



SUZY OAKES

1950-2011



Photograph in public domain

‘Champion of Mill Road’

Who was Suzy?



Suzy spent an idyllic childhood in the Gloucestershire village of Frampton on Severn. After leaving Malvern girls' college (now Malvern St James) at 16, she trained as a secretary in Cheltenham. In 1967 she headed for the US, where she worked as an au pair, and then followed the Snow Goose migration down to Texas, where she got a job on a ranch, lassoing calves and shooting fish in the bayous.

Back in England, she was briefly married and then divorced. When her beloved mother died (from the same type of lung tumour that Suzy later developed), Suzy found herself adrift and penniless in Bristol. The generosity of the people who helped her back on her feet left a deep stamp on her. She excelled as a secretary for David Smith, head of the botany department at Bristol University. In 1978 she set off with a friend to India, via Turkey, Jordan, Israel, Syria, Iraq, Iran (during the revolution) and Afghanistan (which she thought the most beautiful country she had seen). She also spent a couple of years in Greece, but by 1982 she had settled in Oxford.

There, in 1984, Suzy met her future husband, Stephen O'Rahilly. When they moved to Cambridge, she organised a huge study for the European Prospective Investigation of Cancer. During recovery from hip surgery, and missing her kitchen, where she produced wonderful meals, she set up a website called whatamieating.com. It now has more than 70,000 dictionary-style entries about food, in more than 60 languages.

Suzy was deeply passionate about her local neighbourhood, and with a small group of like-minded people set up the Mill Road Winter Fair as well as supporting all kinds of community organisations and initiatives. She was tireless in supporting the traders and residents of Mill Road from the depredations of large conglomerates.

It's largely thanks to Suzy that we have in their present form:

The Mill Road Winter Fair

The Mill Road History Society

Love Mill Road and therefore Mill Road Fringe

Friends of Mill Road Cemetery's History Group

[Https:// mill-road.com](https://mill-road.com)

Suzy managed to make everyone she knew more hopeful and more self-confident so in great part it is thanks to her that Mill Road is seen as a diverse and lively community and a good place to live.

MILL ROAD **WINTER FAIR**

<https://www.millroadwinterfair.org>

Inspired by a Christmas Fair on the Romsey side of the bridge, it was Suzy's vision that a street-long fair would celebrate the different cultures and communities of the road, and would advertise to wider Cambridge and beyond the richness of its many shops and businesses. Those aims are as true as they ever were.



The inaugural Mill Road Winter Fair happened **on Saturday 3rd December 2005**. Three years later, the following comment was overheard by a passer-by in the neighbourhood: "Mill Road is great! It even has its own Fair. Apparently, it's been going on for hundreds of years." The Winter Fair does indeed have that feeling about it!



The first Fair stretched, even then, from Petersfield on East Road to Romsey Mill The inaugural Fair attracted acts which have since become a tradition. These included the Arco Iris Samba Band; Morris Dancers going from place to place, with increasingly erratic steps; a Mill Road History Walk, food and craft stalls. lots of different buskers and performers together with activities arranged by various charities, the Mosques and Churches of Mill Road and of course from the traders themselves.

Suzy's initial vision continues to inspire successive MRWF committees



Programme images from www.millroadwinterfair.org



Photographs from private collections



Suzy's death in 2011, at the age of only 61. was a bitter blow to Mill Road

Her funeral cortege travelled the length of the road, and friends, traders and residents lined the street to pay tribute, many of them holding a single sunflower.

Close friend and local artist Sam Motherwell captured the moment in his limited-edition book 'Pictures of Mill Road'



Reproduced by kind permission of Sam Motherwell

That year the Mill Road Winter Fair paid its own tribute by arranging Shh for Suzy. Immediately after the opening by the Mayor, assisted by sixth formers from Parkside and the Fair committee, people were encouraged to stand in the middle of the road holding hands to form a human chain starting from the bridge and stretching in both directions towards Romsey and

Petersfield. At the sound of a horn a minute's silence began, and this was brought to an end by a jazz band on top of the bridge playing 'When the Saints go Marching in'.

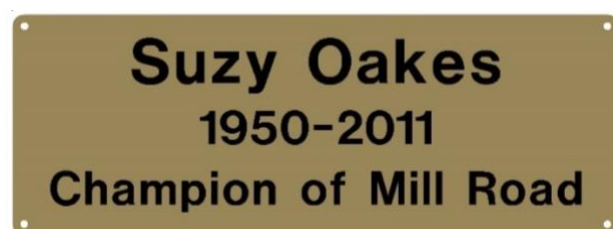


Photograph : Alison McTaggart



Photograph: Simon Fraser

The bench on top of Mill Road Bridge is a permanent and much loved tribute to her.



The Suzy Oakes Trust

With her typical imagination and generosity Suzy left a legacy to Mill Road in the form of a trust fund, The Suzy Oakes Trust, whose initial trustees were her widower Steve, and representatives of the main organisations on Mill Road which she wanted to benefit.

Grants were given to the Fair, to the local mental health charity, Lifecraft, for a renovated Suzy Oakes room, to Mill Road Bridges for a new website, to Friends of Mill Road Cemetery for restoration of monuments and website work, and to seed funding for what has become the Mill Road History Society.

The poster on the next page outlines the grants the Trust made in 2012 and some of the organisations that still benefit from her legacy are highlighted later in this account.

Suzy Oakes Trust

The aims of the Suzy Oakes Trust are to further and promote community projects and events in and around Mill Road, Cambridge.

The Trust welcomes applications for funding. These should be made in writing to "The Suzy Oakes Trust for Mill Road" and sent to The Treasurer, Suzy Oakes Trust,

Andrew Phillips
54 Covent Garden
Cambridge CB1 2 HR
clearly (but briefly) describing the amount of funding required and its justification.

Please support the Trust by making a donation today, or by buying a copy of Suzy's recipe book, on display.

In 2012 the Suzy Oakes Trust contributed significantly to:

The Mill Road Winter Fair for Parade and other costs



Mill Road Cemetery for the restoration of the following graves:



Kate Moreley



Henry Moden



Kate Harding Street

The History Stall at Mill Road Winter Fair 2012



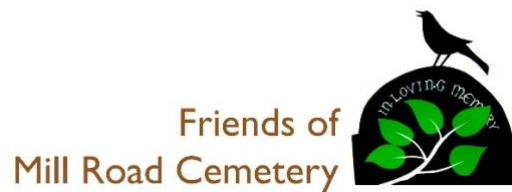
The Mill Road History Project for early setup costs and the publication of a flyer:



Mill Road Festive Lights

The Trust contributed significantly to the repair of the snowflake lights, and also to the installation of lights on two new trees. The lit tree on Petersfield at the corner of East Road and Mill Road was funded in memory of Suzy.





In her lifetime, Suzy was a member of the Friends of Mill Road Cemetery and after her death a grant from the Trust helped pay for the restoration of some damaged monuments

But the FOMRC history group remember also with great pleasure the part she played in kick starting our mapping project. A chance encounter by the Chair of the Group with the deputy head of the Ordnance Survey. led to a remarkable minestrone lunch hosted by Suzy who was a notable cook * with a selection of OS staff and its Trustees

The OS wanted to show their trustees and colleagues some of their new equipment and processes. They wanted access to a site with some challenges, and were prepared to map some of the most significant monuments and landmarks, as well as to teach the Friends some mapping skills they could use on their own.



Suzy and friend
struggling with
mapping techniques
and location of
monuments

Photograph Caro Wilson



*



After her death a friend compiled her recipes and food photographs into a recipe book whose sale raised money for the Trust and provided a memento to many.

The day was fun for everyone and two of the local OS staff were so interested in what the Friends were doing that they came back, with permission from the OS, as volunteers. One has now left Cambridge, but the other, Tim Glasswell, continues to work with FOMRC with the result that nearly two thirds of the monuments in the Cemetery have been mapped and their locations added to the website [Mill Road Cemetery – Cambridge](#).



Photographed reproduced with kind permission of the Ordnance Survey

All the monuments have been researched and are in the process of being photographed.

If you wish to find out more about the Friends of Mill Cemetery email friendsofmillroadcemetery@gmail.com.



Before she died, Suzy was aware, and supportive, of plans to form a Mill Road History Society. A grant from the Trust allowed application to The National Heritage Lottery, and in 2013 the application was successful and resulted in the two-year funded Mill Road History Project. During this time a website was designed: Capturing Cambridge, now hosted by the Museum of Cambridge. Research is ongoing and can be found on [Mill Road Area | Capturing Cambridge](#) The website is now recognised as a major resource for local history of all kinds in the city and wider afield.



Photographs from the Suzy Oakes Collection Mill Road History Society

At the end of the project the Mill Road History Society millroadhistory.org.uk was formed which provides monthly talks or events and promotes research and information sharing. Its free monthly newsletter can be accessed here: [Mailing List – Mill Road History Society](#)

Suzy was a fine photographer and after her death her photographs, together with those of her friend and colleague Ann Horn, were made available to the Society

In 2010 Suzy photographed all the existing shops in Mill Road; these are an invaluable 'snapshot in time'



Photographs Suzy Oakes Collection Mill Road History



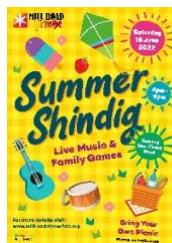
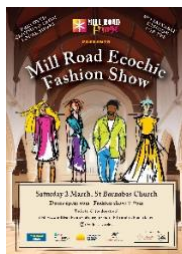
[Love Mill Road](#)

In 2020 a new charity, Love Mill Road, was set up and those funds remaining in the Suzy Oakes Trust were transferred to it

Its aims and objectives are ones of which she would approve wholeheartedly.

Love Mill Road acts as a catalyst to keep Mill Road thriving by channelling sponsorship and donations to local community projects. We focus on three types of activities:

- *Cultural life*
- *Environment*
- *Community and Inclusion*



Funding from Love Mill Road for the Community Aspects of Mill Road Winter Fair enables the Fair to become

sustainable. It has also allowed for several very successful cultural events:

Poetry Thursdays

Summer Shindigs

Film Festival

Comedy Night

Eco Chic Fashion Show

as well as several local projects to increase community involvement, inclusion and sustainability

Repair Café at the Edge

Youth Community Activities at the Abu Bakr mosque.



Love Mill Road, and its ‘action arm’ Mill Road Fringe
[Mill Road Fringe – Mill Road Winter Fair](#) ensure that
Suzy’s legacy will continue long in to the future.

A poem written for Suzy circulated widely after her death.

Love the smile that lights up the day
Shared with Suzy
Mischievous; kind;
And charming besides
That's Suzy.
Cheering-up cheering-on
Being with, moving on;
To living life better;
A real go-getter;
No-one wants to leave
Dinner with Steve
Shared with Suzy

Love the glimpses of steel in the sveldt velvet glove
That is Suzy`s;
So clear in your vision
Your appetite for living
When obstacles abound
You hold your ground;
You don't go away;
You have the say
That is Suzy`s.

Love a walk down Mill Road, summer winter or spring
You'll find Suzy;
From what am I eating?
To affectionate meeting
There`s Suzy
The mood is alfresco;
No town clones, no Tesco
Foie Gras?
Fish and Chips?
The best shopping trips;
Free to stroll
Free to speak
Many tongues
It's unique,
That's Suzy.