NEWSLETTER No. 17

Friends of Meadow Park

AUTUMN & WINTER 2009

HIGHS, LOWS & MYSTERIES

We rejoiced when Rushcliffe Borough Council finally completed its delegation of routine park maintenance to East Leake Parish Council, with the immediate improvement we had been predicting ever since the idea was first floated. The grass verges now look much neater and, more important environmentally, the main fields were mown and cleared twice, as they should be. Richard Jenks, the farmer contracted to do this, is to be congratulated; 2009 was a better summer than 2008 overall, but there were a couple of very awkward spells of wet weather that he had to work round.

One of the best sights in the park this year - a PROPER cut!

Another "high" is the most recent acquisition in the park, a bridge that the parish council has erected over Sheepwash Brook, between the playing field and Kingfisher Walk. There had been a few mishaps when people rashly attempted to cross on an improvised log bridge; now an obviously popular cut-through is also safe.

No more Jungle Jim antics required, thanks to the Parish Council

The Borough Council carried out one of their significant obligations as landlords when they at last repaired the Bateman Road boundary fence.

That was promised years ago, as was the removal of an area of aggressive American dogwood; this has still not been addressed, and causes increasing concern. That is a "low" of omission, but the park suffers from a persistent "low" of vandalism, this year depressingly so in the form of the destruction, **twice**, of a notice board which Kevin Shaw made, that was useful as a vehicle for the "What to look for…." advice kindly provided by Dennis Fox, Max Watson and Ann Weekley. It's a forlorn hope, but if you do have any information about who might be causing this sort of wanton damage, please tell either the parish clerk or the police.

There were two mysteries, one of which was reported in the last newsletter. Our iconic kingfishers disappeared in the middle of summer. Happily, they turned up again by the end of September; it would be nice to think that the Friends' effort in clearing the birds' "fly-ways" was at least part of the reason. The other mystery was the reported sighting of a mink, which would have been really bad news for all small wildlife in the park. Experts from the borough council checked exhaustively, but could find no evidence to confirm the report; we can breathe a sigh of relief for the time being, but positive sightings have been made in Rushcliffe Country Park, not a million miles away, so vigilance is certainly called for.

SPRING ACTIVITY DAYS 2010

WE ARE SERIOUSLY IN NEED OF MORE ABLE-BODIED VOLUNTEERS

SATURDAY 9 January

Hall Field - reducing dominant scrub and pulling young dogwood now seen sprouting across the field path

SATURDAY 13 February

Hedge laying - a further stretch in Bateman Field

SATURDAY 13 March

Pollarding a willow, maybe coppicing more hawthorn, on the south bank of Kingston Brook

SATURDAY 10 April

"Spring Clean Day" and trimming back overgrowth, especially in Gibson's Field

Please get along as often as you can. If the task is a strenuous one, there's always easier work available.

AS EVER - MEET AT THE SCULPTURE AT 10am

TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS IN 2009 - 282

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 23 NOVEMBER, 2009

Chair's report

The most significant development this year has been the transfer of the management of the park from Rushcliffe Borough Council to East Leake Parish Council. We have already noticed the benefits of this – especially in terms of the grass cutting. The frequent cutting of the paths and edges is now done directly by the Parish Council. The cutting of the larger areas and the removal of the cuttings is done twice yearly by a local farmer.

Subject to your approval we have joined the Blue Butterfly Scheme of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. This is a scheme to encourage the management, restoration and creation of grasslands which contain significant populations of wild flowers – wild flower meadows. The common blue butterfly has been chosen as the symbol of the scheme because its survival is closely linked to wild flower rich grasslands. Gaynor Jenkyns who administers the scheme spent half a day in Meadow Park and talked with Kevin and myself about incorporating Meadow Park in the scheme. She has subsequently submitted a report in which she endorses the current management strategies and offers continuing support and advice.

An innovation this year has been an increased exposure of our presence and activities through a monthly entry in the East Leake Times. Thanks go to Mollie for coordinating this and to the contributors who have provided her with copy. Additional thanks go to Mollie for arranging the production of calendars with an appropriate photograph of Meadow Park for each month of the year.

We supported the Parish Council in its bid for funding to create a fitness circuit in the park. This bid was unsuccessful but we have encouraged the Parish Council to keep the idea open.

Much less ambitious on the fitness front was a plan to produce a leaflet of walks within the park with the endorsement of the Health Centre. We are hoping that this will be available next year.

We have continued to hold our monthly working parties during which we have laid hedges, pulled thistles and docks, barrowed tons of stone to resurface paths, planted bulbs and rhizomes of spring flowers, cut back overgrowing shrubs and trees and cleared a flight path for our resident kingfisher.

I would like to thank all those members who have contributed in this way to our work. I would also like to thank all members of the committee for their support during the year. Thanks also to Conrad for so diligently keeping our finances in order and finally to Debbie whose efforts on our behalf go well beyond the call of duty as secretary.

Dennis Fox

Secretary's report

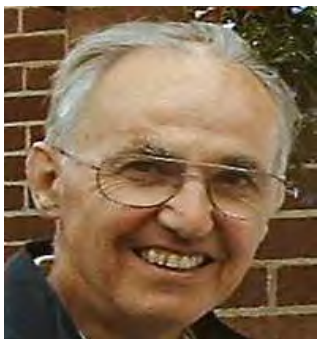
The full committee have met only 5 times this year with most meetings having a good attendance. Again, there have not been many meetings of the sub committees, partly due to waiting for the park management to go over to the Parish Council. Small groups have got together at odd times to discuss matters, one of which was to formulate a questionnaire for members so we as a committee could be right up to date with members' desires & skills. Unfortunately, this was not as successful as we had hoped & did not provide us with much more information than we already knew.

Several members of the committee & ordinary members have tried to educate all park users with notices about trees, plants etc but sadly, as you will be aware, the notice board very kindly made by Kevin, has been vandalised twice. It is hoped that this will be repaired & be used again soon. At this point I'd like to thank Ann Weekley & Max Watson for providing the information regarding flowers & birds in the park that was used for the notice board.

Our current membership has gone up slightly to 92. A couple of these new members are active, which is always well received, even though we still very much appreciate the interest of the non active members who obviously provide us with very valuable income, but as usual, like a broken record – if you remember records - I'm going to ask you to try to encourage others to join. It is hoped that those who attend the activity sessions enjoy them & on behalf of the committee I thank them & the other members who work on their own for their hard work.

Finally, as you might be aware Dennis is stepping down as Chairman, and I would like to thank him on behalf of the rest of the committee for his efforts & leadership this last year.

Debbie Slade



Dennis Fox

ELECTIONS

Alan Barlow was elected Chairman, and Debbie Slade & Conrad Oatey were re-elected, Secretary & Treasurer respectively, all unopposed.

Committee: John Adcock, Peter Bloxham, Dennis Fox, Neil Hunter, Mollie Jacques, Marie Males, Andrew Sandford, Kevin Shaw, Andy Denker & Trevor Jones.

Paul Phillips represents Rushcliffe Borough Council and Jeff Jones represents the Parish Council.

Alan Barlow

FRIENDS OF MEADOW PARK

Please send us your comments and ideas

tel: 852217, email:meadowpark@eastleake.net, www.east-leake.co.uk

TREASURER'S REPORT YEAR ENDING 31/10/09

2008/9 proved to be another solid year financially. Membership income dropped slightly, but donations compensated for this. Fundraising is significantly higher, but this is the result of sales of the 2010 calendars. At the time of writing, we still need to sell more calendars before we are in profit. Fundraising at the Carnival was comparable with last year.

Expenditure was much higher than in previous years, for the following reasons:

- *The purchase cost of the calendars currently on sale.*
- *The purchase of a seat, for which the grant was received the previous year.*
- *The outlay on hedge laying tools (£242) for which eventually we did not receive a grant.*

Overall, taking 2007/8 and 2008/9 together, we have increased our end of year balance slightly whilst having achieved a number of projects. A healthy balance of £811.07 is carried forward to help fund the coming year's activities.

Conrad Oatey,

ACCOUNTS FOR THE PERIOD 01/11/08 TO 31/10/09

2008		2009		Notes
	Receipts			
£373.00	Member Subscriptions	£356.00		
£10.00	Other Donations	£32.50		
£155.63	Grants	£120.50		1
£34.50	Sale of Notelets / Photos / Calendars	£274.00		
£0.00	Bank Interest	£0.00		
£135.06	Fundraising	£126.50		2
£285.00	Other	£0.00		
£993.19			£909.50	
	Payments			
£35.00	Subscription - BTCV	£35.00		
£155.63	Insurance	£155.63		
£14.00	Costs of sale materials	£382.40		3
£4.00	Publicity / Education	£0.00		
£286.00	Projects	£530.19		4
£0.00	Other	£258.92		5
£494.63			£1,362.14	
£498.56	**Excess of Receipts over Payments**		**-£452.64**	
	BANK RECONCILIATION			
£765.15	Opening Balance - Bank	£1,263.71		
£0.00	Opening Balance - Cash	£0.00		
£993.19	add Total Receipts	£909.50		
£1,758.34		£2,173.21		
£494.63	less Total Payments	£1,362.14		
£1,263.71	Balance Carried Forward	£811.07		

NOTES

1) RBC (Bobcat hire for paths) and RBC Members' Initiative (bulbs)

2) Village Carnival Stall

3) Calendars (only part sold this financial year)

4) Hedgelaying tools (£242.94), Stakes & binders (£120.00), Alder trees (£36.00), Bulbs (£84.00) Concrete for seats & noticeboard (£47.25)

5) Seat (income received to cover cost in 2007/8)

WORKING ALONE

We know from the questionnaire responses you gave, and also from seeing it in action, that a number of people are happy to work in the park on their own, and like to use their own initiative as to what they undertake.

This is very welcome, but there a few points to consider:

* The parish council, being responsible for the routine upkeep of the park, has schedules of tasks which need to be done, and also information about what the public should **not** undertake. PLEASE check before you set off.
* Except for litter-picking, the parish clerk should know what activity you intend to engage in. (Compare it to helping a neighbour with **his** garden - you almost certainly wouldn't get busy without his knowledge.)
* It is advisable to wear one of the "FMP Volunteer" badges, obtainable free from the parish office. This protects you if your activity is challenged by other park users.
* Never use power tools in the park. Take the same precautions with other tools as you would at home, but remember that you will often be out of sight of other people and be just a little bit more careful!

Please do not be put off by the above - it is certainly to the benefit of the park to have as much care and attention as possible from all of us, but random activity is less useful than even loosely co-ordinated effort.

A LOOK BACK AT MEADOW PARK IN THE 1990s & BEFORE

Trevor Jones writes:

"Food production by means of agriculture has always modified Nature. Government policy during and after World War 2 aimed at independence from imported food plus savings in foreign exchange. Food rationing was necessary until 1954. Farmers were evicted if not optimally productive. Rapidly growing high yielding varieties (cultivars) of grass which responded to heavy fertiliser application were bred and sown. They suppressed and replaced less efficient plant species. Farmers unable to compete with ever rising levels of competitive production leave farming or go bankrupt. Food surpluses appeared in the 1970s and conservation of species and habitats within mainstream farming emerged as government policy during the 1980s. Our farmers keep the countryside tidy in addition to supplying food. Some people see beauty in a well farmed landscape.

Bateman Field after mowing, August 2009

Heavy flooding by the meandering Kingston Brook complicated plans for house building. Flood control, mainly straightening of the Brook, plus a system of field drains and ditches, was completed in 1969. The fields which comprise Meadow Park were farmed from Old Hall Farm, predominantly a cattle enterprise. Cattle convert grass into milk, meat, manure etc. Potato and cereal crops were grown on Hall Field, which then included Play Field. Oak Meadow was the village cricket pitch and usually grazed, but was ploughed at least once. Hay/haylage/silage crops were harvested from the remaining fields, which were also grazed by cattle. Lagoon Field was called Garden Field because it was once allotments. All fields were sown with modern varieties of grass.

Ten years have passed since Meadow Park was farmed, although taking hay cuts is low-intensity agriculture. Current field grass varieties are not locals from two centuries ago, but may be slowly replaced in the absence of fertiliser. A flourishing flood - meadow habitat will not reappear in the absence of extensive annual flooding and suboptimal drainage (and possibly not in the absence of cow manure).

Meadow Park is a massive boon to our village, fulfilling several functions, one of which could be an insight into farming."

Acknowledgement: Tim Kirk and Roy Vincent (who once worked these fields) for facts.

NEST BOX PROJECT

From a report by Ian Weekley to the AGM, November 2009

In December 2007, 20 nest-boxes were constructed and sited around the park.

10 were tit boxes and 10 open-fronted, some with a high opening ledge, some with a lower one.

They were examined in November 2008 and proved to have been surprisingly successful. 7 out of the 10 tit boxes had been used and one high open fronted (though by a tit, not one of the wrens it was designed for).

One box, low down over the river, had been destroyed. The boxes were all cleaned out and three were re-sited, two from the big ash in Oak Meadow, which is much frequented by children, and one from the ash by Kestrel Bridge.

Remember?

This year the boxes were again examined in November. Nine of the tit boxes had nests and the 10th contained some nesting materials. Only one of the open-fronts was used, again by tits because of its high front. If they're still not used next year may-be we should think about converting and/or resiting, but it would be a shame not to leave some of them, because these are meant for robins, wrens, pied wagtails, maybe even the spotted flycatcher which we saw there last summer, and they may yet be attractive to these species.

Red campion & ox-eye daisies. Teasel

WILD FLOWER REPORT

From Ann Weekley's report to the AGM, November 2009

In 2006, the first year that a full record of the flowers was kept, red campion, ox-eye daisy and meadow cranesbill were the stars of the show. As these three species had been introduced by us, either as seeds or seedlings, it was very encouraging to see them. 83 species were recorded in 2006, though there were probably more. The figure for 2009 is 86. This is not however a simple scenario of 3 new arrivals. 16 species on the 2006 list have 'disappeared' and 19 new species have 'appeared'.

An encouraging feature generally, is the spreading of some species from the field margins to the open meadows. Greater burnet and both meadow and creeping buttercup are making significant inroads. So too are creeping thistle and stinging nettle – less welcome to us but good news for goldfinches, red admirals, small tortoiseshells and peacocks! Rosebay willowherb, teasel and hedgerow cranesbill have all had a very successful year.

There are 2 species causing concern. Firstly hemlock, which is rapidly advancing downstream on both sides of Kingston Brook. This could probably be controlled by removing the seedheads before they ripen next summer.

Secondly, and more urgently, there is a profusion of small American dogwood saplings in the open area of Hall Field, presumably spread by birds. This needs more immediate action; a working party early next year could pull them before they are hidden by other new vegetation.