



www.friendsofpittville.org.uk

April 2016

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

Welcome to the April newsletter from Friends of Pittville.

Before he was famous: Joseph Pitt

Strange as it may seem to Cheltonians, the larger-than-life figure of Joseph Pitt does not have an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. I was contacted earlier this year to see if I would write a short article to remedy this gap – and rashly said yes. Research is now under way. Starting at the beginning, when and where was he born?

Online and printed sources offer various versions, not helped by the fact that there are many Pitt families, and plenty of Josephs. In fact, we can be sure that our Joseph Pitt is the one who was baptised at Badgeworth on 24 June 1759, the son of Joseph Pitt and Anne née Golding. Joseph senior was a yeoman farmer, and documentary evidence at Gloucestershire Archives points to the family farm being at Little Witcombe, a hamlet which at that time was within Badgeworth parish.



Springfields Farm, Little Witcombe, the Pitt family farm

The farm, today known as Springfields Farm, is still there, to the side of the old main road from the Cross Hands roundabout up to the Air Balloon. Diagonally opposite the farm is another pub, the Twelve Bells, one of several

watering-points between Gloucester and Cirencester. Could it have been here that the young Pitt, holding gentlemen's horses for a penny, caught the eye of an attorney, who 'bred him to his business'?

James Hodsdon

Who built Pittville?

On 18 February Pittville School Hall was full for historian Dr Steven Blake's fascinating talk 'Who Built Pittville?' The attentive audience was led through an account which revealed not only the groups of people involved in the building, but a story of expectations, tribulations and tragedies.

Pittville, the dream of Joseph Pitt, was to have up to 600 houses surrounding a newly created pleasure park with walks and rides leading to a magnificent spa. The plots went up for sale in 1824 along with John Forbes' master layout and building designs. The speculators eagerly pounced: one, Nathaniel Colt, had soon resold all seventeen plots and doubled his investment. Pittville Parade was started with enthusiasm, but by 1828 builders and tradesmen had gone bankrupt: there had been a collapse to a house frontage, and a collapse as well in the general economic state of the nation. Some half-built properties were abandoned until ten years later when Abraham Tyler completed the Parade.

Meanwhile a lady of independent means, Juliana Charlotte Wade, financed one of the first properties, Pittville House. Several military officers, such as Colonel Lyman who built Glenmore Lodge in 1827 and a Naval Captain who bought Primrose Lawn in 1830, invested in the emerging Estate.

The creation of Pittville Lawn properties resulted in at least two personal tragedies. A member of a consortium financing an early section was Joseph's son William Gregson Pitt, who became bankrupt and entered a lunatic asylum aged 46. Thomas Phipps

Thomas, a speculator, went bankrupt three times, and eventually killed himself, at the age of 22.

In Prestbury Road thirteen plots were designated for shops. Leamington House, one of the first built, became a chemist, which it has remained until the present time. Further along Prestbury Road more delays in building the houses and consequent financial failures resulted in some plots not built upon for up to forty years.



Leamington House, Prestbury Road, now Badham's Chemists

By 1831 things had picked up: the Pump Room was open and by 1842, when Joseph Pitt died, with huge debts himself, another 152 properties existed. The remaining plots held in Joseph's estate were sold, yet many remained just plots for decades. A further slowdown in building occurred, which can be illustrated in Wellington Square. Builder William Williams bought the west side of the square as a speculation. Numbers 1-5 were built during 1845-7 but it was 1859 before completion, with Number 6 becoming his home and 7 and 8 those of his sons, plus the remaining four houses. By now few adhered to the original plan of John Forbes.

In the 1870s an active builder was Edwin Broom; the large villas on the Evesham Road were built during this period.

Considering the trials and tribulations that went into the creation of Pittville, we are fortunate to be the beneficiaries, albeit of only half the proposed properties. We can all enjoy the pleasure garden, impressive spa and stylish properties which at a glance appear to have sprung up in careful harmony.

Judy Langhorn

Pittville Park Play Area

As many of you will have seen when visiting the park, the construction of the new play area is progressing well. The majority of the new play equipment is in place and the contractor is making good progress with the paths and surfacing. The project is on track to be finished before the summer holidays.

The refurbishment of the aviaries will start at the beginning of April and will be ready at the same time as the play area. New interpretation boards will be installed to give information on the animals. There will be a new cafe and seating to make the experience more enjoyable, particularly for parents, grandparents and carers.



The new play area will open officially in July

Fundraising is going well, with £4,400 raised through Crowdfunding (which is now closed) and money still coming into the Just Giving account and through donations to the FOP secretary. Gloucestershire Environmental Trust have awarded a grant of £25,000 for the refurbishment of the aviaries and it is hoped a grant of over £50,000 will be awarded by Active Together. Due to the amounts raised Cheltenham Borough Council have decided that they can complete the play area. We would like to thank everyone who has made this possible.

The opening ceremony will take place on Sunday 17 July, although it is hoped that there will be a 'soft' opening beforehand, with local schools invited to try out the play area.

Chris Archibald

Cheltenham Civic Awards 2016

Cheltenham Civic Awards are organised by Cheltenham Civic Society on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council. Nominations

are submitted by various parties including owners, architects, builders and members of the public. The nominations are assessed by an independent panel of 11 people appointed by the Civic Society to represent a cross-section of the community.

We are thrilled that Pittville Gates has been nominated for a Civic Award.

Everyone is invited to attend the Awards Ceremony on Wednesday 20 April at 16.00 in the Drawing Room of Cheltenham Town Hall. The guest presenter this year is Victoria Thornton, OBE, Hon. FRIBA, a founding director of Open City, and now running the Open House Worldwide programme <http://www.openhouseworldwide.org/index.php> Victoria will tour the winning entries before the presentations.

Fiona Clarke

Wellies in the Park at half-term

The Boathouse, on the west side of Pittville Park, went 'Back to Nature' during February half-term with Welly Walks, nature-themed arts and crafts and a whole host of fun and outdoor activities.

Over the five days hundreds of children pulled on their wellies and joined in the innovative programme. They could be seen splashing in puddles, hunting for insects and exploring the beautiful setting of Pittville Park.



Wellies in the Park at half term was well supported

Neil Ingram, manager of the Boathouse said: 'It was a fantastic week and a great success. We are pleased we can do our bit to get more people into the park learning and enjoying everything it has to offer.'

With plenty more activities planned, the Boathouse is quickly growing into a strong local community venue, so keep an eye out for drama performances and boat races. Bookings for children's parties are now also being taken.

The Boathouse is run by *In The Park*, a new name for the business that has been running

Central Cross Café and the Boathouse for a few years now.

Mike Evans

Pittville History Works

New articles on the website include 'Joseph and Elizabeth Dunton: archery in Pittville Gardens', by Julian Holland, and 'Edmund Selous - Pittville's First Bird-watcher', by John Simpson.

Information from the censuses and street directories on 19th-century residents of Clarence Square has now been added to the database. Hilary Simpson has begun census work on East and West Approach Drive and Sandy Marshall is looking at the census records of the former Selkirk Terrace, now 47-71 Prestbury Road.

As a follow up to the visit to Trinity Church, a project is under way to create a page for each individual with a Pittville address who has a memorial in the church.

The History Works Group had a stall at Steven Blake's talk. Several people asked to be kept informed about the work of the group. If you would like to join them, email info@pittvillehistory.org.uk

John Simpson

Friends of Pittville website

Friends of Pittville has a new website which you can find at www.friendsofpittville.org.uk. Please take a look and let us have your feedback. We are aiming to keep the news and events sections on the new site as up to date as possible, so add it to your bookmarked favourites and if you have a news item, event or photo which you would like us to include, please get in touch. Many thanks to our web designer Daniel Espley for all his hard work.

Hilary Simpson

Friends of Pittville plant sale

This will take place on Saturday 21 May 2016, from 10.00-13.00 in front of the scout hut on Central Cross Drive. There will be plants for sale from Cheltenham Horticultural Society and from local suppliers such as Hoo House Nursery and Dundry Nurseries.

There will also be some second-hand gardening books for sale.

Clean for the Queen in Pittville



Cake time for the Clean for the Queen volunteers

On 21 March ten of us went to do our bit for this national event. One of us litter-picked, but the main objective was to edge the path and tidy the shrubs and verges along the east side of Pittville Lawn – a job long needed but not a priority for the councils. We were joined by two residents, with others expressing their thanks and possible help in the future. Thanks to everyone for a magnificent effort.

New treasurer and secretary

Although the AGM is six months away, as per our new Constitution and Rules we are planning the transition, when one trustee (ideally) is required to stand down and another is retiring.

We currently have two trustee vacancies, so anyone interested has the opportunity to see how the group operates and to learn about the work involved. Please contact Judie Hodsdon (chairman@friendsofpittville.org.uk) or Fiona Clarke (secretary@friendsofpittville.org.uk) if you would like more information.

Drop-Ins at the Sudeley Arms, Prestbury Road: come along on the last Wednesday of each month, between 11 and 12.30 to find out more about what we are up to and give us your ideas and comments. Everyone welcome.

Pittville Neighbourhood Co-ordination Group (NCG) The next meeting is at Pittville School on Tuesday 28 June 2016 at 7 pm. If you would like to be on the mailing list to receive further information, e-mail the co-ordinator, Dennis Parsons, at dennisp99@hotmail.com

Photos: In The Park, Judy Langhorn, James Hodsdon, Sandy Marshall

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Registered charity number 1146790