themselves  
and visitors go back to work refreshed  
by all the peace and beauty of this place.*

The playground (left) will be reduced in size and lose its fine view of the Palace of Westminster. The view will be dominated by the entrance pavilion (right)



### The Parliamentary Estate

A rather surprising planning application has been for the conversion of an office building in Great George Street into a hotel. This does not seem very practical for a building with double yellow lines and a narrow pavement at the front and very difficult access via Little Sanctuary at the back, but it also seems to us to be absurd to allow this change of use when simple low-tech office space is in great demand from think-tanks and other organisations that need to be near Parliament.

Office space will be in even shorter supply in a few years' time, when the Restoration and Renewal project really gets going in the Palace of Westminster. At the moment we are all aware of the

work to the exterior of the building, but the substantial part of the project is the complete renewal of the services inside the building – heating, lighting, air-conditioning, water, sewage, and all the other things that are essential to a functioning democracy! This work is likely to take about six years during which both chambers will have to move out, along with all the offices and ancillary accommodation. The current plan is that the House of Lords will move into the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre while the House of Commons will move into a purpose-built temporary chamber constructed behind the retained facade of Richmond House, the delightful 'modern gothic' building completed in



Artist's impression of the proposed changes to Richmond House and Whitehall

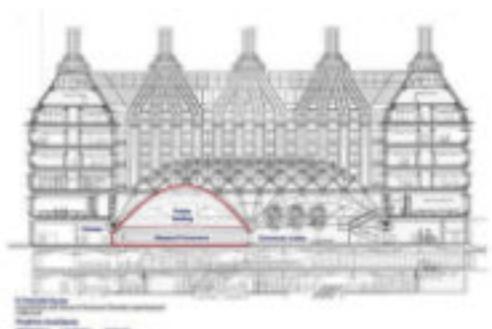


Interior of Richmond House

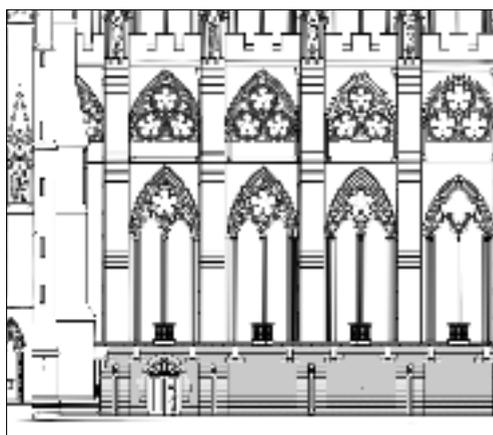
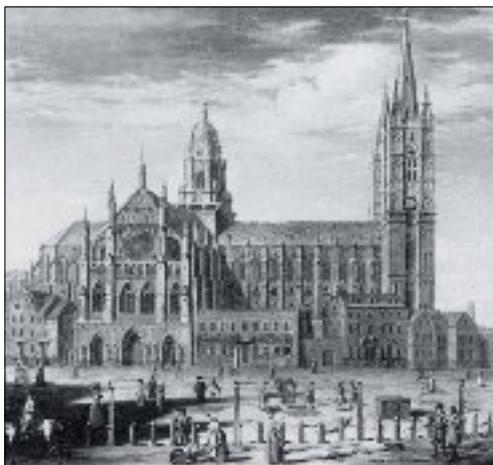
1986. It was designed by William Whitefield and once housed the Department for Health. This proposal is highly controversial because Richmond House is Grade II\* listed. SAVE Britain's Heritage has initiated a campaign to find a less destructive alternative solution. Suggestions have included a huge glass dome over Horseguards Parade (see cover), using the courtyards of the Treasury and Foreign Office buildings, or using the large atrium of Portcullis House.

Incidentally, wherever it is built, the present Commons chamber will be replicated exactly, so there will still not be adequate seating for all MPs and at important times we will see our MPs standing and squashed together on the benches.

In order to allow for this rearrangement most of the buildings in what is known as the Northern Estate have been or are being upgraded, and offices and Ministries are being shifting around in order eventually to leave space for all the MPs' offices when they leave the Palace. An exhibition on the proposed new Northern Estate was recently held in Church House. For the general public the area will still be inaccessible without a pass, but we will get limited views into the circulation space from outside, so the architecture of the new building will matter to us. Along Whitehall an extra layer of security is proposed, with three-metre high railings. This will not improve the appearance of the attractive group of buildings on this lower stretch of Whitehall. The views of the exterior and interior of the Estate are important and The Thorney Island Society will be campaigning to make these as attractive as possible. ●



Section through the atrium of Portcullis House, showing how a temporary chamber could be inserted



## Westminster Abbey

Following on from the wonderfully successful Queen's Jubilee Galleries and access tower, Ptolemy Dean Architects have been commissioned to design a more satisfactory visitor entrance to the Abbey. The current entrance is through the North Door, into the North Transept, which is full of monuments as well as visitor paraphernalia. The space is crowded and confusing. The plan is that a new building will be tucked into the corner between the Transept and the Nave, which is where there were buildings for centuries before they were cleared in the eighteenth century. Visitors will buy their tickets there and then walk round to the West Front, entering straight into the Nave and past the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. The architects experimented with various external wall treatments and their design takes its inspiration from the details of the Abbey exterior. ●

Top: The Abbey in 1735, with the unbuilt tower over the crossing and unbuilt spires over the West towers. Note the buildings under the Abbey walls, which were later cleared

Middle: The proposed Entrance building in the corner between the North Transept and the Nave

Left: Detail of the facade of the Entrance building



Ever since 2005 Anthony Harrow has been our faithful Membership Secretary but, very reasonably, he has decided the time has come to retire. He will be missed, and we extend our fervent thanks to him for fourteen years of hard work. Anthony joined the Society at June Stubbs's instigation, having met her at a Westminster volunteering function. He took on the membership role just a year later. Although he has never lived or worked locally, he feels very strongly about the importance of preserving the area, especially because it includes a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



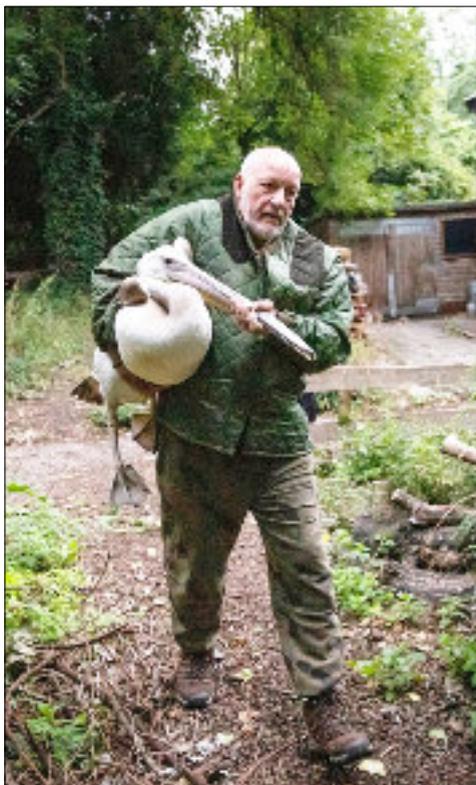
**We are hoping that new software will make the role of Membership Secretary less onerous than it has been for Anthony, but we think we still need someone to do this job, so if anyone would like to volunteer we would be very grateful to hear from YOU.**

## Duck Island Volunteers

Throughout the summer several members of The Thorney Island Society have volunteered in St James's Park, helping to restore Duck Island as a wildlife refuge. We have dug up nettles, sawed up wood, heaved rampant Russian Vine out of trees and bushes, and generally made space for a wider variety of habitats.

Right: Pat and Jules disposing of greenery





John Comfort with Sun

St James's Park has been lucky to be donated 3 young Great white pelicans from Prague Zoo. They came with the names Sun, Moon and Star which we have kept.

The trio arrived in the gloom of Duck Island in the early hours of May 31<sup>st</sup>.

We carried Sun, Moon and Star individually into their new indoor enclosure. Holding the pelicans was much like cradling large stuffed toys.

Being placid birds and reared by hand they were not troubled by the process.

Getting the new arrivals to eat was the initial challenge as birds can often lose their appetites when disturbed. We discovered that Prague Zoo had been feeding the birds freshwater roach, which was different from the diet of our own residents. The less boisterous female, Star, was the first to eat, outwitting her male acquaintances. Within a few days all three were eating confidently, buoyed by their new-found love of swimming.

After a week we opened the hatch to the pelican house so that the birds could leave the shelter of their indoor enclosure whenever they wished. As the days passed Sun became increasingly dominant and took on the role of "alpha". This became noticeable when he began to dominate feeding time and routinely claimed the best roosting spot.

Finally, on 15<sup>th</sup> July the pelicans were released onto the lake. This involved a 4:00am start, with the birds being strategically positioned opposite the older resident pelicans at sunrise. It was an exciting morning, with live BBC coverage and wildlife officers from Bushy Park and The Regent's Park assisting.

Surprisingly quickly the birds took up residence on Pelican Rock. Characteristically the resident birds

disappeared when the new birds came close. Preening and general bill clattering is usually a sign that they are content, and we were relieved that they began exhibiting this behaviour only a few hours after their release.

We were all uncertain as to how long it would take before the two groups gained enough confidence to flock together. There were several comical moments over the first few days involving a standoff between the two groups. It took a week for the old and the new birds to come up to the feeding lawn together and a further few weeks for the flock to roost

together regularly, demonstrating the intricate social behaviours of pelicans.

Feeding time is more work now than it used to be, but the birds seem to have greater stimulation and confidence in their new flock. Both groups happily feed on roach and we have since changed their diet permanently to this species. The new arrivals have become a very popular sight in the park and have caught the attention of many passers-by. The story behind their arrival has also been recorded on several news platforms since their release onto the lake. ●

*Hugh Smith, Royal Parks Wildlife Officer*



Hugh feeding the Pelicans



## 2020 Diary Dates and other information

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- Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 6.30pm: 'Christchurch Gardens' - short talk by David Beaumont. Venue tbc
- Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February, 6.30pm: 'Ignatius Sancho' - short talk by Victor Keegan. Venue tbc
- Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2pm: Talk/workshop by Master Florist, Jen Jakobsen, Blewcoat School
- Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2pm: Visit to St Stephen's Church, Rochester Row
- Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30pm: Visit & lunch at Westminster/Kingsway College, Vincent Square
- Tuesday 2nd June, 3pm: Visit to RUSI (Royal United Services Institute), 61 Whitehall
- June, date tbc: T@35 Celebrations - Summer Party. Venue tbc
- Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2pm: 'Caring for the Poor on Thorney Island' - walk with Michael Marriot
- Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2pm: The IncredIBLE RHS Collections, Lindley Library, 80 Vincent Sq
- Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> September, 10.15am: Shepherd's Bindery & Antiquarian Books Talk, 76 Rochester Row
- Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2pm: 'In celebration of Thorney Island' - walk with Victor Keegan
- Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September, 12 noon: Guards Museum & Band Recital in Guards' Chapel, Birdcage Walk
- Monday 5<sup>th</sup> October, 7.30pm: T@35 Cocktails and Canapés at The Cinnamon Club, Gt Smith St
- Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> November, 6.30pm: AGM and Talk, Blue Orchid Rochester Hotel, Vincent Square
- Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December, 6.30pm: Christmas Party, Carols & Raffle Draw, Blue Orchid Wellington Hotel

Visit bookings can be made through Eventbrite:

[www.Eventbrite.co.uk/o/the-thorney-island-society-10626269821](http://www.Eventbrite.co.uk/o/the-thorney-island-society-10626269821)

Or alternatively, please contact us at [info@thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk)

or 10 Old Pye Street, London, SW1P 2DG

**The Thorney Island Society** is a voluntary amenity and civic society, which was founded in 1985. It is concerned with the welfare of the physical environment of the area sometimes referred to as 'Westminster Village'. It organises visits, reviews planning applications, and maintains a local archive. There are currently more than 300 members, and we would welcome more. A membership form can be found on our website: [www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk](http://www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk)  
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**Disclaimer:** While The Thorney Island Society is concerned that the views expressed in articles are relevant and honestly held by the contributor, the opinions stated by individuals may not necessarily be held by The Thorney Island Society Executive, which is not in a position to vouch for their accuracy.

To comment on this Newsletter or propose a story for the next edition: [info@thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk).  
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