Members’ events for 2012 start with our AGM on Thursday 26 April

The evening should prove to be very interesting, as we’re holding it in the Events Room of our new pavilion and, as well as the AGM, we have a presentation by Nick Bubalo on the Regeneration of West Bromwich. Nick is Area Director of Regeneration and Economy for Sandwell MBC, and his presentation should give us a very interesting insight into what the future holds for West Bromwich. The evening will start at 7.30pm, but if you would like a tour of the pavilion beforehand please arrive at 7pm.

The photograph on the right shows the Events Room and as you can see some of the images given to us by our members have been put on canvas and are on display. The 1882 Map will also be on display.

Papers for the AGM will be included with the April newsletter.

Other dates for your 2012 diary include: Jubilee Bank Holiday Monday 4 June when we will be holding what we hope will be the biggest Street Party in the Borough for our members in Dartmouth Park. Further information on the Dartmouth Park Street Party will appear in the April newsletter. Early September will see the official opening of the Sensory Garden, and in October we are proposing another coach trip, this time to Aston Hall in Birmingham, which has strong associations with the Dartmouth family. Our Christmas Event is already booked for The Madeleine Carroll Suite in The Public as it proved to be very popular last year. The date is Tuesday 11 December and we have booked, by special request, The Naked Beatles and, of course, Penny and Brian Williamson to round off the evening with their dancing and party games.
Sensory Garden Update

The plans are now completed for the Sensory Garden. We are pleased with the overall plans featured right and displayed on the park notice boards. We are particularly pleased with the pergola which includes all the elements we requested. When completed this will be a space to sit, under a canopy of climbing plants.

The application for funding has now gone to Groundwork UK who will give us an answer regarding the grant in mid April.

We are pleased to announce that in addition to the main Sensory Garden we have approval to create a Jubilee Rose Bed. See insert.

Project Manager’s Restoration Update

The next major phase of works in Dartmouth Park will commence in the Spring.

The work is currently out to tender but a contractor will be appointed this month to undertake the estimated £1.6 million contract. This phase will include a host of works such as improvements to the footpath network, transforming the depot area into a car park, turning the former bowling green into a picnic area, improving both the upper and lower pools with new fishing platforms and a large landing stage, and demolishing the toilet block in the Reform Street car park to allow for re-aligning the boundary wall to make it part of the Park. New flower beds will be in place in the Avenue ready for summer bedding and the water play feature in the children’s play area should be installed ready for the summer holidays.

As I’m sure you can appreciate there may be some disruption in Dartmouth Park throughout the duration of this construction phase, which will last approximately 12 months. We will do everything possible to minimise these disruptions but your patience during this time would be greatly appreciated. I’m confident that once this phase is complete the park will be well on the way to becoming a premier park for the Borough of Sandwell and beyond.

John R Satchwell

Richard, our Park Ranger, organises groups to work in the park

Richard has been working with students from Sandwell College tidying the area around the upper pool and they are set to come into the park on a regular basis to continue this work. He has also made contact with the Probation Service and they are sending in a team to work on the lower pool. Work on the Herbert Street Entrance and bridge will also be part of the programme for the Community Pay Back team. This is great news for the park.
Granddad was always referred to as the gaffer and he was a hard taskmaster. His employees, including his family, all had to put in long hours. I remember when my dad had shingles my granddad allowed him 4 days in Bournemouth with mom and me to recover. We always went to Bournemouth for our holidays and stayed with relatives.

One of my fondest memories of my grandfather was that he always gave me a pair of new boots for my birthday, which was in October. The boots were given to me to ensure my feet were kept warm and dry in the winter.

We used to rear chickens to sell at Christmas which arrived by train from Doncaster to the railway station in Paradise Street. Occasionally I would go with my dad to collect the box of a hundred two day old chicks and they all seemed to survive the journey very well as they would be chirping and jumping around in the box. The chickens were reared by my grandmother and just before Christmas the whole family used to have to work together killing and feathering them to sell at the local shops.

Christmas Day was always very special for the family because everyone gathered together in the big room with the range for Christmas dinner. We were lucky enough to have goose or duck and pork. Following lunch we would all gather around the roaring fire to open our presents and mine usually consisted of a homemade wooden toy and an orange. Although it was Christmas Day there were cows to milk and livestock to feed, and in the winter the animals needed a lot of attention, which meant, apart from Christmas Dinner, it was a normal working day.

One of the downsides of living on the farm was I could never go to the ABC Minors Club at The Tower Cinema as there were always jobs to do on a Saturday morning on the farm. So I could never join in the conversations with my pals at school when they were talking about Flash Gordon, the Lone Ranger or Hop-along Cassidy.

Grandfather died when I was 12 and my father took over the tenancy of the farm from about 1954 in partnership with his brother Frank, and life became easier with a lot more freedom. The partnership split in 1957 and when I left school my father persuaded me to join him at the farm, instead of going into the RAF which I had really wanted as a career.

Life could be quite lonely living on the farm, but in 1956 my father started to run a livery stable for horses owned by people in the town, and this meant we had young girls and young lads coming down to the farm to ride their horses. I became friends with lots of the teenagers and we used to have a great time. This gave me a connection to life in the town and it was through this group of friends that I met my wife Linda in the Casa Bamboo in Lower Queen Street. On Linda’s first visit to the farm she was dressed in her best clothes to meet my parents, when the farm dog, Max, came to introduce himself by performing his usual party piece of getting soaking wet and shaking himself, which he did next to Linda ruining her best outfit. Linda and Max became good friends and Max lived until he was 12 years old, and is buried in the woods behind the cottage.

When I was 17 I was lucky enough to have a Vespa Scooter which allowed me to get out of the Valley and into the town.

I worked with my father until I was 21 and decided there was no future for me at the farm because the style of farming we did was already out of fashion and the farm was in decline. I went to night school at Sandwell College on a car mechanics course and I left the farm to join Joseph Lucas. However, I didn’t like working indoors after being raised on a farm, and didn’t stay. I eventually started my own plant hire business.

When I got married I moved from the farm to Great Barr. My father carried on farming and he employed a couple of workers. By which time my grandmother had moved to a house in Woodward Street as the farm was in a poor state of repair. This left mom and dad on their own in the cottage until 1974. They worked very hard and I can remember when we first got married I worked at the farm for a week so that my dad and mom could have a holiday. During their last 12 months there was no livestock at all because the buildings were in such a bad state and mom and dad eventually retired to Great Barr.

I thought life was hard at times, but I wouldn’t change a thing. I had a wonderful childhood, and despite the hard life my dad had as a farmer he lived until he was 88 and died of old age.
Memories of balmy summer days with the sound of the brass band in the park drifting across the valley; people taking a Sunday afternoon stroll past the farm, sometimes calling in to buy some of my grandmother’s eggs, and winter days sitting in front of the range trying to keep warm, flood back when I visit my childhood home with Linda for a cup of tea and a chat with Sue, the tea room supervisor, in the room where the whole Marsh family once used to get together.

The cottage where I lived with mom and dad is now occupied by the stockman for the farm, but it hasn’t changed much, except it now has all the amenities we didn’t enjoy.

The wall I’m sitting on in the photograph on the right is new, but the rose tree climbing the wall behind me is the same rose as the one in the photograph of my mother on the far right taken in the same spot in the 1960s. I’m sitting under my bedroom window, which I occupied until I got married in 1966.

When I visit Aunt Ada and Aunt Peg who, although 97 and 83, they still tell me stories of their lives farming in the Valley. I’m so glad that my old home has been preserved and is part of what is Sandwell’s greatest asset the wonderful Sandwell Valley.

The Farley Fountain which is situated in West Bromwich town centre, in what used to be called Dartmouth Square, is to be dismantled for town centre improvements and will, if funding is made available, be relocated just outside Dartmouth Park. Before it reappears in its new position it will be given a facelift, as it has been sadly neglected for many years.

The fountain was given to the Borough by Alderman Reuben Farley in memory of his mother Elizabeth in 1885 and was originally situated in Dartmouth Square. It was moved into Dartmouth Park in the early 1900s near the Herbert Street entrance, and in the 1970s was moved to the Dagger Lane entrance to make way for the Expressway which cut a swath through the park taking with it the tennis courts and putting green in its wake.

The Friends are looking forward to this new addition to the park’s environs and the following images show its various locations in Dartmouth Square, Herbert Street and Dagger Lane, and its return to Dartmouth Square. The fountain which is probably never given a second look is quite elaborate in design and the actual drinking fountain inside the structure has changed with every move.

Seamus Kelly’s photographs of the park on a frosty winter morning