



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

March 2016

Waiting...waiting...



Butts Close has been waiting, like us all, for the weather to turn. Despite a few sunny days, each time the cold has returned, the curled leaf buds have not been convinced, and we've kept our coats on.

Everything however is in preparation, and from April onwards Butts Close will be full of energy once again...

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

Greenspace Action Plan

Countryside Management Service (CMS) will start work on the new Greenspace Action Plan in April. Their first task will be to identify contractors and obtain estimates for the pond de-silting process. NHDC will then need to identify the capital for this work.



A related decision will be where the spoil from the pond is to be placed. We understand that it may be prohibitively costly to have this removed from the site. Using the silt to create some banking next to the pond might be a choice, and once dry this could be grassed over, and enable a better view of the pond itself. But this is just one idea.

On the Close itself, CMS will concentrate on those tasks in the Year One Action Plan that do not impinge on the pond and its immediate area.

But the Council's earlier surgery to the storm-damaged willow has already been rewarded with some stringy growth.

Tidying Up

Affinity Water finally completed the work on their service access point on the west side of the Swim Centre. There are now secure steel covers in place, which should mean safety for children playing near there, and safety too for the pool and Archers, as the old loose covers meant that the water supply could have been disrupted all too easily.



There still remains the unsightly state of the back of the swim centre, with a broken open gate and old building rubble 'shoved' into the space between the wall and the fence. It may be out of sight for users of the pool but not for other users of the Close. We are writing to James Bliss, Centre Manager, about this.

On the other side of the swim centre, Simon Maddison noted the poor state of the grass verges on Elmside Walk, and let Council Officers know. They responded very quickly, getting the verge re-turfed and setting in posts to prevent further damage by inconsiderate drivers.



Photos courtesy of Simon Maddison

There is still some damage to the verge further north however, and hopefully this will also be repaired.

Circus Fantasia – Wednesday 16th – Sunday 24th April

The circus is coming to Butts Close! Circus Fantasia is an animal-free show, and describes itself as *'presenting a dazzling array of international circus artistes from every corner of the globe, with a brand new show, featuring sensational acts never before seen under the Circus Fantasia big top'*.

More Tidying Up – Sunday 24th April

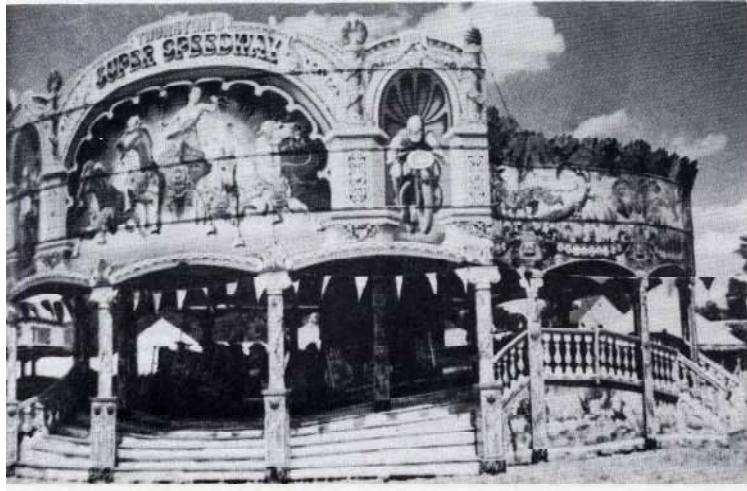
It is also time for another run at the litter! Sunday 24th April is the next Hitchin Spring Clean Day. We've debated whether to hold off until the following Sunday by which time the circus will have left. But that is a Bank Holiday weekend, and it would give the weeds one further week to grow and make picking litter more difficult. We find that most of the litter is on the perimeter of the Close anyway, so we've decide to go ahead on the 24th. As usual we'll meet at the bench to the north of the pond at 10am. Bags and pickers will be available – please let us know via buttsclose@gmail.com if you are coming so we know how many pickers we'll need to supply.

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Thurston's Fun Fair – Thursday 12th – Sunday 22nd May

Thurston's have been coming to Butts Close for decades. The Thurston Fun Fair 'dynasty' was founded by Henry Thurston in the mid-19th Century¹, and his grandson Stanley, who died in 1981, developed the Fun Fair which still carries his name. A photograph shows one of their rides on Butts Close in 1950.

The Ben-Hur Ark, Hitchin 1950.

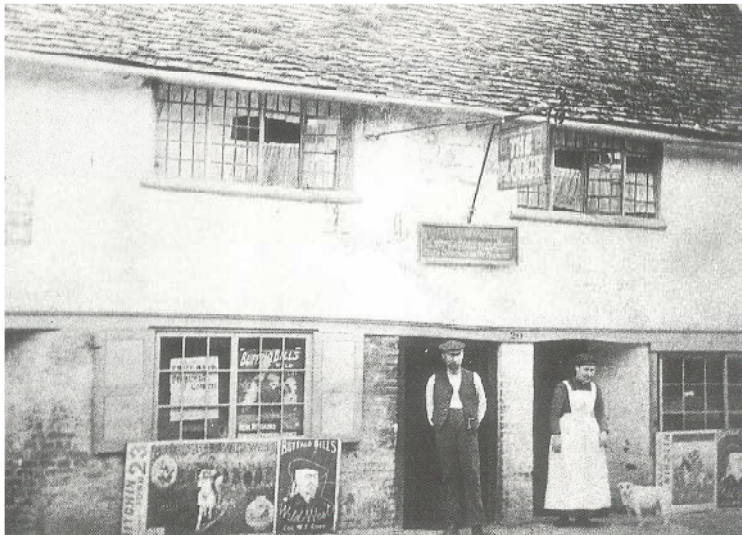


And now some more history...

Since one theme seems to be entertainment on the Close, what better edition than this to write something about the visit of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show to Butts Close in 1904 – probably the greatest event that has ever been staged here.

This extravaganza had first visited England in 1887, with Queen Victoria attending one of his spectacles in London. The show returned to Europe seven more times, and in 1904 included a schedule across England of 30 venues in as many days, now styled as "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World". They started in Truro and finished in Grimsby, visiting Butts Close on June 23rd. Their logistics were impressive. The Wild West show had a 'cast' of hundreds (different sources give 700-800 people) and some 500 horses. The entourage travelled in three special trains; the show finished in St Albans on June 22nd and journeyed from there to Hitchin via Hatfield, as there was at that time a direct rail line from St Albans running west via Smallford to Hatfield. They arrived on the morning of June 23rd, and set up camp on Butts Close.

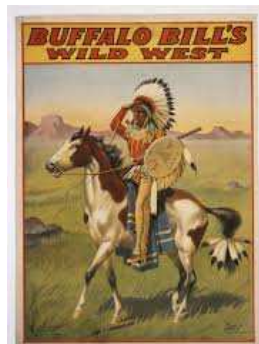
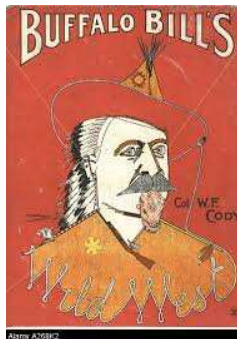
¹ More information on the family and on their equipment can be found at http://fagb.co.uk/Mercury_downloads/vol4-3.pdf



Advertisements were placed around the town and the show was well anticipated.

The photograph² left is indistinct, but two of the stock posters for the 1904 tour can just be identified, and these are reproduced underneath. The poster on the right is of 'Pawnee Bill'.

The Plough pub was on Bridge Street. It closed in 1922.



On the morning of June 23rd the residents of Bedford Road would have looked out across Butts Close to see an array of tepees, and all of the paraphernalia of the event being set up.



There are no surviving programmes of the Hitchin show, but an advertisement (shown overleaf) of the event in Horsham, Surrey just seven days earlier indicates what likely took place on Butts Close.

² The photograph is taken from '*Discovering Hitchin*' by Priscilla Douglas & Pauline Humphries, Egon Press, 1995, page 66, with kind permission of PH.

Public Notice.

ONE DAY ONLY.
HORSHAM, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15th.
JEW'S MEADOW.
Buffalo Bill's
Wild West
Congress of Rough Riders of the World

HEADED AND PERSONALLY INTRODUCED BY
Col. W. F. CODY (Buffalo Bill).

Now making its Absolutely Final Tour of Great Britain.
 Will positively never return! Don't Miss the Last Chance!

3 Special Trains
500 Horses
800 People

The Entire GRAND PROGRAMME
 will positively be presented
 undivided and uncuttailed
TWICE DAILY,
 RAIN or SHINE.

The one Exhibition in all the world that has no counterpart.
 Exclusively its own creation.

All London pronounced it supremely and originally great.
 The only object teacher history has ever had or recreation furnished. Not the imitation
 of fancy, but the stupendous realism of facts. Presenting in Historically Accurate,
 Animated and Spirited Picturesqueness the

ROMANTIC STORY OF AMERICAN PIONEER DAYS.
 Vividly illustrating the thrilling episodes, struggles, escapes, adventures, and
 unique pastimes of Border Life. The Deadwood Stage Coach "Hold-up," Onslaught
 upon the Emigrant Train, Cowboys and Cowgirls in True Pictures of the Western
 Plains, Fun with the Bucking Broncos, Roping Wild Horses, the Pony Express,
 Virginia Reel on Horseback, Burning the Settlers' Cabin.

100 North American Indians
 From the Sioux, Ojallalla, Brule, Uteapapoo, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Tribes in Indian
 Sports and War Dances, Genuine "Blanket Red Men," Chiefs, Warriors, Bucks,
 Squaws and Papooses.

IMPERIAL JAPANESE TROUPE,
 In Ancient and Modern War Drill.

CARTER, THE COWBOY CYCLIST,
 In his Wonderful Bicycle Leap through Space.

Buffalo Bill, the Master Exponent of Horseback Marksmanship, in his
 wonderful exhibition of shooting while riding a galloping horse.

Both Press and Public of the Metropolis united in according a hearty welcome to the
WORLD'S MOUNTED WARRIORS,
 Who, in martial array, teach living object lessons which nations most admire. A Veritable
 Mirror of Heroic Manhood, where men depict the deeds that made them famous in
 warfare and humanitarian acts. An aggregation of strong men trained and habituated
 to daring deeds.

THE VETERAN CAVALRY OF MANY FLAGS in Military Evolutions and Exercises.
 The Equestrian Sensation of Modern Times representing the

ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD.
 A Congress of Wild and most Wondrous Riders, including South American
 Gauchos, Riflian and Bedouin Arabs, Mexican Rurales and Vaqueros, Cuban Patriots,
 American Cowboys and Indians, and Semi-Savage Cossacks in Triumphs of Equestrianism.
 The most Stupendous Masterpiece of Mirrored Warfare.

THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIG HORN.
 A Vivid, Living, Prodigious Picture of Overwhelming Savage Onslaught,
 Dauntless Defence and Annihilating Massacre in American Indian Warfare vitalized
 into realism by the introduction of 800 Sioux Indians, Scouts, Soldiers and Horses, with
 every accessory of Arms, Accoutrements and Savage Decoration, whose inconceivably
 Overpowering Apotheosis of Mortal Combat is the Illustrious Tableau of

CUSTER'S LAST STAND AND HEROIC FALL.
 The vast arena illuminated at night by Special Electric Light Plants.

• Two Performances every Week Day. Afternoons at 2½. Evenings at 8.
 Doors open at 1 and 7 p.m. — One Ticket admits to all Advertised Attractions.

PRICES OF ADMISSION—1s, 2s, 3s, 4s. Box Seats, 5s, and 7s 6d. Children
 under 10 years half-price to all except the 1s. seats. All seats are numbered, except
 those at 1s. and 2s. No Tickets under 4s. sold in advance. Tickets at all prices on
 sale on the Grounds at hours of opening, and Tickets at 4s., 5s., and 7s. 6d. on sale at
 9 a.m. on the day of Exhibition at

S. PRICE & Co., 48, WEST STREET.
 Will Exhibit at Aldershot, June 24th; Lewes, June 26th; Redhill, June 27th. 544p

This advertisement indicates that the spectacle was much more than 'Cowboys and Indians'. By 1904 Bill Cody had enlarged the show to include riders and performers from across the continents, including Cossacks, trick cyclists and Japanese 'warriors', as well as Native Americans and his set piece displays of celebrated battles of the American West.

The local press reported that some 24,000 people attended the event on Butts Close, and that the highlight was still Buffalo Bill's marksmanship, shooting down balls thrown in the air while riding his horse.

The Horsham advert indicates that there were two shows that day, and we may presume that this was also the case in Hitchin. Either way, the entourage decamped and took their three trains to Cambridge, to repeat the shows there on the following day, June 24th.

Tidying Up...

After 800 performers, 24,000 spectators and, especially, 500 horses, cleaning Butts Close of litter and, er, everything else would have been an unenviable task...

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