



Friends of Dartmouth Park
Patron: William, 10th Earl of Dartmouth
Newsletter
Issue No. 19

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*Friends of Dartmouth Park and Sandwell Visually Impaired
 Team up to plant the raised bed in the new Sensory Garden*

On a sunny Saturday morning at the end of May the Friends and SVI were in Dartmouth Park to work together on the new Sensory Garden. The plants were funded by a Sponsored Walk last year led by 'Blind' Dave Heeley, and the raised bed was built, free of charge, by Mansell the contractors for the 1st Phase of the Restoration.

Scented and brightly coloured plants were chosen with the help of Graham Price, founder member of the SVI and a Landscape Architect. Dartmouth Park Ranger, Richard Williams, helped to place the plants in a suitable design before planting started. As you can see from the photographs below everyone joined in and enjoyed themselves. 'Blind' Dave came along to offer support. A big thank you to Richard, our Park Ranger, and Sandra Troth, SVI Development Officer, for helping to organise a very successful event. The Sensory Garden will be a wonderful addition to the park which can be enjoyed by everyone.

The Sensory Garden will be extended as the restoration progresses and when funds are available for more features.



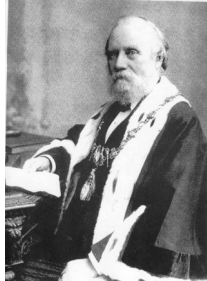
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Committee

Nigel Slater, Chairman	Roger Stopford, Vice Chairman	Annette Welch, Treasurer	Carol Hartill, Secretary
Betty Finney	Margaret Geddes	Pauline Lawley	Sue Slater
Anne Wilkins	Mandy Timms Membership Secretary	Mark Barrett Social Historian	

Reminder about our June Event

Thursday 30 June—2pm Walking Tour of West Bromwich with Robin Pearson, starting at the Farley Clock, Carter's Green, taking in places associated with Alderman Reuben Farley, first Mayor of West Bromwich, and the person responsible for providing Dartmouth Park for the people of West Bromwich. The walk will end at the Town Hall where Anne Wilkins will have assembled an exhibition on Reuben Farley in the Council Chamber. Following refreshments Robin will give us a talk on the great man. Those not wishing to take part in the walk can arrive in the Council Chamber at 2.30pm where Anne will be happy to show you her exhibition. Please note that access to the Council Chamber is via a few steps and not suitable for wheelchairs.



Dates for your diary

Tuesday 12 July
Big Spring Clean

Sunday 11 September
Heritage Open Day
joint event Sandwell Park Farm
and Dartmouth Park
Venue: Sandwell Park Farm

Sunday 25 September
Afternoon event to celebrate the
opening of the new Pavilion,
which will include entertainment
for all ages

Tuesday 6 December
Christmas Party
Venue: The Public

My Home in Dagger Lane by Frances Roberts

My home is one of the Queen Anne cottages in Dagger Lane, which was, I believe, built in 1719. Originally belonging to the Earl of Dartmouth's estate, the cottages provided homes for the estate workers. The 1881 British Census shows a family of 7 living here. At a very tight squeeze I would think.



The cottages were modernised with central heating and a bathroom in 1969, in spite of many members of the council favouring demolition.

When we came to live in this cottage, 60 years ago, it was like going back in time. In the kitchen, a large black range, and a big boiler, the toilet was in the yard and, of course, no bathroom, we

had to use a tin bath. The rooms were decorated with wood panelling half way and a tiny open fireplace. Money was tight in those days so we had to do a little every year to get it how we wanted it.

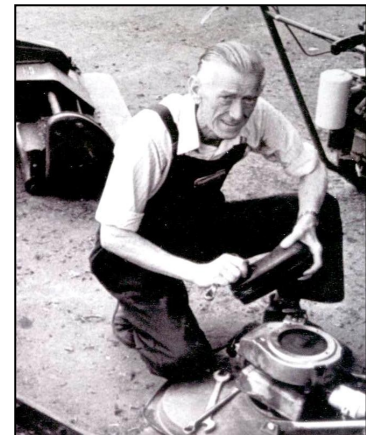
At holiday time and Sundays there was rowing on the boating pool and a band would play lively music from the bandstand. The visiting fair would always ask to plug their cables into our electricity supply (until we found out we had to pay for it). We had some hard winters and the ice was thick enough to skate on the pool. We had no big holidays, just a picnic in the park. A special treat was a day at the seaside.

At Christmas we would have a roaring log fire, thanks to living in the park, and made our own trimmings. Friends and neighbours would come to celebrate with us. We didn't have much but between us we could fill our long table with food. We sang songs accompanied by our own music makers.

Looking back I can't realise where the years have gone but they have been very happy. Living in this cottage on the edge of the park has been like living in the country. The only time my peace is disturbed is on Bonfire Night when the fireworks display is directly behind my home.



Frances Roberts sitting in her favourite room in her beautiful home.



Frances's husband, Ronald Roberts, who worked in the park from a boy and became head of maintenance responsible for keeping the park's equipment in good condition.



Sandwell's Big Spring Clean

This year, Sandwell Council has teamed up with its waste partner Serco to recruit volunteers to help make the borough a cleaner place. The campaign will kick start in May and run through till the end of July.

The Friends would like to put aside **Tuesday 12 July** (not exactly spring) for their day in the park to make it a better place for visitors. We have yet to decide which area to tackle, but have been promised lots of support from Serco so that we can be a little more ambitious than just collecting litter. If you are interested in joining this initiative we are meeting at the Main Entrance in Reform Street at 11 o'clock.

Friends' member Ernie Timmins recalls visits to Dartmouth Park in the Twenties and Thirties

The photograph of the old drinking fountain in the last issue of the newsletter, where I have had many thirst quenchers, has prompted me to write these few lines of my memories of the park in the twenties and thirties.

To visit the park for the Horse Show in the Spring and The Floral Fete (which became the Horticultural Show) in the Autumn were dates on the calendar for many people of West Bromwich. They were indeed festive occasions. As a boy I remember joining the crowds, yes crowds equal to a football match at the Hawthorns, walking from the Sandwell Hotel along New Street past Dickens Sports Shop and the one and only Chads Fish Shop on the opposite side. It was a thrill to be on the way to the park—it was part of our town then and not cut off by "progress" with the Expressway.

There were orderly queues for tickets to enter the park. These were provided from rolls by an almost unseen person in a wooden hut on cast iron wheels. The hut was khaki yellow in colour with the words Highways Department on either side.

Cast iron notices planted in the grass either side of the park entrance stating "Keep off the Grass" were obeyed and no reprimands from the Park Keepers on duty were necessary. To me it was magic.

At the Horse Show hauliers, coal merchants, bakers, milkmen and many others, with their working horses of all shapes and sizes suitably spruced up and 'manicured' to look their best, together with ponies and traps were led in the arena by their proud handlers—Bowler hats and leather gaiters were the order of the day for the proud handlers, who were all hoping for a rosette.

(The photographs below belonging to Margaret Little feature her grandfather Walter Edward Jones, Baker and Confectioner of Moor Street, West Bromwich, with his horses and vehicles all spruced up for the Horse Show.)



And then, of course, there was the show jumping competition provided by the more "well off" members of the town and surrounding area. Two names spring to mind Grant and Allan. No Health and Safety problems then, all the children sat on the grass below the barriers to watch and all was well.

The Floral Fete was a more festive occasion with a greater number of people attending than for the Horse Show. I remember two large marquees on the right hand side of the park entrance. One was the 'Flower Tent' and the other was the 'Vegetable Tent'. Judging of the entries were made on Friday and the public was allowed entrance on Saturday to see where the coveted prize cards were and admire the beautiful entries. The atmosphere was always so fresh and clear away from the smoke and grime of the many factories of our town. My Uncles Bill and Joe had allotments in Claypit Lane and they always displayed their choice produce. I can't recall them ever winning a prize, but it was good to eat. In the Booklet 'Past, Present and Future' my Uncle Joe can be seen sitting in a boat on the pool with my Uncle Ernie who was killed in the First World War.

On the opposite side of the entrance in the arena many sporting activities took place such as athletics, cycle racing, motor cycle football provided by the 'West Bromwich Motor Cycle & Car Club'. The cycle racing included the West Bromwich Wheelers, plus many other clubs. I was a member of the Wheelers and I raced in the park with little success finishing under the barriers on one occasion.

As the evening approached tired and happy people made their way to the most advantageous viewing points for the thrilling firework display. When darkness fell silhouettes of men with torches could be seen moving along the far side of the pool. The show started with rockets, 'oohs' and 'ahs' greeted the massive Catherine Wheels reflected in the pool, then finally the King and Queen in fireworks and the National Anthem, then home after a truly great day.

Throughout the summer on Saturdays, other than the Fete days, cricket matches were played in the park. There were many good teams in West Bromwich from factories and other organisations to provide a competitive league. The pitches were prepared on Saturday mornings by park staff with a tightly cut grass strip followed by a heavy roller. Not test match standard but everybody was satisfied.

I think that it would be from about 1928/29 onwards that a group of boys from Bilhay Street would gather together and walk to the park to watch the cricket; our food would be jam sandwiches and home made bottles of lemonade. This was supplemented by drinks from the fountain, but our attempts to fill the bottles were unsuccessful. I lived at No. 56 Bilhay Street and amongst the group were George Leadbetter at No. 62 and Glyn Savory at No. 42. I mention these two great pals particularly because both gave their lives during the Second World War. Warrant Officer George was shot down in the Mediterranean and Flying Officer Glyn was lost off Akyab in Burma. Special memories for me on Remembrance Sunday in the park.

Continued on page 4.....

Some of the Cricket Teams met by the Sandwell Hotel or St Michael's Church, members taking turns to carry the heavy bags containing wickets, bats, pads, not forgetting the score books, etc. Most teams looked very smart wearing their club blazers. I remember particularly the white boots spruced with blanco and the studs clicking on the pavement.

Groups of supporters and spectators would position themselves in various spots around the area depending upon which game they wanted to watch. The most favoured place was behind the hedge near the cenotaph. We enjoyed watching the scorers completing their records which to us then appeared very complicated. It was good fun when a ball was knocked over our heads and into the flower beds in the avenue. This was the only time permission was granted to go onto the grass. It was more difficult to find the ball when it went into the bushes around the toilets. The aroma when searching amongst the bushes and the undergrowth was a positive indication as to what was hidden in addition to the ball. The search was not always successful, and maybe if and when this area of the park is refurbished the odd cricket ball may be found.

The Bowling Green and Pool must not be omitted. I recall possibly on two occasions being rowed around the pool in the family boat—it was fun to drag fingers in the water. The rower always steered clear of the many anglers who were enjoying their pastime. And so to the bowling green. Children were not allowed in this area unless they were accompanied by an adult. When I was a child I felt that it was a privilege to walk through the Boat House and then sit and watch the games. To me it was a secret place full of so much enjoyment and enthusiasm generated by the players. The term bowls was not used but 'woods'. "Great wood Bill—one down—two up—good try—this way round and so on". I had a few games there with my late wife and friends two years before all was so sadly destroyed.

The Tennis Courts always appeared to be an 'extra' in the park at the 'posh' Beeches Road end. When we watched and heard the players calling 'deuce, fifteen love and thirty love' we thought they were being rather polite to each other not knowing then that the players were calling the score.



The Golf Course appeared to bring all parts of the park together. I cannot recall ever playing a game there. The photograph on the left is of Marion Bennett playing there in 1935.

In 1938 when Chamberlain stepped from an aircraft having returned from Germany and waved a piece of paper in the air and uttered 'Peace in Our Time' the scent of war was in the air. A Youth Rally was arranged by the Local Authority. The Rally was held in the area to the left hand side of the park entrance. Barriers were erected to form an arena and a stage erected for the Mayor and other local dignitaries to view the march past. Many local organisations showed great enthusiasm for the rally and participated. The organisations and clubs, to name but a few, were the West Bromwich Harriers, the West Bromwich Wheelers, Cyclists Touring Club, Women's League of Health and Beauty, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, etc. Displays followed the initial 'March Past'.

A 'Master of Ceremonies' armed with a megaphone stood on the stage and announced the name of each group marching by. I was with the 'Wheelers'. As we approached the stage I felt that I was about to sneeze. I reached for a

handkerchief from the pocket in my shorts. This was spotted by the M.C. who then commented on my untidy presentation.

And so to my most cherished memory of the park. On the 3rd September 1939 I met my girl friend in the afternoon by St Michael's Church in the High Street and we walked together to the park talking about what we thought the future would be. Then we went out into Dagger Lane and into Salters Lane. We were young lovers knowing that soon I would be off to war. We became engaged and when I went away many letters were exchanged. I returned from Africa in March 1944 and we were married on the 31st March. The girl I married was the girl on the Golf Course. The rest is another story.

Ernie Timmins



Security in the Park

When the consultation meetings regarding the restoration of the park were first taking place, and the Friends group was formed, the most important aspect of the restoration was securing the park. This was taken on board by the Project Management and the railings and gates were part of the 1st Phase, and these railings and gates are now in place. However, unfortunately some of the gates are not being closed at night and there are problems with security. The Friends are lobbying to make sure the park is secured at night, and if anyone sees anything which concerns them when they are in the park during the day or evening, please report it to Richard Williams, the Dartmouth Park Ranger, on 07530072601. Richard will then take these concerns to the Sandwell Valley Countryside Watch meeting held with West Midlands Police.