



Friends of Dartmouth Park
Patron: William, 10th Earl of Dartmouth
Newsletter
Issue No. 21

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**Rain didn't dampen the spirits of the visitors
 and stall holders at our Family Fun Day**

The weather forecast had been promising and we were looking forward to a bright day for our Family Fun Day on Sunday 25 September, but this wasn't to be with rain most of the day. However, this didn't deter the visitors to the event who thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment by The Naked Beatles, Lusty Springfield and The Martinique Jazz Band.

We were very pleased to have special appearances by the Mayor of Sandwell, Cllr Joyce Underhill, 'Blind' Dave and Tom Farley. Dave was delighted when our Chairman, Nigel Slater, announced that the Events Room in the new pavilion is to be named 'The 'Blind' Dave Heeley Events Room' in honour of his many achievements. Tom, the Great Grandson of Alderman Reuben Farley, had travelled up from Oxfordshire to join us. Alderman Farley was instrumental in providing West Bromwich with a 'People's Park' in 1878, and Tom commented that he thought his great grandfather would be delighted to see people enjoying the park over 120 years later. Tom judged the best boat in show for Sandwell Model Boat Club, and chose the beautifully made 'Sovereign of the Seas'.

Children were well catered for with Major Mustard and his puppet show, fairground rides, and pony rides. The ponies were kept busy despite the rain.

These photographs give a flavour of the day.



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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	

Visitors to our Fun Day take advantage of the first opportunity to view the interior of the new pavilion



The first opportunity to take a look inside the new pavilion was very popular, and the photographs on the left show one of the groups in the viewing area, and a view across to Swan Pool, which in the poor weather conditions can be seen through the trees. More trees will be sympathetically removed in the next phase of the restoration to allow unrestricted views.



The pavilion is an eco-friendly building designed by local architects Bryant Priest Newman, and is central to the restoration of the park. It will give us the much needed facilities it has lacked over the past decades, with an office for the Park Ranger, Richard Williams, an office for the Park Manager, a small cafe, events room, area to display exhibitions and best of all public toilets. The building also has very attractive green roofs, a terrace area on the first floor with picnic seating, and lots of outdoor seating, which can be seen in the photograph above left.

Work has started on a new path leading from the pavilion down to the pool.

The children's play area is having new equipment installed and this work is scheduled for completion by early November. Next spring will see a water play area installed.

The next phase of Arboricultural works is due on site in November/December.

We will let you know as soon as a date has been fixed for the official opening of the pavilion, which will be a very important day in the park's restoration.



Sensory Garden Update

With the support of the Parks' Department the Friends are applying for a grant of £12,500 from Community Spaces to create a sensory garden alongside the raised bed built free of charge by Mansell and filled with sensory plants from money raised by the Sandwell Visually Impaired and the Friends with a Sponsored Walk. The extended Sensory Garden will include a path going behind the bed to the new pavilion, a supporting wall to bring the level of the upper part of the garden to the level of the main path, and a pergola, benches and wood carvings. Once the plans have been approved we will display them on the park notice boards.

To secure the grant we need to prove that the project has community support. To do this we sent questionnaires out with our last newsletter and promoted the project at our event on the 25th September. Thank you to the 100+ members who supported us by completing and returning the questionnaires, and an even bigger thank you to the 20 members who volunteered to help with the project.

We have to send the completed forms by the end of this year and will know if we have been successful in the spring of 2012.

In the meantime we are keeping the raised bed tidy and replacing plants where necessary.



Changes to the highway outside the main entrance to the Park



If you've visited the park recently you have probably been puzzled by the work going on outside the main gates. This work has caused some disruption, but when finished will enhance the entrance to the park, and the large flower bed will bring some colour to the area. The new road layout is designed to encourage drivers to use Seager Street/Hallam Street rather than Lloyd Street and Dagger Lane.

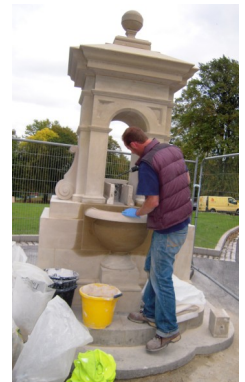
It is understood that as part of the Tesco development the town centre and the park will be linked together with floral displays on the Reform Street bridge.

Our beautiful replica Victorian Drinks Fountain is repaired

The new drinks fountain, which was unveiled by the Mayor of Sandwell in March in front of a great crowd, so pleased to see the first phase of the park's restoration completed, was vandalised by senseless individuals in July and has been shrouded in sacking and fenced off from the public.

The drinks fountain had become very popular with park users, including 'Blind' Dave, who uses the park every day for training, but during the summer months and school holidays the facility of drinking water on tap hasn't been available. Security is to be stepped up with a CCTV camera in the vicinity of the fountain and extra warden patrols, so that people who want to spoil the park for everyone else won't have the opportunity.

How exciting to see our beautiful drinks fountain return as a feature of the main Avenue, although at the moment is it still fenced off until the security has been put in place.



Medal from Sandwell's 1984 Marathon found at Car Boot Sale



Nobby, Dartmouth Park's gardener and member of the Friends' group, spotted this medal at a local car boot sale and purchased it for just 50p. It is in mint condition and one side shows the route of the marathon which started and finished in Dartmouth Park. The park is indicated by the Farley Fountain, which has long since been returned to its original site in the town. The route passed through Great Bridge, Tipton, Blackheath, Brandhall, Bearwood, Smethwick, Langley, and Oldbury, before returning to West Bromwich. The other side has the Borough crest and two runners. The medal is beautifully produced. The two photographs are of the marathon starting in Dartmouth Park taken by Bill Finney. If you have any information about this marathon, or you might even have been a runner, please let us hear your story.



Date for your Diary



Following the success of last year's Christmas Party, we will be holding this year's party at The Public again, in the superb Madeleine Carroll Suite. The date is Tuesday 6 December and the time 7.30pm until 10.30pm. We have invited Duo Encore with their songs from the shows and Brian and Penny Williamson with dancing for all tastes to entertain us. The cost is £5, which will include tea/coffee/fruit juice and mince pies. Please see committee members for tickets or ring 0121 588 4747/0121 525 5524

Bill Marsh's Memories of Sandwell Park Farm, Sandwell Valley

Home Farm, later Sandwell Park Farm, together with smaller farms, was built on the Sandwell Estate in the early 18th century, at the same time as Sandwell Hall, to provide food for the Earls of Dartmouth's large families and their many servants. The Dartmouth family moved to Patshull in 1853 and the estate and farms were looked after by an Estate Manager.

My great grandfather John Hotchkins was a farmer from Wales, who married Jane Hughes from Chester in 1871, and in the 1891 census they were farming at Cherry Orchard Farm in Hamstead. However, in the 1901 census my great grandfather and his family moved to Home Farm (Sandwell Park Farm). They had ten children and their youngest child, Jane, married Frederick Marsh from Hill House Farm in 1912. Following my grandparents' marriage they needed a home of their own and moved to a cottage in Bilbrook on the Earl of Dartmouth's Patshull Estate, where Frederick was employed as a Farm Bailiff.



Jane, my grandmother, working on the farm as a young girl in 1900

Frederick junior, my father, was born at Bilbrook, followed by his sister Ada. My grandparents returned to West Bromwich in 1920 and lived in a cottage on Hill House Farm, where Frank was born, and then moved to Sandwell Hall Farm when it became vacant. Sandwell Hall Farm was a smallholding of around 30 acres which had once produced food for the Hall, but the Hall was empty by then.



The Hall's Orangery where they grew exotic fruits was situated on this land, but all the glass had been removed and it was being used as a barn. My Aunt Peg was born at Sandwell Hall Farm.

In 1929 my grandparents moved to Manwoods Farm, off Forge Lane, where they stayed until 1941. Whilst at Manwoods my father Frederick married my mother Edith Udall, the daughter of a well known furniture removal family in West Bromwich, and I was born in 1941.



Mom & Dad at Manwoods

My great grandparents, John and Jane Hodgkins, had died, and my grandmother's brother Colin and sister Nelly were running Home Farm, but found it difficult, so in 1942 my grandparents took over the farm, with the help of my father, Uncle Frank and Aunt Peg. My grandparents lived in Sandwell Park Farm and we lived in the cottage at the end of the lane, No. 9 Sandwell Park. When my mother first saw the cottage she cried because it was in such a state, and she had been used to a nice home with all the amenities, coming from a family with a thriving business in West Bromwich.

There was a brick boiler in the kitchen which was full of ashes and hadn't been used for years. This had to be cleared out and brought back into working order as it was the only way we could have hot water in the cottage. My mother worked hard to make the cottage a comfortable home for us.



Grandfather Frederick in 1950

When my grandparents took over the farm from Uncle Colin and Aunt Nelly, Uncle Colin went to work for Grant's Bakery to look after their horses. He lived above the stables, until the bakery no longer used horses, when he retired and returned to live with my grandmother at the farm.

I was a baby during the War, but my dad told me of a particular night when the Luftwaffe were bombing along the Birmingham Road. They were standing under an oak tree near the cottage, which was safer than being inside the cottage, with me in my pram, watching the sky, when a stray bomb dropped in one of our fields near to the current car park. This caused a crack in the join where an extension had been added to our cottage. We lived with this damage for several years before it was repaired.

More about life on the farm with Bill Marsh in the next newsletter.