



Environment Trust volunteers learning willow spiling to protect the riverbank at Kew. Photo courtesy Sarah Dixon

ENVIRONMENT TRUST FOR RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Spring Newsletter 2009



Welcome to the Environment Trust's spring 2009 newsletter, showing that, after 25 years, the Trust continues to have a leading role in the borough, encouraging everyone to learn and care about the built and natural environment around them.

With three developers drawing up proposals for the regeneration of Twickenham riverside, our River Centre project is a major focus of this newsletter, along with the educational activities that we are

already running, which will flourish in the building.

Alongside the River Centre, we continue to run our existing projects (e.g. Grove Gardens Chapel, Kilmorey Mausoleum and the Vineyard Passage Burial Ground) and still have time (just) to start new projects, such as the oral histories project 'Between the Locks' that Angela describes below, to take us into our next quarter century.

Sara Black, office coordinator

SPRING MEMBERS MEETING

MONDAY 16TH MARCH 2009 from 7 PM

RICHMOND YACHT CLUB, EEL PIE ISLAND, TWICKENHAM

Nicolette Duckham from the council's Urban Design & Conservation team, will be talking about the team's current work. Come along to hear what she has to say, find out about our projects and meet the project coordinators, over a glass of wine or juice. Everyone welcome.

Directions to the Richmond Yacht Club: come over the footbridge from Twickenham to Eel Pie Island, follow the main path round to the left until you reach the blue metal doors of Eel Pie Island Slipways boatyard. Do not go through the blue doors; instead turn to your right, where there is a gate leading into the Aquarius houses and follow the path round to the left, to a red-brick building which is the Yacht Club.

BETWEEN THE LOCKS

RECORDING THE WORKING LIVES OF THE THAMES

We are delighted to announce that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a grant of £44,700 to the Environment Trust in support of our exciting new 2-year project to record the lives of people making their living from the river. Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity is also supporting the project with £3000 of match funding.

'Between the Locks' is an oral history research project with a practical dimension, bringing together school students with elders of the river community. As well as recording the elders' voices, the students will carry out some of the practical activities of boat-building, lock-keeping, riverbank management and other skills. Sound and video recordings will be made available to schools, libraries and community centres via DVD and the internet.

Among the partners working with the Trust is the Port of London Authority (PLA), whose chief executive, Richard Everett, said: 'The PLA has been helping people make the most of the river, safely, for 100 years this year and have owned and operated Richmond Lock and Weir throughout this time. We share people's passion for the river and it will be fascinating to hear their reflections on the vast changes the last century has brought in the way we work on, play on and manage the river.'

Twickenham Museum's chairman, Peter Payan, agrees: 'From the point of view of a local studies museum concerned with the unwritten history of the riverside this is a project of potentially great value and significance, worthy of support by any means available.'

Angela Kidner, projects manager

'Between the Locks' – bringing the past to life

CELEBRATING THE RIVER'S HISTORY AND INDUSTRY

Interest in the project is already overwhelming, with a superb response to our advertisement for a part-time project manager – we hope to have the successful candidate in place to start the project in earnest in March. The enthusiasm that people are showing for this project confirms the widespread local fascination with the river's history and industry, which will be celebrated in the River Centre.



Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity

TWICKENHAM RIVER CENTRE

The River Centre concept continues to attract a good deal of publicity, sometimes negative, in the local press and online. It has done so since the inception of the revised Twickenham Challenge, whereby adjacent housing development funds the building of the River Centre's shell. Rob Gray and Angela Kidner have written detailed and exemplary replies to the objectors, particularly concerning the business plan, our relationship with the council, and funding projections. However, the consensus from correspondence and meetings with objectors is that it is not the River Centre itself but the necessity for private housing to fund it that is the problem. Some people would also prefer that the whole site should become a riverside park.

APPROPRIATE SCALE AND SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

The project team for the Environment Trust understands this, although we don't agree with either point of view. We also would prefer that the River Centre had a realistic prospect of acquiring funds for its entire construction from the council and grant-making bodies, but we recognise that isn't going to happen. Our remit is limited to the River Centre, but we believe that housing of an appropriate scale and distinctive sustainable design could be an advantage to the immediate area and the town centre through increased activity and security. We are convinced that the great community benefits that the River Centre can provide will justify the development needed to make its construction possible. On the issue of the suggested riverside park alternative, our view is that Twickenham, like other nearby Thames-side local centres, is historically a working urban element of the total river landscape, and its character derives from contrast with the public open space already surrounding it. We are confident that the secure contained open space and leisure opportunities that the current development proposals can provide will produce far more benefit, for a larger proportion of the population, for much more of the year, than another riverside park.

CHILDREN LEADING THE WAY

What really drives us and keeps us focused is the conviction that the most important beneficiaries of the River Centre will be children and young people, who will have the opportunity to learn about the river and wider environmental issues in a practical and exciting way. As an article in *The Observer* magazine on 1st February 2009 pointed out, it is often children and teenagers now who take the initiative in making their parents more environmentally aware,

We are now reaching a critical point in the evolution of the River Centre project – part of the regeneration of the former Twickenham pool site – as tenders for the development of the whole site are soon to be submitted from the three chosen developer teams. This is the most high-profile and potentially the most rewarding project that the Trust has ever been involved in.



The River Centre will bring river access and education to everyone, young and old

because schools (and immersion in digital media) have made them familiar with the crucial issues. On the previous day, *The Guardian* magazine had a feature where children met their 'heroes' to ask them questions; it wasn't entirely a surprise that Sir David Attenborough, the River Centre's patron, was one of the heroes. His inspired analogy in the last River Centre newsletter – that the river is as exciting as any jungle, and as deserving of study – was a real boost to our spirits, as is his continued confidence in the project.

NO COMPROMISE

One further point I need to mention, in my role as chair of the Environment Trust, is the question of whether the Trust is in danger of compromising its principles if the chosen scheme doesn't meet the highest design standards in relation to its sensitive setting. I am very aware that we have a responsibility towards members, borough residents and the Charity Commission beyond our commitment as partners in the scheme. While Angela Kidner and Rob Gray will be involved in the evaluation panel for the three final schemes now being prepared for tendering, I will be taking a step back and asking them to report to me and the trustees on their recommendations so that we can be as objective as possible. The same will apply later in the process when the planning application is submitted. We will withdraw if we are not completely convinced that the final scheme is one that we could support if we were not involved as a partner.

We are happy to engage in discussion with our objectors, inviting them to meet us and put their concerns directly, and of course this applies to all members of the Environment Trust too, whether you just want an update or are concerned about issues aired in the local press. We will do our best to answer; e-mail or phone the office to request that one of our project team contacts you. We have one of our regular Members Meetings on Monday 16th March so please come to that for a full update and discussion on all Environment Trust projects.

Jenny Pearce, Environment Trust chair

SUSTAINABLE BUILDING RESEARCH

The PhD study of the development of the River Centre, a collaborative project between Kingston University's School of Architecture and Landscape and the Environment Trust, has been under way for 5 months now. In that a time a thorough investigation of leading sustainable building methods and techniques has been undertaken by looking at best-practice case studies from around the world. A key aspect of the research is to optimise the teaching and learning potential of the building, not only to raise awareness about environmental issues but to bring about a positive change in environmental behaviour. It is intended that the findings from the 3-year research programme inform the ongoing development of the River Centre as a beacon for environmental education in London and the South East.

John Clarke, PhD researcher

RIVER CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE

The River Centre team launched its latest update of the business plan for the project as a public document in October last year. This 32-page report, which provides an overview of our proposals for developing and operating the River Centre, along with the financial plan that underpins the proposals, can be downloaded from www.rivercentre.org.uk. The plan shows the River Centre to be self-sustaining and robust, with support from 17 separate revenue streams; around half the operating revenue will be derived from educational programmes and a further third from the café/restaurant. An update report, setting out our progress over the past few months, is also available at www.rivercentre.org.uk.

COUNCIL EXHIBITION

Meanwhile there are three developers currently vying for the right to work with the Environment Trust and the council and produce a planning application for the overall site. This competition is known as a 'competitive dialogue' process and has involved us reviewing and commenting on initial proposals from each of the

developers, as well as discussing and developing their proposals in formal meetings. An exhibition of the final schemes from each of the developers will be held in the Civic Centre in Twickenham during the week commencing 9th March; this will also contain display panels from the Trust about the River Centre project. Because of our role in the evaluation process, we cannot express a preference for any of the proposals at this stage; however, we can say that the competition is of a very high standard and has generated some very interesting and imaginative ideas. We urge you to go along, have a look for yourself at the proposals and submit your comments on all three.

EDUCATION

The local press has recently featured the news that Richmond Adult Community College has 'pulled out of the River Centre project'. We can assure our membership that, contrary to press speculation, this has no impact on the viability of the River Centre. As many of you know, education is a high-turnover and marginal-return business and consequently the business plan

(with its broad revenue base) continues to show a very healthy margin, even if no replacement education activities were provided. However, education is an important part of our strategy for the River Centre and we are already planning how we can expand the programmes with our existing education partners and work with new partners to fill the gap. Last year the Trust started to deliver its education programme with local schools and this year we will be piloting a range of adult courses, starting in the summer, with boat-building, the ecology of the Thames and low-energy home refurbishment. Our successful programme for people with learning difficulties will be expanded, and we will start to deliver training and NVQ qualifications in outdoor environmental work for local young people. The plan is to build these activities so that a vibrant mix of courses and training programmes for all ages and abilities will be in place when the River Centre opens in 2011.

*Rob Gray,
River Centre project manager*

SHARE YOUR VIEWS AT THE COUNCIL'S EXHIBITION

We strongly encourage everyone to go along to the council's exhibition on **9th to 15th March at the Civic Centre in Twickenham**, where you will be able to view and give your opinion on each of the developers' proposals for the redevelopment of Twickenham riverside, including our public-benefit River Centre. The hours of opening will be 2 PM to 8 PM on Monday to Friday, 10 AM to 4 PM on Saturday and 11 AM to 3 PM on Sunday.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

TREE OF LIFE

Work is progressing very nicely on the Tree of Life mosaic, involving students from Hampton Hill Junior School and members of the Greenwood Centre's Will and Way craft and social group. The project is being led by mosaic artist Susie John and everyone involved is enjoying the process so much that we have decided to extend the project to include the summer term and get more schools involved.

Children from Hampton Hill Junior School working with ladies from the Will and Way craft and social group on the Tree of Life project



A NEW COMPETITION FOR SCHOOLS

Following the success of last year's Wildlife Garden competition, Richmond Environment Network (REN) has teamed up with School Food Matters to run a new competition. This time the winning school will receive an allotment complete with raised beds, a shed and tools, all generously provided by Mears Ltd. To win, the school must produce a short film with the title 'Where does my food come from'. Over the past few weeks, I have been

running workshops that encourage children to think about where food comes from and different ways of making their film.

REN has also been working with the local authority to secure funding for gardening clubs in schools. If children have the satisfaction of preparing the soil, making compost, and nurturing and growing plants themselves, it really helps them to be

connected to and care about the wider environment. It also gives them practical skills that they will keep throughout their lives, helps their social skills, creativity and confidence, and encourages healthy living.

SCHOOLS ENVIRONMENT FORUM

The Schools Environment Forum is now in its third year and has become an important event for information sharing and partnership building on environmental initiatives in schools. At the last forum representatives from 36 of the borough's schools attended. The next forum will take place on the evening of **Tuesday 19th May** at Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park, and it is open to all school staff, governors and parent helpers. This year, as well as an opportunity to hear talks on schools' environmental projects and meet the organisations that help schools to become more sustainable, there will be a free workshop run by Garden Organic (the UK's leading organic growing charity), which will include tips on growing fruit and veg with pupils, composting, curriculum links and a Q&A session. If you would like to attend the forum please drop me an e-mail on jo.pecorelli@virgin.net.

*Joe Pecorelli, environmental education
consultant*

SHAPING UP FOR OUR HALF CENTURY!

For the past 6 months, the Environment Trust's board of trustees has been meeting regularly to focus on the longer-term direction and organisation of the Trust. The impetus for this has come from the energy, enthusiasm and ideas engendered by a large new contingent of trustees, together with work undertaken last year in preparation for our Investor in People reassessment and the excellent and encouraging feedback that we received from our assessor.

We recognised that, while the core values and work of the Trust remain unchanged, the nature and direction of projects is constantly evolving to become more diverse, and consequently more complex to manage, as we work with an increasing number of partners, often in areas necessitating the rapid acquisition of new expertise, such as our growing role in educational projects. This has led us to review how we can best organise ourselves to deliver the aims of the Environment Trust with the resources we have available.

A clearer structure will help us to increase our capacity and be more proactive in attracting a wider membership and in harnessing the full potential of all our many volunteers, not only in existing projects but also in new areas in the future. This work is ongoing and we will keep you all informed as we progress.

Ann Callaway, trustee

REMEMBERING SIR RICHARD

Reproduced with kind permission from Prospect, the newsletter of the Barnes Community Association.

Prospect editors, readers and Friends of Burton defied an autumn downpour to celebrate the extraordinary life of the Victorian explorer Sir Richard Burton at his Arab tent-styled mausoleum in Mortlake. Sir Richard Burton was an explorer, writer, soldier, hypnotist and ethnologist who spoke thirty different languages, travelled round the world, and translated the *Kama Sutra* and *Arabian Nights* into English.

Until her death in 1896, Sir Richard's wife Lady Isabel used to hold tea parties in his memory at the mausoleum. On Monday, October 20th, the 118th anniversary of his death, *Prospect* revived the tradition. Armed with brollies, cupcakes and flasks of tea, Burton admirers visited the tomb – discussing only matters that would have interested him, as was the rule at the original parties.

The gathering then moved inside, where Margaret-Ann Lee told the group about how she restored the tomb in 1975 after she had found it overgrown and in a terrible condition. Yannick Banks of the Friends of Burton explained about the new restoration project.

*Rachel Rickard Straus,
Barnes Community Association*

Sir Richard Burton



NEW AWARD FOR KILMOREY

The wildlife garden created by the Environment Trust surrounding Kilmorey Mausoleum was awarded a London in Bloom certificate of excellence in December. This award follows our success in achieving a gold award in the environmental section of Richmond Borough in Bloom last summer. The certificate was presented at a York House ceremony to Claire McCormack, the principal volunteer gardener at the site, and Derrik Mercer, the Trust's Kilmorey project leader.

Plans for Kilmorey during 2009 are now well advanced. In addition to the traditional opening as part of the capital-wide Open House weekend in September there will be another **open day on 6th June** when, it is hoped, the garden's wildlife features will be seen at their most attractive.



*Kilmorey Mausoleum in spring
Photo courtesy Tony Lewis*

In July the mausoleum will also be the destination for an East Twickenham walk led by Richmond's tour guides. And visits are planned by local scout and wildlife groups as well as continuing visits by children from St Stephens primary school. A bat walk is also being considered, perhaps for an evening in August.

Regular gardening work continues in the grounds each Monday lunchtime and new volunteers are always welcome, although check in advance via the Trust (tel: 8891 5455) or on the day (07955 172 940). No particular skills are required, just enthusiasm to use the tools, which will be provided, and perhaps a picnic lunch to help pass the time.

Derrik Mercer, trustee

PRACTICAL VOLUNTEERING

The end of last year saw lots of rain but this didn't deter volunteers to come in large numbers and help on the different events that we ran around the borough. We're really grateful to all those who got out of warm (and dry!) beds to help us each month.

The annual draw-off in November saw a fantastic number of volunteers at Twickenham riverside to clear rubbish from the foreshore. This included people of different ages, right across the borough. We're particularly grateful to the pupils from Tower House School and Marymount International School for their willing support. A large amount of rubbish was collected despite the amount of water that continued to flow down the river.

In December we helped at Kilmorey Mausoleum, removing scrub and clearing the paths in preparation for milder and (hopefully!) dryer months ahead. This also included starting the construction of a bird hide, which we hope to complete next month when we head back to help Claire McCormack and the regular Kilmorey team.

In January we continued with the exciting project at Kew Reach towpath to enhance the riverbank along this part of the Thames, using the traditional eco-friendly method of willow spiling to form a natural stabilisation of the foreshore and create new habitats. It was a great opportunity not just to learn about this area and the delicate environment but for everyone to try their hands at being creative, weaving willow!

If you would like to get involved in our volunteer projects over the coming months, just contact the office for a schedule of events and to be added to our mailing list.

Zeph King, volunteering coordinator

MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS

The St Helena Terrace boathouse group now has 12 members, with three boats in active use, one on order and one being looked for. In September, we had a very successful party to say farewell to Mike and Jill Deacon and watch the Great River Race, during which the boathouse operated as an informal changing room for crews.

This year's **Great River Race is on Saturday 5th September** and, because of tides, will run from Docklands to Ham (so no long journey home!) If you're interested in rowing, please do get in touch with the office.