



# Friends of Oaks Park Newsletter 2020

## Review of the Year

Anne Pearcey, Chairman

## 2020 - A Challenging Year



Tony Moorhouse

It's hard to find words to describe the past 12 months. Since our last newsletter, we've been very busy and then suddenly it all stopped.

We held our AGM at Wallington Library in November 2019. There were nearly thirty Friends there, which was very encouraging. We discussed many things, including amending our Constitution regarding examination of our accounts. I was grateful for the advice from a number of Friends on that.

After the excellent talk we had in 2018 from David Warburton about biodiversity, we had a fascinating presentation by Peter Wakeham, Chairman of the Downlands Trust, about the Trust's work and wildflowers on chalk landscapes. We are excited that David will be putting in two chalk scrapes in the Oaks at the end of the year to allow natural chalk vegetation to become established and to attract the small blue butterfly. Information boards will be put up near the scrapes and we'll let you know how things progress.

Then in December, we planted woodland saplings. We started 2020 full of ideas and enthusiasm but have achieved little. We

have worked closely, as always, with the Parks Team at the Council and sought their advice as the Covid regulations have evolved. Our aim has been to keep people safe but encourage them to make the most of the peace and open spaces offered by the Oaks. It has been disappointing that some people have shown little respect for the park, leaving litter and parking badly, but they have been in the minority. It has been lovely to see so many people enjoying the beautiful surroundings of the Oaks and getting lots of exercise. We're very glad the café has been able to re-open too.

I would like to thank the Friends' committee, our website manager and Facebook manager for all their very hard work in trying times. We are planning for 2021 but proceeding with caution. We'll let you know how our plans take shape.

## Friends of Oaks Park AGM

In common with many other groups, we have decided to cancel our AGM for this year due to exceptional circumstances. We considered using Zoom, but many of our members do not have computer access. Our accounts are being examined as usual. They will be available for anyone who wishes to see them, as will our Constitution, which was revised at last year's meeting. (Contact details are on page 4)

## Litter

Keeping the Oaks clean and tidy is always a major challenge and we only have one gardener in the Oaks, who works extremely hard to keep the Park looking lovely. However, we also rely on park users taking their rubbish home or placing it in the bins provided, but this doesn't always happen. We organised our first Friends' Litter Pick on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September. 15 people came to help, the Council provided us with equipment and 13 bags of rubbish were collected from the woodland edges. We will be doing more litter picks in the months to come. Please come and get involved.



## Forthcoming Events

- December: Chalk scrapes will be prepared in the park.
- 2021: Nature walks, litter picks, informal gardening group and CAOS will all be on the agenda. Watch this space (and check the website and noticeboards).

## New and Existing Members

We are delighted to welcome new members of the Friends with 6 new recruits in the past 4 months. We now have a total of 134 members and we're keen to encourage more of you to get involved once things settle down. If you have any ideas about things which you think the Friends might be doing or activities (particularly nature walks) which you would like to see happening in the park, please let us have your thoughts.



## Oaks Park & Covid-19

When the Government imposed a total lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, we were allowed to go out once a day for exercise, which is where Oaks Park came to the rescue.

We were treated to the beauty of the trees and shrubs putting on their spring show and the wonderful sound of our wild birds starting to proclaim their nesting territories. Robins, of course, were the most vocal but blue tits, great tits blackbirds and thrushes were all there plus several less common species, such as nuthatches. We could exercise ourselves and our dogs, walk, run around and relax by wandering along the woodland paths and across the chalk grassland meadows. We could explore the outline of the historic Oaks Mansion, which has recently been re-done and read about its history.

The Café was shut initially, so the leaseholders had a very difficult time. However, they remained positive, just waiting for the chance to re-open in some way. They managed to build a spacious veranda, which provided an outside space with protection from the rain and enabled a perfect one-way system to be introduced when they re-opened on 16th May. Their takeaway service was quickly supported by many of the park's visitors. Our thanks go to the Council, to our Ildverde gardener, for continuing to maintain and care for the park, including handling a significant increase in litter, to the café staff, and to all our visitors who have supported and enjoyed the park. In a very tough year of tight regulations and much uncertainty, to have Oaks Park as a refuge of nature and quiet tranquillity has been invaluable.



## Wildlife and Flora

During the pandemic, we have all been restricted in our movements and work possibilities, but our plants and animals have carried on regardless. Tony Moorhouse, our gardener, has been as busy as ever, weeds and litter don't wait for anyone, and all the formal beds and hedging have been kept in tip top condition. As well as keeping the Park looking excellent, Tony has found time to photograph many of our feathered visitors and other wildlife. We did have a less welcome visit from some wasps who built a nest close to the grotto, but this was safely cordoned off and caused minimum disruption. All the open spaces and meadow areas have flourished in the very hot dry spring and summer. The Gertrude Jekyll roses by the café have had an excellent year and created a wonderful scent. Now we can look forward to birds visiting the park for the autumn and winter and to all the plants and animals returning in full in the spring. We plan to install two chalk scrapes to create a special habitat for the rare chalk grassland Little Blue butterfly. The larvae feed exclusively on Kidney Vetch, which grows on bare chalk.



Tony Moorhouse

## Carshalton Artists Open Studios (CAOS)

As with so many other well-planned events, CAOS could not go ahead in the flesh this year. The artists missed welcoming visitors to their studios near the café in Oaks Park, where they normally have a stall. However, they took their Open Studios online. They were able to offer creative workshops, virtual studio tours and artist demonstrations via zoom and YouTube. If you missed any of this it's still possible to see some of the artists' studios through links on their website: [https:// www.carshaltonartists.com](https://www.carshaltonartists.com).

Next year's dates have been announced already, 26th June-4th July 2021, so put them in your diary.





### Use the lovely park space to find your Inner Artist!

There are wonderful views in Oaks Park for visitors to find their inner artist. You just need a piece of paper, a permanent ink black pen and somewhere to sit.

Spend 5 minutes looking, then starting in the middle of the paper, draw the shape of the shrub or tree you see. Now draw the shapes to the right and left and those you see nearer. Think of it like writing, just new shapes.

The family can have fun with pads of paper, pens and pencils. Now look for 5 minutes at the colours of the bushes and trees, the sky and the grassland. Use pencils, pens, or for the more adventurous, watercolour pencils, to colour in your shapes.

Finally, look again, with half-closed eyes to see the dark tones and shade them on your picture. The secret to

being an artist is that the time spent 'looking' is often longer than the time spent drawing.

When you visit Oaks Park, enjoy what you see and who knows, maybe sometime in the future, you too will make a drawing.

### Planting Spring Bulbs

It was lovely to have a good turnout to get 'dug in' to make trenches for the daffodils and crocuses around the inside perimeter of the area fenced off for children and families on a sunny day at the end of October 2019. There was willing help from people of all ages, and much encouragement was given to the youngest ones to celebrate a sense of wonder to the new generation. This proved a great success and has been visited and admired by many in the Spring when the flowers looked magnificent.

**STOP PRESS: We have just planted 3000 more bulbs for 2020!**



### National Tree Week Planting in Oaks Park – 5th December 2019



A dry day, for a change, saw a group of us planting 100 woodland saplings and some 35 hedgerow saplings, supplied by the Mayor of London, as part of National Tree Planting week. The chosen site was the camp site area between the two halves of the Golf course in Oaks Park. Jack Burrows and his Council Team did the initial clearing and site preparation, as well as organising proceedings, planting and helping dig into the chalk bed rock in a few places. Tony Moorhouse, our Idverde gardener, and our former local MP Tom Brake also helped plant all morning. It stayed dry for us all and was a very enjoyable and fun event. The trees are doing well, although they were a little overgrown with brambles over the summer. They should thrive even better next year.

### Basque Children at Oaks Park – Dr Mary Baines OBE

In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, when the Basque region was subjected to intensive bombing and the town of Guernica was the first non-military target to be bombed deliberately, 4,000 children were evacuated to Britain.

The Government would not support the children for fear of being accused of taking sides, but local authorities and many private individuals were prepared to provide accommodation and food. A group of 22 children arrived in Carshalton in August 1937.



A local Basque children's committee was set up and they persuaded the Urban District Council to house them in Oaks Mansion.

The children put on concerts and displays of Basque folk dances to raise much needed funds to feed and clothe themselves. However, they did not speak English and neither did their adult helpers. Foreign language teaching was limited. French was taught to the brightest pupils and then possibly German. Spanish language teachers were rare. The children were very fortunate that a local teacher, who could speak and teach Spanish, came to Oaks Park to teach them all. This helped them to communicate with their English hosts and settle in more happily.

That teacher's daughter, Dr Mary Baines, got in touch with us early in 2020 to reacquaint herself with the Oaks, tell us about her father and provide this fascinating additional information.

The children stayed at the Oaks Mansion until 1940 and then moved to Culvers House in Carshalton, where they were joined by children from other communities. Some of the children were here for ten years.

Dr Mary Baines OBE dedicated her life to improving care for the dying. As a consultant in palliative care, she established a home care service at St Christopher's Hospice, a pioneering approach that cared for people in their own homes and is now replicated worldwide. Very sadly, she died at St Christopher's in August 2020. We send our condolences to her family and are so glad she got in touch.

### Sutton Council plants new tree to celebrate Foster Carers

On Wednesday 29 January, Jo Davies, a Sutton foster carer and Jonathan Williams, Assistant Director, People Services Directorate (Children's Social Care and Safeguarding), planted a new tree to celebrate foster carers within the Borough. October 2020 is the month when Sutton is celebrating the role foster carers' own children play in the fostering family.

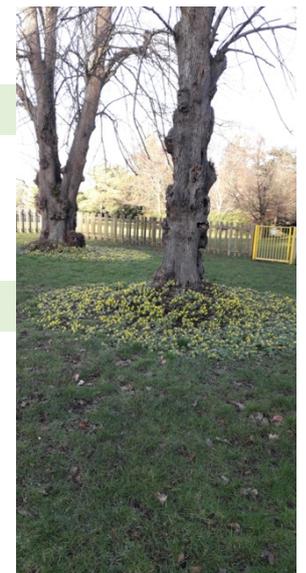


It replaces two older trees in the same spot. The first was planted 20 years ago died of natural causes, and the second was taken out by another falling tree.

Roger Thistle, then Sutton's Deputy Mayor and now a committee member of Friends of Oaks Park, planted the original tree twenty years ago with two fosters carers from the borough. He got in touch about replacing it, and Sutton Council wanted to celebrate this tradition.

The new tree stands in Oaks Park, in the southern part of the London Borough of Sutton. It was brought in by the Planting Team. Over the last year, the team have planted over 9,000 trees,

and this one was the first of ten to be planted that day.



### Website

Our website has undergone a major overhaul over the past year and is still evolving. We hope you have had a chance to explore it ([www.friendsofoakspark.co.uk](http://www.friendsofoakspark.co.uk)) and that you like our new logo. Please use the site to find out more about what's going on and our plans for 2021.

### Facebook Page

We now have a new Facebook page for the Friends and we are using it to communicate with more of you and provide updates. It has proved very useful with the constantly changing situation over the past few months.

### Committee

*Chairman:* Anne Pearcey, *Secretary:* Ray Shepherd, *Treasurer:* Tina Bates, *Publicity:* Anne Jameson, Alyson Elliman, Caroline Kemp, Joyce Llewellyn, Roger Thistle and Derek Yeo

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