



Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery Gardeners Report for 2020



For most of the year the black cloud of Covid has hovered over our lives. Fortunately gardening (suitably distanced of course) has remained an allowable activity. So plenty of exercise and opportunities for mindfulness for the gardening team. Sadly the planned February lecture for members about planting to attract bees and other pollinators had to be postponed, but this did not affect delivery of this part of our WPC environmental strategy. As always, Parks Department have continued to be immensely supportive of our various initiatives. The outcome of our combined efforts was reflected in three awards - Gold from South and Southeast in Bloom, Silver Gilt from Kent Wildlife, and continued national Green Flag status for WPC.

The year had started on a disappointing note when it was noticed that about 10 metres of the Grosvenor hedge, a mixed hedge of blackthorn, hawthorn and wild rose which we planted three years ago, appeared dead and any new growth was seriously damaged. Several knowledgeable people inspected it, but without coming to any conclusion. We can only wait, therefore, until early 2021 to see if it recovers.

On February 9th storm Ciara arrived and completely snapped the trunk of a Mountain Ash tree which then fell across and within the branches of a very large Cherry Laurel, thus causing more damage. This resulted in a very large amount of fallen timber to be sawn up and cleared, which kept our team busy for several weeks.



The snapped tree trunk can be seen behind the shattered laurel



The chart shows which flowers bloom when

During the first Covid lockdown in April we had a long spell of sunny days which brought many new visitors to the Cemetery who were both interested and interesting. With a view to engaging them further we chose a flat tombstone on Millionaires' Row and laid out an inviting display of our newsletters and publications for them to help themselves to (plus an honesty box!)

This year has seen a plentiful array of wild flowers, the most exciting being two species of orchid which is a first for WPC as far as we know. Whilst our aim is to encourage wild flowers, we had the odd surprised comment about some garden varieties we have also trialled on four grave plots with kerbs still intact: sea holly, gaillardia, evening primrose and cheiranthus. The reason being that these plants not only flower for a long period and are favourites with bees, but they will cover the plots in which they are planted and save us a lot of weeding. On the plus side many visitors said they had never seen the cemetery looking more beautiful.

Further planting includes 200 wild flower plug plants in Grosvenor Meadow: bird's foot trefoil, red clover, red campion, yarrow, and ladies smock among others, supplied by the ever helpful Parks Department.

We have also been busy planting more wild daffodils, fritillaries and crocus, but the latter 200 bulbs proved irresistible to the squirrels and the next morning not a single one was left. However, perhaps we have learned something which may be helpful to others as on further bulb planting we spread fallen leaves over the planted area and it remained untouched.



The newest wild flower area has looked fabulous

There was an extraordinary number of squirrels this year, someone counted eight in a sweep of the eye. There was also a huge crop of acorns, so perhaps this abundance brought the squirrels in. Next year we intend to sweep the acorns up as they fall. Sorry, squirrels!

Before the Big Mow, delayed till late August to allow insect life cycles to be completed, we were rewarded by the sight and sound of many grass hoppers in the long grass, such an evocative sound.

In September our vision of a shed in WPC in which to store our tools became a reality: the position was decided, tucked into a corner of the Chapel Meadow, the base was laid, and after garden centre inspections between lock downs, a suitable model ordered. We are now designing the information boards to flank it, since this will be the starting point of our planned childrens (and adults) Discovery Trail. The secluded area bounded on one side by Tunbridge Wells sandstone rock and the alder buckthorn hedge on another creates an "outdoor classroom" with the bug hotel and relocated log pile offering examples of how people could provide friendly habitat in their own gardens.

Whilst working in this area we decided to reduce the bramble overhanging the historic rock face. In summer it is a warm place for basking reptiles and should be of additional educational interest.

Once again the Solitary Ivy Mining Bee emerged on cue in mid September. It is a truly remarkable sight with thousands of bees flying in all directions just a few inches above the surface of the ground. These are the males waiting for the females to emerge. They are to be found on Cowslip bank and only a few metres from the path, but surprisingly hard to spot until pointed out, and then they are so obvious.

In early October we were sorry to see that all the majestic new plumes on the pampas grass were gone, each carefully cut off. Later the Daily Telegraph reported that pampas grass blooms were being stolen in Sussex and selling on-line for £25 each! And we had 14 of them!



Honesty for William Willicombe, widely respected for his probity



Note the damage and threat to the boundary wall now revealed

Many of you will have seen the unattractive boundary between WPC and the new buildings on Park Road, which until recently was a mass of bramble and bindweed. Now, however, after much hard work, all that has been cleared, and in the spring it is planned to plant a hazel hedge, as further wildlife shelter. We are pondering what climbing plants might utilise the mesh fencing to provide an interesting green screen. One possibility is hop bines - *humulus lupulus* - much favoured by comma butterflies. We continue to have serious concerns over the likely long-

term impact of the huge amount of spoil the Park Road site contractors have piled against the Listed cemetery wall, which was built in 1849 and has served hitherto only as a ground level boundary with adjoining fields and gardens.

We plan some nearby plantings of borage which can replenish their nectar supply within two minutes, whereas some plants need up to 24 hours. Foxgloves also ought to be an ideal plant to cultivate in WPC as they favour semi- shade and woodland and we have tried to establish a colony in several areas which we considered suitable, but with little success. Now, however, we have an extensive patch of seedlings growing very healthily, but unfortunately we cannot take the credit for them for they have seeded themselves from a single flower spike flowering in the spring. Which all goes to show that, try as we may, nature knows best .

Last, but by no means least, the wonderful news that two new gardening volunteers have blown in to join us. And what a relief that is! Many visitors assume that TWBC looks after the Cemetery, and they do, up to a point, but the planting, weeding, pruning, raking and general maintenance is all done by four or five ageing volunteers. If you know of anyone who might like to give us a hand do please tell us, or contact Angela Swain, on 01892 541881.



Marilyn and David on the cleared Pegus tomb



Rachel and Graham weeding London Pride

Environmental management map

