# FRIENDS' NEWSLETTER

Winter 2026: Issue 116



# Director's Update

The wonderful news since the last Newsletter has been the joyful occasion of the marriage of our House and Events Manager, Sasha, to Mitch McCraw, an architect. The wedding was conducted in St Paul's Chapel by the Revered Christopher Hancock with a Reception in Stansted House. Many congratulations to them both!



*Sasha & Mitch*



*The Roaring 20's - Paul & Dina*

I am not sure how Sasha found the time to get married given the extremely busy events season she has spearheaded. There is absolutely no slackening in the pace as we move into the Winter. The Estate hosted a highly successful Open Air Cinema showing a series of Halloween films and, in the House, there has been a Murder Mystery, various Talks, including one on the Stansted Archives by Tessa Culley ably supported by Jennie Dolman, an Agatha Christie play as well as a 1920's themed House tour which proved to be extremely popular; this was a great initiative by Jess Williams, with the House Stewards entering fully into the spirit. All these events confirm in my mind two enduring characteristics of the British people; the desire to eat al fresco and the propensity to dress up; the events team is certainly capitalising on these traits! My thanks to Kerrie Davidson and the Housekeeping team for looking after the Mansion so carefully.

All departments on the Estate are fully occupied. There is never a shortage of maintenance and repair liabilities; a new resin footpath has been installed between the Office Car Park and the Stable Block which is a vast improvement on the previous one. The Woods & Parkland team under Michael Prior are busy planting in Castle Field; Toby Hill's Grounds team have been desperately trying to salvage the lawns after the hot and arid Summer with Jan Atkinson and her Garden Volunteers making great efforts to present the beds so beautifully; the gardens are such an intrinsic part of what attracts so many people to the splendour of Stansted Park.

The Bookshop continues to thrive and the significant income that is generated by this volunteer led enterprise is hugely appreciated. The Archivists and other volunteers are busy transcribing the diaries of Loelia Ponsonby, no mean task.

The Organ repairs are progressing very well; the reinstallation will be completed by the end of November, just in time for our Carol Service in December. I am very grateful to Richard Barnes and Mark Hartt-Palmer for very generously performing an amazing concert on keyboard and violin in aid of the organ, raising an incredible £4,190 on the night! The Foundation is so appreciative of the significant donations by the Friends, the Bookshop and many other individuals and grant bodies such that the costs of the refurbishment have been met.



*Richard & Mark at the Organ Raising Concert*

We have our Armistice Talk and Service coming up as well as some exciting Halloween and Christmas events with our usual Carol Service and Peter Auty Concert.

There is no question that Stansted Park is a vibrant and active estate well embedded in the local community and beyond. Everyone tries to ensure that the Estate, despite the weather and limited staff and financial resources, looks its best. As we reach the end of another year, I offer my sincere thanks to all the staff, regular contractors, Volunteers and, particularly, the Friends for all that they do to support the Estate and the cheerful and positive way in which they do so.

*David Bennett*

# Notes from the Head Forester

Due to the protracted birth of the new parkland Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier Scheme, we could not progress the first phase of the East Park North conversion as originally planned. As work could not be carried out until the agreement was signed a profuse growth of weed had developed since the last arable crop. It was decided that there would not be sufficient time for the huge number of weed seeds that had been dropped to germinate and be sprayed off before the new grass and wildflowers were sown. This would have meant that the weed growth would be in competition with the new plants in the spring and would most likely smother them. We have therefore cut the existing matt of dying weeds and cultivated the field to encourage germination which can be dealt with in the spring. This will give us a full year to get a clean seedbed before establishing the new ley next autumn.



*End of summer weed growth*



*First cultivation with a mass of gulls enjoying the spoils*

As I write this, the main thrust of our work is progressing the 4.0ha (9.88ac) of new woodland in Castle Field adjacent to the Main Avenue. This was identified many years ago in a Parkland Restoration Survey as an area requiring new planting to increase the width of the avenue belt that had become almost a thick line of trees rather than a framing woodland. As the Foundation did not own this field at the time it was not able to be progressed.

After careful marking out of the new boundaries when the field had been harvested, we removed the ash trees along the edge of the existing belt. Many were already infected with Ash Dieback Disease and others were rotten in the base having grown from old stools. This work reduced the likelihood of a tree falling through the new fence and allowing access by deer. We have now started on the deer/rabbit fencing around the perimeter with the 660m of the southern boundary now complete. We plan to plant half of the area to start with using 2970 trees with the rest planned for next winter.



*Southern boundary completed*

My focus for the planting season will be putting in 490m of new hedging on our boundary in Chalkpit Field which already has its double fence installed and the weed sprayed off ready for the mixed hedge species to go in. Apart from the huge biodiversity benefit that hedges give, new research shows just how much carbon they lock up in their wood and the soil beneath them and for these reasons the planting of new hedges and the proper management of existing ones is essential.



*Ready for the planting season, part of our order*

Our main tree and shrub order has now been delivered from Cheviot Trees who we have used for many years very successfully. I am just waiting for two varieties of disease resistant elms which will come from a different grower who specialises in these and which we have found to be very successful on the estate's soils and to grow very vigorously.

***Michael Prior***

# Garden Notes ... and autumn continues...

As the summer has ended, autumnal colours and textures are now the overriding impact in the garden. The rains began to fall in September/October and with that some of the struggling annuals such as Zinnias and Cosmos have begun to flourish once again. If I had to choose a plant of the season, for me it would be Callicarpa bodinieri. The beautiful lilac berries always attract attention and as a fairly modest plant throughout the summer, it is wonderful to see it adorned with this delicate jewellery enhancing our borders.



*Callicarpa bodinieri*



*Gaura & Zinnia*



*A single Gaura flower*

The beauty of the Gaura linheimeri has battled gracefully with Cosmos, Zinnia, and Verbena bonariensis throughout Autumn. Helenium is still holding onto the last of its colour as the seedheads become more evident. These too are beautiful and if they can hold on until the frosts they provide a wonderful structural base for the winter borders.

Gaura is a plant which is happier without the frosty cold autumn/winters of the past, as it does not fare well in very low temperatures. However, we hope for some cold weather as it has a place in solving some of the pest and disease issues around plants, besides presenting the garden in the most beautiful light. Autumn sunlight also bathes the borders each afternoon, creating an uplifting scene to carry us through the shorter days.




Next year is being promoted as a hotter season than this year and will follow a predicted wet and windy autumn/winter. This may result in damage around the gardens, particularly to plants such as roses, Forsythia, and the Heptacodiums in the borders. Herbaceous perennial planting is advantageous in this type of winter weather, as next year's growth is still cosy underground and able to prepare for spring. Tasks such as taking off some of the longer branches of roses prevent wind rock but with plants such as Forsythia, care needs to be taken to not cut off all of next year's blooms. This is why we tend to prune these shrubs as soon as possible after flowering. I have been harsh with some of the older Forsythia and Pyracantha, renovating them for the health and vigour of the plants. However, I have staggered this over two years, as generally you lose a year's flowering and so by working through groups of plants over several seasons the interest in the borders is not overly affected. This is a process I have started in the lower shrub borders in the walled garden where we have plans to remove self-seeded plants such as Cornus and Tree peonies. These are misplaced and can compromise old historic walls, but we can also take the opportunity to introduce more plant interest over time.

## What does the autumn have to offer?

Most exciting are the colours that nature exhibits at these times due to changes in temperature, which in turn impacts on chlorophyll production and so the yellow/red/orange (always present in the leaves) begins to show rather than being overwhelmed by green. An informative explanation can be found on https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/10/why-autumn-leaves-change-colour/

/continued…

Autumn perennials such as Sedum and Asters begin to take on an importance in the borders for the last of the flower colour, though grasses such as Stipa gigantea can be stunning in the fading light of an autumnal day. Annuals such as the Tagetes below also hold on to provide some late colour, as do the variety of deciduous trees in the central borders.



*Sedum*



*Tagetes*



*Spindle Tree*

## Seed collecting

Without a doubt one of my favourite activities in this season is collecting seeds from fading plant life. The life cycle of a flower is fascinating and the structural beauty of a seedhead provides hope for the following year. Birds flit amongst the decaying vegetation to collect any food available and network of life sustained in a garden becomes obvious. In being busy in the large gardens of Stansted it is easy to collect seedheads and not deal with them swiftly. This year I have made every effort to collect, dry, and harvest quickly, placing into paper bags and tins. Seed sowing is a joy in horticulture though obviously it can be disappointing, but those which offer a reward make the process worthwhile. Plants grown from last years seed collection include Cosmos, Zinnia, Tagetes, and Verbascum.

**Seedheads around the central borders**



*Annual poppy - Papaver somniferum*



*Strawflower*



Cosmos

## Annual routine maintenance

My hope for this season is to make headway with mulching. Though my overall plan for the Well Head is to leave cutting until spring, this means that often the ground is too wet to work on and so I will be cutting back earlier this year to enable the Well Head to remain within the maintenance plan regarding mulch. Hopefully this will help the borders to retain moisture if we do have a drought next summer.

I will be clearing the central borders and splitting Irises and perennials, clearing some of the areas around grasses to allow them to feature as they grow larger. Shrubs will be planted in the lower borders of the walled garden and general maintenance around will continue.

I will not be planting many bulbs this year other than those saved from a new pathway near the house. Autumn is a great time to plant bulbs and look forward to the display in spring as the garden returns to life after the winter dormancy. Think about succession when planting bulbs and aim to look at the timings regarding their flowering. They often have a short life and so looking at some of the first flowering bulbs such as Snowdrops (Galanthus nivalis) and Crocus through to the later ones such as Alliums and Gladioli, can give a whole season of bulb interest. Some guidance can be found on various websites e.g. https://www.peternyssen.com/blog/succession-planting

## Garden Volunteer Outings

As the volunteer season draws to a close, it does so with many thanks to this group of dedicated garden volunteers. It has been a challenge this year weather-wise, but we have had a great season. We also had two wonderful off-site visits due to the generosity of Andrew Humphris – Head Gardener at Parham and Roy Newnham – Visitor Manager at RSPB Pagham Harbour Reserve. Andrew and his team gave us a wonderful insight into the history and current garden structure at Parham. Roy as a former colleague helped me to demonstrate how my horticultural practice was influenced whilst working on the reserve. This changed my gardening approach to always garden with conservation in mind.



*The volunteer team at Pagham Reserve*

Enjoy the autumn. Stansted is open all year round and the grounds can be quieter at this time of year which allows for a reflective experience. Birds seem to sing louder in the autumn/winter and the sounds around the garden change, but this is also the case on our local coastline and the vast open areas of the downs. By observing and learning about the life in these areas we enhance our gardening experience and work towards an ethos of conservation within our horticulture. Look at the seemingly simple structures and beauty in the plants that surround us. You will notice an intricate and delicate world that the eye evades if only a glance is given! 😊 - *Jan Atkinson – Head Gardener*

# ...and what have FOSP been doing?

## Michael Prior's Guided Walk - 2 September

On a fine day in early September, Friends had the privilege of another splendid walk with Michael. Fifty-five Friends, and friends, (a very large group of interested people) met Michael in the staff car park and strolled round looking at many notable trees on the Estate. We were very grateful for donations to the Estate from four of the non-members who came and enjoyed the walk.

From the car park, via some London Planes, and a Sweet Chestnut grown from seed from Hougoumont, a battle site during the Battle of Waterloo, we went on to the Chapel and it's Cedar of Lebanon, and then into the Arboretum.

So many beautiful and rare trees with fascinating histories, too many to talk about them all, but here are a few pictures of some highlights:

Cedar of Lebanon - From South Turkey and Lebanon, dating back to 1600s, but 1000 planted at Goodwood in 1761. This one, when being regularly checked (as are all the trees in positions on the Estate where falling branches might be a danger to people or property), was found to be sound, with no decay, but then it lost a large bough through summer branch drop in 2022, fortunately falling away from the Listed Chapel. As a precautionary measure, so that any future drop would again be away from the Chapel, a major reduction was made by a competent contractor.

Paperbark Maple - A truly beautiful tree, particularly in the autumn with its amazingly colourful peeling bark.

Shining Gum - This large, stately, Eucalyptus Nitens, with its peeling bark and distinctive smell - a great specimen.

Turkish Hazel - The fruit of the Turkish Hazel, first introduced to England 400 years ago, this one planted in 1990, and now regenerating.

Giant Redwood or Wellingtonia (or Washingtonia if you are American) - The largest tree species in the world by volume, and never known to have been blown down, the oldest thought to be 3,266 years old.



*Cedar of Lebanon*



*Paperbark Maple*



*Shining Gum*



*Turkish Hazel Fruit*



*Giant Redwood*

A huge thank you to Michael for giving up his time and sharing his boundless knowledge and enthusiasm with Friends.

## An Archivist's Role at Stansted – 7 October

During the first week of October members of FOSP and guests gathered for an interesting talk entitled "The Role of an Archivist at Stansted", presented by Tessa Culley and Jennie Dolman.

Tessa and Jennie shared their knowledge and experiences, giving the audience an insight into the role of an archivist and the importance of preserving the history and records of Stansted for future generations.

It was an informative and engaging occasion, offering those present a greater appreciation of the importance of archives in keeping local history alive. The afternoon concluded with questions followed by refreshments.



*From left to right - Jennie Dolman, Diana Roberts (who was the first archivist working on the John Ponsonby Archive) and Tessa Culley*

# Stansted Park Cricket Club 2026 Review

The glorious summer of 2026 was the perfect reminder of the joy of the game of cricket; long hot days, no thoughts of jumpers or dodging rain, a competitive match followed by a chance to recount the afternoon's action over a refreshing beer or two at The Castle pub in Rowlands.

The club runs two friendly teams, one playing a full game on a Sunday afternoon and one playing the shorter twenty over format on midweek evenings through the height of the summer although there is a good crossover of players playing both formats (new players always welcome!).

The Sunday team enjoyed some excellent results this year winning games away at Singleton and against Slindon for the first time in many players memory with a gritty draw played out against a strong Elsted side another highlight for those in the SPCC ranks. The season was particularly notable for the competitiveness of the games; there were hardly any completely one-sided affairs with a great deal coming down to the final few overs and still having all results still possible. The good weather played a part in another season of excellent batting conditions aided and abetted by our groundsman and local legend Pete Clutterbuck's hard work and the support of David Bennett and the team at Stansted House with them maintaining the outfield on our behalf and so scores were higher than average. The season culminated in an enjoyable tour down to Dorset which saw a good win against Wareham on the Saturday and then a very tight defeat (by only 4 runs) against Iwerne Minster with some players performances possibly affected by the hospitality options available to them in close proximity to the hotel in Bournemouth!

The T20 side has enjoyed some success in the last couple of seasons helped by a good core of capable players that play most weeks. This season saw a final wicket victory away at Curdridge in the last over and a notable win at Priory Park, Chichester against a perennially strong Racquets Club side. On the flip side we lost a very tight one against Shipwreck CC who play in South Harting and fell slightly short against Swanmore CC when they visited Stansted Park in July. The season highlight was another win against Lord Sonic's XI to retain the Stansted Park ashes which only got back into our hands for the first time in 10 years in 2025 but another good performance this year saw SPCC over the line for the second-year running. The season finished in August with a win against Chichester District Council to round off a very good season for the shorter format side.



The SPCC side that finally managed an away win against Singleton

We are always looking for new players so if you like the thought of a game of cricket with a friendly and welcoming bunch please do get in touch.

# another year gone … doesn't time fly?!!

It was two years ago that I met with Nigel and Anne to review the role of Editor for this Newsletter and now 8 editions later, we are just about getting the hang of the requirements!! My wife, Linda plays a very important role in the preparation, layout and general critiquing of each edition and the general feel and look of the Newsletter is most certainly down to her.

It's always very useful and valuable to receive feedback about the Newsletter from the members (positive or negative) … so let us know if we are missing something or there is anything you'd like included. My email address is: peter.dudman1@virginmedia.com

*Peter Dudman, Editor*

# and for the end of the year..

## Yuletide Tea - 2 December

This popular event is already fully booked. If you missed out, you could join the reserve list, as cancellations do occur.

If you can no longer attend, please let the Office know so your place can be offered to someone else.

Decorated for Christmas and in the music room and the main hall, Vanessa will again be playing a medley of music fit for the occasion.

Come and see old friends and make new ones.




## Trip to Polesden Lacey
## Wednesday, 16 December 2026



## A Rewarding Volunteering Opportunity for You

**In recent years, many of you will have enjoyed the very popular Springtime Tea, summer Cream Tea, and Yuletide Tea, all held in the beautiful Music Room and Main Hall of Stansted House.**

**We are looking for an enthusiastic and organised person to join our friendly Committee and take on the role of co-ordinating these events.**

**You would have the support of a wonderful team of volunteers who help with making cakes, setting up the rooms and serving refreshments on the day, as well as the support of the other Committee members, so you certainly wouldn't be doing it alone!**

**If you think you might be interested in getting involved and would like to find out more or, if you think you know someone who would fit the bill, please do contact me at anneburton99@gmail.com to arrange an informal chat.**

**We would love to hear from you!**

At the time of writing there are still some spare places on this trip to Polesden Lacey, so if you want to go, please call the Office on 023 9241 2265 to secure your seat.

This promises to be a great day out to see the house at Polesden Lacey decorated with the theme of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'. On our return journey we will visit Squires Garden Centre in Milford which will provide an ideal opportunity for last minute Christmas shopping and afternoon refreshments.

We are planning to leave Stansted at 9.00am, returning late afternoon. The cost of the coach including the drivers' tip is £25 for FOSP Members or £30 for non-members. National Trust members have free entry to the house and for non-members the cost will be £17.10 payable upon entry.

# and as Christmas is not far away…

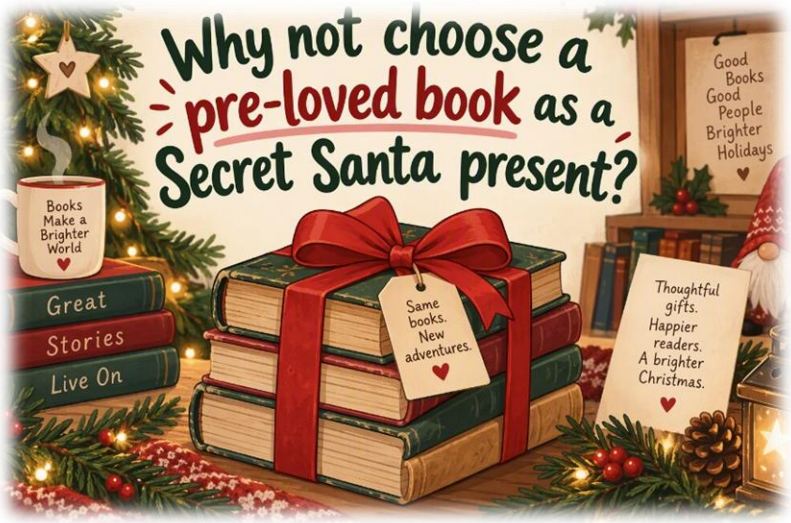
## Stansted Park Foundation Bookshop

Why not visit the Stansted Foundation Second-hand Bookshop at Stansted Garden Centre and choose a pre-loved book for a Christmas gift? We have a wonderful selection of quality books on every subject imaginable, all waiting to find new homes.

Looking for stocking fillers? Our shelves are full of smaller, good-quality books that make thoughtful and affordable festive gifts. If you enjoy Christmas fiction, look out for our seasonal selection, which will be available from the beginning of November.

Whether you're searching for a Secret Santa present, a Christmas gift for a book lover, or simply a good read for your next holiday, you're sure to find something special. Why not give a book a second life and share the joy of reading this Christmas?

We look forward to seeing you.




# Stansted Park Light Railway



Create memories and some magic with your family this Christmas. Come along and say HO, HO, HO to the big man in red while taking in a journey around the wonderful grounds within Stansted Park.

Father Christmas and his helpers will be taking over the rails and spending time decorating the locomotives, the station and the woods.

**"SANTA SPECIALS"** will be running (weather permitting) every Wednesday and Saturday from 2nd December up to 23rd December.

The railway will be closed for essential maintenance, etc. from 24th December 2026 to 2nd March 2027 inclusive, re-opening on Wednesday, 3rd March 2027.

*Jim Hallett, Peter Dudman & Santa*

## Regular Events

### St Paul's Chapel Monthly Prayer Meetings

Prayer Meetings will continue throughout the winter period as usual on the first Thursday of the month and into 2027.

Complimentary tea, coffee and biscuits will be served after the service.

Park in the Garden Centre car park and enter by the Pavilion Tearoom, then through the Dutch Garden Gate to the Chapel.

Everyone is warmly welcome. Please let us know if you expect to attend so our Housekeeping Team can provide enough refreshments.



We continue to raise money for the restoration of the chapel and any donation, no matter how small, is welcome.

Research Corner by Vanessa Curtis

# The hexagonal hut at Stansted Park



The renovation of the hexagonal hut was a project supported by FOSP

This unusual and recently-restored hut has sat tucked away to one side of the front lawn at Stansted for centuries and yet rarely features on ordnance survey maps or drawings of the time. It is however clearly visible as the central part of an extended building in this well-known illustration of Stansted during the Georgian era. Its proximity to the service side of the mansion, along with the (still extant but shortened) chimney and internal fireplace (which also remains today) suggests that it was quite possibly a Georgian tea-pavilion, with the hexagonal part being where guests might have sat by the fire to enjoy their refreshments and the longer, lower and long-since demolished building adjoining it used as a service building for the preparation of food and drink. This theory holds more weight to me since I found an intriguing description of a similar building on britishlistedbuildings.co.uk. It has more sides than Stansted's hexagonal version but there are nonetheless some striking similarities:



*Former lodge/tea pavilion to Moor Park (q.v.). 1763-5. Said to have been designed by Robert Adam for Sir L. Dundas, extended C19 and C20. Brick with stone dressings. Tiled roof, originally thatched.* ***Built as an octagonal block with a link to a square block.***

For any readers who might be interested in seeing the original design for that Moor Park tea-room, it can be viewed online at: https://collections.soane.org/ARC4723

STANSTED PARK FARM SHOP

SAVE THE DATE - For a festive weekend of gifts, mulled wine, food and music, join us on 28th & 29th November 10:00am – 4:00pm to welcome in the Christmas season with joy and cheer.




Visit the Pottery Studio for Christmas Gift ideas.

Classes are also available – why not think of buying these for a Christmas gift for friends and family?

Physio logical

At Physio-logical, we are always looking for ways to help people stay active, comfortable and independent for as long as possible. One of the most exciting additions to our clinical toolkit is MLS Laser Therapy.

One of the reasons we're so enthusiastic about MLS Laser Therapy is its versatility. It can support recovery across a wide range of conditions, including arthritis and joint pain, tendonitis and repetitive strain injuries, plantar fasciitis, back pain and sciatica.

Supporting the Stansted Park Community We are proud to support the wellbeing of the local community, including Friends of Stansted Park.

If you are interested give us a phone call on 02394350270, or email enquiries@physio-logical.net

Visit the Tearooms for a Christmas Afternoon Tea from the 1st to 23rd of December – details on their website - Christmas – Pavilion Tearooms

Your Local GARDEN CENTRE

The Garden Centre is the place to go for Christmas cards and presents and for all your winter garden needs. Why not visit for the Friday music afternoons from 2:30pm to 4:30pm?

Live Music Fridays at Stansted Park | YLGC

# Diary Dates

The Stansted website always has the latest information about what's on at Stansted Park so that should always be your first port of call - www.stanstedpark.co.uk.whatson, Alternatively, you can 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 and emails are sent out regularly with discount codes so watch out for them!



## FRIENDS OF STANSTED PARK EVENTS 2026 - 2027

**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.

Yuletide Tea – see page 7 ..... Wednesday, 2 December at 3:00pm
Trip to Polesden Lacey – leaving at 9.00am – see page 7 ..... Wednesday, 16 December

AGM & Coffee Morning ..... Monday, 24 February, 10:00am

## FOUNDATION EVENTS - 2026

Armistice Service, in front of the Mansion (*park in the staff car park*) ..... 11 November about 11:50am
Christmas Carol Service (*park in the Garden Centre car park*) .....Wednesday 9 December at 4:00pm

## Coming in the Spring Newsletter .....

Spring seems a long time ahead but we'd like to be able to update you on -

- Latest updates about the Visitor Experience
- Early information about the 2027 Cricket season/fixtures
- The latest information about the 2027 Stansted Park "summer season"

**SPRING NEWSLETTER**

*Latest copy date : 22nd January 2027*

..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 22nd January 2027 for inclusion in the Spring Newsletter. We have had some ideas on short themes for forthcoming issues but would love to hear what you like and don't like to hear about. We love feedback 😊

## COMMITTEE MEMBER CONTACT DETAILS

Chairman ..... Nigel Smith–ngs.1957@hotmail.com
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Treasurer ..... Sarah Hutchinson–hutchsj@yahoo.co.uk
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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.