

Friends of Mycenae Gardens

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Newsletter No 9 Spring 2019

Next AGM at 7.00pm Wednesday 20th March 2019

The Friends of Mycenae Gardens will hold its next Annual General Meeting on **Wednesday 20th March 2019 at 7.00pm in Mycenae House, 90 Mycenae Road, SE3 7SE**. (Please note that this will be in room 7, on the first floor).

Membership of the Friends is free, and all those who use or are interested in the gardens are urged to join the group to contribute their ideas and to help with the protection and management of the gardens. There is a membership form on the website at www.mycenaegardens.org.uk/membership/.

If you have time, and are indeed a friend of Mycenae Gardens, please consider helping us preserve the gardens by standing for election to the Committee. You need to be a member of the Friends group and must be proposed by two other members of the Friends. There is a nomination form on the website (see the link in 'Membership'/'Committee members'), to be returned by email to friendsofmycenaegardens@gmail.com, or by post to The Secretary, Friends of Mycenae Gardens, c/o Mycenae House, 90 Mycenae Road, SE3 7SE.

Dear Friends,

The last 12 months have been 'challenging' for the gardens, which have suffered more than previously from vandalism, and from the summer's drought. The lawns, always a problem, have been worn to bare soil in patches and the group has been making vigorous efforts both to keep them going and to find a more lasting solution. It has been encouraging to see new members from the school and from the wider community joining in those efforts, and helping to preserve the gardens. The Saturday afternoon 'planting days' have been congenial and social occasions (when the weather allowed) and much work was done, although in some cases we shall have to wait to see the results. To make the best of all this work and enthusiasm, we really need to find the 'knowledgeable gardener', for whom we have been advertising (and still are, as you will see below).

Mark Barnes

Committee chair

Planting days

The flower bed outside Mycenae House was re-planted as planned, with some delightful extra plants added by Julia of Mycenae House. It was skilfully tended during the October planting day and is flourishing. There was an attempt earlier in the year to seed one of the beds alongside it with wild-



flowers, but they fell victim to the drought, and Mycenae House now plans to lay hard surface over that area to produce a seating area accessible to wheelchairs.



Once again, we planted a few hundred bulbs in the autumn. Results have so far been sparse, but we are learning. At the end of January, we put up temporary willow barriers of a sturdier design, to protect

the emerging bulbs, but this was a little too late for some of the bulbs that had already emerged and been trampled. In future we should erect the barriers by the end of the year.

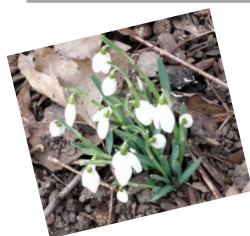
The January 'planting day' also saw a hardy team moving the tables back from the lower end of the gardens, where they had been subject to vandalism, and anchoring them in a position less hidden.



Crafting the willow barriers



Some of the GSS children did a remarkably thorough and persistent job cleaning the tables of graffiti and bird mess, while others mended the post and rope fences.



Your community needs you. The Friends of Mycenae Gardens is just one of several such groups in the borough. The borough's Parks and Open Spaces strategy is: "To work in partnership with the local community to provide and sustain ... safe, attractive, diverse and flexible parks", specifically by working with local Friends groups. The groups provide ideas and management tailored to the needs of the particular park and its users. This only works if users get involved.



[friendsofmycenaegardens](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofmycenaegardens)



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Vandalism ...

... has been a particular problem this year. In April 2018, a young walnut tree was pulled over with the trunk being broken near ground level. At the same time, one of the statues that used to adorn the gardens was broken off its stand and used to attack the bench under the maple. The tables in the gardens have been damaged by fire (barbecues?) and graffiti, and were often surrounded by litter, including nitrous oxide capsules. It is thought that much of this happens after dark, when the gardens are supposed to be 'closed'. The police say they will patrol the gardens occasionally after dark, and encourage anybody aware of anti-social behaviour *as it is happening* to call 999. The difficulty is, of course, that nobody likely to call 999 will be there after dark.



A perennial problem has been the regular damage to the rope and post barriers around the shrub beds, which then get trampled, destroying some of the group's efforts to underplant the existing shrubs. We are considering more robust barriers, such as those put up in the Dell along the border with Mycenae Road. Your comments are invited.

The lawns

For wildlife enthusiasts, the lawns are the least important part of these environmentally rich gardens. For the rest of us, the lawns and the various uses of them are a central attraction, framed by largely mysterious greenery.

The lawns have always suffered from their popularity. The school has taken care to limit use of the lawn during school hours, and until recently asked parents to keep their children from playing ball games on the lawn after school hours. Unfortunately, the school has drawn back from that and there is now a regular football session on the lawns in the afternoons.



Not much of a lawn

Perhaps partly for that reason but certainly as a result of the summer's drought, this year the lawns have suffered more heavily than ever, and we have been casting around for advice on how to restore them and how to maintain them once restored. RBG initially said it could not help and referred us to the Sports Turf Research Institute, which quoted £1,750 plus VAT for a survey and report. Royal Parks sympathised but

told us we needed expensive equipment we did not have, so should approach a commercial lawn company. A commercial lawn company that we approached for advice simply quoted £24,500 to recondition the ground and relay the lawn. We even approached Charlton Athletic, who might know something about mitigating the effects of football and footfall, but they did not bother to reply. None of this was very helpful.

Meanwhile the group soldiered on, fertilising the lawn in the spring and spiking, re-seeding and fertilising again by hand (under heavy rain) in the autumn.

Very recently, a different RBG officer has indicated that RBG could help, has the materials needed to recondition and re-seed the lawn like a rugby pitch and even has the very equipment mentioned by Royal Parks for maintenance in future. This was wonderful news, but at the time of writing we are waiting to hear whether the good intentions will be translated into action, or will vanish into administrative fog.

Wanted: a gardening guru

Ever since Shirley Broughton and Ann Hill retired from the committee we have been short of gardening expertise. We have been looking for a knowledgeable gardener to guide the rest of us in our efforts to maintain the gardens, and to bring new ideas on improving them. One problem is that under current arrangements almost all work is done in one go on our 'planting days', whereas the gardens could also do with more frequent, less intense, doses of TLC. So it is hoped that the gardening guru would also be able to suggest and demonstrate the work that needs doing from time to time, which we could then put up on the website or social media to invite members to carry it out whenever they have a moment.

We also need a naturalist!

It is a few years since Joe Beale carried out his survey of wildlife in the gardens. It would be helpful to have an update. Meanwhile, if you have photos of wildlife in the gardens (of any sort: birds, beasts, bats or bugs, or even unusual trees or plants), please share them with us, sending them to friendsofmycenaegardens@gmail.com or posting them on fb or twitter.

It would be particularly useful to have a comprehensive tree survey. Some years ago, Miles Dove prepared a plan of the gardens for the Westcombe Society, in which 21 species of trees were identified in the main gardens alone. That is now somewhat out of date, but a copy (with key) has been uploaded to the website.



Meanwhile, here are some visitors you might see in the gardens. Can you identify them?



great tit



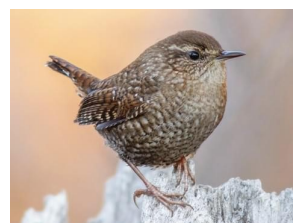
nuthatch



wagtail



green woodpecker



wren