



FRIENDS *of* PITTVILLE

Sept 2019

The aim of Friends of Pittville is to promote greater community involvement in the enjoyment, protection, future restoration and renewal of Pittville Park and Estate.

Welcome to the September edition of the newsletter. This issue contains reports on the Green Space Volunteers' activities during the summer, updates from Pittville History Works and the Pump Room Action Group as well as a last-minute reminder about some local Heritage Open Days events. We also have an interview with FoP's longest-serving trustee, Fiona Clarke, who will be standing down at the AGM in October. Some recommendations for planting spring bulbs from David Richards, some reminders and pleas complete this late summer newsletter. You will also find a flier enclosed from the Holst Birthplace Museum, another Pittville-based charity, asking people to consider becoming volunteers there.

Green Space Volunteers

Over the summer, volunteers have continued to work on a range of jobs in the park: pruning shrubs, clearing paths and laying down fresh bark, keeping the underpass clear and litter picking. Good progress has been made on exposing the stones and clearing weeds in the rockery next to the Upper Lake. Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) recently employed a contractor to remove large stones from the lake and replace them in the rockery. In the coming months, a planting plan for the rockery will be drawn up and the volunteers will plant out the rockery in the spring.

A new project is painting the railings on the bridge over Albert Road next adjacent to the small pond that filters water entering the lake. There was an average of twenty-one volunteers at each working party between January and June this year, contributing 480 volunteer hours to the effort of maintaining our park. We have been lucky with the weather and have only had to cancel one working party. Although we have great support, we are always looking for more volunteers. If you would like to join us, please don't hesitate to contact me on volunteer@friendsofpittville.org.uk

New notice board

CBC have just erected a new, larger notice board in the east side of the park adjacent to the path between the underpass and the play area. This is

twice the size of the previous one and will give CBC, the local police, Friends of Pittville, the Holst museum and many other charities in Pittville a better opportunity to let users of the park know what is going on in Pittville. The old notice board has been relocated near the new notice board and will become a welcome board (similar to those already in the park) to replace the old wooden finger post that fell down.



Chris Archibald

You are cordially invited to our

Annual General Meeting Thursday 24 October 2019 6.30pm

Dunalley Primary School, West Drive,
Cheltenham GL50 4LB

Speaker: **Dr James Hodsdon**, on **Pittville's original swimming pool**

Refreshments from 6.00 and after
the meeting until 8.00pm

Please note: this is the official notification of the AGM. The agenda, report and financial papers will be on our website one week before. Limited copies will be available on the night. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the Hon Secretary who will provide copies (details on back page). Last year's papers are on our website. Note also: the date given in the June newsletter is incorrect, so if you have this in your diary already, please amend to Thursday 24 October.

Members of the public are welcome.

Pump Room Action Group

We met Laurie Bell, the newly appointed CEO of The Cheltenham Trust (TCT), on 27 June. Her remit is to put TCT on a more sustainable financial footing, which inevitably means more emphasis on private hire, leading to increased closure of the Pump Room to the public. This is critical for us, as we have been pressing for more and better access for visitors, including more historical information about the building. Of course, we have a much wider vision for the Pump Room (search online for *YouTube Pump Room Action Group* to see our video), which has already been presented to TCT trustees.

We had a golden opportunity to reach a wider audience at a reception held at the Pump Room to introduce Laurie to the business community.

PRAG Chair Hilary Simpson gave a hard-hitting ten minute presentation (at the invitation of Laurie Bell) to over one hundred people. The reaction to this gave us added confidence to seriously consider moving our campaign to the next level.

We have also met key people at Sandford Parks Lido, a former council venue which was in danger of being shut down in the 1990s. A charitable trust was set up by committed and qualified local people, and the Lido is now a thriving business. Their advice is proving invaluable.

Over the summer we are conducting another mystery shopping survey of the Pump Room, the results of which will be compared to last year's and shared with TCT. We now have a Facebook page where we'll post the advertised Pump Room opening hours as well as report on our progress. Please check out the Facebook page and we would love to hear from you if you would like to be more involved.

Fiona Clarke

On behalf of PRAG: Hilary Simpson (Chair), Chris Archibald, Fiona Clarke, David Collins and Henry Williams

Heritage Open Days 2019

This year, Friends of Pittville's contribution to Cheltenham's Heritage Open Days will be a talk about the park's historic landscape and horticultural history, given by Chris Archibald and Judie Hodsdon.

The talk will take place outdoors at a point just to the north of the Upper Lake and will cover the features visible in each direction from that point. There will be a particular emphasis on the history of the lakeside rockeries, which are currently being redeveloped by FoP in partnership with CBC.

The talks will take place on Tuesday 17 September at 11.00 and on Wednesday 18 September at 17.00. Numbers are limited to twenty and places need to



be booked through the Tourist Information Centre. If there is demand, the talk will be given again for FoP members at a later date.

Judie Hodsdon

Wildfowl feed dispenser – help needed!



Do you feed the ducks on the lake? Do you enjoy using Pittville Park? Are you a dog walker, runner or play park user, or do you just enjoy the open space? We are looking to build a small team to help Friends of Pittville operate the popular wildfowl feed dispenser on the Upper Lake. This well-used facility needs to be maintained, filled up with food and emptied of cash regularly.

Can you give up a small amount of your time during the weekends and public holidays to be part of this team? It is likely to take no more than thirty minutes on each occasion. The money we make is used for improving the park and surrounding areas and for supporting our other activities. It would be great if you could help us. Don't worry – there are back-up arrangements for weekends, holidays and times when you may not be available. Weekdays are already covered by St Vincent's & St George's Association, with whom we split the money.

If you think you can give a little something back to support Friends of Pittville or want to know more, please contact Fiona Clarke on 01242 227720 or email secretary@friendsofpittville.org.uk

Fiona Clarke

Pittville History Works

Pittville History Works continues to add to its website – and all the information there is available for anyone to see. There have been two recent additions. Stephen Blake's excellent booklet entitled *Pittville Pump Room* is now online – just go to the *Places* tab on the Pittville History Works website and click *Pump Room and Park* on the dropdown menu.

The first architectural information on Pittville houses has also been uploaded, thanks to work done by Andrea Creedon. Once we have the basic information for the relevant houses, Andrea will put in key architectural features, and in due course we will be able to show which houses share features and general design styles, and look at how these designs evolved over the years.

The team has also continued the work of mapping former Pittville residents. The availability of electoral registers, in addition to street directories, means that many more Pittville residents can be included in our listings for the first half of the 20th century. This is particularly true for women, who were given the vote in 1928 and therefore appear on electoral rolls for the first time.

We mentioned recently that students from Gloucestershire University have been working on two projects: *Pittville during WW2* and *Crime and Criminality in 19th century Pittville*. There should just be time to see their findings exhibited from 7 – 22 September at Chapel Arts in Knapp Road, Cheltenham, as part of the Gloucester History Festival.

Sandy Marshall

Skatepark ramps refurbished by CBC

After the recent repair and refurbishment of the skateboard ramps in the park by the council, we received a copy of a lovely thank you e-mail from a skatepark user – or rather, his mother!



'Thanks for taking the time to get this done; my sons and their friends are very pleased! They get home from school, change and grab their helmets,

then scoot off there for hours if I let them. The cafe staff are friendly and helpful and the kids enjoy the challenge of the ramps along with the camaraderie of being active with their peers.

'Scootering seems, too, to have really taken off this year and with so many children and young teens doing it, it's great that such a good skate park is here in Pittville. I think it's important that skate parks are well maintained and look attractive as young people spend so much time there, it helps to make them feel valued.'

The sides of the ramps were painted as part of the Cheltenham Paint Festival last year and will be again at this year's festival, which takes place in early September. By the time you read this, you'll be able to see the new designs in place.

Fiona Clarke

Fiona Clarke, our longest-serving trustee looks back – and forward

Fiona Clarke is about to retire from FoP after thirteen years as a trustee. I asked her how she came to be so involved in Pittville affairs.



'We moved to the area in 2006 after I retired. We had visited Cheltenham many times and felt it had much to offer – the architecture, the festivals, its location in the Cotswolds and, of course, its parks and green spaces. We were lucky to find the perfect flat in Pittville Circus and became residents of this side of town. I remember thinking that Pittville looked rather tired and uncared-for, but that it had great potential.'

'Soon after we arrived, a leaflet came through the door about a local group which was forming to support a major lottery application that the council was making to improve the whole of the Pittville Estate, including the squares, the gates, the park and the general environment. At the meeting I attended, Friends of Pittville was formed and I joined the group as a trustee; I later became the newsletter editor and secretary. After a lot of hard work by many people, the council's lottery bid was turned down in 2009. That is when FoP really began to function as an independent body and began to find its own voice. After much discussion we decided we would like to lead a project with the aim of restoring Pittville Gates. As everyone knows, this was successful and eventually, in 2014, the newly-restored gates were officially opened.

'My motivation to be a trustee all those years ago was, firstly, to make things better – I think everyone has a responsibility to try to do that. Secondly, I wanted to engage with the community into which we had moved and this seemed an excellent way. Thirdly, I wanted to be intellectually stimulated and to keep learning new skills. Since 2006 I have had a hand in nearly all of FoP's initiatives, so have had ample opportunity to meet all these aims!'

Have you fulfilled what you set out to do?

'I am impressed and pleased with what has been achieved since 2009: the establishing of the Green Space Volunteers, the Pittville Gates renewal, the upgrading of the park to Green Flag and Green Heritage Site status, the establishment of both Pittville History Works and the Pump Room Action Group. None of these would have been possible without Friends of Pittville and outstanding contributions from many people. I've learned lots of new technical skills by being involved in the development of the website, Facebook page and the newsletter, and by being the person who has handled communications on behalf of the group.'

How do you see the future for FoP?

'I leave as a trustee with the hope that the group continues to make a big impact in Pittville, and indeed around Cheltenham. Only recently CBC said that our Green Space Volunteers team is the template for all the parks volunteer groups around town. FoP has always worked in partnership with the councils, charities and voluntary groups and, together, we can achieve so much more. I hope this will continue. FoP's aim is to promote greater community involvement in the enjoyment, protection, future restoration and renewal of Pittville Park and Estate. Maybe the way forward is to engage even more people in each of these areas and to look at new ways of doing this.'

Andy Hopkins

Suggestions for choosing spring bulbs

Spring bulbs have started to appear in garden centres, so I thought I'd make a few recommendations about bulbs that do well on our local clay and provide late winter/early spring colour.

For shaded areas and those sites covered by deciduous trees or shrubs, try *Anemone Blanda* forms such as *Blues*, *Radar* or *White Splendour*. *Corydalis* forms such as *Beth Evans* and *George Baker* are sometimes available, as are *Cyclamen Coum* and *Cyclamen Hederifolium*. You can also plant snowdrops, of course, such as *Galanthus Nivalis* in both single and double forms.



For more open and sunny sites, there is a wide choice, although some varieties are more suitable for rockeries or raised beds. *Chionodoxa* forms, *Crocus Chrysanthus* and *Crocus Tommasinianus* forms and various *Scillas* all give a lovely show. There are many options for daffodils, too: *February Gold*, *Jetfire*, various *Jonquils* such as *Baby Moon*, *Pipit*, *Sun Disc* and *Tete a Tete* are all good value.

Plant your bulbs at two to three times their depth and if the soil is heavy put a little sand under them. Next spring give the bulbs a feed and they will reward you with a display for years to come.

David Richards

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Andy Hopkins

Photos

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Fiona Clarke

Andy Hopkins

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