

FFWPU UK: Members' Spotlight - The Watford Peace Garden - A Haven of Peace and Renewal

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Members' Spotlight - The Watford Peace Garden: A Haven of Peace and Renewal

Some projects grow flowers. Others grow friendships, community, and hope.



For more than 25 years, Françoise M. and Jeffrey B. have dedicated themselves to fostering understanding and cooperation among people of different faiths through their involvement with the Watford Interfaith Association (WIFA). Their long-standing commitment reflects True Parents' emphasis on interfaith dialogue as an essential foundation for lasting peace.

When they first joined WIFA, acceptance did not come overnight. Over the years, however, they earned the trust and respect of the wider community. Jeffrey eventually became a committee member and later Chair of the association, while Françoise stepped forward as Treasurer in 2006, a role she continues to hold today.

One of their most significant achievements has been the creation and development of the Watford Peace Garden.



Established with the support of Watford's faith communities, the project began in 2013 when half an acre of land in Cassiobury Park Community Garden was allocated for a shared interfaith initiative. Together with WIFA Secretary Judith B., Françoise and Jeffrey helped transform an overgrown plot into a flourishing space dedicated to peace, reflection, and community.

The project brought together people from many backgrounds. Volunteers from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community were among the first to help clear the land, while local organisations, civic leaders, faith communities, and residents all contributed to its development. Through Françoise's efforts, a grant from Watford Borough Council helped launch the project, and many others donated their time, resources, plants, and trees.



Officially inaugurated in March 2018, the Peace Garden has since become a treasured part of the town. Among its unique features are a Peace Arch, a meditation labyrinth, a peace dove flower bed, a Peace Pole, and several symbolic trees, including a millennium yew and a ginkgo tree planted in honour of True

Father's centenary.

Yet the garden's greatest impact cannot be measured by its landscape alone.



Every week, volunteers gather to maintain the garden, creating a community where people find friendship, support, and purpose. Over the years, individuals facing homelessness, addiction recovery, and personal hardship have found encouragement and belonging through working alongside others. What began as a gardening project has become a place where lives are nurtured as carefully as the plants themselves.



The Peace Garden has also become a spiritual gathering place for the wider community. It regularly hosts prayer gatherings, vigils, and moments of solidarity in response to world events and local challenges. People of all faiths and those with no faith affiliation come together there to reflect, pray, and seek peace.

In recognition of its contribution to the town, the Watford Peace Garden received the Audentior Civic Awards 2025 - Pride in Watford Award.

At the entrance to the garden stands a simple message:

"Peace begins with me."

Through decades of faithful service, Françoise M. and Jeffrey B. have helped turn those words into reality. Their dedication demonstrates how patient investment in relationships, community, and shared purpose can create a lasting legacy of peace for generations to come.

We are grateful for their example, and for the countless hours they have devoted to serving both their local community and God's vision of one human family.

Learn More

Watford Peace Garden Facebook Page
www.facebook.com/WatfordPeaceGarden

Watford Interfaith Association (WIFA)
www.wifa.org.uk

Watford Peace Garden
www.wifa.org.uk/peacegarden





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Welcome to Watford Interfaith Association

Watford Interfaith Association (WIFA) is a local interfaith organisation which was established in 1977 and is a member of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

WIFA welcomes people from all faiths to come together in friendship, to learn about each other's faith and to work together for the well-being of all communities in Watford and Southwest Hertfordshire.

WIFA's motto:

'Living our Faith, Loving our neighbour'.

'Faiths Listening, learning and working together'.

Through interfaith dialogue, WIFA promotes tolerance, understanding and mutual respect between people of all faiths. Whatever the differences between the faiths, WIFA believes that based on shared ethical views religious people and groups can work together with great value in service to our wider society.



WIFA's activities:

- Interfaith dialogue meetings on chosen topics, in person or online.
- School assemblies
- Annual gathering for the Week of Prayer for World Peace
- Watford Interfaith Pilgrimage during National Interfaith week.
- Annual Harold Meyer Memorial Lecture
- Sacred Space at the Watford Celebration
- Facilitating Faith Leaders' Forum
- Regular newsletter
- Occasional ad hoc multi-faith gatherings when required.
- Membership of Herts Interfaith Forum
- Participation in Remembrance Sunday Ceremony
- WIFA's project: 'Watford Peace Garden' in Cassiobury Park

'Watford Interfaith Association' has a Facebook page, and the 'Watford Peace Garden' has its own Facebook page.

WIFA has also a YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZf5E6MJZEEdZrRfqv_uCwA

Watford Peace Garden

The Watford Peace Garden is a project of WIFA which was initiated in 2013 with the endorsement of the Watford Faith communities. It is situated in Cassiobury Park and has received the support of the Watford Borough Council through various grants. The Peace Garden was officially inaugurated on 29th March 2018 by Elected Mayor Baroness Dorothy Thornhill MBE. A team of volunteers headed by Jeff Bateman regularly meet to maintain the garden. The major features of the Peace Garden are the labyrinth, the Peace Arch and the many trees planted by the various faith communities.

The Peace Garden team meet every Wednesday from 10 am to 12 noon. If you wish to volunteer please [contact us](#).

For updates and more information please visit our [Watford Peace Garden Facebook page](#).



Installation of Peace Pole in Watford Peace Garden. Wednesday 25th March 2026.

A new Peace Pole was installed to promote unity and harmony in the community on 25th March in Watford Peace Garden. The message on the pole is 'May Peace Prevail on Earth' in the eight most spoken languages in Watford and it stands as a global symbol of peace and hope for all.

The project was led by the Watford Rotary Club and formally dedicated in a ceremony attended by Mayor Peter Taylor, Watford Interfaith Association Chair Jeffrey Bateman and other members of WIFA, and Town Centre Chaplain Pastor Geert Tap. Jeremy Wyman, Rotary's District Governor, and Ali Irteza, president of Watford Rotary, also delivered remarks at the event.

Peace Poles have been planted on every continent in over 200,000 communities around the world as reminders of humanity's collective desire for harmony.

A Watford Rotary spokesperson said: 'They serve as reminders to cultivate peace in thought, word and action while symbolising humanity's shared desire for a world at peace and in harmony with all of creation.'



King's Trust volunteers at the Peace Garden

Friday 6th June 2025.

Over 20 volunteers from the King's Trust spent 2 weeks in the Peace Garden from May 27 to June 6th. They did a fantastic job adding a great deal to the Peace Garden. Cllr Rabi Martins had suggested the King's Trust (formally The Prince's Trust) to send their young people to the Peace Garden as part of their community project of TEAM Programme Watford.

On Friday 6th June, we gathered in the Peace Garden for their final day. A representative from the King's Trust was present as well as Cllr Rabi Martins, the Watford Town Centre Chaplain, Pamela G. King's Trust Team leader for Watford and representatives from the Watford Fire Station. One of the volunteers gave a report of all the amazing work they did around the Peace Garden. We then went around admiring their wonderful contributions: working around the labyrinth, adding a bench, raising a small fence around the Peace dove, watering, weeding and more.

Representing the Peace Garden team, Françoise M gave a short introduction to the history of the Peace Garden and distributed a certificate of appreciation to each volunteer. She thanks the volunteers for their enthusiasm and investment during those 2 weeks and their invaluable contributions to the Peace Garden. Françoise wished them all well in their future endeavours.

The representative of the King's Trust then offered Cllr Rabi Martins and Françoise a certificate of recognition to the Peace Garden as a delivery partner to the Watford King's Trust for their community project.

The Peace Garden team values their volunteers very much. Without them we could never maintain and develop the Peace Garden the way it is today. Every Wednesday from 10am till 12noon, volunteers are taking care of the Garden. You are most welcome to join us on that day or just come and spend some time in this beautiful natural environment. You will feel refreshed and find peace in your mind and heart.



'The Pride in Watford Award'

Friday 7th February 2025.

The Audentior Awards Ceremony took place last Friday, 7th February at Watford Palace Theatre. This is Watford Council's acknowledgement of the hard work that volunteers have done to improve life in the community. The Watford Peace Garden Team was awarded a plaque and certificate in recognition of their hard work in the Peace Garden in the Pride in Watford category, which is for those who have maintained a clean, green and vibrant community. The team was secretly nominated by Cllr Rabi Martins who himself volunteers in the garden, and Jeffrey Bateman, Françoise Murphy, Judith Bruni, Sri Mohan, James O. and Paul Bruni received the award on stage.



Recognition of our volunteers at the Peace Garden

Sunday 15th September 2024

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, we gathered at the Watford Peace Garden to thank and recognise our wonderful volunteers who contributed greatly to the creation and maintenance of the Peace Garden.

Yogesh started by welcoming our various dignitaries and everyone. He invited us all to join in a time of reflections, prayers and meditation on peace as part of our regular third Sunday of the month 'Peace gathering in the Garden'. Jeff played a few tunes on his flute to start us up. Spontaneously people came forward and spoke on how to gain peace in our lives emphasizing that 'Peace begins with me' and ripples out to our family, society and world. Some of our volunteers expressed their thanks for their experiences at the Peace Garden. James who was homeless told us that by joining our team in the Garden his life was completely transformed.

After a time of meditation, Cllr Rabi Martins welcomed us to the second part of the afternoon dedicated to recognising all our volunteers. Rabi invited Hertfordshire Deputy Lieutenant Adam Ginder to meet our volunteers one by one. James was the first to come forward. As an exemplary volunteer James had attended the Peace Garden for over a year and often came more than once a week. James received a certificate of appreciation and a plant for his new home. Three men from 'Emerging Futures', a rehab organisation, were acknowledged as well as many of our dedicated volunteers. The Deputy Lieutenant congratulated all the volunteers and told everyone how much he was impressed by the Peace Garden. Then Jeff gave a short introduction to the Peace Garden mentioning a few of the major landmarks of the Garden like the labyrinth, the millennium yew and the Peace Arch.

Rabi ended by inviting the dignitaries to say a few words: Watford newly elected MP Matt Turmaine, Radhamohan from the Bhaktivedanta Manor and Watford Deputy Mayor Aga Dychton. All praised the value of having in Watford a place of natural beauty where people can come and find tranquillity and peace amid their busy lives. They also recognised how lucky our town is to have such friendly relationships between all its diverse communities. Refreshments and conversations concluded this inspiring and uplifting afternoon.

You can view the full recording of the event on the WIFA YouTube channel at this link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRqaEqaCvIU>



Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Watford Peace Garden

It was a lovely day and nearly 100 people came to the Peace Garden on that Sunday afternoon 9th July. Chair of WIFA Harjit Singh welcomed everyone and Yogesh Joshi, Vice Chair introduced the various speakers. Jeff Bateman (Watford Peace Garden coordinator) gave a short presentation on the history of the Peace Garden. It was followed by various speakers. MP Dean Russell's message was about gardening being so good for mental health and the mindfulness of walking the labyrinth. Our next speakers were: Bella Stuart who gave us the basic design for the garden from what she saw of the existing shape of the land and the trees, Leo Taylor from Interfaith Network praised WIFA as one of the most active interfaith groups in the country and Isabel Crozier who manages Cassiobury Park was happy that WIFA and Green Gym can work together in the Peace Garden /Orchard. Jeff played his flute, the Gospel Manna Choir and folk songs from Sonya, a young Ukrainian girl with a wonderful voice, created a beautiful and uplifting atmosphere for a very special occasion.

Thanks also to Mayor Peter Taylor, Cllr Aga Dychton, and especially Cllr Rabi Martins, himself a Peace Garden volunteer who has provided the team with many volunteers over time, including teams from the NCS in the past, and TKMaxx who came the week before. He presented trowels and certificates to some of our long term and regular volunteers. Revd Tony Rindl, 'Vicar of Watford' gave a short prayer of blessing and Peter Taylor cut the cake.

So many people from all communities came together on this happy occasion. They spoke about how much they appreciated the Peace Garden as a place of peace and tranquillity where one can come, spend some time, relax, and reflect on life.

Many thanks to all who contributed to the success of the event.

You can view photos of the anniversary on the 'Watford Peace Garden' [Facebook page](#) and a full recorded video of the event on the WIFA [YouTube channel](#):

P.S. Few days later Dean Russell Watford MP spoke at the House of Parliament about the benefit of the Peace Garden and the wish for a debate in Parliament. To view [click here](#).



Wildfest

Wildfest was an event run by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust on Saturday 8th July 2023. It took place in Cassiobury Park, which is well-known for its varied and interesting wildlife and natural environment. The Peace Garden team ran a stall there, showcasing all the work that happens in the garden with help from community volunteers, and how the garden can be a centre for gathering for vigils, celebrations and much dedicated work together. While working in the garden, of course all sorts

of plants and wildlife are noticed, as, working with Green Gym on Wednesday mornings, volunteers work for the best ecology possible. Stalls exhibited groups that manage bats, badgers, birds, butterflies, and the incredible wildlife that lives in the river, and advised on gardening for wildlife. There were activities for children and guided butterfly walks and bird spotting exercises.



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