

SELLY OAK PARK NATURE TRIAL OFFICIAL OPENING AND BIRMINGHAM TREES FOR LIFE TREE PLANTING EVENT

Towards the end of 2009, the Friend's of Selly Oak Park started to look at ways in which the park could be improved and more people encouraged to use it. After consultation with Birmingham City Council's Constituency Parks Manager, Simon Cooper, and the local community it was decided to create a nature trail around the park. The idea was that the trail would highlight both environmental and historical focal points within the park and provide local schools and the community with an interesting walk as well as an excellent educational tool.

With the help of Selly Oak Constituency's Performance and Support Manager, Tracey Hewitt, Community Chest funding was secured for the project. Gradually, over a period of 12 months the Nature Trail came together with the help of some very talented craftsmen such as wood and willow sculptors, the Friend's of Selly Oak Park, Constituency Park's Manager, Simon Cooper, lots of very enthusiastic local school children and Quadron's Park Keeper, Derek Foley, and Horticultural Development Manager, Nicola Clarke. Individual pieces of natural sculpture, benches, art work and interpretation boards now grace the designated trail route within the park.



A doe and her fawn carved out of red cedar – one of the many natural sculptures that have appeared in the park over the past 12 months



The welcome sign at the Lapal Canal end of the park carved by local artist Graham Jones

The nature trail was officially opened on 11th March 2011 by Councillor Robert Wright in a ceremony organized by the Friends of Selly Oak Park and Selly Oak Constituency's Performance and Support Manager, Tracey Hewitt. After short speeches from Tracey, Ken Pugh (local historian and Secretary of Friend's of Selly Oak Park) and Andrew Schofield

(Chair of Friends of Selly Oak Park) it was time to take all the invited guests on a guided tour of the trail. The guests included local politicians, Birmingham City Council's Assistant Director for Leisure and Support Services, Penny Smith, Birmingham City Council's Constituency Park's Manager, Simon Cooper, Birmingham Trees for life, local community members and school children from all of the schools in the area.



The first piece of sculpture on the trail was one of the Park's two welcome signs which depicts a narrow boat on one side and an oak leaf on the other. The sign, located close to the Lapal Canal was carved by local artist, Graham Jones. The children loved the tactile feel of the wood and listened enthusiastically as members of the Lapal Canal Trust explained more about the canal in the park.



Wood carver Dick Tilley was also on hand to demonstrate his carving skills with the chainsaw. Dick carved a nuthatch in a standing dead oak tree which is a favourite nesting site for the birds. The Birmingham and Black Country Bat Group (BrumBats) explained all about the secret, nocturnal life of bats to the children who were fascinated to learn that there are plenty of bats in the park after dark.



Carving the Nuthatch in the dead standing Oak



BrumBats explain all about bats

The nature trail is brilliant exercise for both young and old as it follows a long, circular route around the park. The Friends factored this into their design by ensuring that there were plenty of new benches for people to sit on to rest their weary feet and enjoy the views across the park.



Assistant Director, Penny Smith, and Constituency Park's Manager, Simon Cooper, enjoy a well earned rest on the new bench

As the nature trail reached the frontage of the Park it was time to plant some much needed trees with Birmingham's Trees for Life. As usual Jane Edwards and Sue Griffith were on hand to explain how important trees were to the environment and why people should look after them. The children and Councillors Robert Wright and Alistair Dow had great fun planting the trees with the help of Geoff Cole from Birmingham Trees for Life and Nicola Clarke from Quadron.



Geoff Cole from Birmingham Trees for Life Helps the children plant a tree on the frontage of the park



Councillor Wright is helped by park keeper Derek Foley and Nicola Clarke



The children are thrilled to be planting trees with Jane Harding from Birmingham Trees For Life

Once the trees had all been planted, the tour of the nature trail continued with the Story Telling Seat, which was carved by Graham Jones. The children all rushed to sit down and listen to Jane Edwards from Birmingham Trees For Life explain more about the trees in Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces and how important the wood was that they were all sitting on. Then Graham told the children how he had carved the bench from a fallen tree and what the carvings in the seat represented.



The children with Jane Edwards and Graham Jones sitting on the Story Telling Seat



The wood on the carved Seat is so tactile

Following on from the Seat local historian, Ken Pugh, explained about the significance of the plaques on the Park Keeper's Lodge and the original Selly Oak tree stump from which the name of the park originates



The stump of the original Selly Oak from which the park gets its name

Finally the last two features on the trail to be visited were 'Cyril' and the new bench nearby. As Selly Oak Constituency's Performance and Support Manager, Tracey Hewitt, explained how the willow sculpture was created the children wasted no time in trying 'Cyril' out by running through and around the tunnels. The Friends of Selly Oak Park were thrilled to see how much fun the children were having. Indeed, only the offer of the buffet tea that they had prepared for everyone could drag them away.

Over coffee and cake, everyone agreed that the nature trail is a huge success and a very novel and effective way of encouraging more visitors to become active within the park.



A local park user enjoys the new bench by 'Cyril'



The children love 'Cyril' the Squirrel



'Cyril' is a brilliant way of keeping children active in parks