



FRIENDS *of* PITTVILLE

December 2021

The aim of Friends of Pittville is to promote greater community involvement in the enjoyment, protection, future restoration and renewal of Pittville Park and Estate.

Live in the Pump Room



It was so good to be able to hold the Friends of Pittville AGM at the end of October live and in the Pump Room. At the meeting, a number of trustees, some of whom had reached their maximum terms, stood down. We are very grateful to retiring trustees Paul Benfield and David Richards, and to Judie Hodsdon who has been our Chair but remains for one more year as a committee member. Chris Archibald is also formally standing down now as a trustee but remains working with us and continues to be responsible for the Green Space Volunteers. We welcome enthusiastically Sarah de Buriatte as a trustee and our new Treasurer.

Interview with FoP's new Chair, Sally Thomas

After the AGM, Sally was elected to take over from Judie Hodsdon, who has kindly offered continuing support and advice.

When did you move to Cheltenham, Sally?

I moved here in 2000, first to Lansdown and later to Pittville. I enjoyed the architectural splendour of Lansdown, but became even more interested in the Cheltenham environment after moving to Pittville, where the greenery and open spaces of the park combine with interesting architectural landmarks and buildings.

What's your background?

I was brought up in Malvern, and then read history at Exeter University – although my work on Roman Britain hasn't proved particularly useful in Cheltenham! I then worked in Human Resources for Marks and Spencer, and – in a period of secondment – set up a company called Workable, which deals with employment opportunities for disabled people. I also, later, worked in health consultancy with Deloitte and Touche.



How will your career help in your new role?

I hope that my experience in communications, organisation of multi-disciplinary groups and people management will be helpful. I'm interested in community involvement in the Pittville experience, and in all the aspects of preservation and development that the Friends are hoping to achieve. I'll also continue to pursue my interests in history and gardening by participating in the Pittville History Works Group and the work of the Green Space Volunteers.

Where do you think FoP should be in three years' time?

I'd like to see a trustee succession plan in place, recruiting people with the skills to help develop three priorities that have already been identified: making sure we have a robust, diverse and valued membership; using up-to-date media and methods to improve communication with our members and the community as a whole, and – through our projects – taking a leading role in marking the Pittville bicentenary in 2024/25.

Christmas events in Pittville



The Pump Room

The Pump Room is hosting a number of events with a Christmas theme in December: an artisan market (5th–7th); canapes and table centrepiece workshops (6th and 15th), the Christmas show of folk singer Cara Dillon (8th), and the Cheltenham Choral Society's Christmas concert, in aid of National Star (9th). Then there are carols with other local choirs and bands (5th, 18th, 20th, 23rd) as well as storyteller sessions (12th and 19th). Information on all these events is available at www.cheltenhamtrust.org.uk/events.



Christmas lights at the Pump Room

Holst Victorian House

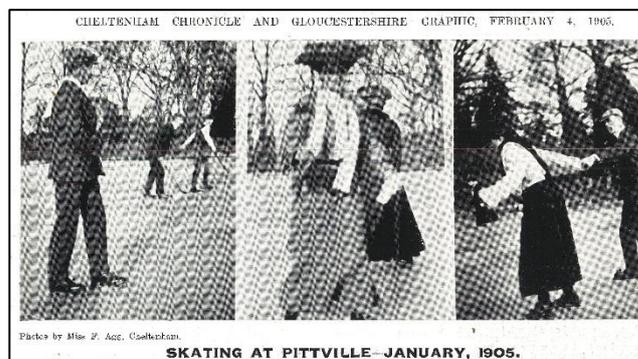
There are printing workshops (Dec 5th), Christmas wreath workshops (12th), live carols and Christmas music (14th), concerts (Holst's Christmas Concert at Cheltenham College Chapel 14th), Candlelight and Carols at Pittville Gates (22nd). For families, there are the Victorian Christmas Day featuring Professor Collywobbles' magic show and hands-on craft activities (11th), Victorian Steam Trains (18th) and a Children's Craft Drop-in making sweets, crackers and centrepieces (21st). For more information go to www.holstvictorianhouse.org.uk/whats-on/

Cheltenham Racecourse

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without the racing. The International is on 10-11 December. www.thejockeyclub.co.uk/cheltenham/events-tickets/the-international

Finally, the Santa Trains will be running between the Racecourse station and Broadway all through December until Christmas Eve.

www.gwsr.vticket.co.uk/product.php/2/santa-specials

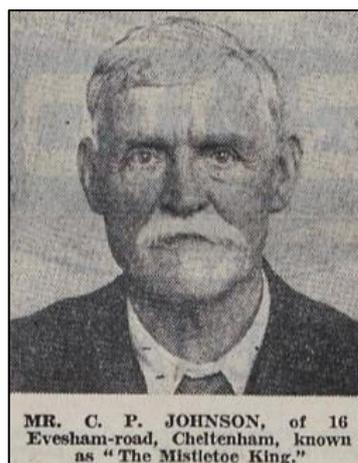


Andy Hopkins

Thanks to Pittville History Works for the above cutting from their archive.

Charles Johnson (1872-1840), Cheltenham's 'Mistletoe King'

From the early 1920s until his death in 1940, the principal resident of No. 8 Pittville Parade (now 16 Evesham Road) was Charles Phillips Johnson. He was well known as a wholesale florist, largely due to his role as the principal supplier of mistletoe to Covent Garden, from where it was exported, mainly to France.



In an interview for the Gloucestershire Echo in 1938, Charles Johnson spoke of his work as a supplier of mistletoe for more than 20 years, and how his farming and fruit growing friends (and foraging local children) would sell the mistletoe to him

in time for export. It was important to start early enough to be able to supply the continental trade and still leave time to supply the domestic market in December. He would start collecting at Bishop's Cleeve, and then work his way around Gloucestershire, usually sending more than two tons to Covent Garden each year. There was some

pride in supplying true English-grown mistletoe to English residents abroad. Mistletoe is still common in Gloucestershire, for although it is found throughout Britain, its core area is the southern Welsh Marches up to south Shropshire.



The fact that it is alive and green in midwinter when other plants appear dead and bare could have been a factor in its veneration. In the Middle Ages it was used to treat tumours, keep witches at bay, protect crops and enhance human fertility – this last may be due to the somewhat suggestive appearance of the leaves. In the 18th century its association with Druidism led to a revival of interest. The plant continues to be valued and Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire is now recognised as the mistletoe capital of England. A December Mistletoe Festival keeps alive the tradition of the seasonal holly and mistletoe market.

Johnson seems to have made mistletoe his personal specialism, possibly leading to his ‘Mistletoe King’ accolade, although, along with ‘the high priest of Christmas’, these titles may have been given by journalists who interviewed him.

Charles Johnson would probably be disappointed in the current levels of the plant in this country: most of the mistletoe now hung up at Christmas these days is imported from Normandy and Brittany.

Sandy Marshall

This is an abridged version of the full article, which can be found on the Pittville History Works website at www.pittvillehistory.org.uk/bios/13940.html

Quiz Night

Our November quiz night was again held at the Feathered Fish, hosted by landlord Andy and run by Quizmaster Paul. There were 35 keen quizzers made up of FoP members, family and friends. It was good to get together again after the pandemic break. While some regulars were absent, we were pleased to welcome some new faces.

Raffle prizes were better than ever, including a day at Cheltenham Races, a steak night at Clarence Court Hotel and some elegant gifts. Thank you to everyone who contributed them.

The pub rang out with the sound of laughter, people made new friends and a very sociable evening was enjoyed by everyone. We raised £312.50 from entrance fees and raffle ticket sales.

Diary Date

We have already booked our next quiz on Monday 28 February 2022, 7.00 for 7.30 at the Feathered Fish. Please put it in your diary. *Phillipa Howells*

Jumble sale donations?

St Vincents and St Georges Association share responsibility with FoP for maintaining the duck food dispenser in Pittville Park. They are collecting jumble for a fundraising sale in February and are taking donations now.

If you can donate items, please drop them in to The Phoenix Centre at 86-90 Winchcombe Street between 9am and 3pm. www.stvsandstgs.co.uk

Cheltenham Lottery

Cheltenham Lottery is an exciting weekly lottery that raises money for good causes in Cheltenham. All causes supported will benefit Cheltenham and its residents. Please help Friends of Pittville by signing up to it at this address:

www.cheltenhamlottery.co.uk/support/friends-of-pittville

Future projects?

The trustees have set up a small group to consider projects and events that Friends of Pittville might consider undertaking in the park in the future. Although we have several projects underway (the Masterplan improvements around the upper lake and the Pump Room, and replacement and new information boards), it is helpful to have a list of ideas in case an unexpected source of funding or help appears.

We have started brainstorming ideas for future projects, particularly for the west side of the park. These have included events, plantings and fixed installations. For example, there have been suggestions for sports events to mark 130 years of the park in 2024; the planting of a copse of silver birches, perhaps near Tommy Taylor Lane, and – on a larger scale – the building of an outdoor amphitheatre for small-scale performances. These, and all the others, are just embryonic ideas at the moment.

We would very much like to have your ideas for improvements or for events you would like to see. We are particularly interested in suggestions for the west side of the park and ideas on how to celebrate the bicentenary of the founding of Pittville in 2024/5. Please send any ideas you have to chairman@friendsofpittville.org.uk.

Judie Hodsdon

Sequoia planting

Many of you walking in the west side of the park will have noticed the majestic looking Wellingtonia (Giant Sequoia), probably over 100 years old, sitting on Marle Hill not far from the Albemarle car park. On 9 November five new sequoia, approximately 10 years old, were planted in a ring around the existing tree. The trees were bought by Chris Chavasse, the Cheltenham Borough Council



You can just make out, in the bottom right-hand corner of the picture, two of the five trees planted.

trees officer, with donations from two groups: the money collected through crowdfunding to save the Cedar of Cheltenham, organised by the Next 200 Years Group and in the end not used, and a generous donation on behalf of the Kuwait Solidarity in Ecology. The sequoia is the third longest lived tree and specimens are the largest tree in the world, although not in the UK. It is also very efficient in carbon capture. This new stand of trees is a great addition to the park and should hopefully prove quite a landmark for generations to come.

A cleaner underpass



You may have noticed that the underpass at Evesham Road that connects the east and west sides of the park was recently painted. This was carried out by a group of offenders as part of the Cheltenham

Community Payback scheme. The underpass had suffered badly over the last couple of years from graffiti. It has now been painted with anti-graffiti paint so while it will not stop anti-social behaviour it may deter it and make it easier to clean off the graffiti.
Chris Archibald

Here we go again!

Unfortunately, Severn Trent have had to dig up the paving in front of Pittville Gates yet again. They thought the problem was a burst water main, but it proved to be a faulty valve deep in the ground which they have now repaired. The repair, which is shown below is, as expected, not good enough. Sally Thomas is in touch with Severn Trent to try to ensure that an acceptable repair is made. Keep up with news on FoP's Facebook page.



And finally ...

A happy and healthy Christmas to everyone! Let's hope for a wonderful 2022 with no more lockdowns ...

Editor

Andy Hopkins

Photos

Sally Thomas

Andy Hopkins

Henry Williams



**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

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