



**A big thank you to all our volunteers for their continued dedication throughout the autumn months. Winter is now upon us with the Park recently dressed in white for the occasion and looking pretty as a picture. Season's greetings to you all!**

### **Lock Keeper's Cottage gets a seasonal make-over**

The Lock Keeper's Cottage has had a seasonal make-over thanks to our Heritage Guide Barbara, who has put on a lovely Christmas display for all our visitors and guides to enjoy.

### **Weekend Opening**

The Lock Keeper's Cottage and the Industry Barge continue to be opened on the last weekend of each month. Thanks to the dedication of our Heritage Guides, we welcomed 1,214 visitors to the Cottage and 1,059 to the Barge on the weekends this year up to the end of October.



### **Holiday Closures**

The Cottage and the Barge will be **closed from Friday 22 December to Wednesday 3 January inclusive.**

Both will re-open on **Thursday 4 January.**

There will be **no Saturday Conservation task on Saturday 23 December.**

Tasks will resume fortnightly from **Saturday 6 January**, with the first task on the 6<sup>th</sup> planned for vegetation removal from the boundary wall at the Giant's Ring – one last push should complete this ongoing work.

### **New Staff**

Two new members of staff have recently joined the small team at the Regional Park.

Donna McKiernan is our new Administration Officer working weekday mornings.

Genevieve O'Reilly joins us on a temporary contract as Volunteer and Visitor Officer, working Thursdays and Fridays and leading the Saturday morning Conservation tasks each fortnight.

### **Volunteer Retirement**

We would like to extend our thanks and best wishes for the future to Ronnie Carser, who recently retired from his duties as a Volunteer Ranger in the Regional Park.

David Briggs, Volunteer Heritage Guide at the Cottage and the Barge, is also stepping back from the end of this year to dedicate more time to his successful artistic endeavours. We wish him all the best and look forward to seeing him again in the future.

### **Lagan Valley Regional Park Board News**

We would like to welcome the new Chair, Robert Wasson, and two new Directors, Amanda Kirkpatrick and Stephen Pollock, to the Lagan Valley Regional Park Board.

We would also like to send best wishes for a speedy recovery to two of our Directors – Frank Jordan, who is recuperating from a recent operation, and Michael McSorley, who suffered a fractured hip as a result of a hit and run accident whilst cycling on Annadale Embankment at the end of November.

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### **Launch of Google Trekker**

From the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, virtual visitors across the globe will be able to visit the Regional Park's towpath, tracks and trails from the comfort of their home, desk or smartphone, thanks to a partnership with Google's Trekker Program. Earlier in the year, Head Ranger Dan Clarke donned the Google Trekker orb – a 360 degree camera pack that maps in a similar way to the now familiar Google camera car - and walked the many trails of the Park so they can now be accessed directly from Google Maps or via the Lagan Valley Regional Park website from our side menu under Google Trekker.

It is hoped that this new facility will bring new visitors to the Park, assist existing users in planning activities throughout the Park and will enable those who cannot visit in person to enjoy the beauty of the landscapes and heritage of the Park from the comfort of home.



## Volunteer Outings and Events

Each year, the Park organises a number of events to say thank you to our volunteers for the huge amount of time, enthusiasm and knowledge they donate to the Regional Park.

This year saw the Heritage Volunteers head to Hillsborough Castle in September, where they enjoyed a tour of the Castle and the chance to explore the grounds, before having lunch.



Meanwhile on their outing the Saturday Conservation Volunteers headed to the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre at Oxford Island National Nature Reserve, where they enjoyed a presentation and guided tour of the site, followed by lunch.

In December, all of the Park's volunteers were invited along to a pre-Christmas get-together on site at the Visitor Centre and Industry Barge. The morning started for the volunteers with a choice of Christmas crafts on the Barge, decorating Yule Logs, or a light gardening task outside the Cottage for those who preferred to be out in the fresh air. And fresh it was indeed, for the snow was deep and crisp and even that morning!



Then it was time for a warming cup of hot fruit punch, a mince pie and a catch-up chat with each other, before climbing aboard the Industry for the annual Christmas Quiz, followed by a buffet lunch outside around the welcoming braziers. It was a lovely day for volunteers and staff alike, and a pleasant wind-down towards the holiday season.



## Updates on Conservation Tasks

The Saturday Conservation Volunteers have spent several sessions over the last few months clearing vegetation from the boundary wall of the historic Giant's Ring. The boundary wall was erected by Arthur Hill-Trevor, 3rd Viscount Dungannon around the henge of the Giant's Ring as he thought the site was under threat and sought to protect it. The commemorative plaque at the entrance dates this work to 1841.



The vegetation removal will help the historic wall stay standing long into the future and facilitate assessment for potential future restoration works.

The volunteers have worked their way around over three quarters of the site so far. The first task of 2018 will re-visit this task and hopefully complete it if we have enough hands on the day.

Other tasks over the last few months have included vegetation control around the young oaks in Belvoir Wood and in Mclroy Park, and a site tidy at Derriaghy Glen, where the volunteers clipped back overgrown vegetation at the entrance to the site and cleared a large amount of litter, enhancing the site for visitors and wildlife alike.

The next three months Saturday conservation programme looks like this: (but as usual confirmation will be emailed prior to task days).

<u>Date</u>	<u>Task</u>	<u>Venue</u>	<u>Meeting place</u>
6.1.2018	Vegetation Removal	Giant's Ring	Car Park
20.1.2018	Woodland Management	Mclroy Park	Drumbo Dog Racing
3.2.2018	Woodland Thinning - To be confirmed	Belvoir – Woodland Trust	Belvoir Car Park
17.2.2018	Laurel Removal	Derriaghy Glen	Yew Tree Walk
3.3.2018	Hedge Maintenance	Lagan Meadows - Sharman	Sharman Car Park
17.3.2018	No task	St Patrick's Day	Holiday
31.3.2018	To be confirmed	To be confirmed	To be confirmed

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### Feedback

Don't forget to provide us with feedback. We are always interested to know of any issues, questions or suggestions you may have.

### Volunteer uniforms

If any of our volunteers don't yet have a body warmer or one of our tee-shirts please let the staff know and we will make sure you are supplied with these items.