

Newsletter, Spring 2014

The Park was entered again this year for a *Green flag Award*, which it first won in 2012.

What is a Green Flag Award? It was initiated in 1996 by the then Government to set a benchmark for a quality park or green space. The scheme is currently managed by Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Department for Communities and Local Government. The award lasts for one year only but our award was renewed last year without inspection. This year, however, the independent judges picked May Day for their visit. The photograph above shows the spruced up area near to the Centre Circle on that day. The inspection took about an hour during which we visited all areas of the Park, including the frontage to Oxford Rd where we stopped to look at the wicker sculpture made during the Gallery's



“Weekending” event last August— this started off as a version of the “Genesis” by Jacob Epstein, but the winter rains modified it in a most interesting way, so that on the day it appeared more like a Mother and Child! (Stop press: it has now been moved after recent heavy rain). We will hear the judges’ assessment in July. In the meantime we understand that the City Council will soon be initiating its own award – the Manchester standard. We await information about this with interest, particularly in regard to the judging criteria. The Green Flag Award criteria are set out clearly and well established. Whilst we have reservations about basing assessment on only one visit at a predetermined time of year, we like the idea of being judged against a nationally applied standard.

***Work-In.** One of the objectives of the Management Plan, guided by our own assessment of the Park against Green Flag criteria, is to recreate a circular walk affording good access for everybody. Research shows that there is a clear link between proximity to quality green space and mental and physical wellbeing, and the green paths which have already been established by joggers, strollers and dog walkers offer the potential for improvement by being reinforced by some kind of wheelchair friendly material. We would prefer this to be something other than tarmac, like grass grown through a supporting structure, but this needs further research. The paths run mainly through areas where, following the Council’s policy of increasing biodiversity (but also as a way of reducing costs), the grass is no longer regularly cut. In our own bio-diversity project on the western side of the Park we are trying to combat this by introducing compatible “exotic” plants into the grassland in the area where 2 years ago we planted over 200 young trees. This is a project that we can do over time using small numbers of volunteers in our regular work-ins with Gallery and Museum staff, but we still need to establish a routine with the grounds maintenance team that will give the grass path here and elsewhere the sharp edge that counters the impression of weedy neglect and a lack of concern for aesthetics. The picture shows Gallery/Museum volunteers Amy, Sarah and Steven helping Alistair plant material grown on from cuttings.*



Don't forget! AGM: 6.45pm 28 May, Academy High School, Moss



Manchester
Museum

WHITWORTH PARK: PLEASURE PLAY & POLITICS



#WhitworthPark

*Lane East: Light refreshments,
6.30pm*

*This exhibition, which runs from 24 May to 5 October, tells the story of how the Park has changed over time through the objects that came to light when we joined volunteers from the community, students and staff from the University's Department of Archaeology in the **Community Archaeology and History Project**. Children's toys, dropped in the lake over a hundred*

*years ago, and other finds, shed light on activities in the Park, not all of them behaviour expected of visitors to the Park. The exhibition also reveals the full range of attractions – bandstand, boating lake, statues, and formal planting schemes and tells how these features have been lost as other demands on the public purse have increased. **The Project** has been carried out as tight budgets and changing management regimes once again threaten the maintenance of the Park, and we are grateful for the opportunity it has given us to make more people aware of its history and beauty. We hope that they, like us, will see the re-opening of the "new" Gallery as an opportunity to change the present challenge into an opportunity to build on the Park's renaissance. We want to thank Sian Jones, Mel Giles, Hannah Cobb and Ruth Colton for leading us through this stimulating experience and hope that their work serves them well.*

See <http://whitworthparklife.wordpress.com/> for lots more about this!

MONOLITH: *For some years, woodland ecologists have been recommending that more dead wood should be retained in natural woodland, commercial forestry and even in public parks. The theory is that many woodland invertebrates and fungi rely on a constant supply of 'dead wood habitat'. Without this vital recourse, they have no food and no home. They totally rely on dead wood and simply cannot survive without it. These fungi and invertebrates in turn become food for larger creatures and become the bottom link in the food chain - no dead wood, no woodpeckers.*

This dead wood habitat can be in the form of both 'standing dead wood' or 'fallen dead wood'. Even quite small pieces can support something. Many of these organisms are of course very small indeed and do not need an entire tree trunk. In a highly used public park like Whitworth Park, a balance has to be struck between safety and wildlife and between habitat and making the park look unkempt. Fallen branches are collected and the Friends group make them into 'habitat piles'. These are great for small mammals and birds to find cover and safe nesting areas.

Recently, an opportunity has arisen to produce a dead wood 'monolith' This is the term given to large dead stems which have had their limbs removed to make them safe but the main stem is left standing. Experience has shown that these can remain in good condition for decades as they are slowly colonised by 'dead-wood invertebrates' and fungi. They become an entire habitat in their own right.

One of the large London Planes near the southeast entrance to the park was struck by lightning some years ago and has never fully recovered. The tree had been monitored but had slowly deteriorated to the point where it could no longer be guaranteed not to shed limbs or even to fail completely. The hard decision was made to make it into a Monolith. A tall high-lift platform was used and the arborists carefully dismantled the limbs until only the main stem and the ends of the large limbs remained. We expect that this trunk will still be providing a service to the wildlife of Whitworth Park for at least the next twenty years.

As a side issue, all of the Plane trees in Whitworth Park are the hybrid London Plane. This tree is a hybrid of the Oriental Plane from Persia and the Occidental Plane from the USA. However, there is one of the parents of this hybrid, the Oriental Plane, growing in the Park and this tree can be recognised by its (slightly) different leaves. Hours of innocent fun can be had trying to locate this tree interloper. Many experts say this species is a better-looking tree than its offspring so it is worth looking out for.

Planes are very long-lived trees and no London Plane has yet died of old age. The Planes in Whitworth Park are only one hundred years old and are already big trees so future generations of park users can expect to find some mighty giants developing over the next two hundred years or longer – they can quite possibly live to make it to one thousand years of age. They are certainly a tree that will benefit from any increase in temperature.

Thank you, Joe Walsh, Neighbourhood Team Leader, Arboriculture, for this.





Please contact *Ken Shone*, with any suggestions or comments at shones@altrincham.freeserve.co.uk or 0161 928 5744.
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