



# Newsletter Autumn 2023

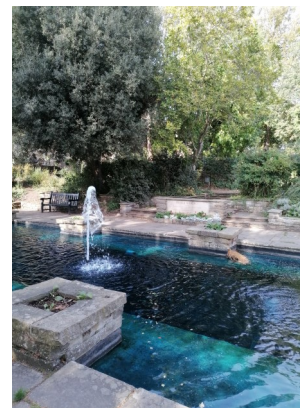
## NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends,

As we go into autumn, daytime temperatures are still well above where they should be, and this is an extra bonus coming after what has been, at least for me, enjoyable summer weather, mostly without temperature extremes. Even the rainy July much benefited plant growth. The park has looked lush and green all summer and needed little extra water. What a change from last year when for most of the season the grass was parched and straw-coloured.

Visitors often comment on how much they enjoy the park's colourful display of roses and seem forgiving at the dire state of some of the plantings in front of the Castle, where over the past several years many of the bushes have died or have become unproductive. This situation has been high on the agenda of the committee since the beginning of my chairmanship in the spring of 2022. During that summer we took receipt of a donation towards our work with the park roses from the Colchester Rose and Horticultural Society which was closing down. Work progressed and I am pleased to be able to report that a large rose order from Cants should be delivered in November for planting before the end of the year. It is it has been sad, however, to see the recent closure of this famous and very long-established rose nursery that has supplied the park since the late 19th century.

You will probably have noticed the steady decline in the state of the Imola pool since its refurbishment a couple of years ago to which the Friends made a generous donation. This has also been an issue repeatedly raised by the committee, and it is therefore good to see that the barriers were removed from around the pool at the beginning of October after it was drained and the sediment removed, and the filtration mechanisms cleaned out. We hope that this will prevent any build up of detritus in the pool in future if the system is regularly maintained. One remaining problem concerns the block work around the pool, some of which it has been too easy for those so inclined, to lift and throw into the pool as has happened on several occasions this year, and the plantings also suffered the same fate. We will continue too press for a satisfactory solution to this problem.



We are aware that anti-social behaviour in the park has sadly continued, particularly in the sensory garden. Such hot spots are well known to those who may be able to deal with the problem, but resources are limited. The amount of attention given to the park and these areas in particular, partly depends on an awareness by the police of the number of incidents reported, so please do call in anything you see in the ways mentioned later in this newsletter.

There have also been staffing problems this year with the ranger team and idverde gardeners, but thankfully enough manpower was made available to manage the planting of the summer bedding which, with the roses, is such an admired feature of the park. Some good recent news is that a new full-time ranger started work at the end of September.

The Friends are a consultative body on management of the park and members of the committee have had meetings during the year with council officials, and more will be had shortly. One issue in particular about which we have raised concerns are proposals in the City Centre Development plan to use the river for activities such as canoeing, paddle boarding and swimming, which would be detrimental to this important wildlife corridor.

I'm pleased to report that there has been a steady increase in Friends' memberships, and with Covid restrictions well behind us, our activities have not only returned to our previous level but much increased. There have been more tree walks, the informal walks in the park have been reinstated, and we have had three stalls in the park during the summer in addition to the one at the Ecofestival and our winter stall selling wreaths and table decorations. The gardening group has also expanded the range of its activities beyond deadheading and pruning roses, particularly in maintaining the sensory garden, and this help is much appreciated by the park's gardeners. A big thank you to all Friends who have helped in making this year so successfully. With best wishes to all, **David**



### Ranger News from the Editor

**This month we say:** Goodbye to **Ranger Bruce** who is retiring. Bruce has been a ranger for a number of years and his love of the park and appreciation of what it contributes to our City has been obvious to all who worked with him. We shall miss him and his cheery smile.

and ...Hello to our new full time member of the team **Ranger Freddie** who started in September and is full of enthusiasm for his new post. He joins recently appointed part time Ranger Simon and Head Ranger Tim.



Also... Thank You to **Tree Team** member **Paul** who as Ranger Paul initiated the renovation of the Imola Pond and has overseen the recent maintenance programme.

***The pond is looking much improved with some structural work to come. There has also been a recent donation to the pond of some large carp.***



## Park security

In September members of the committee attended an open meeting of the Colchester Civic Society who had asked the local police to attend and speak about city centre policing. The question was raised as to how they currently dealt with the many issues the park suffers from including drinking of alcohol, drug using and dealing, plus loud and aggressive behaviour.

It was encouraging to hear that there were, in addition to increased patrols, undercover officers patrolling the Imola Pond and Sensory Garden. However, these patrols are not frequent given the numbers of police in the city centre particularly in the summertime when the need is highest.

The officers said they could not promise to attend immediately when notified of anti social behaviour and people should dial 999 if a crime is being committed or appears to be going to happen. They asked us to report on 101 or online all other incidents.

***They stressed the importance of this as these logged incidents make a significant difference in the number of patrols allocated.***

## Maintenance Work in the park



The repairs to the steps in the upper park leading to the ramparts has been completed. In addition to this most of the upper park railings have received a fresh coat of paint and re-pointing work is being undertaken on the wall alongside Castle Road. The coping stones on the wall below Hollytrees lawn are being bolted on.

### Additional Contact Numbers

Castle Park Emergency Number  
01206 282222

Castle Park Noise Reporting  
01206 769779 - 24 hr out of hours service

01206 282581 - Environmental Health  
General Enquiries **not 24 hrs**

We are pleased to report that the much needed maintenance work on Gray's Summerhouse is also under way. The structure is looking much better and the grills now open fully.



## Childrens' Worksheet



Oakley squirrel created for FoCP by Nick Butterworth

Discover Autumn with

**OAKLEY**

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## **Report of FoCP's Gardening Group      Sue Vokes**

I am happy to report that despite my own back issues, which have prevented me participating fully of late, our group has continued to be very active and productive in the park on Thursday mornings. Cindy, our chairman David, and Marion Murray have each co-ordinated the group most ably in my absence. Happily, we find communication with idverde's wonderful Team Leader, Paul Parker (the term Head Gardener is apparently defunct!) both easy and productive. We have been eight to ten members there each week, even during the torrid heat of June, when we had to cut short our activities by ending early. We only had to contend with morning rain prior to our 9.30am start once, and even then three of us locals turned out to deadhead the roses across the front of the park! Our group members have shown themselves to be commendably reliable and committed to helping make the park look its best despite some of the rose beds being in very poor shape this year, as I am sure you will have noticed, and an earlier serious temporary shortfall in idverde's gardening staff in the park leading to weeds taking over in many of the beds.

Our group has therefore not only been deadheading roses, and sometimes also the pelargoniums, but has undertaken activities from planting up the hanging baskets for the park in the spring, to tidying and cutting back in the late summer and autumn. We tidied some of the raised beds, cut back the lavenders at the front of Hollytrees, did some tidying in the Wetzlar Garden, and a lot of work in the Sensory Garden at the end of summer, which was very overgrown and untidy by then. Cutting back the lavenders and messy tall grasses there and pulling out other climbing weeds has made a substantial difference.



**A full load for the John Deere**



**The Bee Border bursting with colour**

Barbara Burch, who looks after the Bee Border on her own nowadays, has decided to join us on Thursday mornings which means we can help her when required. Paul Parker is hugely grateful for our contribution to the gardening in the park, which he says makes a big difference, and would like to thank all the members of our group for their help this year, as indeed would I and our committee. I am happy to end this report by saying that we always put our FoCP banner up when we work at the front of the park, and we do get many compliments and thanks from passing members of the public, which we appreciate.

**If you would like to join us you would be most welcome and you can email me:**

**[sue.vokes@gmail.com](mailto:sue.vokes@gmail.com)**



## TREE WALKS

There have been an abundance of glorious tree walks this year, several required a waiting list with more people responding than could be taken around.

*With special thanks to members Phil Brew and Ted Benton for leading walks this year and to Diana for organising them.*

**1. Spring Blossom** Diana Hargrave 29th April



**2. University Campus Tree Walk with Phil Brew** 17th June

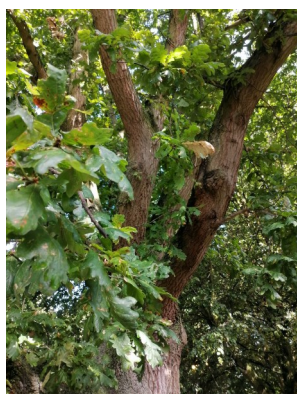


**3. Exploring Nature in the**



**Park & River**

with Ted Benton 12th July



**4. Oak Tree Walk**

Diana Hargrave 22nd September



**5. Awesome Autumn**

Diana Hargrave 14th October

## Wildlife by the Colne in central Colchester

by member Ted Benton

Over recent years there has been a growing awareness of the value of urban green spaces for the protection of our declining wildlife. In the park itself, Friends of Castle Park have maintained a 'Bee Border', planted with bee and pollinator-friendly flowers, and a huge 'bee hotel' has been set up by the dry garden. Outside the formal park, Colchester City Council was persuaded to reduce grass-mowing along parts of the riverside walk, and on Land Lane open space. This was begun in 'Covid Year' 2020, and since then the burgeoning of wildlife has been monitored by myself and other members of Colchester Natural History Society.

The river has always been a crucial wildlife corridor through the town, especially noted for the migratory birds to be seen at the relevant times of year, but now the lake and surrounding areas host many over-wintering species such as Gadwall, Goosander and Little Grebe. Also the habitat now supports many breeding birds in spring and summer, including Grey Wagtail, Green and Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Cetti's Warbler and many more. One regular observer has recorded 78 species of birds, including several rarities.



***Goosander***

My own interest is in the insect-life that has flourished with the new cutting regime. Dragonflies spend the first part of their lives under water, but as adults they need dry-land habitats with plenty of their invertebrate prey. The pedestrian bridge is a wonderful platform for watching our local dragonfly fauna – from the exotic courtship displays of the Banded Demoiselles to the powerful aerobatics of the Emperor Dragonfly: we have now recorded 18 species on this stretch of the river.



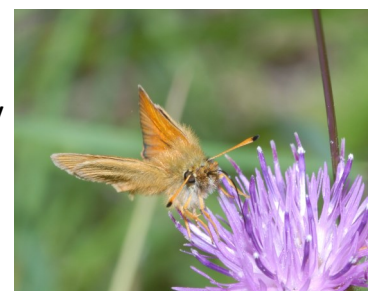
***Banded Demoiselles***

Butterflies, too, have benefitted, with 22 species seen so far. Most of these are quite common grassland species, such as the Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Essex Skipper, but



***Painted Lady***

on one of our FoCP walks we saw Brown Argus and a White Admiral. These are unusual sightings, but they show how many more species may become established as suitable habitat is provided.



***Essex Skipper***



## Cont...

There is too little space to cover all the less obvious insect species, but the riverside harbours a colony of the very localised Slender Groundhopper, and well as Roesel's Bush-cricket, several locally scarce hoverflies, eight species of bumblebees and as many as forty species of other wild bees. These all depend on the rich riverside flora, which includes water Mint, Dittander, Meadow Sweet, Hedge Woundwort and many others.

Let's hope that what is now Colchester City Council will continue its nature-friendly management of these priceless assets.

*Ted Benton*

## This summers' seasonal walk for FoCP members

This summer our seasonal walk of the Castle Park was on a warm morning in August. The park was looking particular glorious with the many varieties of trees in their full splendour and the flower beds bursting with colour. Our walks are a quiet meander, allowing us to fully appreciate all that is around us, while at the same time drawing attention to particular aspects that FoCP are currently involved in.



*Daffodils*

We began with a walk along the river where FoCP had responded to the recent City Development Plan that was out for consultation. We are concerned to protect the river from commercial development and maintain it as a quiet, natural oasis and important wild life corridor. We certainly enjoyed our walk beside the river on that lovely morning and stood for a while on one of the bridges watching the life of the river.



*Buttercups*

We made our way through the upper park to the ramparts behind the Castle admiring the view of the park from that vantage point and took in Gray's Summer House that FoCP were to be stewarding for the Heritage Weekend. Moving around the side of the Castle we took in the Imola Pond, and lamented the damage done by vandals. I can now happily report it has been repaired and restored, and is attracting appreciative visitors.



*Autumn Crocus*

We spent some time looking at the roses in front of the Castle, looked after by FoCP volunteer gardeners. A number of these rose beds are about to be renewed with a contribution from FoCP.

We moved on through the Wetzlar Garden and Sensory Garden, where FoCP Gardening group have also been busy, finishing back at the Café in the Park and enjoyed sitting in that lovely setting, in warm sunshine with a companionable cup of coffee.

**Cindy Salmon.**



*Catkins & Hellebores*

# FRIENDS EVENTS IN 2023

This year they comprised of three activities for members and us taking part in three different community led events.

## Member's Activities

The first on 20<sup>th</sup> May was a trip to **Green Island Gardens**, Ardleigh. The weather was perfect and 20 of us enjoyed a tour around the gardens led by the owner (Fiona Edmond). We all had refreshments and some of us spent further time exploring the grounds.



The second on 22<sup>nd</sup> June was a **Hanging Basket Workshop** which took place in the Barn under instruction from the gardening team. The colourful results were to be seen hanging along the Avignon Garden which is the sunken garden between the bandstand and the ramparts.



The third on 22<sup>nd</sup> July was a morning at **Putt in the Park** putting green in the Lower Park, followed by refreshments and a meet and greet. It was well attended and the weather held fine.

## Community led Events

In August this year FoCP played its part in the **Love Your Parks Week** a national programme organised by Keep Britain Tidy as their annual campaign celebrating parks, green spaces, and the dedicated volunteers and workers that look after them all year round.

Colchester City Council are responsible for great many open spaces and parks. Three of which, Castle Park, Highwoods Country Park and Colchester Cemetery and Crematorium hold Green Flag Awards issued by Keep Britain Tidy.

In previous years we have held litter picks in Castle Park to mark this week but this year committee members joined with the Colchester City Council, the BID team, Colchester Civic Society and the City Centre Zone Wardens in a gardening tidy up session at St Botolph's Priory.



**St Botolph's Priory founded in 1093 is the first English Augustinian priory church and is under the care of English Heritage and Colchester City Council.**





Our second event **The Eco Festival** is organised, coordinated and run entirely by volunteers from the local community. The team is seeking to provide a template for future events, supporting emerging and established solutions, working hand in hand with Colchester City Council and en-form on improving the way we do things.

A big thank you to all of you who helped on our Eco Festival stall, donated plants, put the gazebo up, bought me tea, dried rose petals, knit hedgehogs bees etc. And to those of you who came and saw us on the day, gave us encouraging words, bought plants etc. It was a lovely day.

We made £241.80 profit which will be used to support the park in some way.

*Diana Hargrave*



**Heritage Open Days** is England's largest community led festival of history and culture, involving thousands of local volunteers and organisations. It is designed to bring people together to explore their heritage, community and history. Most of the places taking part are not generally open to the public on a free entry or at all.

**Gray's Summerhouse** is situated behind the castle in our park. This structure is open to see but we provide a self-guided history walk along the ramparts and an opportunity for people to ask questions about Thomas Gray and his garden design.

*Elizabeth Fitt*



**The Eco Festival and Heritage Open Days were both held in September and our presence made possible by the assistance of FoCP members.**



There are already a couple of exciting members events in the pipeline for 2024.

Details of these will be given in the new year.

In the meantime here are the

### **Dates for your Christmas Calendar**

Our annual **Wreath & Table Decoration Making** days will take place on:

**Thursday 7th December &**

**Friday 8th December**

and the **Christmas Sales Stall** on

**Saturday 9th December**

(further details will be emailed out nearer the time)

#### **Committee Members for 2023/24**

Chairman	David Hibberd focp.chair@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	Madeline Whitty focp.membershipsec@gmail.com
Treasurer	Geraldine Grundy
Minute Secretary	Bridget Armstrong
Events Co-ordinator	Diana Hargrave focp.whatson@gmail.com
Volunteer Co-ordinator	Sue Vokes
Ordinary Committee Members	Cindy Salmon Elizabeth Fitt Marion Murray



Check out our web site  
[friendsofcastlepark.com](http://friendsofcastlepark.com)