NEWSLETTER
Number 4

Friends of Meadow Park

SUMMER
and
AUTUMN
2003

VOLUNTEERING ADDS VALUE

There are several examples in these pages showing how the activities of often just a small number of people have helped to improve Meadow Park.

East Leake All-comers Champions

The most obvious occasion in 2003 was on a bright Sunday afternoon in June, when a formidable crew tugged our famous millstone into its position at the centre of the new sculpture at the Manor Farm Meadow entrance. The days that followed saw voluntary effort on a major scale as all sorts and ages of people got involved with Xceptional Designs' sculpture workshops. Most of these wouldn't even have considered themselves as volunteers, but that's exactly what they were. Now, whenever they visit the park, they will have the satisfaction of seeing their handiwork – as will the rest of us.

Throughout the year, some people have picked litter, some have scrubbed away at the objectionable graffiti scrawled on bench or bridge, some have planted young tree whips, some have dug Australia-seeking holes to secure a new bench, some have organised and led walks, some have attempted to carry out a tree census. Quite a number of people regularly go for walks armed with supermarket shopping bags to collect rubbish, and secateurs to decapitate the occasional ragwort.

All these are volunteers, and we all benefit from their activity. If you are among them, then thanks. If not, please consider joining in next time the Friends have a "do" - you may end up hot and a little muddy, but it will be in the best of causes!

ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

As befits its name, this small group of the FMP has been very busy of late.

A bird-watching walk in early May was well attended, but the poor turn-out for a tree-watching walk later the same day indicated a low level of interest and was very disappointing. So – explanatory leaflets are in preparation and there will be no excuse in future when the next walk is announced. We have applied to the Co-op Community Fund for help with the cost of printing.

Max Watson (R) & his flock

Meadow Park has more than one educational role to play. We hope to enhance the pleasure of the park for the average adult visitor, but equally, FMP want to explore with the local schools how the park can be used as a resource for students at both primary and secondary level.

FMP's first ever wish-list included erecting a series of information boards around the park, to add interest for regulars and visitors alike. Joan Meakin and Max Watson have already produced a number of drawings with text.

The next task is to find funding to have them mounted in weather- and vandal-proof form. Not easy, but hopes are high that they will be in place some time in 2004.

A THOUGHTFUL GIFT

A small but efficient working party toiled through a baking hot Saturday morning in August to install Meadow Park's latest acquisition – a sturdy, handsome and well-appreciated bench kindly presented by the East Leake Guides.

Ann Weekley trying out the new bench

It has been sited near Kestrel Bridge, where it commands a perfect view across Oak Meadow towards the village, beyond the young Major Oak, which put on quite a spurt of growth despite the summer drought and is beginning to look like a proper tree.

On the same day, the proto-type "FMP special" bench, which Kevin Shaw made from some donated logs, was erected in the Play Field. There is enough timber left to make a few more, and we will soon be seeking some help for a hammer and nail session.

While all this was going on, Tim Slade and Darcy had a great time with a strimmer and left a lot of nettles seriously the worse for wear.

And of course, whenever two or three Friends are gathered together, they pick litter, so black bags were in evidence …….

The EL Wheeled Sports Park Committee have the support of the Parish Council in their attempt to provide a facility in East Leake, but have so far been unable to find a suitable site. The Environment Agency rejected the preferred site on the Gotham Road playing field, so the committee approached FMP for our views on the possibility of using part of the park. There were fears that a structure the size of a basketball pitch, and noisy with it, might compromise the conservation role of the park, and FMP would certainly not support any application to build in the south west segment (Gibson's Field). It was agreed, however, that the park must operate as a multi-use leisure facility as well as a potential conservation area, and an area close to the Lagoon Field would probably be acceptable. Any decision will be taken by the Borough Council which is the planning authority as well as owner of the land.

PUZZLE CORNER No. 2

What is this? First name out of Debbie's hat on 30th November gets a picture

from the FMP gallery

Phone 852217,

or e-mail c/o parishclerk@east-Leake.gov.uk

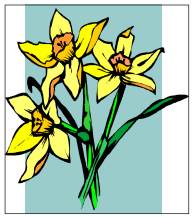
Debbie Slade (Secretary)

or Kevin Shaw (Treasurer)

can always be contacted at these numbers

and would especially like to hear from new members – tell your friends!

SPRING CLEAN DAY PLUS



The Parish Council organised its usual communal clear-up one Saturday way back in April, and FMP joined in again. Several hardy souls spent the morning actually in the brook, collecting some of the junk that lazy and ill-mannered people persist in tossing there.

The trawl was perhaps less exotic than last year's, but the black bags bulged just as much. Thanks to the people who bother to take care of where we live, and shame on those who make it necessary.

Why don't you join us on Saturday 29 November (9.30am - 12.30pm) for an Autumn tidy-up, and to fix up some more benches?

MEADOW PARK'S NEW LOOK ENTRANCE

For a week at the end of June, the south-west corner of Gotham Road playing field was the busiest place in East Leake.

Alex Hallowes and Pete Rogers, jointly known as Xceptional Designs, took up residence in a tented workshop. The mega millstone-pull took place on a hot and sunny Sunday afternoon, and for the next few days a steady stream of modellers of all ages and skills came to create some wonderful designs, which Alex and Pete then moulded in concrete. These now form the surround to the splendid steel arch which "jets" out of the old millstone. The Parish Council is looking to complete the job by tidying up and grassing the triangle.

This great village achievement, largely organised by the Borough Community Arts Officer, Sharon Scaniglia, was celebrated in fine fashion with a few words from Cllr Brian Dale, chairman of the Parish Council Amenities Committee, and a barbecue which revealed Kevin Shaw's hitherto secret skills as a short order chef. It would be nice to report that the sculpture has escaped the East Leake disease of damage and graffiti, but sadly that is not quite true, although the pessimists' worst fears have fortunately not been realised.

In the last newsletter, we reported that Jane Baines, Notts County Council's footpaths officer, had been so impressed with the sculpture design, that she hoped to commission something complementary from Xceptional Designs for a new railing on the footbridge over Sheepwash Brook. The footbridge repair and a new culvert between the recreation ground and Meadow Park will be safer, and should prevent flooding such as has frequently happened after heavy rain. The result is now in place and is receiving the same favourable comment as the sculpture.

The Parish Council is responsible for making good most of the fence on each side of the new bridge, but part of it lies within Meadow Park, and therefore comes under Rushcliffe Borough Council. As a voluntary body, the Friends can attract grants from sources not available to local government, so we have applied to the EMA Community Fund for help to make an attractive job of the whole area. A little finger-crossing is in order, please.

(NB This fund consists of fines levied against airlines which transgress flight regulations, and is available to support communities living within ten miles of East Midlands Airport)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 26 November 2003 7.30pm in the Parish Office

Meadow Park is under the ownership & control of Rushcliffe Borough Council, but it belongs to all of us. The Borough's maintenance programme is pretty basic, but by working through the Friends, we can not only take initiatives locally to improve the park but also apply constructive pressure to maximise the Borough's input.

Please let the Secretary have advance nominations (including self-nomination) for the committee by Monday 24 November.

Please attend – an enthusiastic membership is the way to have a stronger voice.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

A previous newsletter mentioned the appointment of Paul Phillips as Rushcliffe Borough Council's Community Environment Officer. His first brief was to survey all the major public open spaces in Rushcliffe and to liaise with whichever local councils or other organisations had an interest in the various places he identified, in order to develop future strategies.

In the case of Meadow Park, he has written an analysis of the character and quality of the park, and produced a draft management plan (drawing in part from the ecological survey produced for the Parish Council by Andrew Joys in 1996). The plan identifies three aspects of the park's potential, which must be balanced when management decisions are made. The park's amenity value is of significance to probably the largest number of people, but it is also an educational resource (both formal and informal) and a wildlife haven. The wildlife potential of the park is important at the moment because it ties in with a Borough Council policy to create a number of nature conservation areas across Rushcliffe.

The draft plan formed the basis of two meetings between Paul Phillips and representatives of the Parish Council and of FMP, when a number of objectives were identified. For instance, there was once an ambition to establish a wild flower meadow in Hall Field, but its high residual fertility after decades of farming would have necessitated the expensive removal of topsoil, so it was agreed instead to do nothing! That way, after a period when thistles predominate, self-seeding brush will develop, not very "pretty", but a valuable wildlife habitat. To the south west of the park, it should be possible to exploit the vestige of the original course of the Kingston Brook, so as to create an area of wetland which will be attractive to herons and other water birds. We hope this will be the subject of a feasibility study as a medium term target, as part of a definitive management plan, to be adopted – when? The Parish Council and FMP are very junior partners in this enterprise, so we just wait.

Along with management goes maintenance, and this season we have fared somewhat better at the hands of the grass-cutters. Quite a complex mowing regime was devised, of varying frequency, and this was largely adhered to. The designated paths and "desire lines" have been kept reasonably well trimmed, but the "headland" zones sometimes get cut when they shouldn't. In 2002, one farmer was apparently willing to mow and remove the arisings from the three southern fields (in order to reduce their fertility), but the arrangement broke down, and this year was not expected to be any better. Thanks to Neil Hunter, a farmer has now been found who will remove the arisings, and the 2003 autumn cut was successfully carried out.

Nettles, especially round the benches and near waste bins, are a perpetual problem, and for a while we were without the services of our champion strimmer, so had to rely on the ad hoc help of various Friends. It is a constant battle of attrition, with sometimes the FMP winning (with very little help from the Borough's work force), sometimes the nettles.

Being a Friend teaches you patience!

And finally-

REMEMBER SUMMER?

Ian Weekley

captured this picture of

Kingston Brook in sparkling

mood