

Friends of South Park Newsletter

**Summer
2026**



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

September 27th, Sunday 2pm: Trees of South Park Walk (part 2)

October 22nd, Thursday 7:00 - 9:00 pm: Friends of South Park AGM. (location tbc)

150 Years of the Morrells and South Park

By Peter Edwards

2026 is a significant year in the history of South Park. 150 years ago, in the spring of 1876, Emily Morrell, then just 22, had recently moved back to Headington Hill Hall with her new husband Herbert Morrell (her third cousin). Sadly, Emily lost both her parents at the age of 10, and in the meantime the business and property fortune she inherited at the age of 21 was placed in the hands of the Morrell Trustees.

By chance, this period coincided with the land on the south side of Headington Hill being put up for sale by its owners, the Knapp family, in late 1875. They intended to auction the land in 14 building plots linked by a network of residential roads. But before any sales took place the Morrell Trustees stepped in and, by early 1876, agreed with the Knapps to purchase all their land on behalf of Emily and Herbert.

This enabled them not only to enhance the privacy of the Hall but allowed them to create around it something more like the aristocratic park to which they aspired. They named it South Park. It is only in retrospect that we can now see this as the first step in the conservation of the extensive green space, with its sweeping views across the city, that in the mid-20th century would become Oxford's finest public park. But that's another story.

Peter also hopes to offer another of his popular guided walks on the history of the park in the autumn.

Summer in South Park

Summer is now in full swing and it is — as always — wonderful to see everyone out and about in the park: walking, playing football and basketball, using the fitness activities and, of course, enjoying the iconic view of Oxford the park offers as the sun sets over the dreaming spires.

FoSP continues to urge all park users to behave responsibly whilst in the park by not leaving any litter or rubbish behind, and:



Please Remember

BBQs are forbidden in the park! Portable BBQs cause serious damage to the grass and are also a fire risk.

Working with Brookes University and EF Education First

We are grateful to the Brookes University Community Liaison Team for their work in reminding students about taking litter with them and about the BBQ ban. We would like to thank the Community Liaison Team and the Student Community Wardens for their efforts, and thanks to Nick and Carli who joined FoSP for OxClean this year!

Thanks also to EF Education First for meeting with us and for their assurance that they will be encouraging their students to respect South Park and behave responsibly by taking their litter away with them.

There have been regular incidents over the years when a huge amount of rubbish has been left the park in the summer months, and FoSP will continue to monitor this.

Mowing and Management of the Grass

FoSP is following up concerns which have been raised this year about over-mowing and over-strimming of the grass in the park, both in the main areas and at the margins, particularly around the trees.

Water Leak, Headington Hill

Many park users will have seen the water leak that persisted for many weeks last year in the road just outside the London Road entrance to South Park; this stopped for a short while but recurred in the first week of April this year. A Thames Water operative at the site said that they were carrying out tests to determine whose water it is and/or where the water is coming from. Assuming it is their water, Thames

Water will put in place works to remedy the problem; if it is a matter of blocked drains in the road, for example, they will refer the matter to the County Council.

News of Upcoming Events in the Park

There are two big events expected to be held in South Park this year:

- Foodies Festival — August (exact date tbc)
- Round Table Fireworks — date & details tbc

As always, we will email the Friends with details about these events inviting comments as soon as we receive information from the OCC Events Team.

November's Oxford Round Table Fireworks was the last big event to be held in South Park and is always the largest event for South Park. For the 2025 Fireworks, instead of one huge bonfire, there were instead six smaller pallet fires. The smaller fires greatly reduced the damage to the ground, both because of their size and because of the much shorter time it took for the fires to burn out.

OxClean Spring Clean

In March, FoSP organised a group to take part in this year's OxClean Spring Clean Event. This initiative run by the Oxford Civic Society in partnership with OCC and the Oxford Times, coordinates local community groups and schools to tackle litter across the city's streets and public spaces.

Many thanks to the FoSP volunteers and Brookes' student community wardens who took part. Despite the grey skies, a cheerful mood prevailed and many bags were filled with litter and cleared from the park.



Volunteer Working Parties

Over the years, FoSP has organised volunteer working parties to clear the undergrowth, particularly around the Cheney Lane entrance to the park. We intend to organise a further such working party later this year.

Nature in the Park: Guided Walks

The Trees of South Park (Part 1)

At the FoSP AGM in October last year, we were fortunate to have as our guest Professor Stephen Harris, the Druce Curator of Oxford University Herbaria, who gave a talk on the subject 'The Trees of South Park: Past, Present and Future'.

With still more generosity, Stephen very kindly led a walking tour of the trees in South Park on Sunday 17th May. It was a fascinating insight into the history and ecology of some of the trees in the park.

Stephen has kindly agreed to lead a further tour of the trees on Sunday 27th September at 2pm, meeting once again by the Morrell Avenue entrance. Please email friendsofsouthpark@gmail.com if you would like to join the tour.

Stephen has also very generously allowed us to reproduce in the newsletter some of the images of the trees that were the subject of his talk at the AGM.

			
Fagus sylvatica Beech Tree	Prunus avium Wild Cherry	Castanea Sativa Sweet Chestnut	Quercus Robur English Oak

Biodiversity Study

FoSP has begun work recording observations of plants, grasses and trees in the park as the basis for a long-planned biodiversity study.

Plants we have recorded include: short daisies, celandine, buttercups, germander speedwell, dandelion, great willowherb, hanging sedges, soft comfrey, red dead-nettle, catchweed bedstraw, cuckoo pint, sweet violet, broad-leaved dock, herb robert, common dog violet, scilla, wood avens and garlic mustard — and, pictured below, the two iris species native to this country: yellow flag and stinking iris (so called because the smell of its leaves can be unpleasant when crushed or bruised).



Stinking iris (Iris foetidissima)



Yellow flag (Iris pseudacorus)

There are several spring seepage areas where the ground slopes towards the lower part of the park which are of interest. These are likely to be calcareous springs, and Oxfordshire has a concentration of these small, often isolated, rare alkaline fen wetland springs emerging from limestone which, when effectively managed, support habitat for rare and important plant and animal species.

If any of the Friends has any expertise in this area, or would be interested to be involved in FoSP's work on the biodiversity of the park, please email friendsofsouthpark@gmail.com to let us know!

Park Management Plan

FoSP is liaising with the OCC Green Spaces Team to update the South Park Management Plan, which covered the years between 2018 and 2022, and we aim to include a biodiversity study in this.

News About the Barns at Cheney Farm / Depot Site

Plans for the site had, until recently, been delayed while the status of the new barn was decided. Permission has now been granted to retain the new barn for a further three years ahead of a further application coming forward for the whole site.

Signage

The information signs for the park are nearing completion, and we are pleased to say that they should be installed by the autumn.

Creation of Unauthorised Entrances

Most of you will be aware of the recent unauthorised work carried out to the railings by a third party to create two new entrances at the top and bottom of South Park, and the insertion of railings to close up one of the gaps. The work was undertaken without permission from the City Council and Oxford Preservation Trust, and without any consultation with the park stakeholders.

OCC has consulted stakeholders to agree a response which 'may include restoration of the railings as was, or the adaptation and adoption of one or both of the new entrances', and regardless of what happens with the entrances, the Council is considering appropriate enforcement action.

We will update the Friends when we have more information

FoSP Membership and Subscriptions

As agreed at the 2025 FoSP AGM, the membership fee for 2026/27 will be £5 per person. To renew your subscription, or to join, please visit www.friendsofsouthpark.org.uk.

Committee Members

Sue Harmer	Chair
Sue Brownill	Secretary
Mel Hamill	Acting Treasurer
Stephen Dawson	Oxford Preservation Trust representative (co-opted)
Dominic Parkinson	
Zoe Hindley	Social media manager (co-opted)
Vacancies	We have three vacancies on the committee - please join us!

Aims of Friends of South Park

To represent the local community for the benefit of the park and its users. This includes:

- Influencing South Park's appearance (railings, tree maintenance, litter, dog fouling)
- Having a say in the existing facilities (play area, benches, bins, etc.)
- Being a consultee regarding the future of the depot (old Cheney Farm) area at the top of the park
- Being a consultee for the events that happen within the park

- Improving the park's biodiversity
- Promoting exercise, health and wellbeing activities in the park
- Organising community events
- Fundraising through membership, events, sponsorship and donations

STAY IN TOUCH

See the Constitution of FoSP at www.friendsofsouthpark.org.uk Email: friendsofsouthpark@gmail.com