

## Woodland Management



Oaks Park has a large area of woodland which needs to be managed. As trees grow, the canopy stops light getting to

the ground reducing biodiversity and leading to a loss of both plant and animal life.

David Warburton, Sutton's Senior Biodiversity Manager, led a starter course teaching us how to manage the woodlands on a long-term basis. It was very well attended. We all enjoyed it immensely and learnt new skills.

We wore hard hats and our work

area was roped off for safety. Most of us had little or no experience of tree felling and no idea what a dead hedge was, except as a result of recent box blight! We learnt how to fell selected trees to open up the canopy then remove some side branches to leave a long branch/log. Some of these were then made into stakes to support the edges of the dead hedge. This is made by laying down the cut branches between vertical posts driven into the ground to keep them in position with larger branches/logs at the bottom. The branches were interwoven for stability providing an excellent habitat for woodland invertebrates and fungi. The wood will rot down eventually, returning all the nutrients to the ground to support new plant growth.

David showed us how to coppice

the hazel by removing the long malleable side shoots from the base leaving the stump to re-grow, providing more strong flexible poles in the future. After a morning of wielding axes and saws we were tired but happy and retired to the cafe for a well-earned cup of tea and reflected on our morning's endeavours.

There will be more woodland management days in the future so keep a look out for them on our website and come to learn and help nature.



Friends of Oaks Park

# Newsletter 2024-25

## From the Chairman

The last 12 months have seen a whirlwind of activity in Oaks Park and some very impressive work by many of the Friends. People have painted, planted, dead-headed,

sold plants, danced, made wedding cake, spent hours identifying plants and taken lots of photos. We've welcomed many visitors, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayoress

of Sutton and seen cattle, sheep, butterflies, bats and other wildlife in the park. I'm sure 2025 will be equally busy.

## Fête Champêtre

The Oaks Mansion which stood in Oaks Park, was built around 1759 and is now marked by a chalk outline. In June 1774, the cream of Georgian Society assembled for a sumptuous Fête Champêtre to mark the marriage of Edward Smith Stanley, heir to the earldom of Derby and Lady Elizabeth Hamilton. It was such a huge event that Parliament closed for the day so the MPs could travel to Carshalton to join in.

The famous architect Robert Adam was commissioned to create a temporary pavilion described as a "magnificent salon ... illuminated and decorated with the utmost elegance and proportion". This was possibly in what is now the car park near the cafe.

The guests arrived in fancy dress, assembled on the lawn, played games and then moved to the lawn by the orangery (now the Grotto). There they were entertained and danced at a masked ball before



partying in the ballroom in the pavilion until the sun rose. A play about the occasion was written by General John Burgoyne called 'Maid of the Oaks' and staged by David Garrick. It premiered at Drury Lane Theatre on 5 November 1774. Sadly, the marriage didn't last. As 2024 was the 250th anniversary of this event, the Friends of Oaks Park decided to hold a celebration on 8th June, with some of the original music, wedding cake, characters in costume, dancing and a talk about the Fête to bring the history of the park alive. We were grateful for a grant from Sutton Council's Community Fund to help with the costs. It was delightful to see so many people, including The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Sutton at the celebration of this important event in the life of Oaks Park.



## The Joy of Litter Picking...

Litter picks are very satisfying and make a big difference to the environment. They make you feel you have achieved something really useful. Most importantly, they improve the Park. The visual effect is instant.

Amazingly, it is very rewarding filling

a black sack with stuff, such as an odd bottle or can found in a bush, crisp packet, mug or car number plate. Capturing a slippery bottle with your grabber and getting it into your black sack first time is great. Then you wonder what you will find next. Come along and try it.



## Green Flag



We were very proud to be awarded a Green Flag for 2024. This shows that Oaks Park is safe, well-cared for and supported by a strong volunteer group. It also reflects how well we work with the Council and Ilhan and the team in the café.

## The Friends Committee

Chairman: Anne Pearcey

Secretary: Ray Shepherd

Treasurer: Tina Bates

Publicity: Anne Jameson

Committee: Chris Shorthouse, Roger Thistle, Judith Witts, Derek Yeo

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## Thank You

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our work and events particularly Ilhan, Phyllis and the café team, Mark Dalzell, Ian Wolstencroft and the Council

Parks Team, Tony Moorhouse our gardener, Ben Morris & the Trees Team, David Warburton, John Phillips, Elizabeth Andrews, Waitrose Banstead, STAG (Surrey

Trees and Gardens) and Wallington Nursery. Finally, a big thank you to the Committee for their endless energy and the commitment of so many Friends.

## Sutton Landscape Artist of the Year

Sutton Parks ran their Landscape Artist Competition for the third year and again Oaks Park were the first of four parks to take part. Unfortunately the weather was abysmal, wet and very cold but twelve people did participate with only one entrant dropping out due to the rain.

The judges, Dawn Fielding, Emma Ratcliff and Alison Scrimshaw had a difficult job, the standard was very high. Congratulations to our winners: June Truss and Annie Boyce.



The entries will be exhibited in Sutton Library in November and the overall Borough winners will be chosen. The Friends have agreed to take part next year so all budding artists should watch out for the date next Summer.



## The Jubilee Copse

When we started the Jubilee Copse project to mark the H.M. the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, our target was to plant 30 mature trees. On a lovely spring day in March 2024, we completed the Copse with a total of 49 sponsored trees planted. The families involved had a great time working with Ben Morris and the Council Trees Team and Beeches Tree care. The morning ended with bacon rolls generously provided by the café and lots of photos. Thank you to everyone who worked so hard. It has become a special place for so many people.

We are just finalising our new scheme for sponsoring trees in the park. Please watch the website for more information.



## Rolo's Bench

Oaks Park has so many memorial benches that with the Council, we have taken the decision to run a waiting list for any future requests to sponsor a bench. Opportunities do come up but they're quite rare. We were delighted to help the Hutton family adopt the bench by the café in memory of their beautiful chocolate labrador Rolo, a very regular visitor to Oaks Park. They are pictured with Rolo's successor, Beau.



## Downland Day



Over 100 people came to our second Downland Day. We had animals grazing and a scything demonstration with teaching and hands on experience again. David Warburton led two walks around the wild flower meadows. We learnt about different flowering grasses, which ones were true chalk grassland grasses and which, such as the perennial rye grass, were there because the soil was enriched by passing dogs! Knapweed and Yellow Rattle were in flower as were different types of plantain. David explained how

important flowers such as Kidney Vetch are to the life cycle of endangered butterflies, particularly the chalk blue.

The new butterfly bank was in full of flower and buzzing with insect life. It is a haven for wildlife. The team from Old Lodge Farm, who brought the animals, also brought their home-grown chalk grassland plants for us to sell. This generated lots of questions and sales as many people want to grow plants suitable for our very alkaline soil and which also help local wildlife. Please visit our Butterfly Bank and chalk scrapes and follow the progress of the plants there.



## Plans for 2025

Expect the unexpected! We have lots of plans and ideas and remain committed to encouraging people to enjoy the park and appreciate its glorious trees and parkland. We aim to renovate the Bakehouse to create a small visitor/information centre and finish re-chalking the mansion outline (started in November 2023). Sutton Landscape Artist 2025 competition will take place in July and we'll be doing all we can to support our gardener Tony, including dead-heading, planting and litter picks. The revised Tree Trail leaflet will be published and guided tree trails will recommence in April. Please get involved.



## Replanting the Strawberry Tree Bed

At the end of the formal gardens, down the side path opposite the ancient Wisteria, there is a circular bed with a Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) at its centre. It did have hedging dividing it into segments which died because of box blight. We decided to redesign and replant the bed.

In 19th Century, during Italian unification, the Strawberry Tree became one of the national symbols of Italy because its green leaves, white flowers and red fruits are the colours of the Italian flag. This inspired us to plant a selection of perennial plants using the same colours to give interest all year. On 5th May 2024, the Friends replanted the bed using some of our own plants and some purchased at a very reasonable price from Wallington Nursery. Most of the funding came from Waitrose in Banstead. We used grasses to divide the bed into segments and then planted green ferns and a variety of shrubs and herbaceous plants. We'll be adding spring bulbs soon. The bed is slowly taking shape. We hope you will enjoy visiting it and watching how it develops.

