

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Autumn 2023

Registered Charity No. 285383

<http://www.friendsoffarnhampark.co.uk>

 Friends of Farnham Park



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY - for details see website

All events will be held at –
Rowhills Field Centre, Cranmore Lane, Aldershot,
GU11 3BD at 7.00 for 7.30 unless otherwise indicated.

18th October - Remarkable Trees – Liz Ramsey

15th November - Geology of Farnham – Dan Bosence

29th November, 7.00 start – The Friends, AGM

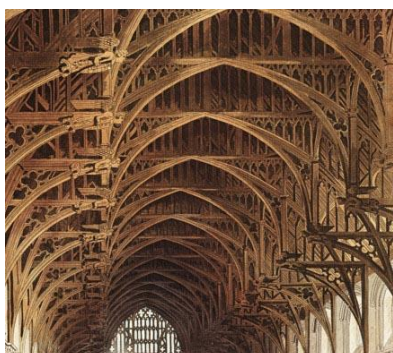
A PARK FIT FOR KINGS AND QUEENS

The existing park known as Little Park was formed in 1376 and is a remarkable example of a medieval deer park. Combined with the Great Park it joined part of the Bishop's estate and was a favorite place to visit by royalty to show connection to their subjects and enjoy good hunting.

In the 13th century King John visited the Great Park, attracted to the red & fallow deer, boar and hare. Henry VIII and the Tudors all enjoyed hunting in the Parks, Henry VII's son, Arthur, being kept at Farnham for the first seven years of his life. Elizabeth 1st spent a whole summer in 1583 and James 1st was particularly enthusiastic describing his visit as a great entertainment.

Queen Victoria was also a visitor after visiting the army camp at Aldershot. She would visit Hungry Hill on the Farnham Road and enter the Park at Oast House formerly known as London Gate and renamed as Queen's Gate. Bishop Sumner commissioned the construction of two mounds at the entrance onto which Scots pines were planted, the mounds can still be seen and local Hale roads named Queen's Road and Queen's Lane signify the Queen's visit.

Commemorative plantings include the Queen Mother's 80th birthday hazel hedge in 1980 on the northern side of the Avenue and two black walnut trees for Queen Elizabeth's II Gold (2002) and Diamond (2012) jubilees planted in White Bottom.



A small oak plantation was planted in 1996 to commemorate Farnham's framing of the hammer-beam roof for Westminster Hall commissioned by Richard II in 1393, the largest medieval timber roof in Northern Europe. The timber was sourced from several locations including the Courthorpe Estate in Sussex. By 1913 a few of the oak beams needed to be replaced and when the MP for Rye Sir George Courthorpe heard about the restoration work, he advised that his ancestors had provided the original oak for Westminster Hall and explained that after the oaks had been felled, new trees had been planted, showing their ability to plan for the next 500 years!

Neil Taylor

DOG FOULING

The problems associated with canine faecal matter are multifarious, including (but not limited to):-
Creates a human health hazard: bacterial infections (E coli, Campylobacter), also parasites, specifically *Toxocara* spp: roundworm species, the adult worms live in the small intestine & shed eggs to the environment via faecal matter. The eggs are microscopic. A recent study (Vet Record Vol 192 No1 “*Toxocara* contamination of park soils in the UK: are we underestimating the public health risk?”) demonstrated high levels of contamination in public parks. This represents a widespread and persistent hazard to human health with eggs potentially remaining viable for several years in the soil. **Whilst exposure in children can lead to blindness in one (or rarely both) eye(s), chronic *Toxocara* infection is linked to epilepsy, cognitive dysfunction & asthma.** Whilst deworming undoubtedly plays a role - please see your vet for further info - collecting & binning canine faecal matter is vital to stop this contamination.

- Creates a hazard for other animals - including cows and wildlife - either directly via contact / ingestion (bacteria such as E.coli, Campylobacter & even Salmonella species, parasites such as Neospora - which causes abortion in cattle - and Giardia) or indirectly via contamination of water supply (e.g. The Nadder & tributaries): bacterial contamination plus parasiticides which have the potential to decimate invertebrates leading to ecosystem collapse.
- Creates a hazard for other dogs (either by contact or ingestion: increasing worm burden and other endoparasites, risking contact with medication including parasiticides which other dogs, depending on breed/genetic makeup, are intolerant to)
- Very negative impact on the environment: contamination with nitrates leaches into the soil encouraging invasive species which outcompete more vulnerable / indigenous species undoing conservation work, introducing bacteria that adversely alter the biome of soil
- Risks encouraging a flourishing rodent population (rats love dog mess)

Quoted at each entrance to the park – is the “Dog walkers code of conduct” which includes:-

“Please clear up after your dog(s)” and “Please keep your dog(s) under effective control. Your dog(s) should be in sight at all times and come immediately when called or be kept on a lead.”

This is in-keeping with the section of the Countryside Code “Protect the Environment”

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052574/Countryside_Code_A5.pdf) “always keep dogs under control and in sight” and “dog poo–bag it and bin it–any public waste bin will do”.

One of the biggest challenges for all areas of Farnham Park is the sheer number of dogs using the space. I think it’s worth pointing out the ranger (me!), colleagues, volunteers, other dog walkers, even parents etc may find themselves “deep within the scrub” on occasion and no-one should have to risk exposure to pathogens (whether bacterial or parasitic) from canine faeces.

(with thanks to Dr Anna Carey MRCVS for help with drafting the above & sourcing references)

Nick Macfarlane

Steve Edwards and Friday Volunteer Sessions

The Friends wish to thank Steve for organising and supervising the additional volunteer sessions on Friday mornings. His Friday team has greatly helped Nick to achieve the improvements in the Park which we can all now see following the difficulties of the last few years.

Tiny Little Mouse House

Whilst cutting back an overgrown margin of brambles and long grass in March 2022, Park volunteers discovered some beautiful, abandoned nests identified as having been woven by Harvest Mice (*Micromys minutus* translation: *tiny little mouse*) - the smallest European rodent and the only UK mammal with a prehensile tail.

Mainly nocturnal, though sometimes active on warm summer days, they feed on grass seeds, fruit, berries, grain and insects.



Their breeding season is May to October when they may produce several litters of 3-8 pups, each in a newly woven nest. As is the case with nesting birds, disturbance of their favoured nesting sites is discouraged during the breeding season.

Predators include owls and other birds of prey, stoats, weasels, foxes, crows and cats, as well as, in the case of the tiny pups, even blackbirds and toads. Other threats include cold Winters and starvation along with pesticides, combine-harvesting and other invasive land-management practices.

Although common where populations occur, mostly in Southern and Eastern England, the Harvest Mouse is nationally rare and categorised as 'near threatened' in the UK overall. We are certainly very lucky to have them living in Farnham Park.



Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) – Schedule 9 Invasive Non-native

Native to the Himalayas, this bane of Park volunteers' lives was introduced to the UK from India as an ornamental garden plant in 1839, but soon spread and is now widely naturalised along riverbanks and ditches, especially close to towns. Favouring moist habitats, it is very fast-growing and multiplies extremely effectively due to its hair-trigger seed pods which fire 100s of seeds up to 7 meters in all directions incl. dispersal downstream via moving water.

In Farnham Park we fight an annual battle to keep on top of the spread which has successfully encroached into woodland and grassland. The plant has an uncanny knack for appearing in the most unexpected places and an accelerated growth, flowering and seed-producing pattern when it knows that time is short. We are convinced that the plants talk to each other and know when they are being attacked – like trees. Research also suggests that they biochemically suppress the germination of other plants to further ensure their own success.

A pretty flower, yes, and food for some pollinators but, overall, a most unwelcome addition to the Park's floral diversity.



Deb Burls

IN MEMORY OF RICHARD BURGESS

Sadly Richard lost his battle with Parkinson's this month. He was an active member of the committee and until recently involved in looking after the park butterfly transect along with monitoring the health of the Nadder stream. Obtaining a botany degree meant he had a mountain full of knowledge relating to flora and fauna however his working life was in the wine trade which led him to all parts of the globe exemplified by the empty bottles on his shelves.

He will be sorely missed.

RANGER ROUNDUP

This year has seen very interchangeable weather in the Park – global record temperatures in June, followed by record rainfalls in July. The effects on the park are noticeable – a strong growing season for vegetation with vivid green meadows and grass compared with yellow straw-like conditions this time 12 months ago. Whilst this is good news for a lot of the flora, for others it can lead to slightly negative effects.

Farnham Park's meadows are what most of us will associate as quintessential Farnham landscape – and we'd be right, the landscape has hardly changed in the last 600-700 years. The Park's ancient meadows remain part of Farnham's cultural heritage and history in very much the same way as the castle or the town's many little lanes do.

Meadows provide vital habitat for a vast array of flora and fauna, providing food to thousands of pollinating insects. They are also great for carbon storage and water retention, preventing flooding. A combination of the intensification of agriculture and poor management has led to a 97% loss of wildflower-rich meadows since 1930, in turn we have witnessed a huge decline in flying insects over the last 30-40 years.

There isn't too much we can do to reverse the intensification of agriculture; however, we can address the poor/mis-management. Farnham Park is managed as a rich mosaic and rather like a roman mosaic, different habitats are like different coloured tiles – the more variation you have, the more diverse and intricate your mosaic will be. This requires a great deal of input as a great deal of Farnham Park's habitats are in existence because of man's historic input. If left to nature, the park would eventually become secondary woodland/scrub and so huge numbers of species would be lost. Scrub succession remains the most significant threat to the Park's meadows.

Whilst the aim isn't to completely remove all scrub, there is a balance to be reached. Scrub is cut on rotation to ensure transitional and diverse structure which supports a greater number of species. Focusing only on fauna, edge habitat is an important feature of woodland and scrub environments, creating more structural diversity and micro-habitats/niches. Amongst others, bats and deer utilise edge habitats for food, safe passage, commuting and cover. A rectangular section of woodland or scrub will have 4 edges, however if that block is managed and now contains rides, glades and rotational cutting, suddenly that 4-sided woodland has 4 times as many edges, gaps, scallops and so on – supporting a far greater number of species.

The 2 images below are aerial photos taken of the same area, one taken in 1999 and the other in 2021. This illustrates the changing landscape caused by scrub succession in just 24 years. The slender tree-lined hedgerows have become thick, impenetrable scrubby blocks, the woodland glades, rides and historic vistas have completely disappeared. The good news is that the ranger, contractors and the wonderful volunteers are out there 'scrub-bashing' quite simply ensuring the longevity of the meadows for the wildlife that call them home and for the enjoyment of future generations.



1999 aerial photo of the park



same area of the map in 2021