



The 100th anniversary
of the planting of the
Peace Oak

Saturday 6 July 2019 at 2.30pm
Sydney Gardens, Bath

Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 'Peace Oak' on the 'Queen of the West Lawn' in Sydney Gardens

The Quercus robur 'Concordia' was planted on the 19th July 1919 as part of Bath's Peace Day celebrations to mark the end of the First World War, by the then Mayor and Councillor, Alderman Alfred Wills.

The Deputy Mayor of Bath, Councillor Manda Rigby, today unveils a new stone plaque marking the planting of the 'Peace Oak', joined by Councillor Wills' granddaughter and family.

Live music with Bath Classical Musicians, as played 100 years ago in Sydney Gardens

Free Tea and Buns for all!

Display of artwork by Year 4 Class at Bathwick St Mary's Primary School made in workshops led by artist Lucia Harley

100 Peace Cranes made by artist Akiko Wakefield in honour of the release of flying pigeons from the Royal Crescent lawn on 19 July 1919. Please take one home with you and keep it as a symbol of peace.

'Make your own origami paper crane' workshop led by Akiko

Make with clay for all ages - make your own peace tree with artist Elise Menghini

The stone plaque has been kindly donated by Bath Freemasons. Alderman Wills was a Past Master of Royal Albert Edward Lodge no. 906 in Bath.

This commemorative plaque replaces a metal and wood one that was placed at the Peace Oak in June 2003 by Councillor Wills' granddaughter Jane Tollyfield. As a young girl during the 1940s, Jane joined her grandfather on walks in the park. Jane Tollyfield and other members of Councillor Wills' family are joining this special dedication.

**SYDNEY
GARDENS**
BATH

Bath & North East
Somerset Council

 **HERITAGE
FUND**

This event and commemoration is part of the Sydney Gardens Project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and B&NES Council.

Peace Day Celebrations in Bath in 1919 to mark the end of World War One A short history by Ann Cullis

On 12th July 1919 the Bath Chronicle & Gazette reported:

A copy of the King's Proclamation declaring Saturday next, July 19th - Peace Celebration Day - a Bank Holiday and public holiday throughout the United Kingdom reached the Mayor this morning [Saturday 12th July].

And so the City Council had just six days to organise everything for the 19th. They had expected the Government to declare the Peace Bank Holiday for August, and were taken by surprise. Immediately, a meeting of the Council created the Peace Celebrations Committee; people volunteered to help and everything was arranged during the week.

Friday 18th July was designated "The Children's Rejoicing", when the weather was beautiful, but on Peace Celebration Day it rained relentlessly for the entire day and evening. The Bath Chronicle & Gazette was weekly, so we have to wait until the issue of 26th July for the reports and pictures.



Children in Sydney Gardens (reproduced from the scrapbook collection of Cllr Wills)

SYDNEY
GARDENS.

THE CHILDREN'S REJOICING

Children's Joy Day

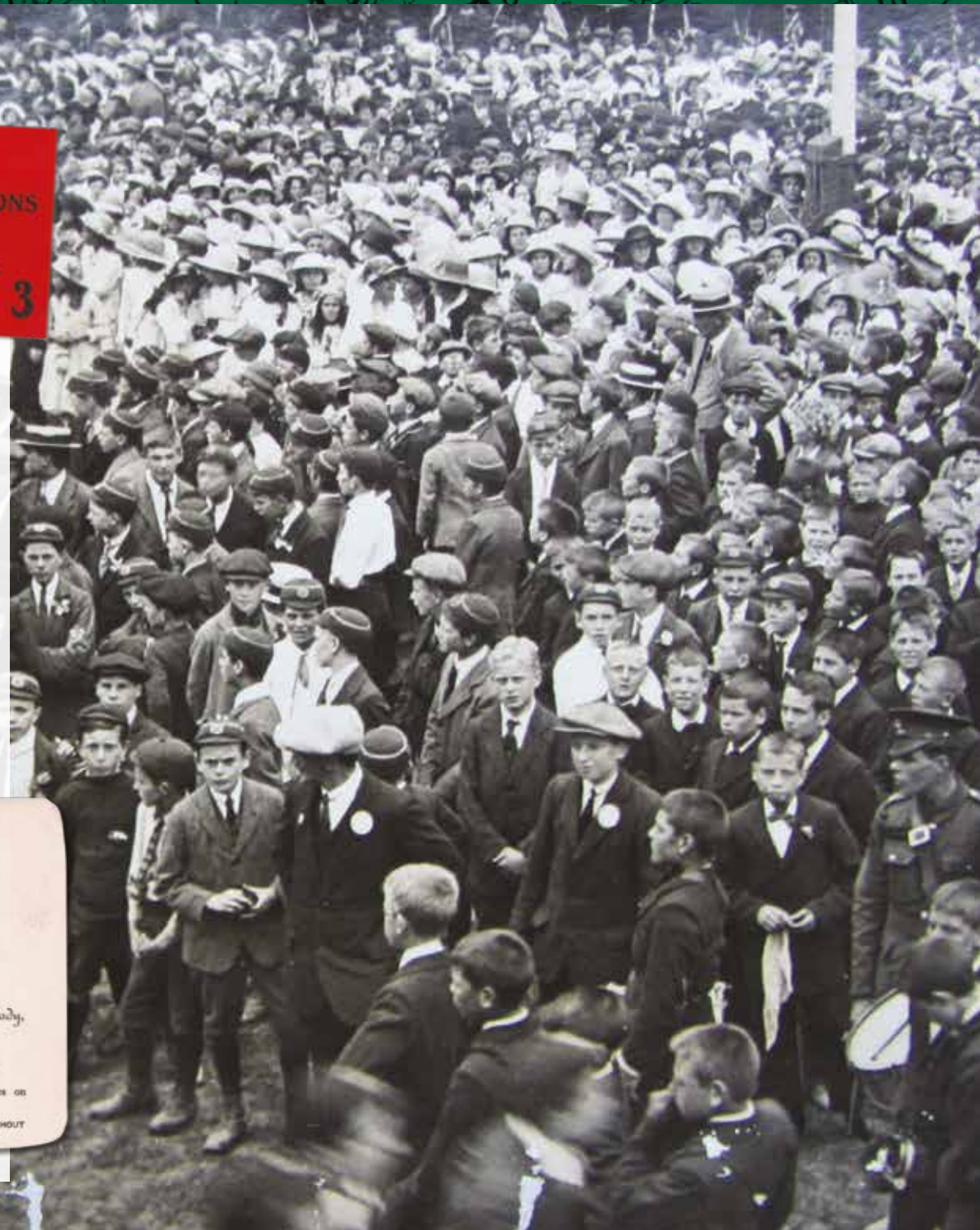
Thousands of Happy Bath Juveniles in Procession Their Celebration of Peace at Sydney Gardens

Children from all over Bath were marshalled and processed to the city centre, where all groups converged in the High Street. At 2.15 approximately 7,000 children marched from High Street along Bridge Street and Pulteney Street to Sydney Gardens; it took until 3.00 for the last of the children to pass the corner of High Street and Bridge Street.

The children gathered by the Bandstand. There were cheers for the Mayor who addressed the children, and all sang the national anthem.

Tea was served in the Gardens at different buffets, and a good substantial tea it was, Messrs Fortt and Son compassing the regaling of the great company in splendid fashion. They provided two tons of cake, 50,000 buns, and a large quantity of biscuits, while 100 gallons of milk was used for tea.

After tea, There were sports and prizes for both boys and girls, Punch and Judy, dances by Miss Pow's pupils, a fairy play, 'Happiness of the Sky', by Citizen House girls, etc. The children's celebration was a great success, and another tribute to Mr Harry Bowen, who may be described as "Bath's big beano boss", and his many capable assistants.



PEACE CELEBRATION DAY

*Peace Enthusiasm Not Damped by Rain
Jubilations in the Downpour
Vast Concourse Attends Choral Thanksgiving
Crowds in the Parks
5,000 Guests at Mayor's Garden Party
Bath's Beacon Blazes Brilliantly*



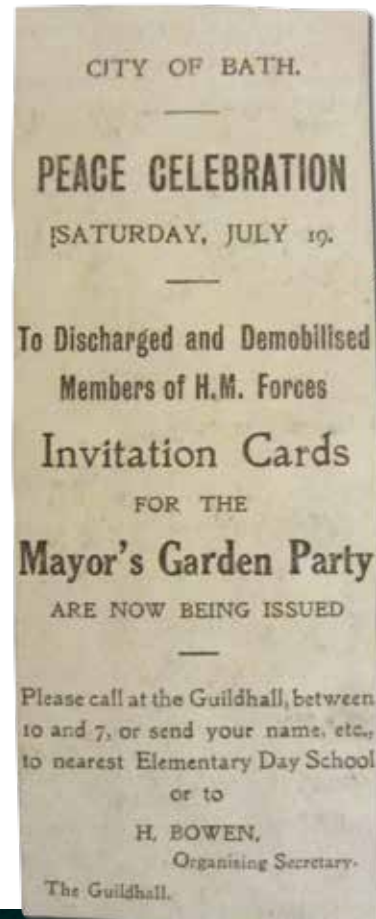
There was a procession from Milsom Street in the morning and 30,000 people gathered at the Royal Crescent for a service of thanksgiving; there were brass bands, cheers for the King and the troops, and the release of 250 pigeons supplied by the local Flying Club.

*The Mayor's Garden Party
Service Men Entertained in Sydney Gardens
Peace Oak Planted*

Further celebrations took place at Sydney Gardens in the afternoon, where 5,000 servicemen and their wives or lady friends were entertained to tea. The Peace Oak planting ceremony was at 5.15pm:

The gathering gave three very hearty cheers for the Mayor, who then, accompanied by the Mayoress, Town Clerk, Sir Harry Hatt and Mr C.H. Hacker, proceeded to the Queen of the West Lawn, where he planted a promising young oak to commemorate the celebration of Peace.

There was then music and dancing in the evening from 7.00 till 10.00pm. It rained *incessantly, though not heavily* and some people, the newspaper reports, carried on dancing on the wet grass. Celebrations continued during the first week of August, a Bank Holiday week, with a fireworks display, concerts and other entertainment at Sydney Gardens.



Biography of Councillor Wills

A biography of Councillor Wills, who planted the 'Peace Oak', by his great grandson Stephen Tollyfield

Alderman Alfred Williams Wills (1872 - 1949) was a local Liberal politician and businessman. In 1904 he inherited his father's business A Wills and Son which was a building and plumbing concern. The firm had business premises at the end of Grove Street. The firm had held the contract for Bath Workhouse from 1890 (which is now St Martin's Hospital), and this was one of Alfred's main responsibilities.



Alderman Wills reads the Proclamation of Peace, 1918

In 1896 another contract would improve the firm's finances still further. Leicester Gataker was a water finder, or diviner. Originally based in Weston-Super-Mare, he nevertheless undertook work all over the country. At the time his services were in great demand. In 1896, following Alfred's completing the dangerous job of deepening a well on Little Solsbury, he became Gataker's associate. This association led on to Alfred performing the water finding when Gataker was unavailable, and going abroad to work in Egypt and Portugal amongst other places. In 1898 Alfred was using Bath workmen to do plumbing works for the French Governor in Tunis, North Africa.

Alfred and his father were Liberals by conviction. Politics and prosperity led inevitably to his joining the Bath City Council. He was elected as a Liberal Councillor for the Ward of Walcot in November 1908. In 1915 he was elected Chairman of the Surveying Committee, a position he retained until 1944.

During the First World War, Alfred was made Chairman of the Food Control Committee. He was successful in this position and, perhaps partly in consequence, in 1918 he was appointed Mayor of Bath. In this position he welcomed the troops back to Bath from the steps of the Guildhall.

After the war, Alfred turned his attention to street improvements. This led to the Bath Corporation Act of 1925. It included 18 major street work projects and the purchase of toll bridges over the Avon, including Cleveland Bridge. The Bath Act of 1937 was controversial and the disputes that led up to its passing are fictionally recorded in Horace Annesley Vachell's novel, *The Golden House*. Alfred continued to serve the Council until he resigned in September 1945. His activity did not cease even then. He was the active chairman of the Horstmann Gear Company in 1945 in the absence and incapacity of members of the Horstmann family. After such a full and active life, he cannot have found retirement easy. He died on 3 March 1949.

Sydney Gardens during World War One by Kirsten Elliott

In June 1914, Sydney Gardens was the setting for a cheerful ceremony, attended by the great and good of Bath – the formal opening of the Temple of Minerva, Bath's exhibit at the Festival of Empire in 1911, which had been re-erected as a memorial to the Bath Pageant of 1909. Councillor Percy Jackman, Chairman of the Parks Committee, was in upbeat mood about the future of the gardens, which had been taken over by the Council in 1912. No one at the ceremony knew that seven weeks later, Britain would be at war with Germany, nor could anyone have dreamed how long the war would go on. In October 1914, Trooper Piles, writing home to his wife in Widcombe, was certain he would be home by Christmas, and told her the shelling was 'like being in Sydney Gardens watching the fireworks'. But soon the gardens were welcoming visitors of a different kind – wounded soldiers. By 1915, the bowling club offered them temporary membership while others, in their blue hospital uniforms, enjoyed the sunshine and listened to the band.



The Illustrated London News of September 1915 showed wounded soldiers listening to the band



The boys of St Luke's School giving an exhibition of Egyptian calisthenics at the Red Cross fair in 1917

In the two final years of the war, Sydney Gardens made a major contribution to the city's war effort. In June 1917 and 1918, Red Cross Fairs, both lasting three days, were held there, with competitions, exhibitions by schoolchildren and many sideshows. At the first one, the Licensed Victuallers Association presented the Red Cross with an ambulance to bring wounded soldiers to the baths for treatment. Over 20,000 people attended and £3000 was raised, equivalent to £165,000 today. A year later wounded soldiers formed a guard for the guests of honour, the Marquis of Bath and Lady Kathleen Thynne, who were greeted by a fanfare of trumpets. A similar sum was raised, and was distributed between the war hospitals and the Royal United Hospital.

Golden Oak 'Concordia'

QUERCUS ROBUR 'CONCORDIA'

The Peace Oak is a cultivar of the English Oak, *Quercus robur*, which is slow growing, achieves only a modest stature, and is chiefly characterised by its golden hued spring foliage, which darkens to green in the summer. The cultivar originated in a nursery in the Flanders town of Ghent, Belgium in 1843. Perhaps the Concordia variety was chosen as the Peace Oak due to its connection to Belgium, which became hallowed ground to so many British families in the years following the Great War, many of whom made pilgrimage to Flanders battlefields such as Ypres.

Oak trees are one of our best loved trees. They are important as a habitat for species of insects, lichen and birds, and of course produce acorns, from which other oaks grow.



Origami Paper Peace Cranes

In Japan the crane is a symbol of good health and luck; to fold a thousand cranes would bring you luck. On 6th August 1945, the atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima creating complete devastation and huge loss of life, ending the Second World War. Ever since then the crane is no longer only a Japanese symbol of luck, but also a global symbol of peace. Every crane is a prayer from those who fold it: a prayer for those who suffer, a prayer of peace, a prayer of love.



Bathwick St Mary's Primary School, Year 4 Peace Oak Project Led by artist Lucia Harley

The children from Year 4 class, with teacher Emma Williams, have had three art sessions with artist Lucia Harley learning about and responding to the Sydney Gardens Peace Oak.

After hearing about the Peace Day Celebrations after the end of WW1 around Bath, and the planting of the tree in the park, the children re-enacted the moment it was planted with three hearty cheers and the waving of hankies and flowers.

They then created their own 'Peace Tableaus' or 'Living Pictures' using costumes and props, taking the idea from a newspaper article of the time. From these, they took inspiration for their monoprints with an added watercolour wash.

On the final session, each child made their own plaque in dedication to the tree, working into clay and casting in plaster of Paris.

The group were fantastic – full of fun and high energy and created some lovely artwork. A selection of the objects and images the children made are included here. All the plaques the children made are on display as part of our event.







Credits

Event organisation and booklet compilation –
Sue Palmer, Community Ranger, Sydney Gardens Project
Sydney Gardens Project Manager – Keith Rowe

Our thanks to:

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Jane Tollyfield and family

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Primary School

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Sally Strachey Associates

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volunteering from the Friends of Sydney Gardens.

Event support: Mary Caron-Courtney
Bath Record Office

Jonathan Overton for the donation of the famous Sally Lunn Buns.
When Sydney Gardens opened as a Georgian Pleasure Garden in 1795,
Sally Lunn's were served hot from portable baking ovens

Photographs and press articles of the
Peace Day Celebration in Sydney Gardens
are from Jane Tollyfield's scrapbook of
memorabilia collected by her grandfather
Councillor Wills.




Jane Tollyfield in 2019


Sydney Gardens is one of Britain's best remaining Georgian Pleasure Gardens. It opened in 1795 and was a favourite spot of Jane Austen.

The Sydney Gardens Project has been awarded a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant for a three year restoration project. The funding will be used to restore historic buildings, invest in landscaping works, renovate the play area for use by people of all ages and create new gardens, alongside a programme of events and activities.

The Peace Oak Commemoration is part of the Sydney Gardens Project.

www.bathnes.gov.uk/sydneygardens

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 Bath & North East
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 HERITAGE
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**Join the Friends of Sydney Gardens
and support the park into the future:**

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