

FRIENDS OF CAVERSHAM COURT GARDENS

Lockdown newsletter Summer 2020 No 25

Please note that social distancing regulations continue to apply in Caversham Court Gardens

1. Thanks to RBC! The Friends are extremely grateful to RBC for keeping Caversham Court Gardens open throughout the lock-down, and particular thanks to our head gardener, Will Paice, who generously came in over the Easter holidays to open up the gates and ensure the gardens were in order and the toilets open. Thanks to all of you who have been visiting the gardens during the lock-down period and observing the social distancing regulations.

We all owe a huge debt to the NHS and all frontline workers for their efforts to keep us safe and supplied during the crisis. We also owe a special thank-you to the Parks Department for making it possible for us to have our very own *nhs - natural health service* - in the gardens.

2. Damage Sadly, a small number of visitors have caused damage to the gardens during the lockdown period. Serious damage has been caused to the most ancient tree in the gardens, the family yew: someone has ring-barked an entire bough, which will cause that part of the tree to die off.

Damage has also been caused by people lighting barbecues in the gardens, scorching the grass and risking setting fire to the dry grass and trees.

There are signs on the panel at the entrance to the gardens indicating that no fires are allowed. Football and cycling are also not permitted, though many visitors choose to ignore the obvious damage these cause both to the gardens and to the peace and safety of other visitors.

3. Trees Whilst we enjoyed the sunny spring weather, many of our beautiful trees in the gardens are showing signs of stress: some of the young trees are struggling on the chalk, many more are suffering in the long periods of drought. The Bhutan pine next to the Tea Kiosk is showing serious signs of decline: the RBC tree surveyor has recommended mulching and watering. The variegated tulip tree (*Liriodendron*) next to the Bhutan pine has a very sparse canopy for the second year running, and the Black Walnut is also struggling. You may have noticed that the bench has been removed around the walnut, since this was adding to erosion round the tree roots. Members of the Friends have been helping with watering and mulching, though during lockdown volunteer activities have been curtailed.

4. Entrance gates lime tree The Covid-19 crisis delayed work on the wall next to the main entrance gates, so a replacement tree for the lime that sadly had to be felled has not yet been planted. Work will be carried out as soon as possible.

You may have noticed a new tree outside the stable yard, which the Parks Department planted in April. It is a copper beech, chosen because there was one there back in the 1930s.

5. **AGM** Many thanks to all those members who replied to our email announcing that due to the lock-down, our AGM was to be held by email. Fortunately everyone who replied voted in favour of our proposal to adopt the Minutes of the 2019 AGM, the Treasurer's Report and Accounts, and also voted to re-elect the FCCG officers and committee. Our speaker has kindly agreed to come in spring 2021, we will settle the date asap. If you have still to renew your membership, this can be done online - see our [website](#)

6. **Website** As the season has progressed, John Evans has been valiantly posting photographs and fascinating facts on the Garden News page of our website (thanks to John and to Katie Russell for technical assistance). Thanks also to Mary Phelan for her drawings capturing the essence of lock-down in the gardens, some of which you can see on the website.

7. **Climate Change Workshops** We were hoping in 2020 to expand on the Climate Change workshops which FCCG volunteer John Edwards led for local primary schools last year, but lockdown has put those plans on hold. We look forward to continuing in 2021, when we hope more local schools will be able to take part. Please contact us if you are interested in finding out about these.

8. **Heritage Open Days 11-21 September** We may not be able to offer the planned guided tours of the Caversham Court Allotments this year, but we will certainly conduct tours as soon as is allowed. In the meantime, we hope to devise a virtual tour of the gardens to go up on our website.

