

Restoration of the Furzey Flower Meadow for our 2022 Centenary.

When we acquired Furzey in 1972 the ancient meadow at its heart had been recently land drained and the stream which ran along its valley piped underground. Over 90% of Britain's flower meadows have been damaged by this kind of activity and the abundance of native flowers lost by the excessive use of fertilizers. Harvesting hay before the flowers have had time to ripen and seed has further depleted the flower stock along with the insects, bees and butterflies that depend on them.

In 2005 we decided to remove the land drains and with the help and advice of Natural England, restored the stream and wetland, re-introducing reeds and local wetland plants and willows.

As part of our Centenary celebration we have decided to further enhance the quality of this meadow. With the help of The National Park conservation manager we shall re-seed sections to increase the range of flowers and extend the growing season by leaving haymaking until the end of August each year. By Spring 2022 it will be a fine local example of the kind of flower meadow which is now being encouraged by environmentalists around the U.K. to aid the diversity of insects and birds and other small creatures.

At the moment visitors can see across the meadow from several points in the gardens that surround it on two sides and we have now decided to allow occasional access when the agricultural use and ground conditions allow it. They will be able to follow a grass path cut through the flowers taking them over a pedestrian bridge across the stream and wetland, then back into the garden, not wandering at will so as to protect the delicate meadow environment.

The bridge will be designed and built by Ramboll Engineering as an environmental gift to the Minstead Trust at Furzey Gardens before they move their offices from Netley Marsh to Southampton. It is a generous gesture by them, following in the tradition of service to the local community set by Giffords who preceded them. The design of the bridge will be by competition throughout the Ramboll organisation and focussing upon the use of locally sourced material.

When you walk around Furzey Gardens you will see the way in which structures and shelters blend imaginatively with the twisting paths, glades, shrubs and flowers. They have been carefully designed, many by our friend, Master Thatcher and creative genius Simon Sinkinson, who sadly died recently and is so greatly missed. The Ramboll bridge will follow in that tradition, a thing of beauty complementing the flower meadow. It will focus the eye on the wetland, with reeds and willows, marsh marigolds and mint. Children will hang over the edge to watch for frogs and field voles. Dragon flies will buzz around them with the many birds attracted by the increasing proliferation of insects.

So, watch out for news of our celebrations next year which we hope you will share with us.

Tim Selwood, Ambassador for the Minstead Trust.