

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Spring 2016

Registered Charity No. 285383

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

 Friends of Farnham Park



WELCOME!

Welcome to our spring newsletter, which seems to have a bit of a tree theme, with David Havenhand talking about the oak species that we have in the park, and Robin waxing lyrical in his Ranger's report about trees old and new. See below for the list of events that we have organized for this year, starting with a display of photography on Tuesday 19th April. Hope to see you there.

REFRESHERS FAIR AT FARNHAM MALTINGS



On 29th February, Friends of Farnham Park took part in a new venture for the Maltings, a 'Re-Freshers' Fair, the idea of a university freshers' fair, but for the newly retired. Stands included general interest and crafts, volunteer activities looking for additional recruits, as well as various care and support organisations. We were lucky enough to be allocated a stand on the stage, where we could prominently display our banner (and also get a good view of all the other stalls!). A number of Friends committee and other members took turns to man our stall, where we had a very good flow of people interested in both the Park and the activities of the Friends. We gave away over 30 memberships leaflets, and two households signed up to be members on the day! Through the fair we have also acquired a new recruit to the Wednesday volunteer work party, and a number of other people expressed an interest (probably when the weather gets warmer!). Overall the day seemed to be successful, and we hope to attend again if the event is repeated next year.

EVENTS FOR 2016

Tuesday 19th. April: Landscape and Wildlife

Surrey photographer Neil Longhurst will give us a show of his photographs of wildlife and landscapes (*NB – this talk was advertised in VantagePoint as Geology, but unfortunately the planned speaker is ill*)

Tuesday 7th. June: The Crop Circle Mystery.

An illustrated talk by Andy Thomas revealing the history and theories behind this extraordinary and controversial enigma

Thursday 7th July: Friends of Farnham Park Barbecue

Our annual social get-together is always well attended, with record numbers last year, and we have been blessed with good weather for the past 3 years – long may it continue!

July tbd? : Flower walk

We hope to organize a walk sometime in July, perhaps to look at the chalk grassland species that pop up on the lower slopes.

Sunday 11th September 2pm Heritage Walk

As part of Farnham Heritage Weekend, Robin Crowther, assisted by some of the Friends, will lead a walk looking at some of the history and natural history of the Park.

Tuesday 13th. September: Deer:

An illustrated talk by Roger Owen, who was chairman of Defence Deer Management and now mentors aspiring deer managers, advises land owners and assists the police in dealing with deer accidents.

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 normally meet at Park Lodge/main car park.

WHAT'S THAT OAK?

It's estimated that there are about 600 different species of oak around the world – and we've got five of them! We used to have six, but our specimens of the Hungarian (sometimes called Italian) Oak (*Quercus frainetto*) have died.

Only two of the remaining five are truly native – the pedunculate oak, often called the Common or English Oak, (*Quercus robur*) and the sessile oak, also called Durmast (*Quercus petraea*). Hybrids between the two species also occur. Most oaks in the Park are of the common variety.

The leaves on the two species are basically the same, both with rounded lobes although those on the sessile tend to be longer, and more slender, and at the base of each leaf on the common, are two small lobes which are absent on the Sessile. However, the way that they (and their acorns) grow from the twigs is the way to differentiate between them. The leaves of the common grow straight out of the twig, whereas those of the sessile are on short stalks. Their acorns, although looking identical, grow the opposite way – the common on stalks, the sessile straight out of the twig. Two of our other three oaks – the Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*) and Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) are natives of the Eastern Mediterranean region. The Turkey Oak has leaves with deeply zigzagged lobes and its acorn cups have bristles. The Holm Oak is an evergreen, and can resemble a giant Holly Tree. It has dark green, glossy leaves which, on the lower branches may have spines, thus giving the tree a “holly” appearance, but higher up, the leaves are spineless. The bark of the Holm Oak is very dark, almost black when compared with the other species, and its wood is very hard. Its acorns are small and hard and take two years to ripen.

The fifth oak – the Red Oak (*Quercus borealis*) is an import from America. The Red Oak has very large, sharply lobed leaves which turn a vivid red in the autumn, thus providing its name. Its acorn cups have “mossy” scales. The acorns themselves are very similar to those of the Turkey Oak, although those of the Red tend to be smaller and fatter. It is the oaks which go a long way in giving our Park its character and variety - Enjoy them!

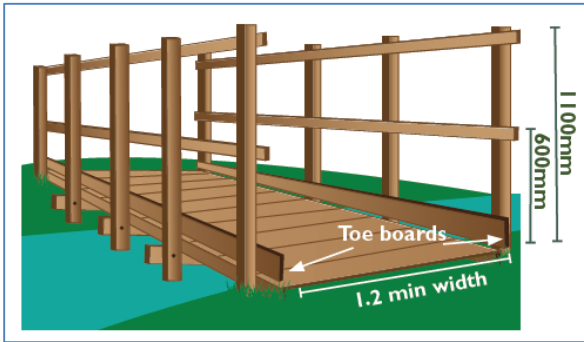


David Havenhand

BRIDGE WORKS

For some years, the Farnham Round Table has made an annual donation to the Friends, in recognition for the work done by the volunteers preparing before, and especially clearing up after, the annual fireworks and bonfire in the Park. This year, they have been generous enough to give a larger donation to undertake a particular project in the Park. Those of you who walk in the Park in the winter will know that a number of the bridges over the Nadder and other ditches are becoming worn and very slippery on their approaches, and we need to replace a number of them. In particular, the crossing of the Nadder below the entrance from Oast House Crescent (above) is very eroded, and the approach from both sides exceedingly slippery.





BRIDGE WORKS

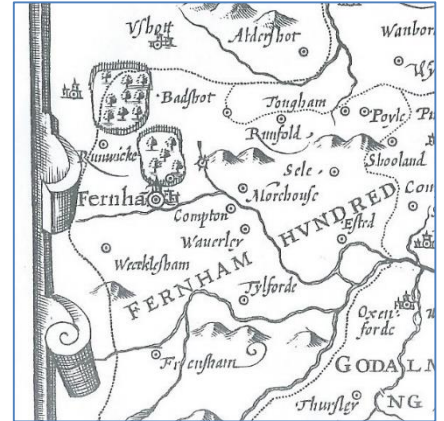
With the money from the Round Table for materials, over the summer months the volunteers hope to be building a new crossing of the Nadder further upstream from the existing bridge, with less steep approaches.

Some clearance work has recently been undertaken, and we have a design that has been tried and tested by other local authorities.

Watch out for progress when we get into the drier months!

FARNHAM OLD PARK

You may know Farnham Park, otherwise the New or Little Park, but what do you know about the Great or Old Park across the road? We do not know exactly when it was created, but maybe around 1138 when Bishop Henry of Blois started work on his castle, and certainly by 1210, when the Winchester Pipe Rolls mention a 'Parker'. Eventually extended into land previously owned by the monks of St Swithun at Crondall, the Great Park stretched into Hampshire as far as Dora's Green Lane, and covered some 700 acres, approximately twice the size of the existing Park, enclosed by a ditch and bank with a fence of high oak palings. Parts of this boundary can still be detected as a continuous hedge bank which other hedges meet but do not cross.



Map of 1620 showing Old and New Parks

Maintaining this would have been a huge task, and there are records of great dissent at the task from the local tenants. However, without enclosure, the king could seize the land as part of his own Forest, and the Park was in any case a huge and tempting target for poachers. In 1374, Bishop William of Wykeham launched the Great Excommunication against 'certain sons of perdition, who, by night as well as by day... have taken, abstracted, caught, carried off and consumed, to the great peril of their souls, rabbits and other wild beasts out of the Bishop's park'. In 1376, Wykeham started creating the New Park, and this may have been a fencing task too far – subsequent years record a number of strikes where bondsmen of Farnham and Crondall refused to carry out their additional responsibilities!

Parks were maintained for hunting, including for deer for the larder, but also for riding and sport. Badgers, foxes, falcons and partridges were also closely guarded. Other products of the Park included timber, bracken for litter, nuts and honey, which is still produced in the Old Park today. The footpath from Potters Gate off West Street leads into Claypit Wood, clearly indicating where Farnham potteries got some of their materials, and another quarry in the park, now wooded, is believed to have yielded stone and rubble for the castle motte. 'The Withies', indicating osier beds west of Old Park Lane, were still a source for basket making at Crondall at the beginning of the last century. The Folly, west of Folly Hill would not originally have been a quirky building, but a mound with trees where hunters could hide as deer were driven past, perhaps derived from 'feuillee', or leafy place.

The Civil War took a heavy toll on both Parks as well as the Castle, and at the Restoration from 1660, the castle was in ruins and the palings of the parks broken down. Bishop Morley at the time tried unsuccessfully to divert incomes from Farnham market to restoring the Park, and eventually took the step of 'disparking' the Old Park, and leasing it out as farms.

Today, most of the Old Park remains farmland, with sheep and some arable. It also retains a number of woods and copses, including Claypit Wood, which are designated Ancient Woodland, or Plantation on an Ancient Woodland Site. Streams that rise in the Old Park flow into the river Wey at Coxbridge, and are said to be very good spawning grounds for wild brown trout. Much of the wildlife we see in the Park today, including deer, buzzards and ravens, probably lives or ranges across the Old Park, and it remains a valuable green space in our local landscape.

Further reading:

Elfrida Manning (1984), *Farnham Parks, a Historical Review* (available in Farnham Library)

Pat Heather (2009), *The History of Farnham Park* (available to buy from Farnham Museum)



A natural succession

Trees have always been at the heart of what makes Farnham Park special. From the gnarled twisted veteran oak, the majestic spreading cedar to the stately London plane and refined spires of lime. This historic landscape is recognised under English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest (Grade II) and so a regular planting programme to ensure the next generation of trees is an important part of the work we do.

We have the botany loving Bishop Brownlow North to thank for the cedars of Lebanon (1781-1820) and many of the older oaks were probably planted by Bishop Morley during the restoration period (1662-1684). Indeed, as Ranger, planting a tree is one of the most satisfying jobs to do. You are providing a living, breathing, life enhancing addition to the landscape - a wonderful gift for the next generation and several after that. But tree planting is much more than digging a hole and putting in a tree. It is a time-rich process where you become very attached to the trees which you have been involved with (just ask the volunteers!). There is the almost childlike care as you ease it in to its new

home, lovingly firm up the soil and give it its first drink. Then there is the stake and tie, perhaps a parkland style tree guard with cleft chestnut palisade to construct, regular watering for the first three years, careful weeding and then comes the pruning - taking off lower branches (known as the temporary crown) and removing twin leaders so it grows with a good structure to ensure a long, healthy life. From then on it has to survive the gnawing of squirrels, competition from other trees, gales, drought, numerous fungal bodies, ravaging insects, perhaps a rubbing of antlers and most lethal of all - the Saturday night walk home from the pub - all in its first 30 years. Then, perhaps, it can start to grow into something resembling a parkland specimen, spread its branches and who knows, be admired, sketched and loved by passers by two hundred years from now.

But there is another way. We are lucky in the park, as we have a variety of natural planters too - mice, squirrels, jays, the wind, even passing deer and dogs - all spread seed to pastures new. Indeed, so successful is this that the volunteers spend many hours removing small trees which are out-competing each other for light. However, if you search among the scrub perhaps along a path, or a car park edge which would be enhanced by a tree, you can often find a self-sown ash, beech, lime or oak growing in these thickets protected from the worst of browsing animals. With a bit of clearance here and a little pruning there, you can give them the potential to grow into a fine specimen in the location you want without the need for transportation, planting or watering - nature has done it all for you. A self-sown tree has a much greater chance of survival in its early years than a nursery bought specimen - its roots have grown in the soil and adapted to the conditions from seed. They are also likely to be the natural descendants of the older trees in the Park, perhaps from the 'Oteringwode' - the original wild wood from which the Park was created. When felling diseased trees, we always look for natural seedlings nearby to grow on as the first option. Even next to a healthy mature tree, finding a self-sown sapling is a delight. Care for it and protect it and you have a readymade replacement from a natural, native and local stock ready to fill the gap when the time comes. Priceless.

Also, young saplings can be dug up and grown in pots, ready to be re-located when the need arises. We've started a small tree nursery at Park Lodge where we can keep a native, local stock of saplings and when the need arises, send them out into the Park to go forth and multiply.

Raising crowns

The volunteers spent a lot of time over the winter 'lifting crowns'. This is nothing to do with past royal visits to the Castle, but involves removing lower branches of specimen trees along the southern path which were spreading low and growing into each other, creating a line of scrub. We'll now be able to mow between them, maintaining sightlines, enhancing their shape and returning more of a 'parkland' feel to the landscape.

Let there be light

You probably will have seen the woodland thinning operation at Shady Nook by now. We removed over 100 cubic metres of oak, ash and beech from the woodland which is about 25-30% of the total cover. That may sound a bit brutal, but what is left will respond to the lighter conditions and it will give space for the remaining trees to grow into something substantial rather than continuing as matchsticks. The brash will provide homes for lots of wildlife and quickly be covered in bramble and rot away into the woodland floor, releasing nutrients. The trees will regain a proper shape and provide dappled shade for walkers to enjoy. The timber stacks, which part paid for the works, will be removed once ground conditions improve in the summer.



