

Friends of Lowndes Park

Newsletter V—December 2007

Introduction

As this is our Christmas edition let me be one of the first to wish you the compliments of the season, however you choose to spend it (although, ideally this will include at least one trip to the park!) What a year we have had. Well it will be a year in

January, since we launched the Friends of Lowndes Park and thanks to all of you, we now have over 100 members (105 to be precise, but we don't need to give exact figures to the Heritage Lottery Fund). Obviously we would welcome more members, and

in lieu of a new year's resolution I would like to set a new target of 151, which is another good number with which to impress HLF and it keeps Phil our membership secretary, on his toes.



Lowndes Park, young trees viewed from the barrow or rolling pin

Corporate members

- ***the Bucks Examiner***
- ***Lucia's Delicatessen***
- ***Chesham Environmental Group***
- ***the Lowndes Park Model Boat Club***
- ***the Chesham Society***

Ordinary General Meeting

Thanks to all of those who came to our OGM to hear about the HLF application and what it contained. It was a good evening and as is becoming traditional for the meeting of the Friends we managed to keep it to an hour (just about). We are keen that attending a meeting of the Friends does not take a huge chunk out of your evening.

Don't worry if you missed it, but if you would like to hear more of progress on the bid we are looking at holding a future OGM on a weekend in the park itself. Here we can explain on the ground what we hope to gain from the lottery bid. Other OGMs will consider the practicalities of what we can achieve in the park and possibly a fun session about marketing the park.

Ordinary General Meeting cont'd

I must also apologise to anyone who didn't come because of transport issues. We can arrange lifts if you have difficulty getting out at night, do call.

Friend's Walk

The only transport available for our second Friends' social event was feet as Andrew Clark very kindly led us on an enjoyable autumn walk. About 15 or so brave souls gathered in the park to explore the surrounding countryside and returned exhilarated and much in need of a coffee, which is why we retired to the nearest coffee shop. Feedback on the walk has been excellent and Andrew has offered to lead a second walk in the spring. Watch out for the new date.

New Year's Resolution

Many of you have asked about getting your hands dirty for the good of the park. So I think that we should start a working party to carry out some tasks. These will commence in January and we will try to do one session a month probably lasting 2-3 hours. If you would like to take part please contact me and I can then draw up a list so that we can advise of the activity and the times etc: also if you have your own gardening tools that you would be prepared to bring along. You do not have to make a commitment to every month but it will mean that we will only contact those of you who might be able to give some time. So if you have lost weight, are exercising five times a week and have given up smoking and alcohol and you can't think of a new year's resolution, why not give the park a chance?

Progress on bid

The council is still on target to meet the March submission date and the various people working on the plan are working in something of a frenzy. The big unknown is the building; can it be made to stack up financially? Can

we draw up a business plan that covers its running costs not just for one year but for future years also? If not, what are we suggesting instead? The management plan that we have written covers all aspects of the bid as well as looking at what we will do if it is unsuccessful. We took this, and the costed plan, to the Heritage Lottery Fund people when we met on the 12th for last minute advice. They were very positive and did not present us with any unforeseen issues so we know that we are on the right track. That said, competition is great and 50% of submissions are not getting funded. HLF will help us put the right figures in the right columns, which will be a big help. The rest is up to us!

As I have said all along, nothing is guaranteed but our job is to ensure that the submission is the best that it can be and that we continue to prove our support for the park. Should we not be successful we know what needs to be done and we can bid for smaller pots of money to improve the park albeit in a piecemeal fashion. We have achieved a lot in a very short time but the bad news is that regardless of success, the hard work is just about to begin. Keep those fingers crossed.

Calling all Santas

Lots of talk around Christmas presents at the moment so I am appealing to any would-be Santa's out there. Dear Santa I would like a website please as the Friends of Lowndes Park are looking a little behind the times and it would be helpful in gaining new members and potential sponsors. So if you have the skill and are willing to spare some time to help set this up please get in touch. I promise not to ask for anything else until next year.

Goodbye and thank you to our fundraiser Heather as she has been accepted on a course which means that she must step down from the committee. We wish her well and are pleased that she will remain as a Friend.

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present site along Bellingdon Road.

Chesham Building Society is the country's longest surviving independent building society, tracing back to the middle of the Century. In 1845 Chesham was growing and becoming more prosperous. The Chesham Building Society was run from a private house until 1935, when it moved to the Broadway. The first freehold premises were opened in Market Square in 1950.

In 1871 typhoid broke out, which was always referred to as the Chesham Plague. It began in Hearn's yard now known as Bury Lane, off Church Street, in a row of cottages (long since demolished) which obtained its water supply from a traditional well in the back yard. The well was adjacent to the rectory garden which was part of the Churchyard. The outbreak spread rapidly down Church Street and into the High Street and affected people living in the various yards and alleys. Off the High street ran White Lion Yard, Townfield Yard, Stratfords Yard, Chequers Yard, Lewins Yard, Francis Yard, Lum's Yard, Tap Yard, Star Yard, Collins Alley, Huntsman Yard and Wagon Yard. Off Church Street ran Parsonage Lane, Hearne's Yard (Bury Lane), Mitchell's Yard, Adams Alley and Reynolds Yard. Off Germain Street ran Duck Square, Duck Alley and Duck Yard.

Off all these yards only Reynolds Yard now contains dwellings, the others were systematically demolished under the slum clearance act in 1930 and the inhabitants moved to the newly built Pond Park Estate.

The earliest recognised club in Chesham is the cricket club, which was formed in 1848 and played on a field at Higham Mead where they remained until transferring to their present ground in Amy Lane in 1880. Football was played by teams from churches and chapels. The Chesham Generals football club was formed by the General Baptist Church in the Broadway and they played at Missenden Road. It amalgamated with Chesham Town in 1919 to form Chesham United and for the first thirteen years shared the ground with Chesham Cricket Club. The present football ground was opened in September 1932.

During the First World War Lowndes Park was used as a military training ground. Contingents of the Royal Engineers were given practical instructions in bridge building across the shallow waters in the lake (Skottowe's Pond).

I am sure that you enjoyed reading Sharon McEwan's potted history of the park. This time her article brings us up to the first world war and the ongoing development of the park. Of course Sharon being Sharon, has taken up the challenge to bring the park and town together and has brought us up to speed on how the town developed.

The Lowndes family's connection to Chesham began with William, secretary to the Treasury in the reign of Queen Anne, and William's successors extended the Bury Mansion, in Bury Lane, which is a short cul-de-sac off Church Street that leads to a terrace of former Lowndes' estate-workers cottages known as 'sixpenny houses' backing onto the park. The Lowndes family had already built the Bury, and bought the park in 1798.

St Mary's Church is the church of the Parish of Chesham Leicester, the Abbey of Leicester built it and appointed the priests. It is believed that a second Parish Church, Chesham Woburn, was sited at the foot of Fullers Hill, it was believed to have been built at the same time as St Mary's but fell into disuse in the 14th century.

St Mary's Church stands on rising ground, and the tower contained a ring of six bells. A carillon mechanism played the hymn tune 'Days and Moments' at noon and midnight, as it was the only melody which could be fitted to the available notes.

In 1845 St Mary's Church built a new Church School at the end of the footpath to Church Street. Education was formalised with the creation of a School Board in 1876.

Chesham was one of the last towns in the country in which the curfew bell was rung from the tower of St Mary's Church. Every weekday night at eight pm, during the winter months from New Michaelmas Day to Saturday evening immediately following March 10th, the bell was rung continuously for fifteen minutes followed by a chime indicating the date in the month. This continued until Easter 1939, as war had been declared and all church bells were silenced.

Chesham's first workhouse was built in 1500 at 74-76 Germain Street. It housed 20 inmates who were put to work in the gardens on the corner of Germain Street and Wey Lane, today used as allotments. By the early 1700s the number of paupers in the parish doubled and a new workhouse was built on the site of 35-37 Germain Street, with the Master's house next door at 33. The paupers stayed until the new poor law

More notes on the history of the park

act of 1837, which grouped 14 other parishes to form the Amersham Union.

The paupers objected to moving to Amersham and felt that their loved ones would be too far away. They staged a protest, which became known as the Chesham riots. On the Southern side of the bridge over the river Chess, Captain Fuller who lived in Germain Street, together with an officer of the Bucks Militia (an early type of home guard) watched and tried to reason with the paupers, but they would not back down. So Captain Fuller dispatched a rider to Aylesbury where a troop of militia were quartered. After two days and considerable protests and pressure, the paupers realised that their cause was lost and proceeded to Amersham. The workhouse was split into two in 1850 and number 37 became Chesham Grammar School for Boys.

Chesham's most famous martyr Thomas Harding was burnt at Martyr's Dell on White Hill on May 30th 1532 for his religious beliefs. Prior to his death Thomas was imprisoned in a small room over the porch of St Mary's church and in 1908 in his memory a memorial in the form of a Celtic cross, was erected in St Mary's churchyard.

The Mad Hatter in Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland' may have originated from a Chesham character called Roger Crabbe, who was born in 1621 and served seven years in the Parliamentary Army during the Civil Wars. Legend has it that Roger's skull was cloven during fighting and for a breach of discipline, Oliver Cromwell sentenced Crabbe to death. The sentence was not carried out and Crabbe opened a hat shop in the High Street near the George public house. Crabbe was rather hostile to potential customers and was looked upon as odd by local folk. After a while, Crabbe had a notion that it was a sin against his body and soul to eat any sort of flesh, fish or living creature, or to drink wine, ale or beer. Crabbe eventually moved to Middlesex.

In 1650 Chesham possessed a fine windmill which was situated in the grounds of the mansion known as Bury Hill. The windmill was on a piece of land known locally as the 'Rolling Pin' at the top ridge above the bowling green. For many years the windmill worked in conjunction with the five water mills on the River Chess but in the early 1800s fell into disuse and decay set in. In 1821 it was sold to the village of Lacey Green and re-erected and put into working order to grind corn until 1950. Sometime during the 1970s the Chiltern Perseveration

Society took over the mill and set about restoration. After several year's work mainly by volunteers, the mill was again restored.

The town has developed rapidly since the first mention of 'Chesham' in the 970AD will of the Lady Elgiva who liberated her serfs working in the upland Chiltern hamlets. Chesham was then called 'Cestresham' or 'Cestreham', and was recorded in 1086 in the Domesday Book.

In 1820 a iron-bearing spring was discovered in Amersham Road, and in 1821 Mineral cottage was built alongside the spring by a group of local businessmen who decided to exploit it, but within a few years the spring ran dry. It reappeared in later years and the overflow was channelled into the watercress beds.

Chesham was famous for the quality of its watercress which was dispatched from the town by railway to London. Many of the original beds resulted from gravel extraction which was needed to provide the embankment in the building of the railway crossing across the Moor throughout 1888/89. Other cress beds in Church Street, Amersham Road, Latimer Road, Pednor Road and Higham Road were excavated and a large amount of cress was supplied. Today a small area of the watercress beds still exist as a trout farm.

Until the mid 1800s, law and order in the town rested with the parish constable who was appointed at the annual vestry meeting. The stocks, pillory and cage for incarceration of felons was situated in the centre of Pillory Green, known today as Chesham Broadway. The first police station was in Amy Lane and there was a small lock-up attached. Anyone sentenced to more than seven days was taken to the county jail at Aylesbury by the local constable. The next police station was built in 1890 in Broad Street, opposite Townsend Road. In 1980, today's police station was built next door to the old station, which became offices.

Before 1840 there was no organised fire brigade; the first engine was a hand pump, which was stored in a shed in Wey Lane. It was pulled by a horse belonging to How's Brewery and used until 1923. The first motor engine was purchased for the town in 1923 and was housed in the High Street. The engine was a solid tyred Leyland named Norah after the wife of Ralph Howard, Chief Officer of the Fire Brigade. In the years to follow, the fire brigade moved to its

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Friends Committee

Michael Rowan (Chair)
Javad Malik (Secretary)
Phil Folly
(Treasurer and Membership
Secretary)
Merrin Molesworth
(Newsletter layout)
vacancy (Fundraising)

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Situations Vacant

• Volunteer coordinator

• Fundraiser

Needed Urgently

please contact
Michael Rowan for details

'Love Parks' Week

Love Parks Week is a national week of celebrating parks in order to raise their profile. The week is June the 14th to the 22nd 2008 (yes, I know that is longer than a week, but I didn't invent the campaign and it means that there are two weekends in which to enjoy parks). A lot of the emphasis will focus on children and exercise and each of the core cities will be staging a walk in the park at 11am on the 12th of June to launch the week.

Chesham may not be a core city but judging by the turn out for the Victorian Fair on one of the wettest nights imaginable, we have the grit and determination to join in and do it Chesham style. I have given you the what and the when so now it is over to you. Can you please think of what we might do?

A walk is obvious but could we jazz it up a bit? Do we have musicians that might give their time, anyone who can face paint or walk on stilts? (Obviously not at the same time). Should we have a colour theme where everyone wears yellow, or spots and stripes or more fittingly

green?

The walk must start at 11am but otherwise we can do what we like. Is there a circular route that we can do

in the park? How do we publicise the event and get people to turn up? Does anyone know someone famous who might start us off or pose for photographs? Can anyone make us a banner?

Members of the Friends of Lowndes Park have a wealth of talent or know people who do, that they can coerce. Chesham has always punched above its weight so this should be easy.

So come on, please contact me with ideas and offers of help and lets not leave it to the likes of Sheffield, Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham and those other core cities to have all the fun – let's put Lowndes Park on the map.



Goodbye to 2007 and all that *Hello to 2008*

How quickly the year has passed. Twelve months ago the council asked us to set up a Friends group in order to meet one of the criteria set by HLF (Heritage Lottery Fund.)

In January my wife and I knowing only a handful of people in Chesham, formed the Friends, and January was spent meeting with some of the stalwarts who have had an interest in the park. This led to other people many of whom offered us outlets to publicise the Friends. We set a target of 101 members to show HLF that we had over a hundred members.

February and March was spent getting to grips with the Consultant's report and more and more people stepped forward to join.

April saw us looking at the bid in earnest and in May we had identified

some issues that needed to be resolved. We also had a visit by the Green Flag judges when despite heavy rain which would continue all summer, the Friends painted benches and litter picked the park to within an inch of its life.

June saw us hold our inaugural AGM and adopt a constitution. We also set up a committee of people determined to make the Friends work.

Sadly in July we found out that we were not going to be awarded the Green Flag but that acted as a spur for more people to join us.

September was busy as we helped out at the Mediaeval Mayhem, by now we had a membership in the high 70s and we had our first annual picnic on top of the barrow overlooking the town.

In October we delivered the first ever Management Plan for the park with spaces for the Town Council to add information and policies. We also held our first ordinary general meeting to explain the contents of the bid.

And so today, twelve months later we have over a hundred members all very firmly backing the HLF application but more importantly supporting Lowndes Park.

To each and everyone one of you who have supported the Friends I say a big thank you.

Lets hope for an even more successful 2008.