

### FOCUS ON WARWICK

#### PRIORY PARK, WARWICK

Priory Park, Warwick covers some forty acres close to the centre of the town. It has a long and fascinating history, which may well feature in a future issue. It derives its name from a priory dedicated in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century to St Sepulchre, which was later run by Augustinian canons. Its adoption as a public park dates from 1953.



Rosemary Jewel-Clark with Dave Skinner

Friends of Priory Park is an organization which has enjoyed great success recently. To explore how this has been achieved and learn more about this group, a meeting with the chairman, Dave Skinner, was arranged.

He explained that the original impetus for setting up the group was to oppose developments which might adversely affect the park. From a core of people who individually felt strongly that the area was a rare resource and needed champions, a vibrant organization has evolved over some two decades. Ironically in the early days, it was an act

of what was seen as a sort of vandalism, the cutting down of trees unnecessarily, which helped to kickstart this pressure group! Dave outlined how recently the organization has sought to promote engagement rather than just protect Priory Park by objecting to unsuitable initiatives. He and others have used both traditional and very modern methods to achieve this goal. Active members of the group have particular areas of expertise and these skills are utilized. A carving trail booklet has been produced. This can be downloaded from their website. Tree walks are organised periodically by Lesley Hall, who is a member of both FOPP and WGT, and these are very popular. Last Easter pixie doors could be found around the park; children followed a map to try and see them all.

One new project has been the creation of a wildflower meadow. This is to be a gradual transition from grassland, which has begun with a no cut period. Already some species are appearing – there were cowslips earlier in the year and while we were walking the park, the ox eye daisies were flowering in great drifts. At the end of this first year, there will be an audit to establish what has grown, and only then at the very earliest will any decision as to planting specific indigenous wildflowers be made.

There are many groups of people for whom Priory Park is most naturally important. Dog walkers, runners, those who cross from the station to get into town, parents and the young children in the nursery and all those in nearby schools, local residents of every age and anyone who seeks the beauty and shade of this oasis of green: all will automatically wish to protect and value the area.

What has been achieved by modern methods, however, is to widen this platform of support. Facebook has proved a most useful tool. Currently the FOPP Facebook group has some 800 members. They can post about and read and see images of life in the park. Changes in specific areas, like the wildflower meadow, and wildlife sightings feature. We learned that two sorts of deer are now regularly seen when the park is quiet at the very start and end of days. Sharing photographs of these sightings allows many more to enjoy the experiences.

The organisation has also been able to have excellent relationships with the town and district council. Currently the chair of FOPP is a local councillor himself, but a secure channel of communication has been established which will be able to endure when this direct link changes. Also, as part of a desire for connectedness, committee meetings are Open Meetings, held in a room at the Wild Boar in Lakin Road.

The strategies used by FOPP, many of them innovative, would seem to have relevance for other organisations, including our own. WGT has already consulted with Dianne Loftus, from the firm Nice People, who advised the Priory Park group. We now have our own newly refreshed Facebook page and Twitter and Instagram accounts. These we trust will generate further awareness of WGT, encouraging wider participation in our activities and engendering greater enthusiasm and participation. We will hope to have a strong relationship with FOPP, and wish them well.

Rosemary Jewel-Clark

#### Illustrations:

1. Rosemary Jewel-Clark and FOPP Chairman Dave Skinner by the Priory Park wildflower meadow. Photo: Diane James

2. Daisies in the Priory Park wildflower meadow. Photo: Dave Skinner



#### List of plants flowering in Priory Park wildflower meadow on Midsummer's Day

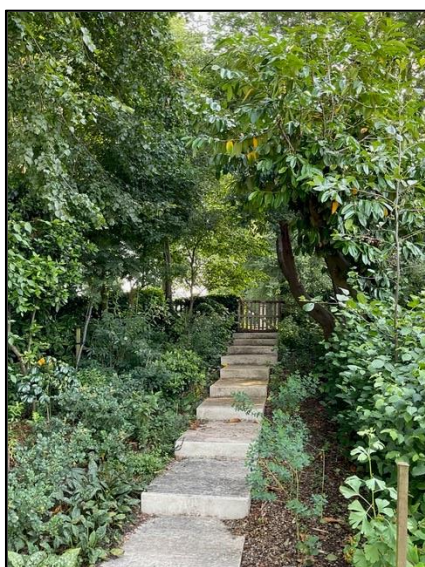
- Oxeye daisies *Leucanthemum vulgare*
- White clover *Trifolium repens*
- Creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*
- Mouse ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*
- Birds foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*
- Lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*
- Oxford ragwort *Senecio squalidus*
- Common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
- Cleavers (goosegrass) *Galium aparine*
- Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara*
- Bramble (blackberry) *Rubus fruticosus*
- Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*
- Red clover *Trifolium pratense*
- Meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*
- Creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*
- Stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*
- Bindweed *Calystegia species*
- Broad leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*

Lesley Hall

## WARWICK BOAT CLUB & BANBURY ROAD PLANTING

Warwick Boat Club occupies a strategic position near the centre of the town. It is, of course, an important sports amenity for young and old. The setting is also unique: the castle, the river and people enjoying themselves.

One feature of the site is the planting. This is not the central feature of the club but is important both for the members and also because a high proportion of the visitors to Warwick walk past it along the Banbury Road. Although a private space, it has some of the attributes of a public space in the sense that people can look over the fence.



### Environmental and ornamental aspects

In recent years there has been a lot of new planting in the area alongside the Banbury Road.

That area is the focus of this note. (Of course there is much other planting elsewhere on the site, especially near the clubhouse.) I have used common names where possible. I am happy to supply a full plant list. Contact me on [davidhowells50@gmail.com](mailto:davidhowells50@gmail.com).

### The inheritance

Until quite recently the area was a dark thicket, with overgrown shrubs and little or no bird life or even insect life. There was too much unrestrained growth of laurel, cherry laurel and other shrubs. Some mature trees had also grown over to produce a dark canopy in places.

Apart from the evergreen shrubs, the main tree species were yew, elder, ash, cherry plum, holly – all of limited environmental value. On the other hand there were some good mature trees and also a number of shrubs which would respond to better light.

### The approach

The planting has multiple objectives. Environmental-friendliness has been one, but not the only one. We also sought a result that was ornamental, easy to maintain and provides a shield of sight and sound from the Banbury Road.

Research on how to achieve biodiversity is constantly moving on. We therefore tried to incorporate the latest findings:

- Pollinating insects favour planting with species from diverse regions. The insects take advantage of the extended flowering period that exotic plants often offer.
- Nevertheless many other invertebrate groups are best served by planting a dominance of plants native to the UK and elsewhere in the northern hemisphere.
- Denser vegetation is better.
- Exotic evergreens give important winter cover.
- The fewer the number of different species, the greater the abundance of invertebrates.

The choice of plants reflects these ideas, with over 150 new specimens of trees and shrubs from around fifty species. In addition eight specimens have been moved and thirty left where they are. Some species have been cut back quite sharply, notably laurel, cherry laurel and elder.

There is an orientation towards native plants, but certainly not on the basis 'native good, introduced bad'. Indeed the British tree palate is very narrow, with only 35-60 species, depending on definitions. That excludes plants like sycamore that have been here for many centuries and also near-natives from the northern hemisphere like holly oak and wild pear.



### **Native plants**

Most native trees are now present in the collection. Some are mature – oak, ash, beech, holly, sycamore, elm, common lime. In some cases they have been joined by additional planting of the same species. Many more species are new to the site. Some could make medium or large trees: hornbeam, alder, bird cherry, wild service tree, field maple, birch.

Others are smaller: rowan, arbutus, blackthorn, dogwood, alder buckthorn, goat willow, crab apple, wayfarer tree, spindle, dogwood, guelder rose and holly in various forms.

A mix of native saplings from the Woodland Trust will form an under-storey. They include blackthorn, alder buckthorn, hawthorn, crab apple, field maple, hazel, hip-bearing roses and others.

### **Oaks**

The inheritance includes good specimens of English oak, red oak, and holly oak. More young English oak have been planted. In addition there are three new species: pin oak, and sessile oak in a purple form.

### **Evergreen screening**

Along the Banbury Road there is now a dense planting of evergreens: 4 x holly oak, 2 x Scots pine, *Eucryphia x intermedia*, *Magnolia grandiflora*, *Osmanthus x burkwoodii*. They join the existing planting of elder, cherry laurel, ash, cherry plum, holly and yew, together with the ivy hedge embedded in the fencing. All this will quickly form a good screen. We also have four Western Red Cedar, which are good for absorbing particulates and reducing pollution.

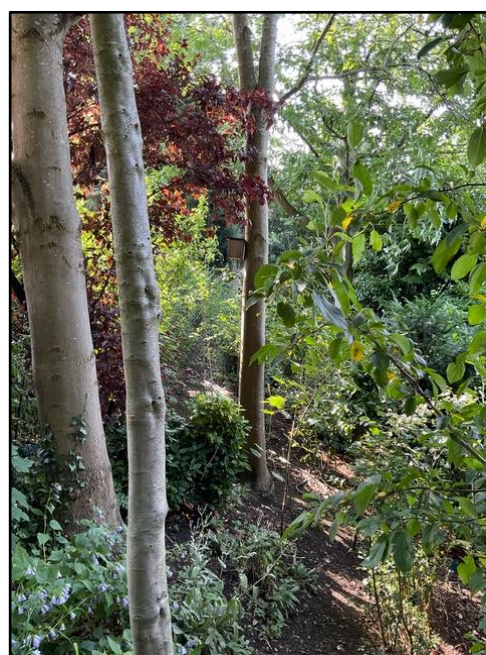
### **Other non-native plants**

These are a mixed bag, reflecting the research recommendations on biodiversity. A number have definite value as pollinators or source of food: Himalayan birch, *Ceanothus*, Hubei crab, *Ribes speciosum*, *Rosa rugosa*, mock orange, weeping pear, common lime. Others are of botanical interest or provide volume: ginkgo, Japanese and other maples, winter-flowering *Viburnum bodnantense*, *Daphne* 'Everlasting Fragrance',

*Cornus kousa* (in different forms), *Cornus mas*, and *Pinus pinaster*.

### **Ornamental forms**

In a number of cases the tree or shrub planted is not the pure species but a selected form. These include purple forms of hazel and sessile oak, *Euonymus* 'Red Cascade', the yellow magnolia 'Lois', *Ceanothus* 'Puget Blue', *Viburnum bodnantense* 'Charles Lamont', *Rosa rugosa* 'Fru There are also two forms of *Magnolia grandiflora*: 'Goliath' and the upright 'Kay Parris'. Colour contrasts add interest. Notably the white *Eleagnus* 'Quicksilver' intermingles with purple sessile oak and hazel.



### **Wildflowers**

Quite a wide range of native wildflowers have been planted, mostly from plugs. These include primrose and cowslip, red campion, selfheal, betony, St John's Wort, hedge cranesbill, autumn hawkbit, greater birdsfoot trefoil, woodruff, and fox and cubs.

### **Herbaceous planting**

A careful selection of non-native herbaceous plants have been included. Among these are different varieties of campanula, dead nettle, *Epimedium*, and lungwort. Lily of the valley now grows near the current entrance.

**Bulbs**

Over 2000 bulbs have been planted, of which daffodils in various forms are easily the most numerous. The most prominent is the white 'Thalia' but we also have the two native forms: *Narcissus pseudo-narcissus* and *N.bulbocodium*, growing opposite each other either side of the old entrance path.

Other natives include bluebells, wild garlic, *Erythronium*, and wood anemones, together with familiar introduced species such as snowdrops, species tulips, scillas, fritillaries, anemones, crocus, and cyclamen. Some of these have been planted in quantity.

**Log Piles**

A number of log piles have been started to encourage fungi and invertebrates. This will ultimately benefit bird life.

**The future**

The planting is deliberately dense in order to provide a quick screening effect. It will need progressive thinning as far ahead as one can see. The abundance of young growth will open up an important option: whether to retain the cherry laurel screening or replace it gradually with transplants from nearby.

David Howells