

Friends of Whirlow Brook Park (FoWP) Newsletter

Issue 18 - Autumn 2024



Registered charity no 1204004

Message from the Chair

It is always a joy to be in the park during the summer months, but equally so when the autumn tints appear and the glancing light picks out new aspects. We have achieved a huge amount during the last quarter, starting with the hugely successful launch of the Blue Trail (which is proving very popular with families) and finishing with a complete restoration of the children's maze.

In between we tackled Himalayan balsam, held three more concerts, conducted a survey of park users, staged a Heritage Open Day in the hall and made a good start on clearing the community orchard. All that on top of the usual twice-monthly gardening sessions! The SW LAC kindly paid for two swales which Tom Collier, our ranger, has put in for us. These are dry ditches which will help to retain water during periods of flash flooding. They will no doubt be put to the test this winter!

We continue to monitor the weather and encourage the wildlife and are now linked to the Wildlife Trust's 'Nature Counts' system for recording purposes. Friends and members of the community have enjoyed bird and bat walks and wildflower surveys.

It never ceases to amaze me how much we achieve through small injections of money and by using volunteer help. Without this support the park would be in a sorry state and the Council staff would be demoralised.

Autumn is here, the fungi are due to appear any day and soup will be back on the menu in the cafe. The Autumn Plant and Produce Fair is on the 5th October - do come along to support them and if you can contribute a pot of jam or a plant, then so much the better!

Best wishes

Shelagh Woolliscroft, Chair of FoWP

Plant Swap/Sale Oct 5th

Following our very successful plant swap/sale in May we have decided to hold another one in October. It will run from 10.00-12.00 on Saturday 5 October. Please bring any plants to swap or donate. We also hope to have some food produce such as jams and chutney for sale too. And our resident sharpener Geoff will be on hand to sharpen small garden tools for a donation.



Fungi Walk - 11 October

Another popular event - Join Ziggy Senkans from SCC for a fascinating walk and talk to discover fungi in the park. Learn lots that you didn't know about fungi. Meet at the bottom car park (opposite the café) at 2.00pm on Friday 11 October. Numbers are limited so please book by emailing Shelagh Woolliscroft at shelagh.woolliscroft@gmail.com



Blue Trail Launch

After months of planning and designing, our Blue Trail was officially opened on 28 July by our Patron Sir Jamie Benton Jones and his son Blake aged 13. Sir Jamie's ancestors lived at Whirlow Brook Hall in the 1920-30s, but Sir Jamie now lives in Irnham, Lincolnshire. Sir Jamie said: "I am delighted to be here with my family, and pleased that my son Blake is going to open the trail. The Friends work tirelessly to improve the park and this Trail will enhance it even more." Blake did the honours by digging in the Blue Trail signpost to mark the start of the trail. He thanked the Friends for inviting him, saying it was his first visit to the park which he thought was lovely.



Sir Jamie (right) and cousin Andrew Renwick at the Launch

He then led children and parents around the Trail looking for things to spot. These included metal birds in the trees, wooden animals including deer, a rabbit, badger and a fox. When coming upon the story chair they encountered a riddle-telling white rabbit (courtesy of Kath Wiles, one of our volunteers). Further along the trail is a waterfall or cascade, and a bug hotel with magnifier for children to get a closer look at nature. Over a small bridge, there's a newt carved in stone and a frog and toad set into the stream. A willow moth and fairy doors complete the trail. The trail is easy to follow tracing the beautifully carved wooden roundels set into the ground.

Shelagh Woolliscroft, Chair of the Friends, said: "This trail had been achieved through a generous donation from the Sheffield Town Trust, along with other donations and fund raising activities. I want to thank all the donors and local sculptors

who made the newt, frog, toad and moth. Thanks also to Henry Boot Ltd for clearing and building the trail paths, and our own volunteers who designed it and made it happen. It's been a real team effort! The trust's donation has also paid for a repair of the rainbow maze, which volunteers are currently working on." Catherine Downes, one of our volunteers, explained the purpose of the Blue Trail which was to introduce families to lesser-known parts of the park where they could have fun and be creative, whilst learning more about the wildlife and the need to care for nature.



Blake opening the Blue Trail



Children leading the Blue Trail

Sounds of Summer concerts

On the same day as the Blue Trail Launch we held our third concert in the afternoon with some great music from Collage and The Crafters. We had a new bigger gazebo for the bands. The park was packed because of the beautiful weather, so we had our biggest audience so far, with people enjoying picnics in the sunken garden. Our audience even got up to dance! Takings from this one, including the raffle, came to around £590. August was not so sunny but still a reasonable sized audience enjoyed The Domino Effect and the Sons of Rodger with takings around £400. Our last concert in September was a real round off to the year, despite a chilly day.



The Sons of Rodger

We listened to the dulcet tones of Bungalow Bliss and the very entertaining Treebeard. A big thanks to all this year's bands and a special thank you to 'promoter' Michael Richards, who sourced some amazing bands. Please do try and support the concerts next year- they are good fun and bring in much needed donations.



The Crafters



Bungalow Bliss



The Domino Effect



Treebeard

Volunteer Update

We have been very lucky this year in hosting a number of corporate volunteer days to help with our work in the park. In July, we had the first of our volunteers from Henry Boot Construction Ltd. They helped clear the canal that drains water down the side of the drive. They also got stuck into the mammoth task of clearing scrub and brambles from the site of the former orchard that we hope to restore. (See Orchard Update on page 8) Then in September, we had two separate team days with Cadent Gas. It is amazing what we can achieve with the extra help from a group of (younger) volunteers. If you know of any companies who wish to volunteer as part of their corporate social responsibility then please get in touch. We'd love to have them!

fowp@friendsofwhirlowbrookpark.org.uk



Cadent Gas volunteers

Helping to stop the floods

A big thanks to Ranger Tom Collier and the SWEEP team who recently installed two 'swales' in the park, one behind the Hall and one near the new Blue Trail. These are land drains put in to help divert the flow of water during periods of heavy rain, such as we experienced earlier this year. The Shelter Café and Whirlow Brook Hall were both affected by the flooding, with the café having to close for a couple of days. The park itself also became very muddy and dangerous underfoot.



Clearing the site of the former orchard



Volunteers from Henry Boot Construction Ltd



Picnic in the Park

On a sunny day in August a few families from across Sheffield caught the bus out to Whirlow Brook Park to have a picnic together, enjoy this beautiful space, play parachute games, engage in some craft activities and explore the new family trail. We love to see the park busy with different groups and activities. Thanks to volunteer Catherine Downes for organising it. A great time was had by all!



Playing the parachute game

Heritage Open Day

We were very grateful that Vine Hotels allowed us to open up the Hall as part of the national celebration of Heritage Open Days and provided refreshments for our visitors, many of whom hadn't visited the park before. Our displays of historic photos of the gardens and the work done recently by our volunteers provided lots of interest and both the tours of Whirlow Brook's global trees were fully booked. Sue Turner led

enthusiastic visitors in exploring the grounds, looking in particular at trees that have their origins from around the world.

Much praise was also given by visitors to the recently opened children's Blue Trail with promises to return with younger family members to explore further.

While the Open Day was a successful promotional event it also raised funds through donations and book selling for the orchard project. Thanks go to our volunteers who spent the day engaging visitors, answering questions and promoting the park.



Visitors at the Heritage Open Day

Volunteer days

Volunteer sessions run from 9.30am-12.15pm on the first Saturday and third Monday of the month. We meet on the grass square just below the top car park. No need to book - just turn up! There will be a sign-in sheet and health and safety information for new volunteers. We will also ask for an emergency contact number for a partner, friend or neighbour. (Under GDPR, we don't keep this data and it is shredded after each session).

Please wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves. There are a variety of gardening tools to use but you are welcome to bring your own. Don't forget to bring a drink. Biscuits provided!

Dates for 2024

Sat 5 Oct, Mon 21 Oct, Sat 2 Nov, Mon 18 Nov, Sat 7 Dec and Mon 16 Dec (TBC).

Please don't come to the sessions if you feel unwell or have a positive covid test.

Going Batty in September

Katie Smith from the South Yorkshire Bat Group (SYBG) led a bat survey in September. Here's how it went - an account from volunteer Elizabeth Birks



“When bats want to find potential prey in the vicinity, they send out an echolocation signal and wait to see how long it takes to get back to them. The bats that hunt in trees send out low volume short signals. The ones we found this evening were brown long eared bats that signal at a frequency of about 30 kHz. We found a few under the trees to the right of the main path as you approach the Hall. On Katie's device you could see little splurges of signals covering a wide range of frequencies. My device was set to 45 kHz and at first I found nothing even when other devices were clicking away. These were finding common pipistrelles. I needed to twiddle the control and then I could hear the clicks too. I tried setting the control to 55 kHz to find the soprano pipistrelle, but I had no luck. No one else did either. One or two of the tall trees have some bat boxes attached, but by the time we got to them it was quite dark so it's likely that any bats that normally roost there were already out and about looking for food. If their young were born in spring, the parents spent a lot of energy caring for them for the first few months, but now they'll be pretty good at fending for themselves. By pointing our torches up at the branches we had little chance of seeing the bats, as that's probably what made them steer clear of us. They prefer a nice dark, noise-free habitat, but if there are lights then some species will delight in the potential for insects to gather round the lights and they can then zoom in and eat them. Small insects can be caught whilst flying but to catch a moth or beetle, they will need to find a place to roost, and spend a bit of time

devouring the bits of the insect that they can eat.

The children who came on the walk, enjoyed being out in the open air and experiencing the freedom of the park, looking for bats, but some of them were now ready to go home. We'd started off in the twilight at 7:30pm - and by then it was about 9:30pm, so adults and children had done very well to keep going. I must say it was a warm, dry evening with very little wind, so we probably had ideal conditions for us and for the bats!”



Follow us on Facebook

We have now reached over 1K Facebook followers! (1,202 to be precise) But we'd like more! Please follow us on Facebook - the more likes and followers we get the more exposure we will have to spread the word about our lovely park and recruit more volunteers! Search for <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofwhirlowbrookpark>



Twitter or 'X'

Please follow us on X- [Twitter@FriendsBrook](https://twitter.com/FriendsBrook)
<https://twitter.com/FriendsBrook>

FoWP Contact Information

If you wish to volunteer and/or join the friends please contact us at:

Email: fowp@friendsofwhirlowbrookpark.org.uk

Website:

www.friendsofwhirlowbrookpark.org.uk

Facebook @friendsofwhirlowbrookpark

Twitter or X @FriendsBrook

Telephone: 0114 255 8948

Registered Charity no. 1204004

Amazing Maze

There is a new children's maze down near the horseshoe bed to the side of the Hall, which has replaced the old battered one which had been there for over 30 years. The new maze is made from recycled plastic bollards and hopefully should last for years. It is aimed at under 5s and will soon be included as part of the Blue Trail. We are indebted to Michael Parker, a local retired builder, for all his hard work and dedication in planning and constructing it. Michael and his neighbour Jack Copley also made the Story Chair, the Fairy Doors and the wooden animals in the woods. We'd also like to thank the Town Trust for helping to fund the maze. It will be officially opened on 28 October, but it is open for children now. So take your little ones to explore!



The old maze



Michael Parker with the new maze

Wildlife Monitoring

Events like the bird, bat and fungi walks are a great way to learn more about wildlife and discover what currently lives within or passes through the park. Our wildlife monitoring team, a small group of enthusiastic members, have recently changed their way of recording and can now see what others have entered, enabling us to build up a picture of our resident wildlife and those visiting seasonally. The more data we have, the more informed we can be when making decisions about future developments within the park. From observations entered so far, we know that robins, coal tits and blue tits are our most common birds, but kingfishers, chiffchaffs, blackcaps and bullfinches have also been seen. All our data is passed on to Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust for inclusion in their records.



We would welcome anyone who visits the park to help with the monitoring, either with one particular animal, plant or fungi or more generally with any observations that are made. It's not necessary to visit on a regular basis or have any specialist knowledge, all sightings are useful and training will be given.

If you are happy to help or would like more information, please contact Sue Turner either in person at an event or on s.e.turner@icloud.com.

Community Orchard in the Park

Not many people know that there used to be a small orchard between the main drive and the south west boundary hedge. Three apple trees are still there, stoically bearing fruit, amongst a mass of bramble and nettle, self-sown saplings and ground ivy. Volunteers from Henry Boot Ltd and Cadent, plus a forthcoming day with folk from Gripple Ltd, are helping us to clear the area. In October we meet Area Parks Manager, Andy Mumford to take stock and work up a design. We need to decide how many trees can be accommodated, what types of fruit should be grown, how biodiversity can be maintained, where to put a natural play area and what to do about the huge Leylandii hedge along the boundary etc. We will be holding a community consultation morning from 10.00am to 12 noon on Saturday 2 November when people can view the site, look at a draft plan and make suggestions. We hope the trees can be sourced locally and that Friends plus other local people will be involved in the planting at some point in 2025.



Surveying the former orchard site before work began

We have been raising funds for this project throughout the year and a grant application has been made to the South Yorkshire Community Foundation. A Just Giving page is in preparation but meanwhile individual donations, including those made in memory of people who loved the park, would be very welcome. We are planning to make a permanent record of these, with illustrations of before and after.



Making progress



We found the gate!