



house & home

The Birtley House Group Newsletter, Spring 2014

Hope Springs Eternal

After the seemingly unending conveyor belt of storms that deposited record levels of rain on us during the Winter, it is with a huge collective sigh of relief that we now reach, what we fervently hope, is Spring. Apart from one annoyingly persistent water leak, Birtley House came through the storms relatively unscathed, and even when most of this part of Surrey lost power for several days just before Christmas we were able to rely upon our generator and wood-chip boiler to keep us all warm and well-lit over the holiday period.

On a different note, there is finally some positive economic news to help restore our spirits - although we are not yet done with austerity completely. The fortunes of the self-funded sector of the Care industry are closely linked to the country's economic outlook, as it allows people to have better options on future plans. During times of recession and stagnant house prices those on fixed incomes do struggle and confidence is hard hit. However we have seen the number of enquiries rise quite dramatically in the past couple of months and this is a good indicator of returning confidence.

The considerable increase in the number of newly-built care homes in Surrey is obviously fuelled by care operators hoping for a piece of the ever-expanding pie of self-funding 'service-users' (a horrible CQC-speak phrase). It is creating quite a change in the types of homes that are now available – someone considering a nursing home often only has a choice of either

a rather standardised 'corporate'-style home from one of the big care groups, or a smaller home that might provide a more human touch but is beset with all the difficulties that small-scale businesses face.

Where Birtley House differs is that while it is still very much independently-owned and run by my family, we are unusual in being a one-site business but on an estate of nearly 50 acres with a large country house for our 47 nursing home Residents and eight Mews apartments. Our long-held commitment to providing a real home to spend the last years of someone's life rather than chasing short-term financial gains has allowed us to develop our workforce so that we are in the fortunate position of having a higher staff-to-resident ratio than most Homes. We are able to have wonderful additional resources such as a Counsellor and a Chaplain on our staff so that we can assist with spiritual and emotional needs as well as nursing and care, and this 'whole person' approach certainly impressed the inspector during the recent Gold Standards Framework assessment. (see page 3)

So, let's hope that we have the Spring that we all deserve after such a sodden Winter; I know our Residents are looking forward to enjoying the gardens again!

Frank Whalley



Birtley House

From Matron's desk...

Dear Residents

The year is running away with itself and we are at last seeing some spring weather. It is lovely to see the garden start to come to life with snowdrops and daffodils.

I want to thank everyone for their cards and kind wishes following my car accident, plus some lovely flowers which are now planted out in my garden. It has been a challenging time trying to achieve full health and has given me a fresh understanding of how frustrating it is to have to use sticks and crutches to get around.

We have finally heard from the Gold Standard Framework assessors and we have achieved a Commended award. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the teams and the Residents at Birtley who have contributed to this success and who have participated in improving the communication and care over the last two years. We hope to build on this with regular GSF meetings and continuing to learn and develop in this area.

We have had some changes in the staff department over the last few months with staff moving on due to personal commitments and



we wish them well in their new ventures. Kim Edwards (Sister-in-Charge) has now left and I will be supported by Rudo Rumveye and Vimla Seedheeyan-Koolash as the senior nurses, plus the rest of the nursing and care team. I am currently in the process of interviewing both care staff and nurses to replace those who have left. We take great care with recruitment to ensure that we get the right people to come and join the Birtley House team, so that our Residents receive the best care possible.

I am once again wedding planning as my eldest son is getting married on May 9th. We are hoping for good weather and I will share the photos with you following the event.

Karen Williams
Matron/Manager

Introducing... Matron's PA

My name is Julie and I started as Karen's PA in August last year. I have worked with managers, nurses and care assistants when I was previously working at Woking Hospice where I first went as a volunteer therapist and then went on to become their Fundraising Manager. Working at the hospice gave me a high level of respect for anyone who 'cares', but now working much more closely with the nursing department at Birtley House has given me a new understanding in what they do - to see the passion and dedication which all the staff have for everyone is amazing, and they really do care about how they do their job and the outcome that that brings to the Residents.

With all the rain over the winter it's been a challenging few months, especially so for Karen who sadly had a bad car accident. Being the trooper she is though, this did not put her off from

making sure that all was well with the Nursing team by phoning in daily and emailing regularly. Thanks must go to the team here who enabled business to continue as normal while she was recovering. We are all very glad she is back working full time again though!

My role is extremely varied and includes a bit of HR, arranging staff training, administering recruitment, taking minutes at meetings and generally being available to support Karen at all times. No two days are ever the same, and while there is the occasional rather crazily stressful day it's always great fun and I am thoroughly enjoying working with Karen and getting to know not just the nursing team but all the different departments.

Julie Jenkinson
PA to Matron

Birtley House joins Gold Club

In the Winter 2011 newsletter we announced that Birtley House was starting to work towards the accreditation process required for the Gold Standard Framework (GSF) in Care Homes Quality Hallmark Award. The GSF framework helps homes provide the right care, at the right time in the right place – reducing inappropriate hospital admissions. More than that though, it is about adopting a culture where we have the evidence to prove that the well-being and care of the Residents, along with the support of their families, is at the core of everything we do.

After two years of hard and committed work, and following our on-site inspection in December, we are delighted to announce that we received Commended status and the award was presented to Birtley House at a ceremony in Birmingham at the end of March. To be accredited, we had to show that all of the strict standards in 20 different areas were met, ranging from leadership and support to dignity and respect, as well as submitting a sizeable portfolio of evidence.

“We are delighted to have gained this prestigious award. We have always prided ourselves on the excellent care we provide our Residents. GSF has helped us formalise this and take our care to the next level, ensuring that Residents enjoy their lives, receiving the high quality care they want in their chosen place, right up to the end.” Frank Whalley, Director

Thanks goes to all the teams but in particular to the Nursing team and to the core GSF team (Staff Nurse Sarah Carroll, Amber Turnell and Matron, Karen Williams) for the dedication and sheer hard work involved in ensuring that all of the standards required by GSF were met. Birtley House did meet all the standards and even excelled in many areas – not easy, when to get such an accolade requires innovation above and beyond the provision of care required by the standard – which is set very high in the first place! To meet requirements, the implementation of considerable documentation and new procedures were put in place. The Award also required educating staff, whatever their role, to fully understand and support the ethos that we are all employed here to make the lives of our Residents at Birtley House as good as possible.

Janet Hall
Marketing Manager

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Activities at Birtley



It has long been known that the benefits of companionship and being occupied are enormous. We witness this every day at Birtley as our Residents join our Team for the Activity of the day. A great deal of thought and forward planning goes into each monthly programme, with no two months ever the same! Yes, there is always music, arts and craft, word games, quizzes, films and documentaries, speakers, themed afternoons, indoor gardening, indoor games and cooking, but always varied so that neither the Residents nor the Activities organizers become bored! The Team all love their role here as they know how much pleasure a few hours each afternoon can bring to each individual.

We are delighted to see the numbers increasing for our Day Club visitors and also to see how enthusiastic and positive they are after having spent time with us. We aim to be as flexible as possible for every enquiry – we have visitors who come regularly once or twice a week, others who pick and choose their day depending on the Activity, while some might arrange to include a bath, a visit to the hairdresser, the manicurist, physiotherapist or massage therapist (although these must be booked in advance in order to fit in with our Nursing Home Residents' needs). Morning coffee can be enjoyed either in the Sitting Room, Drawing Room or, weather permitting, in the beautiful, tranquil gardens. Lunch is served in the Orangery together with our

Residents, after which the afternoon activity takes place followed by tea with homemade cakes and sandwiches.

Birthdays are always considered special and are celebrated with a cake made in the Birtley kitchens, and the occasion shared with fellow Residents, staff, family members and friends. We were especially delighted in February this year that our Matron, Karen Williams' grandmother, Gladys Amey, celebrated her 103rd birthday. No-one could believe that she was really that age – many congratulations Gladys! Her family joined her for lunch on the Sunday prior to the day and again on THE day! The extremely large 103 in helium balloons was too big even for her room, so had to remain downstairs! Later this year, Norah Cade will be receiving her telegram from the Queen and I know that her family have already reserved the Drawing Room for her party. Norah is well-known by everyone here as she seldom misses an Activity and participates and contributes very enthusiastically.

We are always more than happy to involve members of staff from other departments in the Activities and would like to encourage more





people who have a talent (musical, artistic etc) to share this with the Residents or to show their holiday photos. This was recently done by Tim Whalley who had been in China visiting Shanghai and the Yunnan region. As currently we have several Residents with Chinese connections, this proved to be a very popular afternoon, sparking some special memories. Another member of staff, Janet Hall, shared her holiday photos of Sri Lanka which was guaranteed to be another interesting "travel" afternoon. Likewise, Simon & I will be showing our photos of our recent trip to South Africa and Botswana, particularly focussing on the animals and birds that we saw. At the end of January, Theo Tramblinas and Simon combined their knowledge and gave us all a most interesting talk about Birtley's wildlife. Theo even brought in some live wildlife (a vole and a woodmouse) as well as various skulls, snakeskin, etc which we had to identify! This topic brought the crowds down and we had a very full room! With Spring in the air, Tessa Johnson, an invaluable voluntary visitor to Birtley, has used her musical skills and knowledge to compile an afternoon of Music for Spring, introducing each piece with some relevant information. Music touches almost everyone and we are all looking forward to listening to Tessa's various choices.

We are delighted to see that the numbers attending Armchair Yoga with Jean Rawlings, T'ai Chi with Charles Townsend and our own Gentle Exercises to Music are increasing each month with very positive feedback from everyone who attends. If you haven't yet

tried any of the above forms of exercise, you really should! It's all good fun as well as being extremely beneficial for health and well-being.

Other visitors to Birtley who help bring comfort and happiness are PAT Dog Theo (spaniel) and PAT Cat Qweenie. Theo is brought here on alternate Wednesdays by his owner, Claire Jenkinson, and Qweenie visits once a month with her owner, Sue Collingwood. For those people who miss the companionship of pets, these two visitors are very popular amongst many of our Residents and both can visit those who may have restricted mobility or unable to leave their rooms.

With the arrival of better weather at last, we are planning an outing in April, probably to one of the Garden Centres in the area where we can do a little shopping and enjoy tea as well. However, with such gorgeous gardens right here, an outing to the Secret Garden behind the yew hedge would probably meet with just as much enthusiasm!! Maybe we'll organize that as well. We certainly all deserve a warm and pleasant Spring and we envisage using our courtyard off the Activity Room as much as possible this year now that we have put in French Doors!

The Team would like to thank everyone for your continuing support for all our Activities.

Caroline Whalley

Garden Views

It's been a struggle in the garden for the past few months. Storms over the Christmas break followed by two of the wettest months on record have meant that the ground has become saturated, due to the water table being so high. Any talk of a hose-pipe ban this year will come as a bit of a shock!

With the ground so wet, we are getting behind with our annual mulching of beds and borders. Any heavy wheelbarrows being trundled across the grass has badly churned them up. We have managed to get the East end of the long walk completed with the help of boards and matting to protect the ground and this is now ready to plant up ready for the new season. Hopefully, after several years of intense weed control, we are now on top of that problem and will be able to re-establish the long walk as the 'stand-out' feature in the gardens.

In the vegetable garden, we are exploring a new avenue for the excesses of fruit and vegetables we produce. As well as supplying the kitchen with seasonal produce, we also intend supplying the local greengrocer in Bramley, who will then sell some for us. As with anything going to sale to the public, quality control is of paramount importance and we have invested time and money in ensuring the crops can be protected as best as possible with netting and fleece to help stop pests attacking the plants. We don't wish to use any chemicals, so we will use these physical barriers as protection.



As are also looking to supplement the day-to-day running of the garden by selling produce to Residents, their family members and staff and we will display what is on offer in the entrance corridor. We will also offer plants, cut flowers and logs and charcoal, sourced from timber extracted from our woodland.

We intend utilising the space by the garden office, which was home to the old raised beds. We have dismantled most of these and moved the 'flowers for cutting' into the old raspberry beds. Our aim is to replace the old raised beds with new, more substantial ones including a central feature that will include a seating and communal area that can be enjoyed by the Residents. We also plan to re-skin the old poly-tunnel making it weather proof, realigning it with its neighbour and finding a permanent home for the greenhouse.

In the Mews courtyard, Paul has installed brick edging around the gravel borders and lamp-posts, making the edges much crisper and neater and also making mowing and edging easier. We have dug two new beds at the end of the lawn; the one at the top of the retaining wall will be home to the spare roses and the one under the fir will have a selection of mainly white herbaceous plants.

We have had a major prune on the Wisteria around the house, reducing the height and considerably reducing the bulk. Over the years, as the plant found its way around the house and up the walls, a lot of deadwood has built up and become entangled with itself. It's been quite fiddly work and a lot of concentration was required, as we didn't want to cut the wrong bit! It took a week to untangle all the congested stems. This has let more light into the ground-floor rooms and also increased the size of the terrace border, freeing up more space to be planted.

The grass would normally become dormant over the winter months but due to the wet, relatively mild winter, the grass has continued growing and the waterlogged ground has made getting onto the lawns very difficult. Despite this we have taken every opportunity we can, dodging

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torrential rain and frustrating shower bursts, to get the grass under control before it becomes unmanageable, even mowing as early as the first week in January. Some areas, particularly the mini orchard and long walk, still have water running through them so we have no option but to leave them until they dry out, probably around June at this rate!

The cider orchard is progressing well and before Christmas we mulched all the trees and finished planting the rows. Some of the trees will need re-staking as the storms over the winter have caused a few to start leaning and our flock of geese have been doing their best to keep the grass under control.

The cider we pressed in November is fermenting nicely and the sugar levels have dropped to a significant level where we need to

decide whether to add some concentrated fruit juice to slightly sweeten it again, or not. The equipment required for the bottling process is on order and should be here shortly. We will therefore be doing the first bottling in the next few weeks and the finished cider should be ready for sale to be enjoyed over what we hope will be long, warm summer.

I hope that the worst of this winter is over - the last few days have been mild and, more importantly, dry raising hopes that spring will soon be with us and the garden will come to life again once again. All of us in the garden team very much look forward to seeing you out and about enjoying the grounds.

Matt Miller, Deputy Head Gardener

The Bees Have Arrived!

For the first time in nearly 60 years we now have beehives in the garden. Guildford Beekeepers have brought 4 hives which have been installed at the west end of the kitchen garden – exactly where Simon’s grandfather had them when the family first moved to Birtley in 1945.



Woodlands

Coppicing

We have had a busy winter down in the woods. Much of the hazel and alder have been put back into a coppice rotation, a process which has been used for thousands of years. Every time the hazel is cut it regenerates new shoots which, after seven years, are the perfect length for beanpoles - sought after by many a gardener. The straighter the better, so we have to maintain the hazel from predation by deer, which nibble the ends and cause damage to the poles.

Fly Fishing

The Trout season is now upon us. We have been feeding the trout regularly to get an idea of their numbers and so far we are at about the 50 mark. Some lovely looking brown trout and rainbows grace the lake and are fighting fit. For those of you that don't know, the lake is open to the public to book a day or half day's fishing so please feel free to tell your friends and relatives.

There are already eight ducklings on the lake. They have all survived the last few days so I hope they will be with us for the rest of the year. Being so early on in the season it shows just how mild the year has been so far, if a little wet.

Merrist Wood

Merrist wood Students on the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Countryside Management visited Birtley on the 3rd March. They came to learn from our bird ringing trainer, David Ross, whom some of you may remember as he did a talk about bird ringing in autumn last year. The results were incredible with two new species added to our ringing checklist. Goldcrest and Goldfinch were the two new birds to find our nets. The day was extremely informative and the students were kind enough to lend us a few hours of their time helping to build a dead hedge through the woods. The dead hedge is a brilliant way of creating new habitat; a wildlife corridor, saving tons of waste wood from being burnt unnecessarily which is better for the environment.

We have two work experience students, who come to Birtley every Tuesday to learn and help us complete projects in the woods. Sam and Ryan are both studying Countryside Management at Merrist Wood. They have done a variety of jobs so far which are important for us to complete within the winter season.



Birtley Pigs

Following on from the successful experiment with woodland pigs last year we have now taken delivery of a new group of piglets – this time Saddlebacks, who are settling in well to their new home. The pigs will root around in the soil helping clear areas to allow tree re-planting and the native woodland flora to re-establish.



Children from the age of five upwards can invite their friends for their birthday parties and take part in a variety of activities in the woods. Den building, BBQs, woodland games and adventures are all part of the fun to be had. Even the adults get to see and learn new things. For more information just ask me and I can help you out with any queries you might have.

Naturdayz

As springtime begins I start to get a lot of work from my business, Naturdayz. This company aims to get people out into the woods and we specialise in looking for, and humanely trapping, small mammals such as voles, mice and shrews. These animals are released back into the wild and are well looked after during their time in the Longworth trap.

Theo Tramblinas

Birtley Ranger





Events Update

The Sculpture Garden

Many may feel that holding a major sculpture exhibition in the grounds of a Nursing Home is rather unusual and yet, now in its 6th year, our Sculpture Garden exhibition goes from strength to strength with some 150 exhibits in a wide range of media, by sculptors from across the UK and as far away as Eire and Zimbabwe! This year, 11 of the 50 sculptors are new to Birtley which is very exciting and helps to keep the exhibition very fresh.

Our initial aim in holding an exhibition here was to attract in the local community to an event which would be enjoyable for all ages and especially to our Residents. Staff and Residents alike love the extra 'buzz' created firstly by the arrival of the sculpture, followed by the continual flow of visitors over the five weeks of the exhibition. Many of our Residents regularly enjoy a daily walk or trip in a wheelchair around the grounds and this enjoyment is enhanced by the added interest of the exhibits. If the weather is too cold or wet for a walk then there are the indoor pieces to enjoy. The exhibition offers something for everyone – there is even a quiz for the under 12s.

As usual, the Activities programme during May will have two afternoons devoted to the exhibition – an art appreciation afternoon, which always generates much lively discussion, and a refresh of the Activities display board, with a collage of a favourite sculpture.

Entrance to the exhibition is free, but once again we will encourage donations to the Community Foundation for Surrey, which we support via the Birtley House Community Fund. New for 2014, there will be musical entertainment in the garden during the afternoon of Sunday 18th May: 'Music Kids' are aged 5-15 and 'Minor Cord' are teenagers, who sing unaccompanied. The afternoon has been kindly organised by Barbara Keene who



many of you have met. Barbara is the leader of the Guildford GAMBIT group of blind and partially sighted who we support via the Birtley House Fund. Once again, we look forward to welcoming both the Guildford and Godalming 'Sight for Surrey' (formerly SAVI) groups to enjoy the sculpture exhibition. Some of our Residents will join the groups for morning coffee during the visit, which is planned for Monday May 19th.



We are delighted that, for the first time, we will be able to offer refreshments on a daily basis. The refreshments will be provided by WB Events who will serve them from

small marquee at the entrance to the Parkland. The daily opening times of the exhibition have changed to 11am – 5pm to coincide with the availability of the refreshments.

Janet Hall
Marketing Manager



Surrey Hills Trust Fund to launch at Birtley House

Regular readers of 'House & Home' will know that we have been strong supporters of both the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Community Foundation for Surrey (CFS) for some years. Now these two organisations have come together to establish the Surrey Hills Trust Fund with the objective of establishing a secure, long-term, source of funding for the better protection of our wonderful natural heritage in the Surrey Hills. Many of you may also be aware that our annual Sculpture Garden supports local projects through the CFS and that we have in the past also held a wine-tasting dinner in support of this – though we have not done so for a couple of years.

The opportunity to bring all these threads together seemed too good to miss and we have agreed to Launch the new Surrey Hills Trust Fund with a local wine and food tasting dinner on 23rd May here at Birtley. The event

will include a delicious dinner of locally-produced foods and wines (and beers) from some of the best local vineyards and small breweries. As the event precedes English Wine Week which starts on 24th May the guests will be amongst the first to sample the new wine releases for 2014.

We are looking to have 20 tables of ten and tickets are very reasonably-priced at £70 per head (or £600 for a table). Guests will also have the opportunity for a private view of the Sculpture Garden. All profits from the evening will be donated to the Trust Fund but the main objective is to create awareness of the vital importance of securing the future of the natural heritage of the countryside we all treasure so highly but which could so easily become eroded.

Simon Whalley

Staff News

In other news...

New Faces...

Over the past few months we have welcomed some new members of staff to Birtley House:

- Nikki Beaumont-Williams (Senior Carer), Andy Kovari and Monica Gacikowska (Care Assistants), Madalina 'Madi' Bardas and Chris Sulliman (Staff Nurses) have joined Karen's Nursing team
- Jason Griggs (Housekeeping and Pantry) has joined the Housekeeping team
- Wendy Bicknell has joined the Reception and Administration team.

Leavers...

Sadly we have also had to say goodbye to some, and we thank them for all their hard work during their time at Birtley House. We wish the following all the best for the future:

- Kim Edwards (Sister-in-Charge)
- Rajani Vargehese and Sally Anne Bourke (Staff Nurses)
- Svetlana Franova (Care Assistant)
- Mina Budhathoki and Peter Walker (Housekeeping)



News from Birtley House

The next edition of House & Home will be Summer 2014.

In the interim, please see our Blog for the latest news from Birtley House.

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