



# NEWSLETTER

## JANUARY 2024

### Roundup of 2022 - 2023

There's much to report since our last newsletter in February 2022, when we were planning to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022. Unfortunately, the Jubilee Gala Day we organised was a wet, dismal day and there was a very low attendance. We installed the specially commissioned Jubilee bench between the two granite benches overlooking the central "star bed".



Sadly, the Queen died in September 2022, and we decided that it would be appropriate to also commemorate King Charles' Coronation in May 2023. The three "star beds" in the northwest area of the Valley Gardens were long overdue for attention; the star edging had eroded, and the planting was unattractive. We grassed over the two smaller beds and concentrated on the central bed. As the star shape is difficult to maintain, we changed the shape to a circle. We ordered a large metal crown for the centre of the bed, made for us by Bekfabs in Skinner Lane, who installed the crown and plaques. We chose a variety of perennials for colour and foliage interest throughout the year, for sustainability and drought resistance. The new bed cost £3,000: topsoil, plants, and crown, and was funded from the proceeds of Friarwood Festival.



**"Crown Bed" – commemorating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and King Charles' Coronation**

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2023, the first anniversary of the Queen's death, we held a bulb planting event. St Giles' School pupils and Yvette Cooper MP planted red, white, and blue hyacinth bulbs as jewels in the crown.



**Hyacinth bulb planting**

Last autumn we planted tulip and daffodil bulbs in the Crown Bed to provide spring colour, and the perennial plants will gradually fill out the bed. We hope to persuade the Council to restore the herbaceous border here; it has become very overgrown but could be an asset to the Garden.



## Children's Activity Trail



The thermoplastic play trail was installed in April 2022, paid for by Friarwood Festival. It has proven to be very popular.

## Tree Carvings



In July 2022 last year, we commissioned four tree carvings into the trunks of dead or dying trees. These were paid for by a grant from the Neighbourhood Improvement Fund, Friarwood Festival, and our contingency funds.

## Events in the Valley Gardens 2023

We were fortunate with the weather for all our events last year: Easter Egg Hunt in March, Liquorice Festival in July, and Yorkshire Day and

Friarwood Festival in August. Liquorice Festival in the Valley Gardens is a satellite to the main event in the Town Centre and offers a respite from the crush in town. A few weeks later we held another family gala on Yorkshire Day, 1<sup>st</sup> August. Both events were popular and well attended, free entry with lots of children's activities: bouncy castle, donkeys, Punch and Judy, and children's games. We obtained a Neighbourhood Improvement Fund grant towards the cost of running them.



## Liquorice Festival



## Yorkshire Day



## Friarwood Festival 12<sup>th</sup> August 2023

Friarwood Festival is now a ticketed event to control numbers and to cover the cost of holding



the event, which this year cost nearly £10,000. All surplus funds from Friarwood Festival are used for improvements in the Valley Gardens. In the past two years, Friarwood Festival has paid for the play trail and the Crown Bed and contributed towards the cost of the tree carvings.

### **Volunteer Activities**

Volunteer activities continue throughout the year: gardening every Saturday at 2pm and litter picking the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of each month at 10.30am. As well as the Rose Garden and Sensory Garden, we have several flower beds and an herbaceous border to maintain and there's always something that needs doing.



### **The Rose Garden**

There are 31 rose beds in the Rose Garden needing regular weeding, edging, and mulching with wood chip. In the summer there's deadheading and in the winter, pruning of the 2,000 rose bushes.



In recent years, we've adopted flower beds at the Friarwood Lane entrance, and this year the new Crown Bed, all requiring regular maintenance.



### **We need more volunteers.**

We have a very small team of volunteers and need more help. We're gardening every Saturday from 2 – 4pm, weather permitting. We have the tools but best to bring your own gardening gloves. If gardening isn't your thing, there's helping with the events. All the events have become more popular, and we need help with organising, setting up, marshalling, and lots of other little jobs on the day. Although as a volunteer it's not necessary to be a member of Friends of Friarwood Valley Gardens, we do have a membership scheme. The annual subscription is just £5, which is additional income for the group. Visit our website or Facebook page for more information.



## Our plans for 2024

### The Liquorice Fields at Pontefract

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of John Betjeman's death and our contribution to Wakefield's "Our Year" of culture, we are hoping to install a feature depicting Betjeman's poem "The Liquorice Fields at Pontefract". Liquorice was cultivated in the Valley Gardens, in the area now occupied by the Rose Garden, until the 1940s when Pontefract Borough Council acquired the land and created Friarwood Valley Gardens as a public park, and we still maintain a group of liquorice plants there. Sir John, who was Poet Laureate from 1972 to 1984, visited Pontefract several times, and had a special affection for the town.



**Harvesting liquorice root**

**Bill Kieghley digging out the liquorice root in the 1930s. Old Pontefract General Infirmary in the background.**

The Kieghley family grew liquorice in the Valley Gardens from the mid-1800s until the late 1940s, by which time cultivation of liquorice in Pontefract was being replaced by imported liquorice root from warmer countries where the liquorice root can be harvested after 2 years, compared to 5 years in Pontefract.

## Children's playground

The playground was installed in 2015, eight years ago, and extended in 2019. It is very popular, but all the grass has worn away and we have asked the Council to investigate having a rubber mulch surface put down. We are also considering having some play panels, and restoration of the wooden pigs.



## Events 2024

We are planning all our usual events this year again. Here are the dates:

Easter Egg Trail for pre-school children:  
Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March

Liquorice Festival in the Valley Gardens:  
Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July

Yorkshire Day: Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> August

Friarwood Festival: Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August

Pontefract Lions Club also plan to hold the Lantern Festival again in October.

We always need volunteers to help us with these events, so please contact us if you would like to help.

## Contact Us

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