



## FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

### AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

June 2023

#### *To the Rescue!*

In the months since the Countryside Management Service (CMS) coppiced the west wall hedge in January<sup>1</sup>, the surrounding grass and weeds had sprung back - helped by the wet weather. Andrew Mills offered to get O'Connors to cut back the grass, warning them to carefully avoid the coppiced hedge. We said we'd follow up by weeding round the little stumps, trowels and manicure scissors at the ready.

Oh dear! Not careful enough. Over-enthusiastic strimming by the contractors made a mess of the hedge stumps, damaging some by slicing through the bark.



It looked as if all our work over the last two years was for nothing...

---

<sup>1</sup> See the March 2023 Newsletter.

But a flurry of phone calls later, we discovered that the CMS Volunteers were already scheduled to work elsewhere on the Close that week, and their crew rescued 'our' hedge.



Heidi Hutton, Community Projects, CMS

They will look after it from now on, and will replace any saplings that didn't survive the strimmer.

### *The Detectorist*

Not the TV series, but a lone chancer on the Close. He had been approached, separately, by two Friends of BC and he gave them lies about his having authorisation. NHC does not give permission to metal detectors on Council land, in common with almost all local authorities.

I sent an email to you all on 5<sup>th</sup> May asking for any sightings. I did get a call, saw him operating myself, and called 999 to report 'a crime in progress'. I was thanked for the information and the call was deprioritised – but the Police did contact NHC.

The Council has just two Environmental Crime Officers for the whole district, but one, David Furr, happened to be driving near the Close and advised the man that he did not have permission to operate there. He wouldn't give his name, but he trudged off – and has not been seen since.

Metal Detecting may seem a fun and harmless hobby, and the organisations that promote it have careful Codes of Practice, but he obviously wasn't following them. Further, he had been digging many holes to search for, identify or retrieve objects. He replaced the divots but these were not regrowing, and this was leaving shallow and potentially dangerous holes, hazards for adults and kids alike. Since he wasn't following the Code of Practice there might also be doubt as to whether he would have reported anything relevant to the Local Finds Officer (Matthew Fittock, Verulamium Museum), which would be a loss to local archaeology.

But for me there was one useful outcome. I found that there is a 'Heritage Watch' scheme, part of the Neighbourhood Watch initiative. I joined, and I now get regular updates from the Police on related (and alas unrelated) matters.

## *Barbecues or Barbeques?*

Whichever spelling<sup>2</sup>, it is illegal to use one on Common Land. This is English law, not a Council bylaw. On Saturday evening there was a small party<sup>3</sup> on the Close down near the pond, with music and a barbecue - one of the larger disposable types<sup>4</sup>.

There are very good arguments against their use. They are a significant fire hazard and environmentally damaging, so much so that none of the major supermarkets now stock disposable barbecues, leaving outfits like B & M who still do (sometimes labelled 'instant barbecues'). Local authorities also frequently ban their use on Council property that is not registered Common Land, for the same reasons<sup>5</sup>. The whole of the Close last summer was a tinderbox for any flying sparks or spilt charcoal, and the same hot and dry conditions will doubtless be repeated.

I do feel for people with no garden or a patio where they could safely barbecue for a family summer party. Some local authorities elsewhere set aside barbecue areas in parks and so on, and are clear about requirements for safe and environmentally friendly operation.

Are there any in North Herts? If not, should there be? I'll find out.

Tony Riley

for

FoBC Steering Group

12 June 2023

---

<sup>2</sup> Language nerds like me might want to look this up.

<sup>3</sup> The partygoers left behind a lot of trash. It was there at 6 am, but gone by 7.30 – picked up by O'Connors!

<sup>4</sup> The ban on Common Land applies to all barbecues. It would have been just as illegal if someone had trundled in their £5,000 monster, however unlikely.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, they are exceptionally hazardous if used indoors, as they create carbon monoxide. Some years ago, a Hitchin family suffered serious poisoning due to a disposable barbecue being used inside, but luckily were rescued and all survived.