

Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Park (FoGH)

Newsletter 24 Autumn 2017



picture courtesy of Tunbridge Wells Museum

A Summer of Activities

The first sign of the summer holidays this year was a few hundred people showing up on the Lower Football Pitch, to see Quantum Theatre perform Alice Through the Looking Glass. Locals came from all sides of the Park, with chairs, rugs and hampers to watch the free performance. Despite the threat of rain, the show went off without a hitch, and the crowd saw the performers use a fantastic range of props to tell their tale.



Crowds at Alice Through the Looking Glass

At the Wildlife Footprints event, young and old learnt paw-prints by following a trail of different prints from UK mammals. The trail went from the deer in the woods, to the rabbit near the bowling green. On returning to the Hub, children made their own clay print of one of the prints to take home. Some of the groups even spotted a "husky" print in the woods as they searched.



Rolling Pin Making in Hilbert Woods was an exciting morning. 7 – 11 year olds (and their parents) learnt how to use bowsaws and scout knives to make their very own rolling pin from coppiced hazel branches. They started by splitting pin wood to create handles and then whittled down the sides to smoothen out the finish. When it was fit for use in their own kitchen, they got to toast their success with a celebratory marshmallow.



Making rolling pins



A finished rolling pin



A paw print on the trail



Painting plant pots

Early August brought stories from Storysock (and the tale of Litter Bug Doug), as well as Mug Painting in the Hub. This turned into plant pot painting after 80 mugs were painted in the first 40 minutes!

This summer has also given locals an opportunity to learn more about the Park's wildlife.

Ian Beavis led walks and talks on the Grasshoppers and Crickets found in the Park, as well as the Dragonflies and Damselflies. There was also an opportunity to learn how to identify different moths at two Moth Blitz events.

During the Flower Power event, families were guided around the Park looking for 10 specific native species. They also identified others they passed along the way. We finished in the orchard making flower crowns, using willow and a few flowers collected on the walk.

Steff D'Agorne, Community Engagement Officer



Making crowns



Flower crowns

Chairman's Report

Well, the weather never seems to do anything by halves these days! There was a prolonged period of near drought during April, May and June, when the main growing season should have been under way. July brought a torrential storm, the cause of major damage to the surfaces around the Marnock Lake, spoiling all the new landscaping. As you will see in further articles, this is by no means a new phenomenon. It explains why this was such a good site to collect water for the reservoirs in the 19th century. Meanwhile, vegetation growth in the wetlands has gone from strength to strength and increasing species of wildlife have been recorded, which should establish well in the coming years.



Community Engagement Officer Steff D'Agorne organised a brilliant array of events for the summer holidays. This has encouraged many more regular visitors and helps to justify the money spent by the Heritage Lottery Fund on the refurbishment. The volunteers with Steff and KHWP have worked hard to allow our native species of plants to flourish, clearing away invasive growth. A big thank you to all those who make time to help.

It has been rewarding to see the increased uptake on the use of the Hub too. Family celebrations and smaller scale events are ideal and it is always a warm and cosy place to hold an event whatever the weather. During the coming winter it could be a good place for small classes or clubs to use as a meeting place.

There is an interesting diary of events for the autumn, including a printmaking demonstration on Sunday 24th September. The Etchers of Seal Chart, led by Lawrence Jenkins, will take people through the process of producing this detailed and finely textured work. We will be holding another Fish and Chips Quiz Night in November, following the popularity of the event in March. Whatever your interests may be, I hope you will find something to attract you to the Park this coming autumn.

Liz Edwards

Camden Road Education, Arts & Theatre Enterprise

For full details: www.camdenroad.org & www.facebook.com/createTW



CREATE Community Choir.....Rehearsals on Thursdays 7.15pm

At the Church of Christ, Commercial Road, off Camden Road

A FUN informal choir for those who enjoy singing: no auditions, just turn up & join in!

Voluntary donation of around £3 a week: contact choir@camdenroad.org

Nose in a Book Night.....First Thursday of every month 8.30pm

At the Church of Christ, Commercial Road.

An informal hour sharing favourite pieces of writing based on a theme & bringing them alive with performance. (Unhappy to read in public? Someone else can read your piece)

table 8

The Cafe at the Hub

Light Meals

Cakes & Biscuits

Milkshakes & Ice Cream

Hot & Cold drinks

Daily Specials

Open Daily 9am – 5pm

Update from the Parks Department

Since the last update we have appointed a new monitoring officer to inspect the parks and sports pitches. Robert Schembri joins us from Bromley Council with plenty of experience and will be keeping a close eye on the standards in the Park.

We also welcome Simon as a replacement for Tom, who has gone to work with another team. Simon has already made a huge impact and has taken ownership of the Park with plenty of enthusiasm and ideas. Do take the time to say hello and welcome him to the Park.

I'm afraid the rest of my update is taken up with the storm damage we experienced a few weeks ago.

I'm sure many of you have seen the devastation around the Marnock Lake area after the heavy storm and torrential downpour. Most of the sub base from the paths has washed down and ended up in the lake, resulting in the collapse of the paths and the wall edge of the lake.

In addition, there has been damage to the access chamber leading to the main sewer that runs under the Park. As a result, raw sewage has entered the lake, causing algae to form on the surface. While this will not damage the plants, we will need to drain the lake and clear the debris from the lake base.

We are currently discussing the options for repairs with Southern Water and have appointed our engineers, Watermans, to oversee the repair works. It will be important to make sure measures are put in place so we don't see a reoccurrence of the damage in the future. Mary Hughes carried out research and it seems this has been a problem since the 1880's! (See page 4.)

Sadly, this is not going to be quick process, and it's likely the lake area will be closed for a considerable amount of time while work is carried out. While I appreciate many are curious to see the damage, can I please ask that everybody stays out of the lake area. Please remember, don't let your dogs near the water.

Enjoy the rest of the summer and, as always, if you have any questions about the Park, please do contact me on parks@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Peter Every – TWBC Parks & Sports Team Leader



A Summer of Activities contd

The Great Get Together

We had decided not to have a big Family Funday this year, but it seemed a good idea to join in the national event of The Big Lunch in June. This year it was also a celebration of the life of the late MP Jo Cox, organised by her husband Brendan, and called The Great Get Together. We elected to have a picnic on Sunday 18th June.



Sack racing

FoGH bought a range of games using some of the Heritage Lottery Funds available to us for purchasing capital goods. We also decided to get some accessories for a 'selfie booth', although this was less successful!

We realised we'd need to be on the football pitch to have somewhere flat for games. On the day, it was boiling hot by 10am, so we opted for the corner with shade from the trees. It was a well-attended day, although we did all rather huddle in the said shade.

The picnic carried on until about 4pm, with some ukulele playing, and a visit from Greg Clark MP (FoGH patron). We shall be discussing FoGH event plans for 2018 towards the end of this year, but this was an easy day for the committee to host,

made better by good weather. Our thanks to all those who came and to the ukulele players.

The ukulele players



National Playday

A rain-filled affair this year for the Kent High Weald Partnership run event! Luckily the morning stayed dry enough for many to enjoy the excitement of cardboard boxes, mud kitchen, face painting and tug of war.



Storytelling in the woods



Having fun at Playday



The mud kitchen

By the afternoon the crowds were sheltering with picnics under the big oak trees in Hilbert Woods, while nearby children were making dens and mud faces on trees.

The event finished in the woods, with storytelling under a tarpaulin, where children sat on logs to enjoy the wonders of Storysock. Thanks to KHWP and all the volunteers.

Steff D'Agorne



News from the FoGH Committee

Since the last newsletter we have heard that the sculpture for the Park, 'Gneiss', will be delayed, with installation now due next year. The grind-rail in the Skate Park is also on hold until an opportunity for further funding next year.

Our big bug-bear with the council – the vast amount of loose gravel left on the paths – looks like being resolved by a range of volunteer sweeping events with Steff. Perhaps entitled "You Moaned about It Now Sweep It".....

Another issue raised was anti-social behaviour: don't forget this should always be reported using 101 so the incident is logged. FoGH are concerned by the proposal by TWBC to take 2% and 66 trees from Calverley Grounds as part of the Civic Centre Development. This could set a precedent in terms of 'borrowing' land from parks and green spaces, but we have been reassured about this by the Leader of the Council, Cllr David Jukes.



How 'Gneiss' may look



Recent national coverage showed the risks faced by parks and green spaces from development and lack of government funding. It emphasised the need for good and active Friends groups!!

Christmas Shopping Already? Don't forget, you can buy a year's membership of FoGH for friends and family for just £10.00, and help us put on events and carry on our aims to preserve, promote and enhance the Park.

Carolyn Gray

The Power of Water: Recent & Historical

The violent overnight storm of 19th July this year and accompanying torrential rainfall caused substantial damage in the Marnock Lake area. Water from a large storm drain on the railway side erupted through the paths and flooded into the lake.

The paths are ripped open in many places by the force of the water escaping. Gravel, debris and edging bricks were dumped in the lake, which turned milky with sediment. The material washed into the lake has caused algal growth, which is the unpleasant floating green scum. It looks unsightly and can lead to deoxygenation of the water, with a harmful effect on pond life.



Marnock Lake after the storm

The damage took place near a manhole cover. During the Heritage Lottery Funded refurbishment, contractors working during heavy rain saw the manhole cover explode up on a fountain of water. For safety reasons, this cover was securely fastened down.

However, it appears that during exceptionally heavy rain, the storm drain is overwhelmed near the cover. On previous occasions, the water escaped by forcing the cover off. But with this fixed down, it shot up through the paths and into the lake.

I have been researching the history of the Park and there is a history of problems in this area caused by water. The vivid descriptions are from contemporary reports in the Kent & Sussex Courier.

In the 1870s, the drain ran beneath two reservoirs. Once part of Calverley Waterworks, these were used as First and Second Class swimming baths. In 1880, Tunbridge Wells Bathing Association complained that the Second Class Bath had been out of use "for nearly the best part of two seasons". "...The sewer which runs under it having caused the bottom to give way and let the water out." I believe it is the same drain (shown in red on the map).



Debris in the lake

In 1889, the Park opening was postponed following "a storm of unparalleled fury" accompanied by "hail of unparalleled severity." "Immense volumes of water" overwhelmed the storm drain, even though it was "a very capacious structure in which a man can almost stand upright." "A large iron trap covering a manhole.... was forcibly lifted with a report... like an explosion". "A column of water shot up four or five feet and began pouring over the path and down the slope". "The... torrent of water carried with it earth, gravel, plants, shrubs.... into the lake."

There was a similar incident in June 1913 during a severe storm. "A manhole cover, together with the brickwork surrounding it, was blown off, and hurled several feet away." "The water rushed out in a torrent and filled the lake." Water overflowed into the Open-air Swimming Bath, which had to be emptied, cleaned and refilled. In June 1922 "a great hailstorm" caused the "main sewer" to overflow into the Open-Air Baths, which again needed emptying and cleaning.

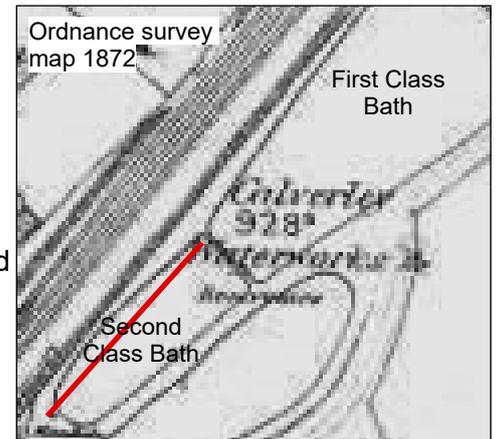
A storm in October 1928 led to "flooding of the outdoor baths". Questions were asked at a meeting of the Town Council about how to prevent this from happening again. Borough Engineer Mr Maxwell advised that "the sewer in question was a large one and when there was an exceptional storm it became charged with storm water." "If the sewer was doubled in size it would not prevent flooding."

During a period of over a hundred years, the power of water has caused disruption and damage. Even if we think it's tamed, hidden away in pipes, it's still strong enough to break out..... **Mary Hughes**

History collected from Kent & Sussex Courier 1873-1950 (©Local World Ltd courtesy of The British Library Board) via British Newspaper Archive



Damage to the path near the railway



The path to the lake

October 1987: Remembering the Great Storm

On the night of 15th – 16th October 1987, a powerful storm struck the UK. The greatest damage occurred in the south-east, with gusts of over 81 mph recorded continuously for up to 4 hours. Around 15 million trees were lost and thousands of homes were without power for over 24 hours. Fallen trees on roads and railways caused major transport delays.

30 years on, local residents share their memories.

“We spent most of the night calming our children, who were upset by the roaring noise of the wind. Sheds appeared in gardens where they didn't belong, one completely intact, but no contents inside. There were no trains or electricity and all schools were closed.



Police advice was to "stay at home unless your journey is VITAL". Roof slates/tiles or chimney stacks could fall onto the pavements and most roads were blocked by damaged cars and debris. Pavements were covered by leaves, twigs or branches.

The photo is of children from the Montessori Nursery School, studying the trees blown down by the 'Great Wind'! They were very surprised that the roots were so short and didn't go into the ground as far as they imagined. As the school was in the old British Restaurant building, we were surrounded by fallen trees and the Park lost about 40 trees in all.”

Linda Lewis

“I was woken by the noise of tiles leaving my neighbours roof... When the BBC went off the air I realised it was serious, and retreated to the upstairs, landing away from windows, two dogs leaning on me. That morning I heard on the radio that all schools in Kent were closed so I relaxed (I was a teacher).

I remember the joy of two small boys, when I reassured their mother she didn't need to take them to school. I took the dogs to the Park by the Grosvenor Bridge entrance. I found I could go no more than two or three yards into the Park, as the paths were blocked by fallen trees. Later that day, when the wind had calmed a bit, I went back with my camera.”

Dorothy Swann



“The gale force winds roared and buffeted the house, the effect increased by scaffolding on the south side. The noise increased to a shriek and debris was flying by the window. The lightning danced spectacularly, and within seconds the lights were out.

The constant part of this storm was equivalent to a heavy gust in a gale, but the heavy gusts in this Force 11 were something else. A bread delivery tray flew by at head height for the complete length of Dorking Road, crashing into the trees in the Park.

By the morning the place was a wreck, many trees down, broken branches and blackened leaves everywhere, burnt by the sea salt in the air. Astonishingly, our bay and apple trees survived relatively unscathed.”

Pete Smith



So what can you find in the wetlands?

Since the boardwalk was completed last summer, nature has been creeping back into the wetland area. The three slow-flowing pools provide great places for invertebrates and vertebrates (despite the iron-rich chalybeate water). The dipping platforms allow us to take a closer look at what is colonising (or recolonising) the slightly murky red water. We have hosted many pond dips over the past six months, allowing us to uncover what lies beneath the surface.



Smooth newt

The largest creatures were amphibians, common frogs and smooth newts. Having caught multiple individuals at pond dipping events, and seen many near the surface, I conclude we have a healthy newt population.

The most entertaining invertebrates were dragonfly nymphs. We watched in awe as a small nymph (the size of my little finger nail) shot out extendable jaws and grabbed a mayfly nymph. It ate the whole insect in seconds! (We quickly separated them from the rest.)



Broad-bodied chaser m.

Fortunately the wetland has a good diversity of dragonflies. Most often seen are broad-bodied chasers, emperors and common darters. Dragonflies spend most of their lives underwater as nymphs, for up to four years. They emerge on marginal vegetation as a dragonfly.

We also see a wide range of damselflies: most common are large red, azure, blue-tailed and common blue.



Greater water boatman

The other smaller invertebrates include: mayfly nymph, non-biting midge larvae, caseless caddisfly larvae, water flea, greater water boatman, whirligig beetles, pond skaters and beetle larvae. To name but a few!

Considering our wetland is only a year old in its current shape, I am delighted with the broad range of creatures. It provides a refuge for invertebrates that start their lives underwater, frogs and newts, even an occasional duck.

So next time you are passing through the wetlands, take time to stop and look off the end of the boardwalk, as

who knows what you might spot!

Steff D'Agorne



Pond dipping



Dragonfly nymph



Common darter m.



Common blue damselfly

Sport Report

Bowls (see <https://www.facebook.com/GrosvenorBowls/>)

A fairly successful season for Grosvenor Bowls Club so far. The weather has been kind and we've won more friendly matches than we've lost. And had a great time in the process.

The men's league team had a strong finish, but will drop a division next year. There was success for Grosvenor players in the Kent County competitions. Graham Bridges reached the men's divisional finals and Jo Cartwright was in a Kent final on the ladies' side. Jo represented Kent in the National Championships, losing to Suffolk's Katherine Rednall (current indoor world champion).



The Triples: Stuart, Steve & Graham

In the Tunbridge Wells Open Tournament, Grosvenor had four men in the singles quarter finals, with Lionel Hanmore going out at the semi-final stage. Defending triples champions Graham Bridges, Steve Jenner and Stuart Moaby reached the final again, but finished runners-up to a strong Calverley team.

Our own club competitions have gone well. We invite anyone who fancies having a go to our practice nights on Wednesdays from 6pm.

Jo Cartwright

Football (see <http://www.wksl.org.uk/>)

St John's Yard will be playing on the top football pitch (gold shirts and black shorts). The West Kent season starts on Sunday 3rd September, with the first home match on 17th September against Speldhurst Rangers.

Mary Hughes



A home match

View from the Allotment



Courgette plants

It's been a funny old year. The heat wave in June dried the soil and gave seedlings a slow start in the ground. But all those trips to the watering well paid off.

We are enjoying rainbow chard, beetroot, lettuces, French beans, runner beans and TONNES of courgettes. Far too many to eat ourselves, which

my neighbours are very pleased about!

Another consequence of the heat wave is the early arrival of the blackberries. Unfortunately we had too much rain in the last few weeks and not enough sun. Despite their size and juiciness, they are lacking in their usual sweet flavour and are a bit dull and lifeless.

The winter veg (purple sprouting broccoli, kale, Japanese over winter onions) are in. Fingers are crossed that they keep growing and avoid being eaten by caterpillars and wood pigeons, both of which seem to manage to get through nets.

Emma Melville

Dogs in the Park

This is our little Florence, who is a Cavachon (a King Charles Cavalier Spaniel and Bichon Frise cross). She is mostly white in colour, with slightly darker Blenheim floppy ears like her King Charles father, and a few faint patches on her back.



Florence

We got her in 2013 at twelve weeks old. Florence is now four, but quite small and often mistaken for a puppy. She loves people and always comes up to say hello. Everyone she meets in the Park wants to take her home!

She loves to explore the woods and paths of Hilbert and often runs through the long grass of the orchard. Unlike most dogs, she's not bothered about chasing after a stick or a ball, but she does love a pine cone!

Florence is an extremely loyal little dog and often trots along at our feet like a little white shadow. She has the kindest eyes we've ever seen and is very much part of our family!

Simon, Laura & Elinor Blake

Grasshoppers and Crickets in the Park

Grosvenor & Hilbert Park is rich in grasshoppers and crickets, with 12 resident species, over a quarter of the British total. They are typical of high summer when fully mature, although the less conspicuous nymphs or larvae can be found earlier. The question often asked is how to tell grasshoppers from crickets. The answer is easy: grasshoppers have antennae shorter than the body, crickets have long, thread-like antennae.



Oak Bush-cricket f

Most of the Park's species live in long grass or low vegetation like bramble patches in sunny places (some crickets). The exception is the Oak Bush-cricket, which lives high up in trees and is rarely seen unless blown down or attracted to lights at night.

Grasshoppers and some crickets can be recognised by their characteristic songs, made by rubbing their hind legs against their wings. The two sexes use songs to communicate while camouflaged in foliage.

The easiest song to pick out is the monotonous chirp of the Field Grasshopper. The Meadow and Common Green Grasshoppers have a more complex song. Starting softly, it builds in volume, then cuts off.



Meadow Grasshopper



Male Field Grasshopper singing to female

Each grasshopper species comes in a huge variety of colours. They can be shades of brown, green or even purple, or combinations of these. All are useful for camouflage, and all coexist in the gene pool as none has a competitive advantage.



Roesel's Bush-cricket

To identify grasshoppers, ignore colour and focus on structural features. For example, Field Grasshoppers have abundant white hairs on the underside, clearly visible in profile, and long wings. Meadow Grasshoppers have wings clearly shorter than the body. Common Green Grasshoppers have long wings but no hairs.



Common Green Grasshopper



Speckled Bush-cricket

Crickets are much less variable. The two fully winged species are Oak Bush-cricket and the well-named Long-winged Conehead. Once a rare wetland species, it has spread more widely in recent years. Roesel's Bush-cricket is commoner now, and has a bright yellow or green U shape on the side of its body.

The remaining species have always been widespread.

These are the large dull brown Dark Bush-cricket and the smaller Speckled Bush-cricket, which is green but peppered with tiny black specks.

Ian Beavis



Long-winged Conehead



Dark Bush-cricket f

Autumn Event Highlights

- Heritage Open Days at the Hub**.....Friday 8th September 2 – 5pm
Displays on Park history & more. Saturday 9th September 10am – 4pm
New information on the swimming pool. Sunday 10th September from 10.30am
- HODs History Walk** Sunday 10th September 11am – 12.30pm
Guided walk through the Park with insights into the history & wildlife.
Meet at the Hub. Places can be booked through editors@FoGH.org.uk
- Bird, Bat & Bug House Building**.....Saturday 16th September 10.30am – 1pm
By the Hub: drop-in event to make homes for wildlife with FoGH & KWHP.
Children must be accompanied by an adult.
- Etching Event**.....Sunday 24th September 10am – 4pm
Have a go at etching with Seal Chart Etchers at this free drop-in event.
At the Hub. Suitable for all ages. Children must be accompanied by an adult.
- The Big Draw**.....Wednesday 11th October 3:30 – 5:30pm
After-school art event at the Hub on the theme of Living Lines.
All ages, children must be accompanied by an adult. Suggested donation £1.
- National Moth Night**.....Saturday 14th October 9:30 – 11am
Ian Beavis returns to catch late flying moth species in the Park.
Drop-in session at by the Hub. Suitable for all ages.
- Apple Day**.....Saturday 21st October 10.30am – 3pm
By the Oast House. Activities, games & refreshments.
We'll be making juice with our apple press: bring bottles to take some home.
- Mug Painting**.....Wednesday 25th October 2 – 5pm
Booking essential at steff.dagorne@tunbridgewells.gov.uk.
All ages, children must be accompanied by an adult. Suggested donation £2.
- Children's Halloween Party**.....Saturday 28th October 2 – 4pm
Halloween Fun at the Community Hub.
Face painting, art & craft activities. Come in fancy dress.
- FoGH Fish & Chip Quiz Night**.....Saturday 18th November 7pm
The Quiz returns to the Hub by popular demand! Tables of 6: £10 per person.
Booking essential at editors@fogh.org.uk & advise of any dietary requirements.
- Fairies and Goblins**.....Monday 20th November 3:30 – 5:30pm
Children can create a fairy/goblin door from natural materials.
At the Hub. All ages, children must be accompanied by an adult. Suggested donation £1
- Carols with the CREATE Choir**.....Sunday 10th December 2 – 3.30pm
FoGH invite you to join us at the Hub (outside if the weather is good).
Mulled wine, juice & mince pies.

HLF/TWBC conservation tasks most Thursdays & some Mondays: contact Steff D'Agorne

Kent High Weald Partnership volunteer days & events: www.khwp.org.uk/

See posters, www.fogh.org.uk Facebook www.facebook.com/GrosvenorHilbert or Twitter <https://twitter.com/FofGH>

FoGH Contact Details

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To join, contact the Secretary at 41, Dorking Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2LN or on Friendsghrp@aol.com

Our sincere thanks to Tunbridge Wells
Borough Council for all their support
in printing and collating hard copies of
this Newsletter



Other Contacts & Useful Information

TWBC Parks Service	01892 554031
Out of Hours Service	07920 534369
Toilets: Opening Hours	7am - 6pm

Photos & images courtesy of Dave Barnett, Ian Beavis, Simon, Laura & Elinor Blake, Jo Cartwright, Steff D'Agorne, Carolyn Gray, Chris Hughes, Linda Lewis, Richard Perry, Dorothy Swann, Tunbridge Wells Library & Richard Woodfield