What a terrific afternoon of entertainment in Dartmouth Park

Saturday 23 July saw Dartmouth Park full of families enjoying a free afternoon of entertainment courtesy of the Shape Youth Festival and Birmingham and Solihull Jazz Festival. Visitors were spoilt with live entertainment on the main stage from, amongst other acts, Stooshe the girl group from London who have had top 10 hits in the UK Charts, whilst the David Moore Band entertained an appreciative audience on the terrace overlooking the Park.

The children were catered for with the play area in the Park, which includes the very popular water play. The events area hosted a great choice of activities for everyone and visitors certainly took advantage of everything that was on offer. There were also donkey rides and the new Swan Pedalos were in action and very popular. The photographs below, most of them taken by Seumas Kelly, give just a snapshot of a wonderful event, which was greatly enjoyed by all who attended.
On Tuesday 12 July members of the Friends visited The Big House in Oldbury, where we were greeted by The Mayor of Sandwell, Cllr Julie Webb, and George Murray, the Mayor's Chauffeur.

The building houses the Mayor's Parlour where we were given a talk by George about the history of the regalia on display and how he is trying to collect items relating to the towns that make up the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell. West Bromwich is lucky because much of its regalia has been kept safe, but this is not the same for some of the other towns, where chains of office have been stolen and photographs of past Mayors destroyed. George's knowledge of the collection was very impressive and, although not a native of the Black Country, he is determined to keep the history of each individual town alive for future generations.

The photographs below show George with the Mace that still plays a big part in Council ceremonies, and Friends' member Graham Saunders wearing Alderman Reuben Farley's chain of office, presented to him in 1882 by the 5th Earl of Dartmouth. The photograph bottom right shows some of our group with the Mayor outside The Big House.

Selwyn Hayward gives an impromptu rendition of Happy Birthday in the new Bandstand to celebrate Annette Welch’s birthday. This was after a morning of hard work in the Sensory Garden for the Park’s volunteer gardeners, and was followed, of course, by some ‘healthy’ slices of birthday cake.

Autumn Fair Saturday 10 September from 11am until 2pm
Events Area in Dartmouth Park

All your favourite stalls, children’s activities, plus some new additions, and listen out for live music to suit all tastes on the Bandstand—see page 3.

If you would like a stall, or have any bric-a-brac or tombola items, please contact Annette on 07963 101750.
We’ve got The People’s Orchestra playing on the new Bandstand at our Autumn Fair on Saturday 10 September

The Sandwell based People’s Orchestra’s line-up of members boasts a mix of occupations, including a BA pilot, a retired aeronautical engineer, a number of students, doctors and teachers, who come together to create and perform shows in venues across the Midlands. The orchestra has a huge wind section including ten saxophones – perfect for their core repertoire of film music and popular classics. It is also an independent music charity, which uses music performance to help grow musicians and community wellbeing. They rehearse in the Town Hall, West Bromwich.

They have been chosen to appear in a BBC competition which could see them perform at the BBC Proms in the Park.

The series, which begins on BBC 4 at the end of August, will visit the orchestras in their home-towns, meeting the players in their homes and in rehearsal, taking part in masterclasses and staging their own concerts. It will follow them on their unique journeys, showcasing their development and giving them opportunities to perform at world-class venues including the BBC’s Maida Vale studios, the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester and London’s Royal Albert Hall. Each week’s episode will have a distinct musical theme, from the symphony to opera. The orchestras will present a performance based on the week’s theme in every episode, which will be judged by Conductor Paul Daniel.

The four other orchestras featured in the series will be: London Gay Symphony Orchestra, North Devon Sinfonia, Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra and Stirling Orchestra.

What a great scoop to launch our new Bandstand and an event not to be missed.

Express & Star’s ‘Cash for your Community’ project starts on Thursday 15 September and the Friends of Dartmouth Park need your help

We have a beautiful Bandstand and now we need benches and chairs so that visitors to the Park can sit comfortably to listen to musical events. If our members and their friends could help us to collect the tokens appearing in the Express and Star from 15 September to 22 October it would be a great boost to the amount of funding we could receive from this Express and Star and Homeserve initiative.

After the 22 October can you please pass them onto any member of the committee, or post them to 2 Sandwell Road North, West Bromwich, B71 4JB.
The Dartmouth family lived in Sandwell Hall in Sandwell Valley until 1853 when the 4th Earl moved to join his son (later the 5th Earl) and family at Patshull Hall. However the Estate, which comprised of around 2,200 acres, remained in the ownership of the Dartmouths. The majority of the land was in West Bromwich, but around 200 acres was within the City of Birmingham in the Handsworth area. The whole area was ‘farm land’ and let to a number of tenant farmers.

In the “Town Plan” for West Bromwich drafted by Council Officers during the war, the whole of the Estate was designated as “open space”. Lord Dartmouth’s Land Agents (Messrs Thynne and Thynne) were commissioned by Lord Dartmouth to consider the development of the land for housing purposes. However, because of mining from Jubilee Colliery which extended northwards under large areas of the Valley, Thynne and Thynne were advised that until settlement of the surface area was complete, the development for housing could not take place and this was abandoned.

It was at this stage that the Council decided to negotiate for the purchase of the Estate. The outcome was the acquisition by the Council in 1947/48. It was one of the most important and expensive purchases made up to that time. The purchase was of sufficient importance for me to handle the completion of the deal personally, and I visited Lord Dartmouth’s solicitors in London for the settlement. I needed to examine the title deeds before parting with the Council’s money.

The solicitor dealing with the matter explained that during the “London Blitz” their premises had been severely damaged by bombing and fires. Many of the valuable records and documents in their care had been affected, including the Dartmouth Estate Deeds. Some of these were badly scorched, but they could be accepted as genuine! What I brought back, will be amongst the deeds now in the care of Sandwell Council.

By the time West Bromwich acquired the Estate the Earl had already disposed of a number of areas. Dartmouth Cricket Club and Sandwell Park Golf Club had purchased their sites off the West Bromwich—Birmingham Road. The Golf Club ownership was extensive on which an 18 hole course was built. Dartmouth Golf Club had established the 9 hole course off Church Vale, the land being leased by the Council. Another major disposal was land on which Dartmouth Park was established. This land was a gift to the Council in 1923.

Two further items on the disposal of the main estate are worthy of mention. The Earl’s Agents withdrew from the sale a strip of land fronting the West Bromwich-Birmingham Road between the Cricket Club and a point opposite the Albion Ground, which the Earl wished to sell by auction in plots for industrial development. This was agreed and at the auction sale the Council obtained one plot. I had hoped that they might buy more. This plot was subsequently leased to an adjoining industrial concern to be used as the company’s playing fields. The Council secured a small parcel of land off Salters Lane designated for residential purposes. A few good quality houses were built on plots sold by the Council. (This must be Warstone Drive?)

The Sandwell Hall Entrance Archway on the Birmingham Road stood in the way of the building of the motorway and the Ministry of Transport, which acquired all the land needed, indicated that the Arch would have to be demolished. This aroused a furore in the Council and in the end, the Ministry agreed to remove it and find a suitable place for it. Thus, it now stands on the traffic island where the motorway slip roads join the Birmingham Road, and is a continuing landmark.

(Mr Day goes on to write about his memories of the tenant farmers on the Estate, which I will feature in the next issue of the newsletter.)