



# The Friends of Duchess Wood

## Members' Newsletter No. 14

(March 2014)

### FODW events in the John Muir Festival

The Friends of Duchess Wood are contributing to the John Muir Festival in April and May.

Our list of activities is as follows.

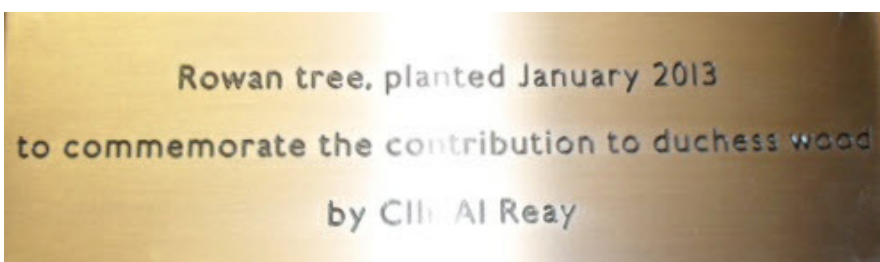


- 21st. April (Easter Monday) Repeat of last year's successful Easter scavenger hunt. Children will follow clues all over the Wood and may find some chocolate treasure. Start at 10.30 am at the Duchess Wood 'Pony Field' (above the Rugby pitch).
- 27th. April John Muir themed performance by the Walking Theatre Company. Please bring children. The performance will start at 2.00 pm. Meet at the Duchess Wood car park. Free of charge – but donations of (say) £2 per adult on the day would be gratefully received as FODW will be subsidising the event.
- 3-4 May Rook count in the Scots pine wood rookery at the south-eastern part of the Wood. Further details to be announced later.
- 24 May Launch of the self-guided flower walk based on Alison Rutherford's walk last year (lower Wood) and a guided visit by Plantlife Scotland (upper Wood). Meet at the Duchess Wood car park at 11.00 am.
- 28th May Visit by Buglife (The Invertebrate Conservation Trust). Further details to be announced later.

All the above events are free of charge. Everyone welcome.  
*[Please note : children must be accompanied by a responsible adult.]*



There will be an events programme supporting the 21-26 April opening of the Dunbar to Helensburgh John Muir Way. This will reach Helensburgh on 26th April when there will be an afternoon of events in the town. Afterwards there will be an evening of activities (fireworks display and ceilidh) in Balloch.



The memorial plaque to Al Reay has now been made (see above) and will be erected at the edge of the Pony Field. As A&B Councillor responsible for the Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve, Al did a great deal to support and enhance Duchess Wood. A rowan tree was planted by his widow, Liz, in his memory and the plaque shown above is being put in place beside the tree by FODW.

### News in brief

#### FODW now has somewhere to store equipment and materials.

We have rented (at a preferential rate) a place to store equipment and materials. Among the equipment is a hand-pulled trolley on which logs and other heavier items can be moved.

**Logs for sale soon.** FODW is starting to store logs from fallen trees and branches. It will make these available for sale when they have dried out.

**Zombies and other events.** Members may have noticed that there has been an increase in the number of externally-organised events in the Wood. This follows a policy decision by the Argyll and Bute Council's Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee. New rules have been drawn up to control the number and nature of these events.

**Outdoor nursery.** In our last newsletter we informed you about the possibility of an outdoor, year-round nursery school in part of Duchess Wood. We have now heard that the organisation, Stramash, is looking for an alternative Helensburgh site.



### STORM DAMAGE

The winds were not as damaging to Duchess Wood this winter as they were in the previous year. But a few trees did come down. As always, our first priority was making the paths accessible and safe, and then clearing debris. Thanks to A&B Council (see above) and FODW volunteers for swift action.

## DUCHESS WOOD and CASTLE WOOD

Presentation by Fiona Baker

Those who attended the AGM of the Friends of Duchess Wood last October will testify to the fascinating talk by Fiona Baker, local archaeologist. Space only allows a few key points here, but anyone wanting the full text, please contact our secretary.

The woods were part of the grounds of Ardencaple Castle, of the Clan MacAulay. First mentioned in 1296, enlarged in 1566, with a designed landscape added in the 18th century, it was sold to the Colquhouns of Luss in 1752. The name Castle Wood derives from the castle, but why Duchess Wood? Almost certainly after Dowager Duchess of Argyll, Ann Campbell, who lived there after her husband's death. She probably did much to improve the Wood. The castle was demolished in 1957, but thankfully Duchess Wood remains today for us to enjoy.



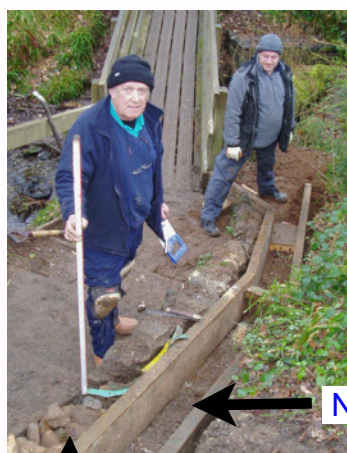
The 1860 OS map (above) shows no Rhu Road Higher, while the now playing fields were then farm land. The Ha Ha wall north of the Pony Field probably kept in cattle. The eastern footpath ran down to the sea and most of the paths remain today.

There is much more in Fiona's paper, including the weir at the south-west corner, an old mill, a pattern of dykes, canalisation of burns in places – but you should read the whole paper. A big thank you to Fiona for a very special illustrated talk.



## FOCUS ON BRIDGES

FODW has a policy to replace wooden bridges gradually over time. The Thurgood Bridge (see far left below) is robust and even withstood a tree falling on it in a storm. But some other wooden bridges are showing signs of wear. It is our intention to replace them one-by-one with large culverts encased in stonework – see north-western bridge below, centre.



### Facelift for Thurgood Bridge steps

New drainage

New wall



New steps

The steps to the Thurgood Bridge at the north-east corner of Duchess Wood are being renewed, thanks to the Community Payback Team. Previous subsidence of the soil-based steps is being replaced with a pebble sub-structure to allow drainage and a whin dust top surface, while the retaining boards are being renewed. Each board will have a top slat which can easily be replaced with wear.

The bridge is named after Ferdie Thurgood who loved to walk the hills behind Helensburgh. On his death, his executors offered a bequest to the Green Belt Group which advised that a better home for the money would be with the Access Trust which used it for the bridge.

Next on our list for replacement will be the small bridge to the west of the Pony Field (see right). The present wooden structure was only intended as a temporary replacement to a previously damaged bridge.



The stone bridge on the eastern path (see photo right) was constructed in Victorian times and shows the wisdom of that construction



## YOUR VIEWS WELCOME

If you have any matters to raise with Friends of Duchess Wood, please contact our Secretary at [am.mac@virgin.net](mailto:am.mac@virgin.net) or by phoning 676792.

Website: [www.duchesswood.org.uk](http://www.duchesswood.org.uk)

FODW is a voluntary, non-political local community group and a registered charity. It works co-operatively with other groups such as the Lower Clyde Greenspace, the Employability Team, Community Payback, the Access Trust, the Green Belt Group, and a range of other bodies especially, of course, the Council's Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee which is responsible for the Wood. We are grateful to them for the contributions they have made to make the Wood so special.

Current FODW Trustees are Stewart Campbell (Chairman), Alastair Macbeth (Secretary), Bill Hassall (Treasurer), Morag Young, David Lewin, Margaret Paul, Rachel Bailey, Kevin Johnson, Richard Horrell.