



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

August 2016

PROGRESSING THE BUTTS CLOSE GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN 2016-21

Desilting Capswell Pond



Waiting for action...

You will recall that the Friends of Butts Close were asked for ideas and comment on how best to deal with the spoil from the desilting process, and in May we advised Andrew Taylor¹ and Andrew Mills² of the results. Both have thanked you all for the feedback, which supported a proposal for the spoil to be used to form a berm or hillock on the south side of the pond. Andrew Taylor has now advised us that the District Council has identified the

capital for this work, a contractor has been selected, and the work will be carried out between September 1st and October 15th. It should take no more than a week to complete.

CMS Volunteer Work Party

Andrew Taylor has also advised that he is planning to start work on other areas of the GAP as set out in the Year One schedule. He anticipates that a CMS Volunteer Work Party will come on to Butts Close in November. He will provide more details and firm dates later, and is inviting all Friends of Butts Close to join in the work.



...Needing a haircut

¹ Projects Manager for the Countryside Management Service - CMS

² Service Manager, Grounds, NHDC

Interpretation Boards

In July we send out a 'first cut' mock-up for the interpretation boards – planned for the entrance to the Close from Fishponds Road, and at the south-west end of the central path. We also consulted with Hitchin Historical Society (HHS). As a result of everybody's feedback we have produced a revised draft version, which is at the end of this Newsletter. Please do have a look – there is still time to make changes. For the sake of simplicity this time we have not added the references for the content, but do contact me if you want to see the details.

Mysteries on the North Side...

One mystery has been the big dip close by the Fishponds Road entrance, beloved of all small children, running up and down and sliding and sledding in the winter snow. Residents with long memories have discounted a WW2 bomb crater. It has been suggested that this was dug out to hold water for horses and for livestock grazed on the common land. HHS advised us that Capswell Pond was only created in the early 20th Century, so prior to that there may have been no recourse to accessible water. Small ponds for the same purpose have been identified on Oughtonhead Common and elsewhere. However, the 25-inch map³ of Hitchin dated 1898 shows no indication of a pond there, and the detailed drawings of banking and of water elsewhere on the same map are sufficiently precise to suggest that if the Butts Close depression was a substantive feature (such as a water source for livestock) then it would have been indicated on this map. Any more information would be most welcome!

Another mystery is the appearance of a Fairy Circle, between the same depression and the Fishponds Road entrance. The photograph below shows it in full Spring growth, but it is clearly robust as it's still visible this August. Some of you believe that this phenomenon is due to circular



fungal growth, which increases the nitrogen level in the soil and which in turn darkens the grass.

The better explanation is that the ring is caused by elves or fairies dancing on a moonlit night, leaving just the trace of their revels for

³ <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=17&lat=51.9527&lon=-0.2827&layers=176&b=8>

mortals to find the next day⁴. But, just sometimes, a fairy may have had a particularly good time, and will come back in daylight to re-visit the scene.



Fortunately someone took a picture of a fairy doing just that...

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Entertainments

Some more earthly visitors will be:

- Abbots Funfair, 21st to 28th September. This is the smaller funfair, quieter and more geared to younger children than Thurston's
- The Circus will be visiting 16th – 23rd October.

Next Big Hitchin Clean-up

This will be on Sunday 16th October. The last time the Circus came it also clashed with the clean-up on Butts Close, but there was very little impact on the amount of litter. We'll send out reminder emails nearer the time!

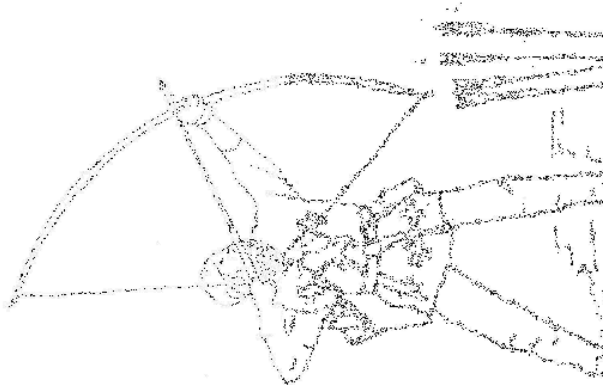
Tony Riley
for
FoBC

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy_ring#Oral_tradition_and_folklore

Butts Close

This public open space in the centre of the Butts Close Conservation Area has been used for parades, demonstrations, sports, fairs and festivities for centuries, a tradition that continues today.

The celebration of Edward VII's Coronation ended here with a bonfire and fireworks. The avenue of trees on the central path and the limes along Bedford Road were planted in 1937, to commemorate the Coronation of George VI.



This site has been Common Land for perhaps a thousand years. In 1363 a Royal Statute required common land to be used for mandatory practice with the longbow; the first local record – in 1492 – of the name 'Butts' refers to the proper name for archers' targets. Hitchin is reputed to have sent men-at-arms to fight for King Henry V at Agincourt (1415).



In 1466 Cecily Duchess of York added land specifically for the townsfolk's recreation. Games, sports and exercises, formal and informal, have long been a feature on the Close.



Military parades massed here between the two World Wars. A First World War tank, the 'Fearless', was presented to Hitchin in 1919 and was mounted on Butts Close. While it was being restored, it slipped from its pedestal and a live shell was found inside! The tank was melted down for scrap in 1937.



Joseph Arch



Alfred Ransom

In 1873 there was a major demonstration on the Close for the rights of agricultural labourers, addressed by Joseph Arch, a campaigning orator. The demonstration was supported by Alfred Ransom, a Quaker and an enlightened local employer.



The largest spectacle seen on the Close was probably Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1904, with 800 people and 500 horses. They arrived at Hitchin Station on three special trains. The local press reported that some 24,000 people attended the event,

[NHDC, CMS, HF HS logos]

[for more information contact...XXX]