



**F** December 2008 **F**

### Seasonal Cards

Lovely scenes from Highbury Park are on sale as gift cards at local venues, including Armadillo in Poplar Rd, Kings Heath.



Proceeds help to cover some of our activities. You may have seen some of the photos on our website, and we hope you will recognise the locations where they were taken in the park! Current stock is limited to what we have on hand, though we expect to continue producing cards next year.

### Changes to our constitution

As everyone who attended the AGM will know, Highbury Park Friends have been reviewing our constitution. The existing constitution has served us well for several years, but is not suitable if we want to register as a charity, raise money from certain funders or broaden the scope of our activities. The revisions are based on a Charity Commission model and are more specific about the rights and responsibilities of the committee and procedures for managing the organisation.

The new draft also reflects our aims and broader aspirations regarding the future of Highbury (Hall) and the long-neglected gardens between the house and the park. The revised aims reflect our recreational,

environmental and educational activities, which are becoming more wide ranging.

Membership clauses remain the same for individuals and it's still one vote per family at general meetings, although local organisations that support our aims can now become voting members. Henceforth, the committee will have the ability to co-opt people for their particular skills and experience and organise duties in a more flexible, effective manner. To comply with charity law, there will be a dissolution clause leaving any assets to a charity or similar organisation, should we need to disband.

All told, the changes will put the Friends in a better position to address park issues and pursue opportunities. The draft constitution will be posted on the website soon and will be adopted at the January committee meeting, after a review of feedback.

A big thanks to all those who have helped with and commented on the review so far.

### Where's the Ranger?

Highbury Park is currently without a Ranger, Warden, or 'parkie'. The Assistant Ranger (Emerson) has moved on, and the word from the Parks Department is that there is no plan to find a replacement. A hiring freeze is in place, and other parks are facing the same conditions.

Highbury Park Friends have long campaigned for a park warden, and are now renewing that campaign.

We need permanent staff for our park. Why? To provide continuity; to keep up the good work that's been done over the last two years; to give people a sense of security and pride in the park; to inform and engage; to provide a point of contact for activities and feedback.

Highbury Park and the people who use it need permanent staff as points of contact and coordination. We need staff who can keep an eye on the park, who can take input from users and organisations, and who can manage day-to-day issues while helping the community make better use of the park.

We know this because we have seen how much difference one person can make in monitoring conditions in the park, coordinating among relevant agencies, developing links with schools, community services, park users and the wider community.

People feel safer and are more likely to make use of their park when there are permanent on-site staff. People also learn more about wildlife, history and park resources through staff-led activities.

We have gained this much and more. We want to make sure those gains are permanent, and are concerned that conditions have already started to deteriorate after only a few weeks without a dedicated

park warden/ranger. So we are calling on the Council to give us definite proposals for the required staff.

We will continue to press the issue through the HPF committee, but we need your support. Please write, phone or email your councillors and Cabinet Member Ray Hassall ([Ray.Hassall@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Ray.Hassall@birmingham.gov.uk)) to make it clear that permanent site-based staff are a necessity.

## Parkforce Pledge

If you plan to contact Councillors about park staff, you may want to remind them that Birmingham signed the [Parkforce Pledge](#).<sup>1</sup>

The pledge was developed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), and signatories affirm that they recognise the value of *having staff on site*, and commit to *developing and sustaining investment* in the people who care for these public spaces. We want to remind Birmingham council of that commitment.

CABE have also produced reports on the value of park staff, most notably [Parks need parkforce](#).<sup>2</sup>

Points made in that report include:

- The presence of park staff can address ongoing problems and encourage infrequent park users back into parks.
- Park staff can help the most vulnerable groups to enjoy parks and public spaces.
- Improvements must be made permanent by ensuring there is long-term support for dedicated park staff to maintain our parks properly and encourage greater public use.
- Research shows there is a clear public perception that parks are unsafe and poorly maintained. This is matched by strong evidence that people feel safer in parks where there are visible staff.
- A full-time park keeper or park warden might act as a point of liaison with the local community, helping with sporting, community events, and education programmes, as well as litter picking, taking responsibility for some aspects of horticulture and generally policing the park.

1. <http://www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentitemid=472>

2. <http://www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentitemid=346>

## Parks Maintenance decision due

Open spaces advocacy group Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) report that a decision is due shortly for the new parks maintenance contract that the council have been working towards for over two years. It means that parks maintenance will change significantly, with high-tech reporting systems in place to ensure jobs are done to standard.

BOSF anticipates that this will mean a new lease on life for many parks. But we must still be wary of cuts to other services. (Or staff, perhaps?) We will be looking at details of the package once it is announced, and will alert you to important points.

## A critical moment for Highbury Trust

Our efforts to bring more of the Chamberlain estate into public use has brought good news and not-so-good news. We have formed an action group with other local organisations and have been pressing Highbury Trust (Cllr. John Alden and others) to work with us on a better future for the Hall and gardens.

At this point, we have a verbal agreement from Cllr. Alden on a feasibility study relating to the proposal we put forward earlier this year. That positive news is somewhat negated by Charity Commission plans to let the Trust sell bits of the Chamberlain estate. We are puzzled by this move, as much of the estate is a listed garden, and presumably barred from sale.

Kate Waring of the Charity Commission made this comment recently: 'The Commission is currently in the final stages of agreeing a Scheme with Birmingham City Council as trustee of the Highbury Trust. This Scheme will be the governing document of the charity. It will provide a power to sell a very small part of the charity's land to generate funds which can be used to improve the remainder of the site and enable charitable activities to be undertaken. Our priority at the present time is to get the Scheme in place as soon as possible. There will be a period of public notice which will allow interested parties to make representations on the draft Scheme. This is likely to be early in the new year.'

We believe reform of the Trust is the better option. No sale should occur. The Chamberlain estate should remain intact and in charitable use. See our website for more information about the reform proposal.

## Volunteers needed

We are hoping to put on more events and produce more information in 2009, so we are looking for people to help with shorter or longer projects. That means we're looking for people to help with events, write bits of the newsletter, work with other groups and organise longer term projects. We'll want to organise and present tree survey data, make a calendar or other souvenirs, meet with council and community groups, improve the website, research park history and make displays.

If any of these appeal to you, please drop a line and let us know your interests. Your time, whether a little or a lot, helps us give Highbury Park the attention it deserves.

## Annual subscriptions

Highbury Park Friends have been successful at raising funds for specific projects, but we still need funds for basic things like the newsletter and website. Your membership fee helps us cover these costs. If you want to support our efforts, please join by writing a cheque to Highbury Park Friends. Rates are £5 (standard) and £3 (low income) per year.

Cheques may be left at York Supply in Kings Heath, or posted to:

Highbury Park Friends c/o  
65D Oxford Road, Birmingham, B13 9ES

If you have any questions, please ring 242 1845 (David) or 444 0819 (Ellen).

## Park memories

### 1. Beryl Gibbs

"My father's name was Arthur Markham. He was Park Superintendent at Highbury Park from 1950 until his death in 1963. We lived in The Lodge on the corner of Yew Tree Road and Moor Green Lane. It was a wonderful childhood, the park was beautiful with the Herbaceous Garden being my father's pride and joy. There were 14 gardeners and 2 or 3 full time Parks policemen (in uniform), who rode bicycles round the park on the lookout for troublemakers!

There were 3 'shows' a year – Moseley Round Table, a Flower Show and everyone's favourite, the Conservative fete which always included a high wire act or something similar. When the rockery around the tea rooms was being made a stone with Roman writing was found and was later displayed in the Museum. A monument to a famous race horse stood on a mound across from the Open Air School but had to be knocked down because it was dangerous. Later someone from the Sunday Mercury came to take a picture of it – too late!

In my childhood I always saw children at Uffculme Open Air School having their lessons outside or resting on beds outside. When my own children went to school I went to work at Uffculme School, now special needs, and stayed there for 35 years! I seems a large part of my life has been spent at Highbury and Uffculme, with so many memories."

### 2. George Wheeler

"I can remember my days at Uffculme Open Air School so perhaps the following account will be of interest. It must have been during the war years because the buses had a coating on the windows to protect against bomb blast and you peered through a small diamond in the centre. Also to save fuel alternate bus stops on the number 11 outer circle route were removed.

You arrived at the school at 8.30 and given breakfast before starting lessons. Lunch was at one o'clock followed by a one hour rest. You had a folding bed and blanket. In winter you slept in the gym, a building with a roof but no walls. In summer you lay outside in the sun. (That would raise a few eyebrows today.)

There were four class rooms, each had a north facing wall of brick to house the blackboard, the remaining three walls were glass folding doors. In extreme weather conditions the sliding doors would be closed. The very large gym was against the wall of Queensbridge Road, again this had no other walls.

The main playing field ran parallel with the park and at the bottom the gardening plots were on the right hand side. For the gardening sessions we were issued with clogs and more than once there was a pierced foot with a fork. The gardens backed on to a hospital and we often spoke to men there."

## Nootka Cypress



photos by Philip Brassett

One of the many conifers in the park is the Nootka cypress. *Cupressus nootkatensis* is named after the Nootka people of Vancouver Island in Canada.

It is also called the 'Canoe Cedar', its timber being highly valued and used to make canoes, paddles and bowls. Nootka is one of the parents of the well known and controversial 'Leylandii', the other parent being the Monterey cypress. The Nootka cypress is a long lived tree and one specimen in British Columbia was found to be 1800 years old! The scale like leaves, are said to have a 'turpentine' smell when crushed and the cones are spiky little spheres.

You can find this tree south west of the walled rose garden, with tag number 498.

## Bee Sensitive

John Madgwick of the beekeeper's association writes about the way Highbury's bees have struggled with wet, cold weather for two years:

After a terrible year in 2007 we thought that this year must be better. We were wrong. Cold and wet weather once again caused problems for the bees.

In May the bees replaced last year's queens as soon as the weather was warm enough. They instinctively knew that they had mated poorly during the poor weather last year. The resulting population would not last out the season. It also meant they kept older queens from previous years that they would normally have replaced.

This past summer, the cold wet weather hampered foraging. This again affected breeding, as the queen lays eggs in response to nectar being brought into the hive. Less nectar, fewer eggs. It also stopped bees from expanding the nest, because the young bees produce wax and do all the work in the hive, whilst old bees do the foraging. That changed this year.

By the end of June some hives had failed, dying out, and others were having to be fed to stop the bees from starving, leaving the majority too weak to gather enough to survive through the year. Most hives required up to 15 bags of sugar to give them sufficient food for the winter.

During August, the bees were all treated for Varroa mite and other bacteria. This has to be done in August when there is only a small amount of brood for the mites to hide in.

In talking with beekeepers in their eighties and nineties, they don't remember years as poor as these, and after a second poor year we can only hope for better weather soon!

## Tree Survey update 2008



We are nearing the end of our Tree Survey of Highbury Park. This mammoth task was started in spring 2007 and more than 30 people have taken part over this time. We have plotted, measured, identified and generally fussed over a total of 576 trees in the park. We have found more than 60 species and numerous cultivars. Some trees need to be revisited at different times of year to confirm our identifications. We have produced 2 tree leaflets and website information for the trees.

When the survey is complete **all** the information will

be on the website so that people can track down the identities of their favourite trees. We have also recorded lichens, mosses, fungi and other species growing around the trees.

When we find holes (good for bats and woodpeckers) we record those too. So far it is clear that hawthorns and crab-apples and sycamores are particularly good supports for lichens. Mosses appear to be surprisingly rare on trees. A large number of trees in the park were found to have small yews growing at their bases spread by birds feeding on the yew berries.

We think this is worth celebrating, and are hoping to put together another event in the new year. Look for information on the noticeboards about forthcoming surveys/events, or get your email put on the mailing list by phoning Ellen (444 0819), or emailing us ([contact@highburyparkfriends.org.uk](mailto:contact@highburyparkfriends.org.uk)).

## Ridge and Furrow Hunt

Join our search for medieval features with Mike Hodder – the Birmingham City Archaeologist. Early in the New Year we hope to have a walk round the park finding all the areas of Ridge and Furrow to make a definitive map for the Sites and Monuments Register.

## Useful Contacts

### Local Councillors

Emily.Cox@birmingham.gov.uk

Ernie.Hendricks@birmingham.gov.uk

Martin.Mullaney@birmingham.gov.uk

or c/o

Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB

### Assistant Park Ranger

*Position vacant*

### District Parks Manager

Sue Amey - 464 8728

### Ranger patrol

454 7810 (use this to report urgent matters)

### Birmingham & District Beekeepers Association

John Madgwick - 558 8623

### Police non-emergency calls

0845 113 5000

# D Happy Holidays! k

from Highbury Park Friends