



FRIENDS' NEWSLETTER

Summer 2026: Issue 114



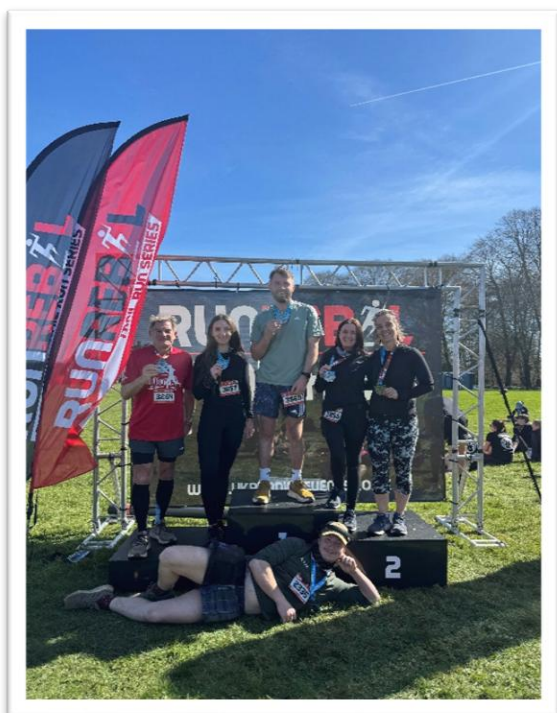
News from the Director

The House and Grounds have now opened to the public for the Summer Season. Mothering Sunday proved as popular as ever and there was barely room to park on Easter Sunday with 750 cars arriving on the Estate in 2 hours! I fear that the car park will never be large enough to cope with these High Days and Holidays and so we will need to examine the options for a Seasonal Car Park to cope with these surges in demand. It is reassuring that Stansted Park is a known destination with some exciting amenities and shopping opportunities. One of our objectives is to develop some more commercial units in the Walled Garden area to capitalise on the existing footfall and enhance this area as a business and recreational hub.

Other recent notable activities have included an excellent talk on 'Is it too late to Save the Ocean?' in the Mansion with a sell-out audience and the Stansted Trail Run which attracted over 500 runners with several staff members dragging their reluctant and groaning bodies around the 10km or 21km routes.

The opening of Oak Copse by the Forestry team so that the public could enjoy the spectacular array of bluebells was extremely well-received. The Grounds team are now in full mowing flow after a very wet Spring with the Gardens team and Volunteers working hard to ensure that everywhere looks stunning.

The House Stewards are now poised ready to cope with the influx of visitors this year with Guided Tours being particularly popular. The publication of the new Visitors' Companion, generously funded by the Friends, has certainly added a lustre to the visits and is selling well. This should prove to be a highly profitable enterprise.



The Stansted Park Trail Run Team

Plans are underway for the new Visitors' Information Point and it is hoped that a planning application can be submitted shortly.

Summer is here and it's good to see Cricket being played again and the footpaths full of people enjoying the fresh air and ambience unique to Stansted Park. With all that is going on in the world, it is hoped that lots of folk can find good value fun and entertainment at our many events. These range from the Super Car Rally, Food Festival, Open Air Cinema, Proms, Outdoor Theatre to our very own Summer Festival on 27th & 28th June. The latter is now in its 6th year and going from strength to strength. Always the main threat comes from the weather but we are holding our nerve that, this year, the sun will shine and the public will attend in their droves! My thanks in advance to the Friends who will be helping out over the weekend.



The Stansted Park Corporate Hospitality Team

I would also like to thank the Friends for their continuing support and generosity; I wish you a very enjoyable Summer!

David Bennett



Notes from the Head Forester

Having mentioned I had planted the last trees in Compartment 3 in the last newsletter I hoped they would have a good start to the growing season with no problems. We have had just enough rain to get them going and driving past and looking through the deer fence I could see plenty of fresh green shoots appearing across the plantation. I awoke one morning to frost in the field across from our house and later noticed large areas of young bracken shoots had been burnt off by the unseasonal cold in several places in the forest. A later inspection of this plantation revealed a sad tale of frosted growth across a large area where it clearly had been very icy overnight. They will recover but will be set back somewhat and may now produce multiple leading shoots that will need singling in time.



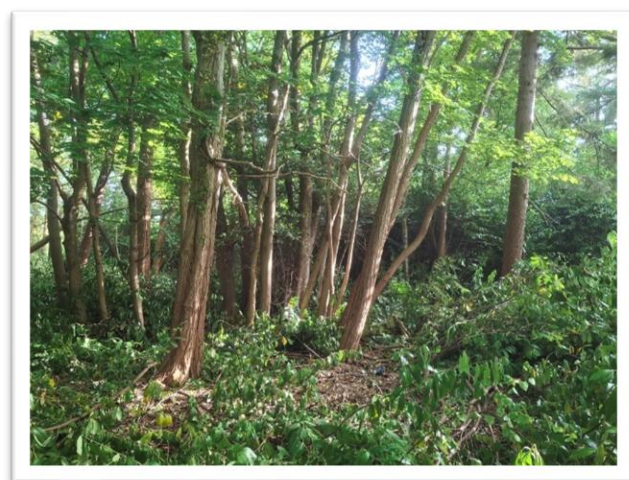
Frosted Douglas fir

The rain was very welcome after a rather dry period as our agricultural contractor was able to cultivate then drill the two hectares (five acres) of the winter bird food plot on Horse Pasture Farm. We have moved it to the other end of the field this year as the soil on the original site was getting stale and needed a rest. Providing it grows well it will provide some much-needed winter feed through the hungry gap for farmland birds.



Ideal drilling conditions

Although marked on the stock map as compartment 6b, this area has always been referred to as the Old Nursery. Many estates in the past had their own nursery area where seed was sown or saplings lined out for growing on to larger sizes; these areas were often tended by a retired woodman. You can still see some quite large limes, sweet chestnut and Robinia in lines within the area although many have been shaded out and died. Whether the large area of common laurel that covers most of the area was heeled in plants that then spread when the nursery was abandoned or planted later for pheasant cover, I do not know but it has produced an impenetrable thicket with little benefit for anything. As part of the management programme, we have with the Forestry Commission we are removing as much laurel from the forest as we can and are at present cutting this area before grubbing the stumps out with an excavator to limit regrowth. Any subsequent seedlings and shoots from roots will be sprayed over the next couple of years. We can then either allow natural regeneration to take place or plant the area.



The old nursery stock emerges from the mass of laurel.

Pests and diseases of trees are centre stage for all foresters and land managers nowadays and we are dealing with many more than our predecessors ever did. One recent addition to our problems is the Larger Eight-toothed Spruce Bark Beetle (*Ips typographus*). This beetle has caused devastation in commercial timber crops of spruce in Europe and has recently been found in the UK having flown across the channel on favourable winds. To counter this threat any infected stands are subject to a plant health notice and are destroyed. The Forestry Commission are also working with landowners to create a cordon sanitaire across the South-East of England so that the beetle will not be able to leapfrog north and threaten the huge spruce forests in the north, so essential to our timber industry. Although the last of our large commercial spruce crops were felled a few years ago when they were mature, we still have some smaller areas and scattered old trees across the forest, and I am at present in consultation with the Commission about removing these.

Michael Prior



As Spring moves into Summer – what we will see in the gardens ...

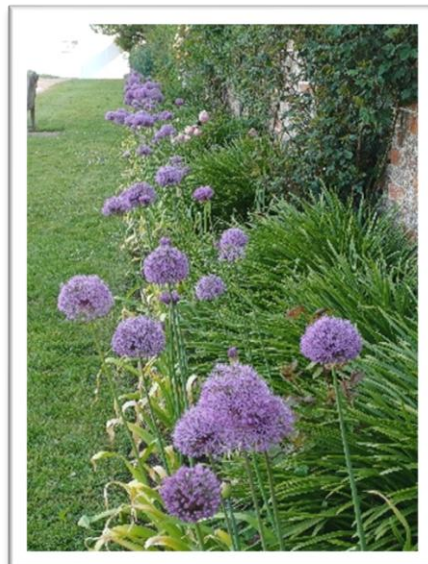
As spring moves into summer, the garden begins to burst into life. Bees can be heard buzzing around early pollinating plants, birds flirt amongst the hedges, and the chatter of our seasonal Thursday morning volunteer group once again returns, whose help is much appreciated at this very busy time of year.

Working in the walled garden invites visitors to ask questions about plants in the borders and they often ask about planting for a drought, and this year has been no exception. My answer is to try to be balanced in approach. Our weather can be unpredictable and varies each year regarding rainy and dry spells. I tend to plant for both and in doing this you are likely to lose some plants, but invariably, you will have a good selection throughout the season. This year has been no different in that the copious levels of rain over winter soon turned into a very dry few weeks and the heat/winds affected the longevity of flowering of some early bulbs/shrubs. It is with excitement that the season begins to take shape and we adapt the maintenance and care of the borders to cater for the unexpected twists and turns in weather.

The Crocus, Daffodils, Camassia, and Scilla have all faded now but, in their place, we see perennials and shrubs taking centre stage. As the Forsythia ends its flowering the Viburnum plicatum enjoys the admiration of visitors, the roses are beginning to bud, and plants such as Geum and Peony are beginning to bloom.



Viburnum plicatum



Allium 'Purple Sensation'



Geum 'Queen of Orange'

New plants in the borders to look out for include: Paeonia 'Bowl of Beauty', Potentilla 'Flambeau' and 'Etna', Sidalcea 'Wine Red', Artemisia 'Powis Castle' and Catananche caerulea amongst many others. The hardy geraniums of various varieties such as Geranium pheaum and Geranium sylvaticum 'Album' together with Nepeta 'Six Hills Giant' are beginning to establish this year and provide an early burst of interest. Alliums have been added to the borders over the last two years and this year they are making a wonderful and varied display. Varieties include: Allium 'Haarlem Superglobe', Allium 'Miami', Allium 'Ping Pong', Allium 'Toabago' and Allium 'Purple Sensation'.

I have started to add some larger grasses such as Miscanthus 'Purple Fall', Stipa gigantea, and Pennisetum 'Black Arrow' through the borders and this should add some interest in the autumn in amongst perennials. Annuals are also growing in the nursery area, and like last year, these should add some beautiful colour around the gardens until October time when the first frosts are likely to arrive. These will include varieties of Cosmos, Tagetes, Larkspur, Ami major and Nicotiana.

Birdlife around the estate provides a wonderful backdrop of song. The blackbirds and robins have been charmingly attentive whilst working in the borders gathering worms from any turned soil. The nursery area and Well Head are wonderful bases for listening and enjoying this aspect of the garden and birds such as Firecrest and Goldcrest can be seen flirting around the walled garden regularly.



The Well Head section of the garden, which is being managed for biodiversity, provides a calm and peaceful oasis to escape for a moment of tranquility. Already, butterflies such as brimstone flutter happily amongst the natural borders with many plants such as dead nettle being allowed a home. Verbascum is a magnet for shieldbugs and Mullein moth caterpillars, which helps to bring to life the concept of managing parts of the garden in a way which allow the natural interaction of many species.



Mullein moth caterpillar



Snail on Plantain



Shield bug

Enjoy the predicted heatwave. Though watering is obviously important during these times, established perennials are often more resilient than we realise, and they can access some water from deep within the soil. So, the message is to be vigilant with watering but also mindful and selective. Remember to prune shrubs such as Forsythia now that they have finished flowering, as leaving this too late will affect next year's flowering. The RHS website is a great source of information for when to prune most plants in the garden if you are unsure. As with many shrubs, it is beneficial every now and again to renovate and prune right back. This will mean that the shrub will not flower for one or two seasons, but it will be a healthier plant. Enjoy the summer season!

Jan Atkinson - Head Gardener

The Stansted Maze

Why?

It all started in the Autumn of 2002 (that's nearly 25 years ago) when the Trustees of Stansted Park were facing a challenge of how to provide a greater level of public access and enjoyment of the Lower Walled Garden which would be compatible with all the other visitor attractions and provide another revenue stream for the Foundation.

A maze was proposed as it would provide an attraction for visitors of all ages and represent both a physical and mental challenge.

Moving forward, and after several iterations, the current maze was conceived and in late 2002 the hard work began. Five hundred yew trees were imported from Holland and planted and it then took another nine years for the maze to reach maturity. It finally opened to the public in 2011.

The maze follows the design of a similar maze at Villa Pisani at Stra in Italy and there is approximately one kilometer of yew hedging which needs careful cutting every year.



Peter Dudman (with thanks to James Cooper for valuable input)



What we've been doing so far this year..

AGM – 25th February

The room was full of FOSP members for this year's AGM along with most of the Committee members.

Chris Freeborough and Lynda Fulford, long-time Committee members, chose not to seek re-election. Their efforts in organising many events over the years has been appreciated by Committee members and FOSP members alike. We will miss them both.

Special Spring Coffee Morning – 26th March

A large group of people came to this Special Spring Coffee Morning. There was a lot of chatting between new and old Friends and guests were treated to a selection of delicious choice of cakes, as well as tea and coffee. The atmosphere was further enhanced by Vanessa Bowler, who played the piano throughout the event, providing delightful musical entertainment for everyone.



Spring Talk – 30th April

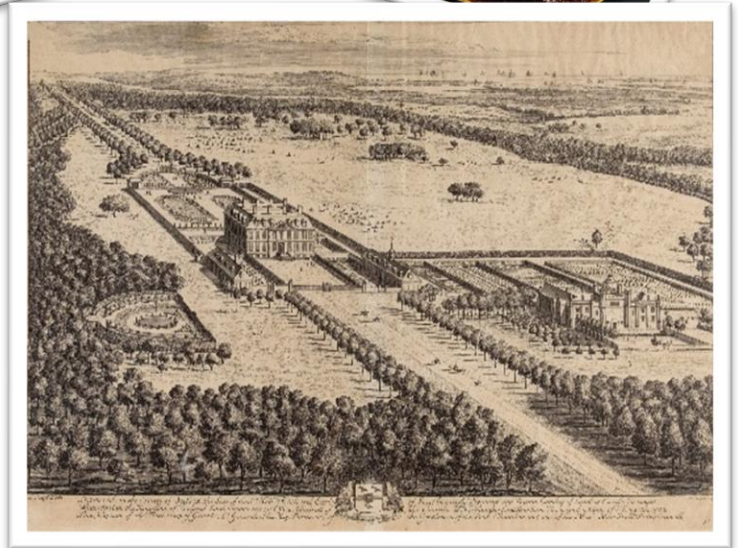
We were very lucky to have Mark Seaman, Chairman of the Chichester and District Archaeology Society, talk to us on the subject "How True to Reality was the Kip Engraving of Stansted?"

Around forty people, FOSP members and guests, listened to Mark explain the history surrounding this engraving and giving us research reasons why he wanted to carry out this study. He made many comparisons to other known pictures and to maps of the area over time.

Many of you will be familiar with the Kip engraving of Stansted House, and Mark summarises his findings in the following paragraphs. The investigations indicated that much of the engraving to the east of the House is, in fact, accurate.

Do have a look at the Kip drawing when you next visit the House.

"The Kip engraving was an entry in Britannia Illustrata, a major work which contained engravings of the top houses and gardens of the 17th C, whose owners paid large sums of money for the privilege. These engravings were not always accurate and sometimes contained exaggerations or features planned but not implemented. So, the question was, how accurate was the engraving of Stansted, dated 1707-09?"



Kip (Johannes, engraver). Stansted in the County of Sussex, c.1710

CDAS (the Chichester & District Archaeology Society) carried out a geophysics survey in 2025 which showed details of the original garden under the surface of East Field. It even showed the original fountain which was previously of doubtful existence. So, after 300 years, we can now say that the Kip engraving was actually quite accurate.

There remains one feature whose existence is still doubted, the "Orange Grove", a hemispherical feature in the lower left of the engraving. CDAS will carry out a geophysics survey of that area, which is near the cricket pitch, this summer and we look forward to hearing the results."

A big thank you to Mark Seaman, and to Sheila Miles, the FOSP Committee's new Talk Organiser and to everyone that came along.



Exciting Summer Events Ahead...

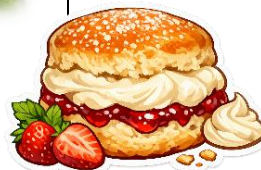
Stansted is hosting lots of events over the summer period - the What's On page on the website gives details of everything you need to know - <https://www.stanstedpark.co.uk/whatson1>



...and as usual, FOSP will have a stand at both the Food Festival and the Summer Festival - please come and see us to say "hi".

Summer Supper Party Wednesday 8 July @ 6:30pm, Pavilion Tea Room

We look forward to seeing you at our much-loved annual event, the Summer Supper Party - festivities begin at 6.30pm with fizz in the walled garden, then supper in the beautiful Pavilion Tea Room. (We are very fortunate because the Pavilion doesn't usually hold evening events, but has hosted our supper now for many years, and has willingly welcomed us again this year).



Cream Tea - Thursday, 13 August @ 3:00pm

Cream on first, or jam?

You decide, but do join us in the grand rooms in the Mansion for another delicious Cream Tea - indulge yourself with scone, jam, clotted cream, homemade cakes and tea (or coffee).

We are delighted to say that Vanessa Bowler has again offered to play the piano for us, so come and enjoy a relaxed afternoon meeting old and new Friends in delightful surroundings.

FOSP Members £9 , Non-Members £10 - please book before Friday 31 July.

Sadly, we will have to restrict numbers so do book early. Gluten free option available on request to anneburton99@gmail.com

The Friends' Committee look forward to seeing you.

The **Raffle** is another regular feature of this summer occasion, and we would be delighted for any raffle contribution - you can bring it with you on the night.

FOSP Members £28, Non-Members £32 - please book before Friday, 26 June

Use the South Entrance for general parking in the Garden Centre Car Park. For disabled parking please use the Bothy Car Park, by the Chapel.

To book either the **Summer Party** and/or the **Cream Tea**, simply telephone the Stansted Office on 023 9241 2265 option 5, to pay by card, quoting your FOSP membership number.

If you'd prefer to pay by cheque, payable to Friends of Stansted Park, send it to Anne Burton at Dapplend, Walnut Tree Drive, Woodmancote, Emsworth PO10 8QH, giving your name, FOSP membership number, and a contact telephone number



and sadly

Dawn Spencer

Sadly, we report that Dawn Spencer, whom many of you knew as a longstanding House Steward at Stansted, recently died. There was an article in the summer 2025 Newsletter about Dawn's 100th birthday celebrations - she certainly didn't look anywhere near that age and was still coming to the House as a steward well into her nineties!

Dawn was a keen golfer at Rowlands Castle Golf Club, becoming Ladies' Captain in 1974. She became involved with Stansted House in 1985, when the House was first opened to the public, and she stayed involved for the next forty years.

Frederick (known as Eric) and Mary, 10th Earl and Countess of Bessborough, set up Stansted Park Foundation in 1983 and, when stewards were needed to guide visitors, and to protect the contents of the House, ladies from the Rowlands Castle Golf Club rose to the occasion and volunteered to help.

Dawn was an accomplished steward, sharing with visitors a wealth of knowledge in her own inimitable way. She was a strong authoritative character and, with her distinctive, crisp, well-modulated voice, she was occasionally thought by visitors to be the Lady of the House. Dawn however, was a modest and private person, who was fun but didn't suffer fools gladly.

Dawn was brought up in Storrington and enjoyed riding her ponies and playing tennis. She was only 15 when war broke out. She shared her father's interest in aircraft and was able to tell the make and class of an aircraft from a distance. When old enough, she joined the Royal Observer Corps and, after training, became a 'plotter' moving model planes around in briefing rooms for war time air operations.

Dawn married in 1958, having met husband Michael at a tennis club. She loved playing tennis and her interest in that sport never waned. Wimbledon fortnight was sacred to Dawn - so no stewarding during that period.

Widowed early, Dawn still travelled the world - everywhere from safaris in Botswana, to Hudson Bay in Canada. She had a long and fulfilling life with her golf, and bridge clubs, and her other great love - Stansted House.

With thanks to Dawn's nephew Robin Ede, and Joan Felton, for their help in providing information on her long and interesting life.



FOSP Committee Changes

The Leavers

We are incredibly grateful to the two Committee members who have chosen not to stand to seek re-election for the time, care, and dedication they have given to Friends of Stansted Park over many years. We thank them both.

Lynda Fulford - still very much a volunteer but retiring from the Committee

After a long and varied career working in the UK and abroad Lynda was looking for a volunteering opportunity which would use her strong organization skills once she retired. She had always had an interest in history so becoming a volunteer steward at Stansted House, learning the history of the estate and the people who lived there seemed a good fit for her. She still enjoys meeting people and taking them on private tours plus working in the Stansted Bookshop.

Lynda has thoroughly enjoyed her time as part of the FOSP Committee organizing the refreshments for Talks and the AGM and bringing new ideas and concepts to the catered events in the House which proved extremely popular with the Friends.

She is standing down from the Committee but will continue to spend time being a Steward in the House and volunteering in the Foundation Bookshop.



Chris Freeborough - retiring from the Committee

In his words..

"I qualified as a chartered accountant in 1958 and after doing my deferred national service in the Royal Artillery started my working life. Over the years from that time, I worked in a number of companies, both manufacturing and the service sector until I retired in 1995.

After retiring I turned my professional experience to voluntary work. I served as a business advisor with the Prince's Trust and was an active committee member for the Rwenzori Sculpture Foundation in Uganda, contributing my time and expertise supporting arts and entrepreneurialship.

In 2010 I joined the committee of the friends. Since then, I have arranged 13 trips and took over the twice-yearly talks program from Bill Corrigan.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working with the Friends & colleagues on these programs and being involved in the work of the committee supporting Stansted."



And the Joiners

Sarah Grant will be taking over from Lynda Fulford organising our events in the House. Sarah works in the Estate Office so is the ideal person for this role.

Annette Wood, a long-standing FOSP member, will be continuing Chris's work in organising external visits. She brings a wealth of experience to this role and we look forward to seeing what she arranges over the coming years.

FOSP would like to welcome both Sarah and Annette to the FOSP Committee.

Sheila Miles, a current FOSP Committee member, will continue to arrange talks for our members.

Regular Events

St Paul's Chapel Monthly Prayer Meetings

Prayer meetings are held on the first Thursday of every month at noon, through February until October. Entrance is via the Pavilion Tearoom, through the Dutch Garden Gate to the Chapel. Everyone is most welcome, but our Housekeeping Team would appreciate it if you can let us know if you are likely to attend so we can make sure we cater for enough people.

Complimentary light refreshments are served after the service - tea, coffee and biscuits.

Guided Tours of Stansted House



Guided tours of the house take place throughout the summer so please check the website for more information -- <https://www.stanstedpark.co.uk/whatson1>

PENSHURST PLACE VISIT

As you are all aware the Committee took the difficult decision to cancel the visit to Penshurst Place on 17th June. Based on the number of bookings which were lower than anticipated it became obvious that FOSP would incur a substantial loss and so deemed it unwise to proceed. If you haven't had your refund yet please contact the Estate Office.

Autumn Guided Walk

Wednesday, 2nd September @ 2:00pm - no need to book! Details on parking and where to meet will be emailed to Friends nearer the time.



Cocktail Watch Belonging to Roberte Bessborough



This delicate silver watch by Mappin & Webb is hallmarked to the year 1930, which means that Roberte might well have worn it at Stansted. The strap is made of black silk and the Bessborough crest is engraved on the back of the watch and on the dark blue box which contains it. The wind-up mechanism still works, making this a wearable piece as well as a collectible. Underneath the velvet insert inside the box, I found an intriguing letter folded and tucked away. This letter poses more questions...

63 High Street Gorleston is a Victorian building, now converted into a shop with living accommodation above. But who was 'Aunt Susan'? A friend of Roberte? A much-valued servant? If anybody can answer this question, please get in touch!

Vanessa Bowler

*63 High Street, Gorleston, Gt Yarmouth, Norfolk
Sunday 17th*

Dear Miss White,

*I am enclosing Aunt Susan's watch given to her
by the Countess of Bessborough.*

We thought you would like it as a keepsake.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs D. Clarke

Retirement & Volunteering

never a dull moment!

Introducing Tessa Culley

Like many of the Volunteers that frequent Stansted it all started for Tessa when she retired in 2003. Looking for something to keep her occupied after a full-on career in the teaching profession and living on Hayling Island, Stansted seemed to offer the ideal opportunity - for Tessa to utilize her skill sets.

Starting out as a House Steward/Volunteer where she is still very active she also spent, until very recently, a number of years as part of the Garden Volunteer group. Being a very keen gardener with a huge knowledge of plants, this also was very appealing and allowed Tessa to indulge in her love of gardening.

So right now, Tessa is extremely busy being one of the "in house" Archivists at Stansted which she says is very rewarding in terms of learning about the history and people of the House.

Don't miss Tessa when she gives a talk on "Being an Archivist" in the House on **7th October**. Further information will be provided in the FOSP Autumn Newsletter which is due for publication at the end of August.





Dates for your Diary

To see summer and early autumn events planned for Stansted Park, including many house tours planned, either visit the Stansted website www.stanstedpark.co.uk.whatson, contact the Office by email - enquiry@stanstedpark.co.uk or phone 023 9241 2265, option 5

FOSP Members can get discounts on many Foundation Events. Emails are sent out regularly with discount codes so watch out for them!



FRIENDS OF STANSTED PARK EVENTS

How to get here: Unless otherwise directed, please use the North Entrance to attend FOSP events. Drive through the automatic gates, veer to the right where the drive forks and park in front of the House.

- [Summer Party](#) - Stansted Pavillion Tea Room @ 6.30pm - see Page 6 for more information.....Wednesday, 8th July
 - [Cream Tea](#) @ 3.00pm - see Page 6 for more informationThursday, 13th August
 - [Walk](#) with Michael Prior @ 2.00pm - information will be emailed to Friends nearer the timeWednesday, 2nd September
- Further information and booking details for the following events will be in the Autumn Newsletter**
- A Talk by Tessa Culley on her role as an Archivist @ 2.00pm.....Wednesday, 7th October
 - Yuletide Tea @ 3.00pm.....Wednesday, 2nd December

Coming in the Autumn Newsletter

It's hard to contemplate Autumn when we have been blessed by such outstanding weather but we plan to include the following:-

- Visitor Experience update
- The Stansted Light Railway is reaching a milestone
- Reports from both the Summer Party and Cream Tea

Autumn NEWSLETTER

latest copy date: 28th August 2026

..and, as usual, if you have anything that you think would be of interest to the Friends please send any copy to peter.dudman1@virginmedia.com by 28th August for inclusion in the Autumn Newsletter. We have some ideas for future articles but any ideas and comments from members are always gratefully received.

Also, feedback of any sort is good 😊.

COMMITTEE MEMBER CONTACT DETAILS

- ChairmanNigel Smith-ngs.1957@hotmail.com
- Secretary Anne Burton-anburton99@gmail.com
- Treasurer.....Sarah Hutchinson-hutchsj@yahoo.co.uk
- Membership SecretaryPaul Bennett-friendsofstanstedpark@outlook.com
- Newsletter Editor..... Peter Dudman -peter.dudman1@virginmedia.com

For **membership enquiries**, please contact **Paul Bennett**. Membership cards will be issued to new members only. **Membership Renewals**: When renewing your membership, would you please consider setting up a Standing Order to save on volunteer time. Our Bank Details are: Sort Code 60-10-20 Account 61788627. Please give your membership number as a reference.

Consider keeping a photo of your membership card on your phone for ease of access.