



A 100 year old tree - the 'Peace Oak' in Sydney Gardens, Bath

Sue Palmer and Ann Cullis

There is a special tree in Sydney Gardens Bath - a 'Peace Oak' on the 'Queen of the West Lawn'. It is a specially chosen species - a Golden Oak 'Concordia' - and it 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. 2019 marked the 100th Anniversary of its planting.

To find the tree in Sydney Gardens, stand with your back to the Holburne Museum looking up the central pathway through the park. Go up the central path and take the first path to your left and continue down a slight slope. There is the Golden Oak ahead to your right, towards the edge of the lawn.

Below the Peace Oak, on the bank, is a stone plaque donated and engraved by Bath Freemasons and installed and dedicated on Saturday 6th July 2019, by The Deputy Mayor of Bath, Councillor Manda Rigby, joined by Councillor Wills' granddaughter and family.

The Sydney Gardens Project organised a special event to commemorate the 100th Anniversary that included live music as played in the Gardens in 1919, origami Peace Cranes, free tea and buns and displays of artwork made by children from Bathwick St Mary's Primary School in response to the anniversary.

The Golden Oak 'Concordia'

Quercus robur 'Concordia' 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. It seems the Concordia variety was specially chosen as the Peace Oak for Sydney Gardens 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.





The Peace Oak



A tree planting as part of Bath's Peace Day celebrations to mark the end of WW1 in 1919

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 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.

Peace Day Celebration

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 Peace Oak



*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.

The Peace Oak was planted by Alderman Alfred Williams Wills (1872 – 1949) who was a local Liberal politician and businessman. He was elected as a Liberal Councillor for the Ward of Walcot in November 1908. 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.

Alderman Wills was a Past Master of Royal Albert Edward Lodge, hence the current carved stone plaque being donated by Bath Freemasons. It replaces a metal and wood one that was placed at the Peace Oak in June 2003 by Councillor Wills' granddaughter Jane Tollyfield who still lives in Bath. As a young girl during the 1940s, Jane joined her grandfather on walks in Sydney Gardens. Jane Tollyfield and other members of Councillor Wills' family joined the Sydney Gardens Project in July 2019, to mark the 100th anniversary of the planting of the Peace Oak in the park.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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You can download the commemorative booklet from the centenary celebrations [here](#).





Jane Tolleyfield and extended family
July 2019