

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Spring 2014

Registered Charity No. 285383

Website: www.hairycalyx.com/fofp



SPRING AT LAST?!

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter, and as I write, the sun is shining and bluetits are nesting in a hole in our wall, so let's hope that spring is really here after the eventful winter that we've had.

We are pleased to present our programme of events for 2014, including a number of themed walks as well as interesting talks – see alongside for details - and we hope to see many of you at these. In the meantime, I hope you will enjoy the articles that the Friends of Farnham Park committee has put together for your interest, including: Helen's interesting research concerning the Park in WW1; David's explanation of why we pull balsam, and Richard and Alan's Riversearch report.

Libby Ralph

LOCAL ARTIST



Chris Sercombe has lived in Farnham all his life and so the landscape in and around the area has always been of interest to him, and he has produced a number of pictures of the Park and the surrounding area, such as this lovely picture of oaks.

He says: "Hopefully this summer I will be returning to the Park again as it is such an interesting place to work. As far as painting practice is concerned, I work in oils and go out and paint in front of the subject instead of using photographs. The pictures usually take a few weeks to complete (weather depending!)" So look out for Chris this summer in the Park, and in the meantime, have a look at some of his other pictures on his website: www.chrisssercombe.com.

EVENTS PROGRAMME 2014

Tuesday 15th. April: Hidden History of Surrey, Polish displaced forces after World War II. An illustrated talk by Wies Rogalski.

Wies was brought up in the Tilford area and is passionate about the life he and other families lead as displaced persons. There is a Polish exhibition at The Rural Life Centre, Tilford.

Tuesday 10th. June: Fleet Pond History, Natural History and Restoration. An illustrated talk by Colin Gray.

Colin is chairman of Fleet Pond Society and a member of The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE). We have 7 ponds in The Park so could learn a lot about looking after them.

Saturday 14th June 2:30pm: Wildflower Walk with Isobel Girvan, Surrey Wildlife Trust

Isobel is the Plant Ecologist for Surrey Wildlife Trust, and also knows the Park well. She will talk about how the different soils of the Park influence the plants in different areas.

Thursday 3rd July, 7pm: FoFP Members' Barbecue

Once again this will be at the Cricket Pavilion, with kind permission from Farnham Cricket Club. Hopefully we can repeat the perfect weather that we had last year!

Thursday 23rd September, 7pm: 'My Friend Jane'. A talk by Geoff Lunn

The return of a very popular speaker, this talk was originally a personal record for family and friends - it tells of the life of the lady after whom Elstead Wildlife Rescue was created.

Sunday September 14th (to be confirmed): Heritage Walk

Join Ranger, Robin Crowther, and members of the FoFP committee on a walk around the Park

Sunday October 19th, 10am Fungus Foray

Join West Weald Fungi Recording Group for a foray around the Park.

Note: all indoor talks take place at the Rowhills Centre (Cranmore Lane), 7pm refreshments for 7:30pm start. Events are free to FoFP members, £3 to non- members. Walks meet at Park Lodge/main car park.

Sally Hall.

RIVERSEARCH

Riversearch is a new initiative launched in 2013 by the Surrey Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Wey Landscape Partnership, intended to monitor local rivers and the wildlife associated with them. Trained volunteers undertake regular surveys of publically accessible stretches of the Wey and its tributaries to record pollution incidents, obstructions and the presence of non-native invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam.

One of the tributaries included is the Nadder stream which runs diagonally northwest to southeast for about 1.5km across Farnham Park from the Hampton Road entrance to just north of the Six Bells exit from where it goes on to join the Wey to the east of Farnham.

The character of the stream is influenced by the underlying geology, starting with a relatively straight section running over London clay. In the eastern section this changes to a more gravelly substrate resulting in a shallower more meandering character and finally a narrow section of chalk with a deep channel.

Because the Park is relatively steep the flow rate is generally quite fast and during wet periods (like this winter!) a number of minor drainage channels come in to play and help drain the water into the main stream although because of the generally clay substrate it takes a long time to dry out.

So far the only major problems highlighted have been the inability of the underground water/sewage pipes to cope with the volume which flows through them in wet periods - an issue which has been brought to the attention of the various bodies responsible - and the Himalayan Balsam, which is quite invasive in certain sections. Although it looks pretty when in flower it smothers the native flora and seriously reduces biodiversity so the Park volunteers spend many happy (?) Wednesday mornings pulling it up (see David's article below for more on this plant).

Future plans involve surveying the invertebrates in the stream as a means of monitoring the water purity as well as doing chemical analyses to check for pollutants.

Richard Burgess and Alan Walter



THE BANE OF THE PARK (AND ELSEWHERE) - and why we pull it up

Himalayan Balsam – *Impatiens glandulifera* – (also known as Indian Balsam, Jumping Jack and Policeman's Helmet, amongst others), is a relative of the much loved Busy Lizzie, but is a highly invasive foreign import. It should not be confused with Giant and Rose bay Willowherb, both of which are common in the Park, and with which it grows and resembles. It also flowers at the same time of year.



(Balsam in the foreground, surrounded by Willowherb)

Himalayan Balsam was introduced to the U.K. in 1839. As its name implies, it is a native of the Himalayan region. It likes our warm, damp climate, and having escaped from gardens, has spread rapidly, not only in the Park, but across the country, as well as Europe and the U.S.A. Without doubt, it is a pretty flower, and bees love it as it produces nectar, but it has a habit of shading out other vegetation, thus impoverishing habitats by killing off other plants and denying them nutrients. As it is an annual, the soil is then denuded in winter and this causes severe erosion on river banks.

Each plant produces numerous seed pods, which can contain up

to 800 seeds. When ripe, the pods explode, expelling the seeds as much as 20 feet in every direction. It can readily be seen how the plant spreads so rapidly. Unfortunately, there is no selective chemical means of controlling the plants, and there is no known biological control either, so pulling, before the flowers reach the seeding stage, is the preferred option.

The Friends' work parties last year spent four Wednesday morning sessions "Balsam Bashing", and must have pulled up many thousands of plants. In addition, many people, when walking in the Park, pull up what they can safely reach, and other organisations have visited and done their bit!



A Friends work party enjoying Balsam Bashing

Nevertheless, this year, it will be back (hopefully less of it!), and we will be seen Balsam Bashing again. Fortunately it is easy to pull up, being shallow rooted, but as it is invariably amongst brambles, briars and nettles, this can be a painful exercise, and after a few hours, boredom sets in and muscles start to complain! If only those Victorians knew what they were leaving behind them, and Himalayan Balsam is only one of their legacies – Japanese Knotweed is another, and we've got some of that too!!!!

David Havenhand

FIRST WORLD WAR IN FARNHAM PARK and AREA compiled from Farnham Library, Museum and the Herald.

During this period Farnham Park was owned by the Bishop of Winchester. Pat Heather writes in her book, 'The History of Farnham Park,' that Bishop Edward Talbot and his wife lived at the Castle and kept open house. 'The Bishop was a friendly and neighbourly man and made no attempt to keep the Park in any way private.' By 1913 with the prospect of war with Germany looming, Bishop Talbot gave permission for a brigade of soldiers with artillery to encamp in the Park.

From his book 'Farnham in War and Peace,' W. Ewbank-Smith notes on Aug.4th 1914 Farnham went to war. Bishop Talbot offered Farnham Castle as a hospital if required, and the Park as a grazing area for ill-conditioned horses on military service.

From 'Surrey Home Guard' Paul Crook says... with war breaking out many rifle clubs began to form units to help ward off any potential threat. Many other such units were raised across the county in towns and villages.

By November the government grudgingly gave official recognition to a new body known as The Central Association of Volunteer Training Corps to co-ordinate these local units. The V.T.C. never received any government funding. Weapons and equipment were also not forthcoming and the only items of uniform provided were armbands with GR on them. This caused many jokes at their expense, 'George's Wrecks,' 'Genuine Relics,' or 'Granpapa's Regiment.' However, The volunteer regiments lasted until after the war, some continuing until 1919.

Food production was a major problem and this is recorded in 'Badshot Lea and Farnham in the Great War' by Maurice Hawins. He says that at the beginning of 1917 a public meeting was held in the Council Chamber, in Farnham, to discuss ways of increasing food production. The Bishop had offered land in the Park and Farnham Golf Course was ploughed and used for growing food. Pat Heather adds that the Surrey Agricultural Committee commandeered part of the golf course resulting in the closure of nine of its 18 holes, £500 being paid in compensation.

The Herald 25/8/1917 writes that this produced an exceptionally large crop of fruit. Children and women 'did their bit' and here the Park did come in useful as seen in the Herald 20/10/17 "Hale school children collected 2 tons of conkers for munitions, while those at East Street School collected one ton. Conkers are a source of acetone" [which was also needed to paint the canvas on the wings of the WW1 aircraft.] It also said that Lady Howard collected moss for the French Wounded Emergency Fund. It was needed to stuff stretcher pillows and she encouraged children to collect moss from the local woods.

On 24/8/18 and throughout September the Herald requests that all people in the District collect Blackberries and Crab Apples. It goes on to say, 'The Food Controller at Kingston will supply, free of charge to all local Food Committees small hand baskets which when full will be weighed and paid for. They hoped for 100 tons or more for jam making. The International Stores wrote in the Herald, Sept.1918, that they too were open to purchase any quantity of blackberries. By now only a third of the acreage of hops remained in the area as they had all been grubbed up for food production. Mr. Frampton at Old Park was growing none.

Herald 26/7/19 reports ...Farnham held its Peace Celebrations on Sat. 19th July 1919 with a sports day in the Park for past and present servicemen and their wives. It was a fun event with sack races, egg and spoon races for the ladies and blindfold driving for both sexes. No competitor was to receive more than 2 prizes.

WW1's FAMOUS FARNHAM MEN.

From Farnham in War and Peace by W.Ewbank-Smith.

When Bishop Talbot's youngest son Gilbert died on July 31st 1915 in Flanders, his elder brother the Rev. Neville, who was also serving in the 7th Rifle Brigade, found and buried the remains of the body. Afterwards as a memory to him he founded a soldiers institute for rest and recuperation and named it Talbot House, which became known as Toc H, the start of the international charity.

Mr. J. Alfred Eggar, the Bishop's agent, mooted the idea of a 2 minute silence for those that had fallen. He explained the idea was born in a meeting in his office in 1916. The government eventually adopted the idea and Mr. Eggar received a letter of thanks from the then Home Secretary.

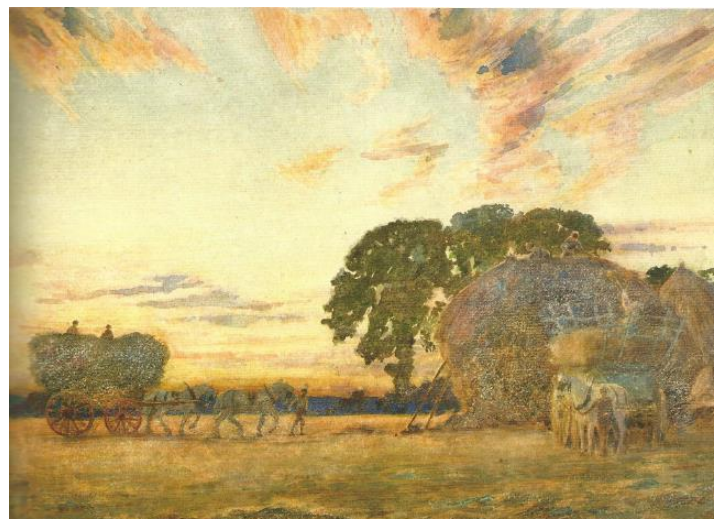
Helen Wilson

W. H. ALLEN

While researching the First World War, we came across the works of this local artist, who is commemorated in the Allen Gallery in Alton. William Herbert Allen (1863-1943) was an artist and Master at the Farnham School of Art, who lived in Farnham for over 40 years. His favourite spots included Farnham Park and the water meadows (now Bishop's Meadow), and he painted several pictures of the Park during WWI, one of which is reproduced here, courtesy of Hampshire Arts and Museums Service. A fuller history, and more of his pictures, will appear in the next newsletter in the autumn.

David Havenhand

Building the hay rick



RANGER'S REPORT

RE-CONNECTING TO THE CASTLE



The new view of the Park from the Castle

The unique combination of a well preserved Motte and Bailey castle adjacent to a medieval deer park makes this a special site. For the past 30-40 years, much of the Castle had been hidden behind a tall, dark screen of sycamores. Castle contractors have now cleared the majority of the trees from the ditch (not a moat as it never contained water). It has opened up wonderful views of these truly significant and historic buildings, deep into the centre of the Park and it makes you realise what an impressive defensive structure it must have been. Sycamore trees are very fast growing and they posed a significant risk to the ditch and curtain wall (both Scheduled Monuments) due to subsidence from root action and the risk of wind throw damage. Certain older trees with greater landscape and wildlife value have been left, as have a number of trees on the Folly Hill boundary which will require a road closure to dismantle. Further links between Park and Castle are being discussed.

SPRING WORKS

The Park coped fairly well with the winter storms, although walking anywhere other than the surfaced paths was quite a challenge! We said farewell to one of our veteran oaks, a few more Japanese elms, the top half of one of the large cedars, and a few birch here and there. The Ranger team were kept busy across the whole Borough, dealing with flooding issues, checking trees and clearing roadside ditches and culverts. It's nice to see the sun again.

Looking ahead this spring – fencing, cycling and leaflets are some of the main projects. We will be improving the ageing fencing to the grazing area as many of the stiles are in a poor state of repair and are no match for some of our cattle which enjoy exploring further afield! Although we'll be reducing the number of access points in the fence line, we'll be replacing some of the stiles with larger kissing gates to make access for dogs, buggies and the less mobile easier.

Waverley will be shortly undertaking a consultation process to get views on replacing the surfaced path along the eastern boundary. We plan to make the Nutshell Lane - Bells' Piece path fit for purpose, as a safe, shared-use track for cyclists and walkers while softening its impact on the landscape at the same time. This is an exciting project and will require extensive private funding and considerable input from a range of user groups.

It is five years since the three Park leaflets were created and we are due for a re-print. The history and wildlife leaflets will have only minor changes, but we're going to re-design the third welcome leaflet with a more family friendly feel and incorporate closer ties with the Castle. Hopefully they will be ready for release in early summer.

Robin Crowther

SHARON'S TREE

Thanks to a generous legacy from Sharon Watson, the Friends' Volunteers have recently been able to plant a fine specimen of London Plane (*Platanus × acerifolia*) in her memory, near the north-east boundary of the Park. First occurring in the mid seventeenth century, and thought to be a natural accidental hybrid of *Platanus orientalis* (oriental plane) and *Platanus occidentalis* (American sycamore), London Plane is a fine, robust and long-lived tree with attractive peeling bark - the characteristic tree of leafy London streets, widely planted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No-one knows how long they will live; none have yet died of old age! It will cope well with the clay soil we have at the top of the Park, and joins a line of specimen trees that help blur the contrast between the green of the Park and the houses beyond.

Libby Ralph



How many Volunteers does it take to plant a tree?!