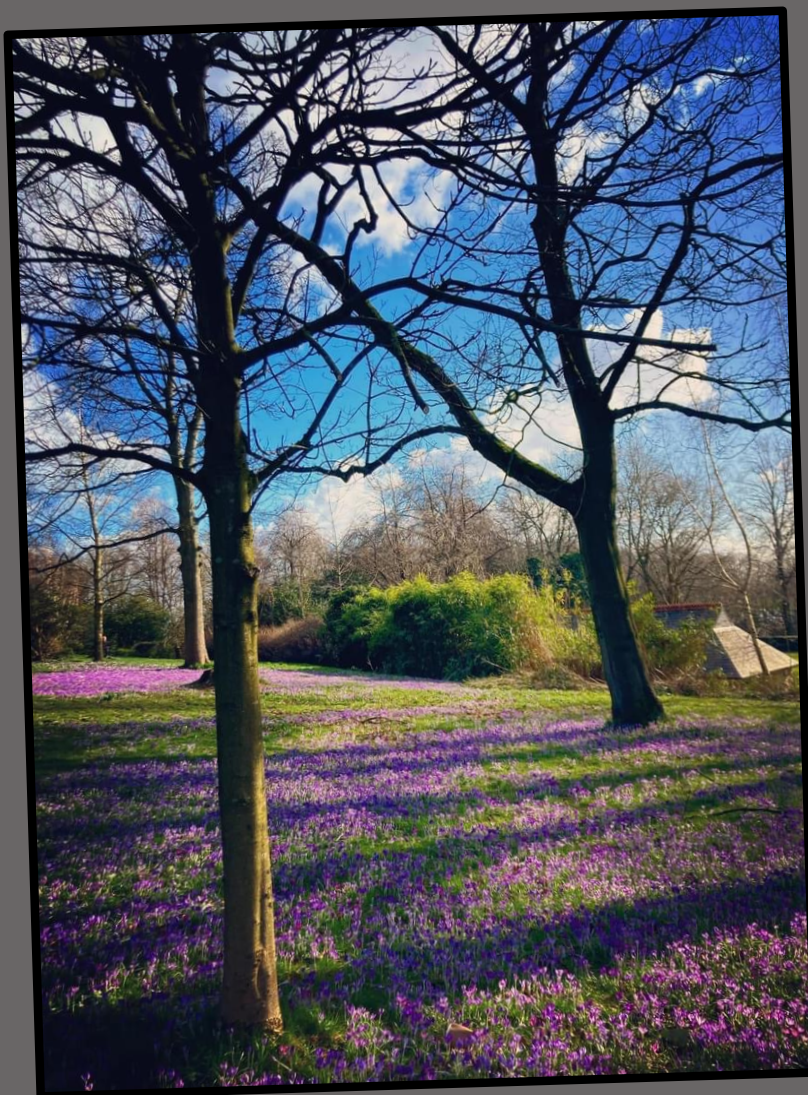


The Newsletter

Spring 2026



The King's Award for
Voluntary Service

FRIENDS OF ROUNDHAY PARK

GET INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING

"The park needs your support. There are so many ways you can help keep it looking beautiful and play a part in its future. Inside, you'll find details on how to get involved."

Chairperson: Richard Critchley
Friends of Roundhay Park
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LS8 1WY
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secretary@forp.org

Chair's Letter

In our last newsletter at the end of 2025, I remarked on the unusually mild weather that we had enjoyed last year and hoped to see some much-needed rain. Maybe I should have kept quiet and not wished for what followed.

Throughout the first couple of months of this year, we have been subjected to rainfall of almost biblical proportions with numerous storms and widespread flooding. But with the advent of Spring, we have seen a welcome improvement in the weather and leading to nature making an immediate response bringing forth a colourful display of Spring bulbs and fauna.

In the Christmas edition I also made reference to the planned concerts (officially called the American Express Roundhay Festival), especially the promises of minimal impact on the park and surroundings. I do now have some more news and information.

We, together with other similar organisations in the Roundhay area, held a constructive meeting with Ed Whiting, the Chief Executive of the city council covering a wide range of pertinent subjects. In particular, we pressed the point on the distribution of income the council will receive from the festival. In response we were assured that all the income will be returned to support all the parks and green spaces in Leeds, but with the promise that Roundhay Park will get its fair share.

The following day, we attended a very upbeat meeting with LS Events, the company organising the events. The concerts will take place over three days, Friday 3rd – Sunday 5th July with the main stage on the cycle track/cricket oval with setting up and fencing across the park taking place between 18th June and 17th July.

The festival will be open from 1.00pm until 10.30pm, but bars will remain open and music played until 11.45 pm. Visitor parking will be on Connaught Field. Over that weekend there will be many major road closures, but local residents will receive vehicle passes.

In answer to questions, the organisers confirmed that 7,000 homes in the immediate area will be included in a further information letter-drop, approximately four weeks before the dates of the concert.

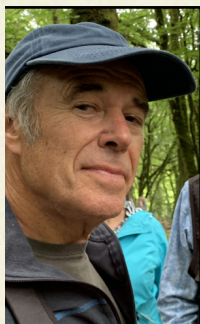
Following the festival, the Ironman event will also be held again this year, on Sunday 16th August.

On other matters, Leeds Buildings Preservation Trust has now cleared the next hurdle in our quest for funding to restore the gate lodges on Wetherby Road as accessible holiday accommodation and the trust is submitting an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

At the same time, planning permission is being submitted to restore the old Canal Gardens toilet block as commercial premises and the sponsors would be pleased to hear from anyone interested in developing the use of this space.

In conclusion, our many volunteers, who have been working throughout the winter months are now spending more time helping to make the park safe and look its best. Please support them and their efforts by visiting and making good use of the many amenities and sights the park has to offer.

Richard Critchley



YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS

We always welcome your comments, letters as well as longer contributions. We are also interested to meet any members who are keen to contribute on a regular basis or who have desk top publishing skills and would like to get involved in the design. We always want and need your park photos. Send them to the editor

EDITOR: Pete Staggs

ARTWORK: Carol Staggs

Roundhay Park Needs You

Roundhay Park has belonged to the people of Leeds since 1872, when Mayor John Barran fought to secure it for the city. It remains one of the largest and finest urban parks in Europe — but it is in decline. Years of tightening budgets have taken their toll, and the signs are visible.

This is your park, and it will only be saved if the people of Leeds step forward to defend it.

FoRP have worked for over 30 years to protect and improve this remarkable place. Now, in the most challenging period we have faced, we urgently need more support.

We are looking for volunteers across a wide range of roles including:

- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Website content manager
- IT support
- Membership secretary
- Minutes secretary

If you have the skills and the will to help, please contact us at secretary@forp.org. We are happy to discuss any of these roles with you - simply reach out.

The People's Park needs its People. Now more than ever.

The Spillway on Waterloo Lake - Safety of Birds

Some park visitors have recently expressed concern about ducks and swans going over the spillway by the dam at Waterloo Lake, asking if some sort of barrier could be put in place. FoRP has previously contacted the RSPB regarding young birds falling over the spillway. They advised that ducklings have plenty of food and are not in any immediate danger. There is also a way out, which they find eventually. Having sought further advice on this matter, we have been asked to share the following information from the Senior Estate Manager regarding the yearly problem of ducklings and wildlife going over the spillway.

“Waterloo Lake reservoir is regularly inspected by a Supervising Engineer (SE) in line with the Reservoirs Act 1975. We meet with and take advice from the SE in relation to any issues or concerns flagged to us, including this one. In previous years we have discussed measures to mitigate the problem of ducklings entering the spillway. The advice we received was that the top of the overflow needs to be kept clear from anything that may cause a build-up of twigs, logs or debris which could cause the water level to rise. Placing floats or other obstructions have not been permitted by the SE, based on the balance of risk. It is not possible to put in place temporary barriers that can be checked and cleared on a daily basis as storm situations can occur at any time, day or night.

It is not permitted for anyone to enter this spillway without the correct training, safety gear and risk assessments in place. The retrieval of any duckling can be undertaken by the parks team, RSPCA and Swan Rescue. Park staff are asked to monitor the area regularly, and ducklings that enter the spillway usually continue safely through the culvert to Wykebeck. Information signage (agreed with the RSPB and Swan Rescue) will be put in place in the near future.”

Senior Estate Manager, Leeds City Council



A Hopeful Future for Canal Gardens Eyesore?

Members will have long been aware of the dilapidated state of the old toilet block at the roadside of Canal Gardens. At last there is hope for a bright new future for this once attractive building. Leeds Civic Trust has been very active in seeking to rescue this building and we are grateful to their vice president, Peter Baker, for this hopeful update.

The 2021 World Triathlon Championships brought the splendours of Roundhay Park to an international audience. Prominent in the background of the TV coverage though, as cyclists returned down Princes Avenue, was the dilapidated roof of the old toilet block in Canal Gardens (photos below). That was the impetus for Leeds Civic Trust's Heritage Watch Group to add the building to its list of heritage at risk in the city. When the council submitted a planning application to demolish the building, the trust approached them and suggested that restoration and an alternative use might be possible. Though not listed, the building was an attractive addition to Canal Gardens when first built, and with an appropriate use, has the potential to become a positive attribute once more.

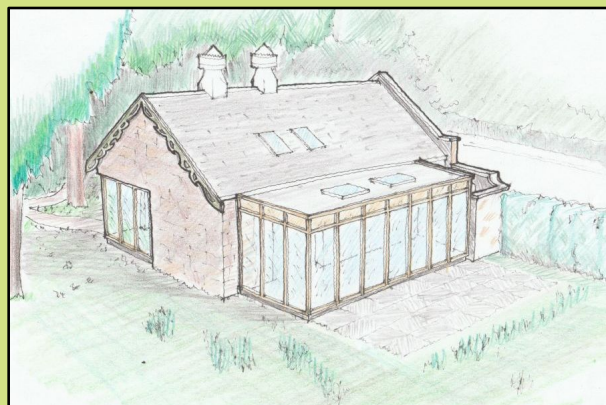
The building was constructed in the late 19th century, after Princes Avenue was built and the trams started bringing people to the west

side of Roundhay Park. The facilities were particularly useful for tram drivers before the run back into Leeds. On one occasion in the 1950s, one unfortunate driver failed to fully apply the brake before popping in, emerging only to find his tram gently rolling down the hill towards Oakwood. Unable to catch it, the fortunately empty tram only came to a halt when it hit an unfortunately full one.

With its attractive stone gable onto Princes Avenue needing attention, its ornate bargeboards disappearing and its roof slates partly missing, the building has not been in use now for several years, with alternative facilities available in Tropical World. However it has a substantial footprint and could, if restored, be brought back to life with a suitable use. Leeds Civic Trust therefore agreed to prepare a planning application and consider options for its future.

The application, for restoration, an extension and a change of use was submitted in September 2024 and finally approved in December last year (see sketch below). Leeds Civic Trust is continuing with detailed plans for the building itself. The permission is for retail or office use of over 65 sq. metres (700 sq. ft.) and the trust is asking for expressions of interest from anybody looking for such an opportunity. If that is you, or someone you know, please contact Leeds Civic Trust at office@leedscivictrust.org.uk.

Peter Baker
Vice President, Leeds Civic Trust



The Friends Gardeners - Back for Another Year

In these hectic times, just take a regular stroll through the Friends Garden. This tranquil hidden corner of Canal Gardens beside Old Park Road, created and tended by FoRP volunteers, is always a soothing experience. Our team of volunteers, led by Janet Wilkinson are back at work once again, making everything in the garden lovely. Thanks to Janet for this update.

During December and January the Friends Gardeners took their annual winter break from gardening. We did manage to meet up for coffee in January to catch up and discuss our plans for 2026.

The first session back in the garden for 2026 was on Tuesday 3 February and although it was very cold we had a great turn out. We have been focusing on clearing the leaves from the areas where the bulbs are coming through and around the

hellebores which are already looking gorgeous. The garden looks loved again.

We have also been tidying the area around the tree sculptures where lots of Spring flowers are looking lovely.

We are all looking forward to another great year keeping the Friends Garden looking lovely for all our visitors.

Janet Wilkinson



Waterloo Lake and the beginning of our Roundhay Park

Waterloo Lake is a central feature in our wonderful park. Here, Neville Hurworth, our expert local historian provides a fascinating account of how this beautiful lake came into being. Thank you, Neville, for another great contribution to our newsletter!

Waterloo Lake is the magnificent creation of Thomas Nicholson, a Quaker who was born in Chapel Allerton. In his teens he went to live in London and married into a respected hard-working Quaker family. In a few years he made a fortune mainly from shipping and insurance.

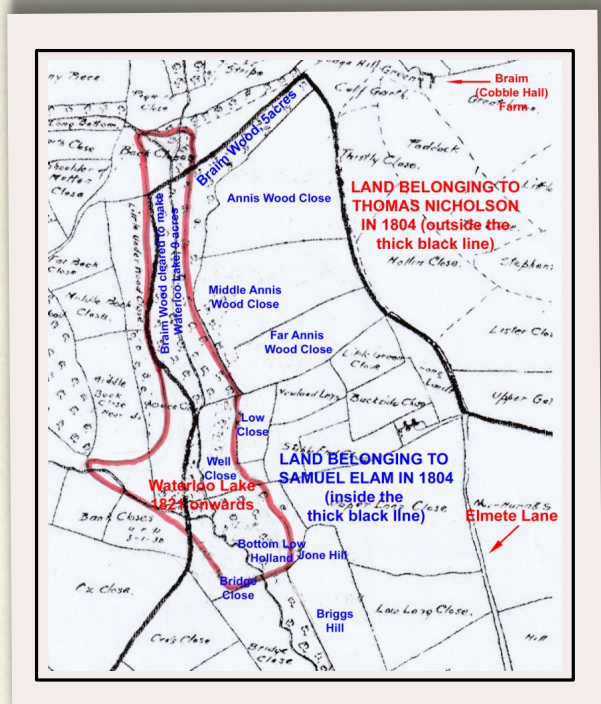
The sudden death of his brother and the effect of the London atmosphere on his wife's health, caused him to prepare to return to his roots. He bought an estate in Chapel Allerton, and in 1803, he bought Roundhay with another Quaker, Samuel Elam. Thomas's aim was to build a luxurious estate for himself and his family and he set about it in earnest. Joshua Thorp's map of 1819 to 1821 (see diagram in black; my additions are in red) shows the result of Thomas's work. Many features are visible that can be seen today. It shows that the Upper Lake and Waterloo Lake must have been completed by 1821, the year Thomas died. Samuel Elam intended to sell off his half of Roundhay at a profit, in pockets of about 40 to 100 acres, but he died in 1811 soon after he became bankrupt.

Although in 1803 Thomas's land was almost entirely to the north of the line of today's Wetherby Road, there was an important section of Samuel Elam's property above it. Thomas needed some of this to build Waterloo Lake, as can be seen in my second diagram (below right) where I have attempted to superimpose accurately the boundary of the Waterloo Lake on a section of Jonathan Taylor's sale map of 1803.

We know from newspaper reports in 1811 that Thomas used to fish a pond he had made near the castle. That same year, Thomas bought an important lot from a sale of Samuel Elam's property from his executors and in August 1815, a couple of months after the Battle of Waterloo, Thomas completed a major purchase (see diagram, items labelled in blue) and he now had all he needed to build the lake of his dreams.

It is believed that soldiers from the Napoleonic Wars were employed in building Waterloo Lake. A trade directory of 1899 concurs with this, and it also claims the lake took two years to build at a cost of £15,000. I don't have much information to fill in details of the building of the lakes at Roundhay Park except for a couple of newspaper reports.

In May 1817, The Leeds Intelligencer mentioned two men who were charged with a burglary. One of them was apprehended "at Roundhay ... where he had obtained work in digging fishponds, etc." From their appearance the men were thought to have been "delvers."



Then, most interestingly, in August 1820, the Leeds Intelligencer left us with a revealing colourful picture of a happy celebration:

"T. Nicholson ... completed his hay harvest ... and gave a sumptuous dinner ... of roast beef, plum pudding and old ale to the persons employed in that service, together with all other workmen on the premises, amounting to about 70 persons ... The dinner was served up under a canopy in a field adjoining the noble mansion."

The following paragraph has a clear military ring about it:

"... previous to the company partaking of the bounty, their worthy benefactor ordered the English flag to be hoisted over the canopy, and addressed them ... observing they were about to dine under the protection of the British flag which had made all Europe tremble, and he hoped they would never live to see the day when it should be disgraced. In the evening, about six o'clock, the company, out of respect to their benefactor, ... and their loyalty to their king and country, retired to the front of the house where they sang the favourite air of God save the King."

Finally, a letter by Hugh Lupton tells us "my father who was born in 1813 remembered as a child riding on a large Newfoundland dog and seeing the men at work on the Lake ... it is a tradition that in his last illness in 1820 Thos. Nicholson looking from his window saw the filling of the lake." Sadly, Thomas didn't live to enjoy it, ~ as we can and do today.

Our Princess Kate is directly descended from Hugh's father, Francis Lupton. His granddaughter Olive Christiana Lupton, married Richard Noel Middleton They were Kate's father's grandparents and lived at "Fieldhead" on Park Avenue.

Neville Hurworth

✕ A Clean Environment – Chasing a Dream?

A growing number of FoRP and other volunteers go out regularly to pick up litter around the park. Regular group sessions are led by Martin Child. Although it sometimes seems to be a forlorn task (more litter always appears), we must never give up. Martin has also led our growing involvement in scientific water monitoring in the park, linked to Yorkshire-wide testing of water quality. Thank you, Martin for this update on all these activities.

Litter picking started well in 2026 and all sessions were well attended. We were joined at our February session by a group of year 7 students from Allerton Grange School. They were delightful company and very enthusiastic and effective litter pickers. They found a fishing rod and a pink fairy castle and so won the 'virtual' award for the most unusual items found. Thanks to Deputy Head Liz Braim and our FoRP friend Darren Wall for their support. Hopefully we will repeat this later in the year.

Water monitoring

We are now entering our third year of this project. FoRP have again contributed to ensure the project continues. As we gain experience things evolve and we are now testing a greater range of parameters. We aim to provide data that can be gathered reliably and accurately and to present this in ways that are accessible to all. Our focus must be to carry out meaningful tests that can be used to monitor and subsequently to improve the quality of the water flowing into and through the park.

Teaming up with REAP

A few FoRP members helped out with the terrific effort made by REAP volunteers in planting a new mixed native hedge around the allotments on Connaught Field. They very kindly donated a significant number of 'whips' to FoRP to plant behind the bottle banks on the tram car park. These were planted with the help of Ian Nicholson and the working party, and will form a hedge along this bank. There has long been an issue of litter going over the edge down towards Fox Beck and it is treacherous to remove. Our litter team do have a session or two tackling this annually but it has to be done carefully in suitably dry weather. A hedge should catch much of the litter and allow easier removal. It will also be a useful and attractive wildlife corridor for animals, birds and insects.

Litter Free Leeds Conference

Heather, Alison and Martin attended this excellent event held in the Civic Hall (which was lit in purple to celebrate!) Litter Free Leeds is expanding in a most impressive way across the city. Purple bags are a real feature of the Leeds urban landscape now. The FoRP Litter Team will support 'Leeds Goes Purple' in late March.

Martin Child



Taking a Mindful Moment in the Sensory Garden

Located in the corner of the walled garden at Canal Gardens, FoRP's Sensory Garden is a delight, thanks to all the hard work of our volunteers led by Sarah Jackson and Lyndsey Ward. Our thanks go to Sarah and Lyndsey for this update, as well as this lovely poetic quote – so fitting for the arrival of Spring.



Whilst the cold, wet winter weather kept us away from the sensory garden between December and February, our volunteers met for a coffee and a catch-up and started planning for the new growing year ahead.



We held our first session back in the garden on a beautiful sunny day at the end of February and started tidying up the borders – cutting back plants, clearing leaves and digging them into the soil to provide a natural rich compost and doing some fine weeding. The larger grasses were cut back to allow new green shoots to form.



Something is stirring underfoot. Energy is rising. The first green shoots appear. Expectation is in the air. The first bumblebee is spotted, feeding gratefully on early lungworts and hellebores. Snowdrops ring out the changes. The birds serenade our ears with their beautiful song. Time to grab our coats and scarves, and venture forth into our little bits of Eden. Being aware of our breath in the cold air. Walking mindfully. Revelling in the promise of a new year of abundance.

By Ark Redwood

The garden is coming to life again, it now feels brighter, busier and full of promise. The first spring flowers have started to appear. Bright daffodils, hellebores, snowdrops and Erysimum add cheerful spots of colour. New leaves are also emerging, and it is always lovely to notice small changes each time we visit. Spring is a season of hope and renewal and we look forward to sharing the garden with you.

Sarah and Lindsey



Two Rare Visitors come to Roundhay Park in One Month



Dave Johnston, who regularly provides information and wonderful photographs of birdlife in the park, is always on the lookout for something new and unusual. In February he spotted two rare visitors that turned up on Waterloo Lake. Thank you Dave for bringing us this story.



The dark wet days in February were brightened up for many people at Roundhay Park by the arrival of two rare birds on Waterloo Lake early in the month. Two Russian white fronted geese (above) flew in and stayed for only one day. An Iceland gull (left) arrived and stayed throughout the month. As I wrote this on 12th March it was still there.

Huge numbers of the Russian geese arrived in the UK this winter, from late December onwards, with several hundred at some sites. It is likely that they were driven here by the extremely cold continental weather and easterly winds. As the name suggests, they are from Russia, mainly western Russia. They are smaller than the Canada geese and greylag geese which are resident on our lakes. They have a white forehead, (the 'white front') dark bars on the chest and a pink beak. They have recently had very successful breeding seasons in western Russia, which may have contributed to the larger than normal numbers crossing the North Sea to the UK.

The long-staying Iceland gull does not actually breed in Iceland. It breeds in the Arctic, mainly Greenland, Canada and the northern USA. They move south in the winter as far as our coast. Wintering Iceland gulls are rare inland, which caused a great deal of excitement at Roundhay Park. Some birdwatchers travelled up to a hundred miles to see it. It was very easy to see, perching on the posts in front of the Lakeside cafe.

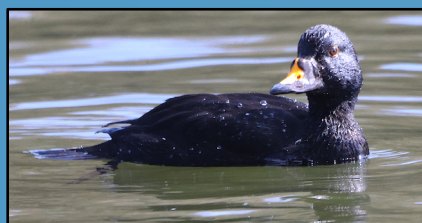


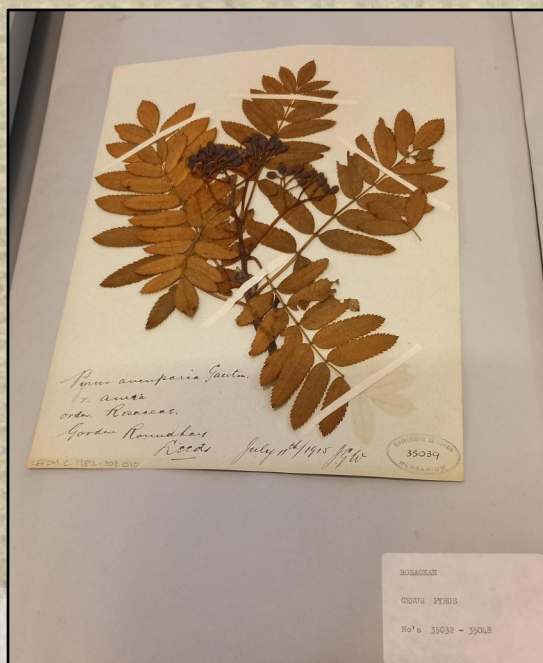
The Roundhay bird was a juvenile first-winter gull. They take 4 years to mature. The main distinguishing feature of Iceland gulls is the total lack of any black feathers. They are a creamy brown colour and seem more buoyant in the water than our other familiar gulls. They are slightly smaller than the herring gulls frequently seen here.

On 12 March 101 mute swans and 21 cormorants were present on Waterloo Lake. A chiffchaff was calling near Barran's Fountain. Spring has arrived!

Dave Johnston

Late Bird News! Dave also reported seeing a male (see below) and female common scoter on Waterloo Lake at 11.15 on 23rd March. This is primarily a sea duck and certainly not so 'common' on Waterloo Lake!





A Rare Opportunity to See the Work of The Blind Botanist

Through our links with the Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery we have learned about John Wilkinson (1856-1937) who became known as the Blind Botanist, and almost certainly had influence on the trees planted in Roundhay Park. Carol Houghton put together this article, drawing on the Leeds Discovery Centre website and input from Jeanette Bolton.

FoRP volunteers were invited to join the Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery on their visit to the Leeds Discovery Centre on 25th March. The visit was arranged by Jeanette Bolton who has done a lot of research into John Grimshaw Wilkinson and his mother Theodosia Grimshaw Wilkinson who are both buried in Beckett Street Cemetery. The FoRP newsletter (Spring 2024) featured an article about the life of John who became known as the Blind Botanist.

On our visit we met the ladies from the Dead Plant Society which is a project by Leeds Museums and Galleries to search through and do research on the herbarium sheet collections at Leeds Discovery Centre. The collection, comprising 250,000 sheets, is not displayed very often due to their fragility and inaccessibility. We felt privileged to be shown some of John Wilkinson's work during our visit. One of his specimens is shown above. Some of the ladies had visited Canal Gardens to follow up on records of plants recorded in this area. Although they were not able to find any, their efforts are incredibly valuable to ensure the information can reach people.

John Wilkinson was born in 1856 and worked as a grocer for the first quarter of his life, indulging in painting as a hobby. At the age of 22 he lost his eyesight to a bout of rheumatic fever. Eventually, and with his mother's help, he realised he could determine the type of tree he was under by the sound of the raindrops above him and touching the bark, inspiring him to develop his other senses.

Theodosia spent hours reading books on flora and fauna to her son when he first became blind and assisted him whenever he went out into the field. John studied botany, using his touch, taste, and smell to identify plants and compiling information on flora in braille for reference. Theodosia was appointed an honorary member of the Leeds Naturalists Club and Scientific Society. She was an incredible help to her son,

Thanks to Jeanette for her research and for inviting FoRP volunteers (Lynn, Mark, Carol and Jeremy - above right) to join her and her group in visiting this amazing place.

Carol Houghton



FoRP Working Parties - Tackling Thorny Problems

The dedicated FoRP volunteers who turn out regularly are undaunted by even the thorniest problems in their efforts to improve the appearance of the park. If you think you're tough enough, you can find out how to join the party on our website (www.forp.org). Jan Nicholson has provided this account of their recent work.

Our first 2 working parties were cancelled due to poor weather. Our next get together was on Valentines Day! Martin Child had pointed out a problem with litter blowing into the gorge behind the tram car park. It was decided that an extension to the hedge would help relieve the problem. Martin had provided us with native hedging whips to fill the gap. We planted approximately 200 with accompanying supports and rabbit proofing (photos: top right, bottom left)

Later in the month we returned to one of favourite spots – Ram Beck – to remove branches and twigs. Moving further round little lake we cut back brambles so that the emerging narcissi were given some breathing space. Our last job took us up to the serpentine path to clear brambles and pendulous sedge. We also cut back the brambles overhanging the fence on the edge of the path leading down to Waterloo Lake.

The first session in March saw really good weather. We had decided that the area above the serpentine path needed attention as the brambles were threatening to swamp the young trees that had been planted there. Everyone got stuck in with enthusiasm, so much so that they had to be reined in at one point. We managed to clear a 1.5 metre 'bramble break' along the fence and clear a lot of dead material. We do not clear all the brambles as they are very beneficial to wildlife. We also try to leave plant material close by so it will return to the soil.

Jan Nicholson



Notices

Grateful thanks to FoRP Colleagues

After more than 10 years dedicated hard work, our Secretary, Carol Haughton, will be stepping down from this role after the FoRP AGM on Tuesday 23rd June 2026. Our Treasurer, Jeremy Stonehouse, will also be stepping down from his role after the AGM. We owe huge thanks to Carol and Jeremy for all the great service they have given voluntarily to FoRP and to Roundhay Park. They will both continue to join in FoRP activities.

We are now seeking willing volunteers who can take the roles of Secretary and Treasurer for FoRP. Is that you?

'Walk back in Time' – Geology Walks in Roundhay Park.

Bill Fraser of Leeds Geological Association is once again leading some geology walks in the park. The total length of the walk, which takes in 10 locations, is 4.5km. It follows designated paths for most of the way but these can be muddy after wet weather. To visit two of sites requires a diversion off the path depending on how many questions are asked! A copy of the Geology Trail guide will be provided to all participants.

The walks will take place on Saturday 2nd May (at 2pm) and Thursday 11th June (at 5.30pm)
Meet at the Mansion (Garden Room Cafe side)
Walks will be limited to a maximum of 15 people.
Please book a place by contacting Bill Fraser at lga.sec@btinternet.com

ADDRESS LABEL

Forest School – Fun for Little Friends of Roundhay Park

Melody Thornton continues to run Forest School sessions for children in the park, providing fun and activities which foster a love for nature and for the park. Melody says:

"We are looking forward to the next few months, where we'll make family trees and seed bombs. Feeding the forest and helping the soil and minibeasts is our aim. It's a wonderful, fulfilling educational experience".

For more info, please email Melody on forestschool@forp.org



FoRP AGM Tuesday 23rd June at 7pm, Education Room at the Mansion