

# Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Spring 2020

Registered Charity No. 285383

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

 Friends of Farnham Park



## EMERGING INTO SPRING!

I thought Nick's atmospheric picture below captured the mood – after an extremely wet and gloomy winter, there is a glimpse of spring peeping through the trees! This wonderful old tree is on the first fairway at the golf course and is one of my favourite trees in the Park. It was pollarded in Robin (the previous Ranger)'s time to prolong its life and given a protective fence to reduce trampling on its roots. It now has a fabulous profile!



After a very wet and slippery winter in the Park, we look forward to some better spring walks, and to our events programme listed opposite.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

As we move into Spring, we are pleased to be able to announce our next series of events for 2020, including a range of interesting talks and walks. We hope to see many of you there.

### Tuesday 17th March Return of the Peregrine

by Keith Betton (Hampshire Ornithological Society).

### Tuesday 21st April Linear Landscapes

by Roy Champion from Rowhill Nature Reserve. A talk on hedgerows in our landscape.

Thursday 21st May 2pm Paths Less Trodden Join Richard Burgess and Libby Ralph of the Friends, for an 'adventurous walk' up the stream as part of Farnham Walking Festival.

### Tuesday 23rd June 6pm Tree Walk (location tbd)

by Ron Hills. Ron is a former Ranger for the Park and based his Masters' degree dissertation on the old trees of the Park.

### Thursday 30th July 7pm – Members BBQ

Our annual get together at Farnham Cricket Club.

### Tuesday 15th September Castle of Deception

by Roy Waight (Local Historian) – a look at Farnham Castle's role in decoys and camouflage.

### Saturday 19th September 2pm – Heritage Walk

With members of the Friends' committee, the annual history walk as part of the Heritage Weekend.

*Note: all indoor talks take place at the Rowhill Centre (Cranmore Lane), 7pm refreshments for 7:30pm start. The Centre now has a hearing loop should anyone need it. Events are free to FoFP members, £3 to non-members Walks meet at Park Lodge/main car park unless otherwise stated.*

## RAPTORS OVER THE PARK

The term raptor is another name for birds of prey: eagles, hawks, falcons and owls. The fate of these birds has been rather varied as in the 1950s-60s many were at risk due to the rise in the use of insecticides such as DDT, which passed through the food chain via small birds and mammals to the large predators causing infertility and weakening the shells of their eggs. Other factors in their decline included changes in farming practices affecting the number of prey animals and birds. Fortunately, the use of such chemicals has been stopped and farming improved and since 1981 all raptors and their nests have been protected by law.

In the UK there are 20 birds of prey in total ranging from the majestic white-tailed eagle to the thrush sized merlin and little owl. Certain features are common to most: they have powerful talons to hold and kill their prey and a hooked beak to strip the flesh from the bones. They also have very keen vision and their flying skill is amazing. Females are generally larger than males and rule the roost, laying and incubating the eggs while the male provide food for her and the chicks. The eggs are normally laid over a few days and the oldest chicks are most likely to survive especially in times when prey is scarce.

Of the 20 species, only a few are regularly seen on the Park – buzzard, kestrel, red kite and tawny owl (more often heard rather than seen). Sparrowhawks, barn owls and little owls have also been seen occasionally.



The buzzard is a medium sized hawk and is Britain's commonest raptor with an estimated 79,000 breeding pairs. They can often be seen in pairs or small groups soaring on thermals on their over 4 ft wide rounded wings with their shortish tail and wing tips fanned out. The female lays 2 - 4 eggs in the twig built nest which can be 3 ft across and the diet is a varied mix of small mammals, birds, reptiles, larger insects and carrion and the young mature at 3 years and have an average life of 8 years with a record of 25 years!

### *Buzzard*

of 500 breeding pairs in 7 locations rising to 1000 pairs now of which 350 are in southern England and are regularly seen over the Park. They are magnificently graceful birds with a reddish-brown body, 5ft angled wings and a deeply forked tail. They feed mainly on carrion and their twig nests are lined with grass and sheep wool. Apparently prior to egg laying they also decorate the nest with rubbish such as paper, rags, crisps packets, carrier bags, underwear(!) and toys - a useful bit of litter picking and recycling!



*Red kite*



The kestrel is a classic falcon, once the commonest UK bird of prey, but has now declined to about 45,000 pairs. It can quite often be seen near the Deer Pond on the Park as there is a nest box nearby. They are the only UK bird that truly hover (another name is windhover), and it is lovely to watch them hovering or catch them resting on the fence around the pond. Sparrowhawks (our smallest hawk) are occasionally seen. They like to hunt in woodlands and gardens and do not limit themselves to sparrows - in fact up to 120 species have been recorded in their diet.

### *Kestrel*



*Sparrowhawk (male)*

Barn owls and little owls have put in the odd appearance but the commonest is the tawny owl which is often heard ( the classic male/female to whit/to woo ) but are difficult to spot especially when sitting in trees as their plumage resembles tree bark giving them excellent camouflage.

The final Park resident which I am sure you have all seen is the carved one in the adventure playground!

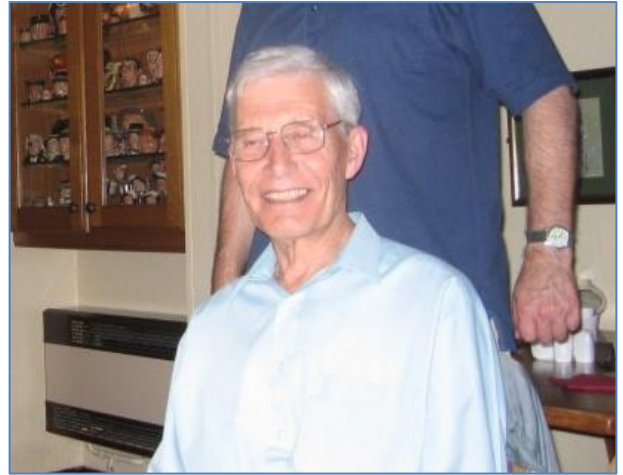
*Richard Burgess*



## TRIBUTE TO ROGER GRIFFITHS

Roger Griffiths, a long-term member and Committee member of the Friends, sadly died in his sleep on Sunday 12th January at home. He would have been 84 in March. Roger had recently suffered from poor health on several occasions and had been diagnosed the previous week with cancer.

Roger was one of the nicest and kindest people one could ever hope to meet. His easy smile always greeted us. His imperfections were few: he didn't drink alcohol and he didn't drink coffee!



*Roger Griffiths*

We were so pleased when he and Brenda got together. We had secretly hoped this would happen and one day, Philip returned from the working party and said: "I think there is something going on between them, he was offering to wash her boots"!

They became inseparable and both sold their respective houses and moved into a bungalow in Fernhill Lane. Sadly, their life together was cut short when Brenda was taken ill and subsequently died. Roger's wife, Diane, had died some years earlier.



Roger was the Treasurer for the Friends of Farnham Park. He was always enthusiastic and looked forward to the volunteer working parties on Wednesdays. In Roger, the volunteers have lost their expert firelighter.

Roger brought with him, a fund of knowledge on all manner of subjects: having lived in the area for many years, he knew the village and the people, being a regular at the monthly village hall coffee mornings. He also loved his garden and he much enjoyed walking in the Park.

*On a Park task in the grazing area*

Roger was an RAE apprentice from 1954 intake, He went on to spend his career at the RAE, which became Qinetiq. Roger served 20 plus years in I.A.P. Drawing Office in R177 building, where he met his wife Diane who was a Tracer in the early days in R177. He was also a member of the Cody Flier project for the "FAST" museum in Farnborough.

He kept in touch with several ex-apprentices and was a regular at the apprentice functions.

He will be sorely missed by all the Friends and Volunteers, past and present.

In losing Roger we have lost a true gentleman.



*At a FAST project reunion in 2007*

*Penny and Philip Stevens*

## **FRIENDS COMMITTEE - VACANCY**

At the AGM in November, the Committee said goodbye, with great thanks for all their hard work over the years, to David Havenhand, Chairman (although he remains on the Committee), Martin Clegg, Secretary, and Jerry Hyman, previous Chairman and Committee Member. Martin has been made a Life Member of the Friends, and 'The Chairman's Bench' is being installed at Deer Pond in David's honour.

The new Committee is: Chair – Libby Ralph

Secretary and Membership Secretary – Neil Taylor

*Treasurer – vacant, see below*

Events – Isabel Overd

Other committee members – Fiona Allison, Richard Burgess, David Havenhand, Nick Macfarlane (Ranger).

The sad death of Roger Griffiths has left us without a Treasurer. The committee is managing the accounts for the time being, but if anyone is interested in taking this on, we would love to hear from you. Talk to Libby Ralph or Neil Taylor at one of our events or at a volunteer workparty.

## **RANGER ROUND UP**

The Park witnessed a memorable winter with record temperatures and rainfall. The hawthorn hedgerow was beginning to leaf in late January and White Bottom became a raging torrent capable of hosting white water rafting!

The volunteers worked hard and achieved a great deal of fantastic work across the Park, despite of some pretty

awful weather. The Queen Mother's Hedge was given a hair cut in the hope that it will thicken up in the sparser parts. It is important to ensure that the hedge remains short enough to keep the historical vista, whilst remaining thick enough to provide homes and food for the wildlife.

The last section of overgrown hedge would have been a mammoth task for the volunteers (and the Ranger) and so the Surrey Hedge-laying Group have been called to speed up the job. They will continue into mid-March. Eventually the aim is to lay and plant up the entire length of site east-west as a biodiversity project, including the last un-planted section running from the golf course right along to the end of the current hedge.

Other volunteer achievements include scrub management/bashing, to the north west of the site to avoid encroachment into the area of historic parkland. A group of young men and women from the Hale Academy visited the Park and very helpfully made a fantastic start on the area and planted several trees including a yew.

Recently the volunteers were in the south west of the Park building stag beetle 'hotels'. A major problem facing these wonderful insects is lack of deadwood, essential for their life cycle. Gardens and parks are far too manicured and so the provision of deadwood of all shapes, sizes and positioning can help them tremendously. There have been several sightings of stag beetles in the Park and bordering properties to the south but if you see a stag beetle in or around the Park do let the ranger know. You can find out more information about stag beetles and how to build a deadwood hotel on the People's Trust for Endangered Species website:

<https://ptes.org/campaigns/stag-beetles-2/>

As spring now fast approaches we can look forward to seeing the Park 'spring' to life.



*Nick Macfarlane*