



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

November 2015

An Autumnal Carpet



Thanks to Simon Maddison for this photograph

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES – the walk-around

On Saturday 17th October a group of us spent a morning with Andrew Taylor, Projects Officer of Hertfordshire County Council’s Countryside Management Service (CMS), walking round the Close, with the purpose of identifying what work might be put into the Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan (henceforth the GAP). We wrote up our findings and views in a document which appears at the end of this Newsletter. We now await the formal draft consultation GAP from CMS.

The Big Hitchin Clean Up



Another ***Big Hitchin Clean Up*** took place on Sunday 18th October, but as a number of us were out and about for the above Saturday walk-around, we decided to litter-pick the Close then. The results are opposite. No trolleys, bikes or tractor tyres this time, but certainly still worth it!

But still some eyesores...

In the October issue we carried a photograph of the ‘Tardis’, otherwise known as the Gas Regulator Housing, which had been tagged by some graffiti artists. We thought that the designs were rather good, and somewhat oriental in flavour.



There is now a new addition – this time in the classic tag style – we think less attractive.... BUT this is only on the side of the structure facing Elmside Walk. The other three sides still just carry the more delicate red symbols that were there previously.

..and another one...



Two years ago we carried this photograph of the eastern end of the pond, the part underneath the willow trees. It was a mess of debris and mud. On our walk-around with Andrew Taylor we saw that this patch of the pond was sadly no better. It is an eyesore, especially in a Conservation Area, and dealing with it forms one of our requests for the GAP.

A bit more history

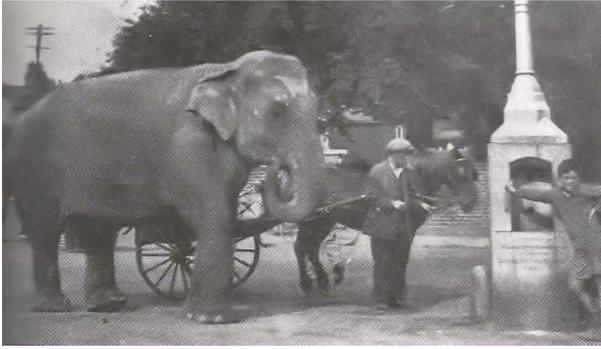
The avenue of lime trees along Bedford Road was planted in 1937, as part of the commemorations of the coronation of King George VI. This 1913 photograph shows the edge of Butts Close before the trees were planted:



Photograph: Hitchin Historical Society

The drinking fountain was at the intersection of Bedford Road and Oughtonhead Way. The trough was for horses and any other animal that might pass by....

Contact Friends of Butts Close at buttsclose@gmail.com and Hitchin Forum through www.hitchinforum.org.uk



Photograph: Hitchin Historical Society

...presumably from a visiting circus.

Finally...

We recently discovered¹ that the Butts Close Pond is actually fed by the Capswell Spring, which results from water descending from the Gaping Hills, that promontory to the west of the town next to (of course) Gaping Lane. The water exits the pond eastward as Capswell Brook, which runs in a culvert down to the river Hiz at the back of Bancroft Gardens. Thanks to Ellie Clarke for locating the reference!

¹ <http://purwellvalley.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/purwell-valley-circular-walk-route-3.html> and see the entry for 18-1-2012 from Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, Archaeologist of NHDC. See also page 5 of <http://www.hitinform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Desk-Based-Assessment-2010.pdf> (page 12 of the pdf)

Butts Close Greenspace Management Strategy 2016-2021

Draft CMS Greenspace Action Plan

Walk-round on October 17, 2015 with Andrew Taylor (AT), Projects Officer, HCC Countryside Management Service (CMS)

Present on the walk-round were representatives of Hitchin Forum (HF), Hitchin Historical Society (HHS) and Friends of Butts Close (FoBC), & HCC Cllr Derrick Ashley.

Purpose

AT advised that the purpose of the walk-round was to obtain local views on what should be put into the Action Plan. Following the outcomes of the morning and the receipt of all other views, CMS would draw up a draft Plan which would be put out for formal consultation.

Outcomes

Historical Interpretation: AT advised that this could for example be by setting an interpretive plaque at each end of the central pathway carrying a brief summary of the history of the Close. It was noted that HHS had a chapter on the Close in their book² which could serve as a source for this. **It was agreed that this approach should be pursued.**

Perimeter Bollards: It was noted that a number of these were significantly deteriorated due to years of frost damage. Some members of FoBC had suggested that these should be replaced with the same wooden post and rail system as was already in place on the north (Fishponds Road) side of the Close. Others proposed leaving the bollards as they are. It may be noted that FoBC had discussed the matter with Andrew Mills of NHDC and he had advised that there was no budget for their replacement, and that this had not been specified within the brief given by NHDC to CMS. **There was no consensus on this matter regarding the draft Plan.**

Pond: work by CMS some eight years ago had borne fruit, with a 'soft' edge to the pond and rushes etc growing vigorously, but this was now overgrown. **It was agreed that the area needed management.** The east end of the pond was however still very unsightly, with no growth on the submersible sections placed there by CMS previously, with algae and general scum mixed with sunken debris. AT advised that when the willow was pollarded this would allow light to reach this end of the pond in the growing season and this should result in a cleaner area. However once the willow was fully re-established the same problem would return. **It was agreed that this area needed better and consistent management.**

South edge of Archers: AT advised that there were in fact two parallel fences, with the outer fence in place temporarily to protect the growth behind it. This could now be removed and the bushes etc coppiced. **This was agreed.**

² *Discovering Hitchin* by Priscilla Douglas & Pauline Humphries, Pub: Egon. 1995

South perimeter of the Close: this is an uneven mix of trees and bushes against the red brick wall, which had fallen down in some places. **It was agreed that the perimeter needed clearing and management.**

Trees at south corner of Close and Bedford Road: two trees were overgrown with ivy and there was a lot of scrub at their bases, which frequently harboured litter and other debris. **It was agreed that this needed investigation and management.**

Wilderness centre of the Close: this was judged successful but there was not a great variety of flora. AT suggested that this could be strewn with appropriate wild flowers. **This proposal was agreed.** This together with the other grassed areas should be subject to a cut and lift regime but the contractors were only providing an amenity cut. This was leaving an inappropriate amount of cut grass on these areas, which was inhibiting biodiversity. **It was agreed that NHDC should be approached to ensure that their contractors were fulfilling the specification** (see http://www.hef.org.uk/nature/action_plan_highlights_2008.pdf)

Cyclical Management: AT advised that CMS had a team of volunteers who could be commissioned to manage the area on a regular basis. **It was agreed that this should be put into CMS' cyclical plan for their volunteers.**

Furniture: it was noted that the basket style rubbish bins on the pathway across the centre of the Close were quite inadequate as they were open to birds, squirrels etc and litter was frequently spread about. Although the bins were in the centre of the pathway there was no bin by the bench. The benches themselves were adequate; they were made of wood but it appeared that where they had been replaced, NHDC were using recycled plastic, which was stronger. The exception was on Elmside Walk where a different design was in place, but on these (relatively new) seats the top rails had been broken/removed. It was agreed that recycled plastic furniture would be appropriate where the wooden seats require replacing. **It was agreed that alternatives to the basket type bins should be researched, and that wooden seats should be replaced by resin seats of a similar design on an as and when basis.**