



FRIENDS *of* PITTVILLE

September 2020

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.

Emerging from lockdown?

Another three months of this strange year behind us and though some things seem to be getting back to a kind of normality, much has not.

At least we were able to resume working parties in the park in early June, although a few of our volunteers have been working hard to keep it clear of litter ever since lockdown began - taking black bags with them on their daily walks! Pittville History Works researchers have kept working online throughout, and they have also produced an app – see Hilary Simpson's article below.

However, we have not been able to hold the garden party for members that we had planned for July, or to have our usual stall at the Cheltenham Horticultural Show, which should have been in August. Also, we have had to limit this newsletter just to members again, rather than using a wider distribution to broadcast news of the park and our activities to a much larger readership. In addition, we have decided to abandon the usual format of holding our AGM at Dunalley School and instead will circulate the annual reports by email.



But there have been some upsides. We have been able to take advantage of the extra space at the Pump Room café to start holding the monthly drop-ins again and, in partnership with the Cheltenham Trust, even embark on a new activity of promoting live music events in the bandstand there. I do hope that by the time the next newsletter comes out we will be looking forward to much more normality in the new year.

Judie Hodsdon

Green Space Volunteers return to the park

The Green Space Volunteers were able to start work in the park again on 9 June. Nineteen volunteers came along and after a Covid-19 safety briefing by Malcolm Walls from Cheltenham Borough Council, we started work again in groups no bigger than six. It was very good to get out into the park to do something purposeful after being in lockdown since the middle of March.



Since this restart, we have had a very good turnout – up to thirty on a couple of occasions – so we have been able to catch up on some of the jobs we would normally have already done by this time of year. These include weeding the rockery and bed 38, two of the projects to improve the park, as well as catching up with the general maintenance pruning of many other shrubs.

We celebrated starting work again with a get-together (socially distanced) at the Pump Room café after our working party on 6 August with coffee and cakes - it's not all work! We have been very pleased to welcome some new volunteers recently and if you feel like volunteering you will be very welcome. It is a very big park to look after!

Chris Archibald

Are you interested in butterflies?

Butterfly Conservation has asked if any Friends of Pittville members would be interested in carrying out a survey of the wildflower areas in Pittville Park to map butterflies. It is not a large time commitment and can be done by a small group. It is a good chance to brush up on your butterfly identification skills. Training will be given. If you are interested, please email your contact details to volunteer@friendsofpittville.org.uk

Chris Archibald



Matt Brierley of Butterfly Conservation has written a very good presentation on butterflies - well worth a look. You can see it on Facebook here: www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2701671936715711

Chris Archibald

The Pump Room Heritage Café and Bar

One of the surprise delights of this summer in the park has been the café and bar at the Pump Room. The financial crisis that The Cheltenham Trust faced with the closure of all its venues soon after the Cheltenham Festival in March was sudden and severe. How to mitigate the loss of its revenues at the Pump Room from large events such as weddings and classical concerts? One answer has been the very successful operating of the open-air café and bar in Pittville Park.

The venture has been helped, of course, by the almost unbelievably good weather of the summer months. But there is no doubt that the initiatives in bringing music to the park and the provision of table seating, good food and drink and, crucially, toilets, have been a major draw for visitors to the park. We have, at last, seen a return to the Pump Room occupying a central place in the community of Cheltenham, so we congratulate those responsible for planning and managing the café and related events.



The challenge now for the Trust is to continue to keep the Pump Room at the heart of the community. We sincerely hope that, even when life has returned to normal, a café bar will remain a permanent feature of the Pump Room offering, but also, importantly, that regular provision will be made for the building to become a heritage experience for visitors.

Andy Hopkins

Friends of Pittville presents ...



The emptiness of the bandstand in the early summer was a source of frustration for many people. Surely here was a place where it was possible to have live music safely, and where



groups of people could enjoy some kind of communal experience in a socially distanced way? So Friends of Pittville decided to try and play a part in bringing music to its traditional summer home in the park.

On 2 August a local string quartet called *Gaudeamus*, a local

played what we think was the first live concert in the area since lockdown, and the experience of hearing people play in front of us again was a joy.

On 23 August, we hosted two wonderful singer-songwriters, *Rainy* and *Rik van den Bosch*. The rain kept off as they each played excellent sets to a very appreciative audience. We hope this kind of event will be repeated next year.

Andy Hopkins

Pittville History Works

Pittville History Works has carried on its research without interruption, with members working on street directories, electoral registers, house deeds, biographies and house histories. Our May and July meetings were held via Zoom. Recently the most visited pages on our website have been those on Pittville house names in the 19th century, Pittville and the inheritance of the slave trade, and our online version of Steve Blake's book *Pittville 1824-1860*. Our article on the inheritance of the slave trade in Pittville also got a mention in the *Gloucestershire Echo*. The lockdown appeared to generate an interest in family history and over the last few months we've been contacted by a number of people with family connections to the area.

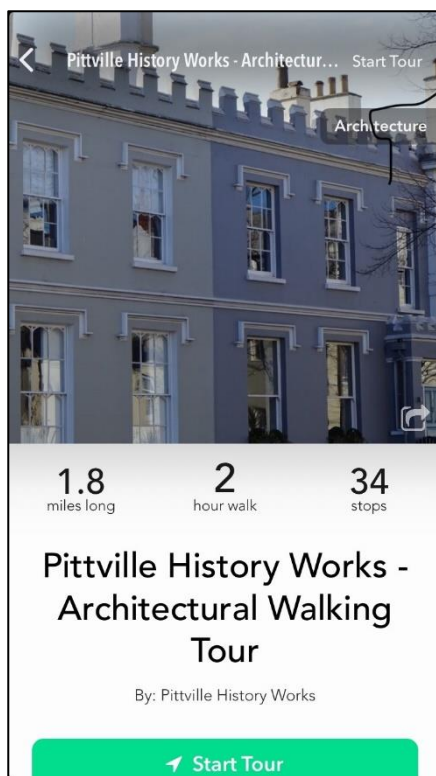
An app to explore Pittville's architecture

Our latest project is an app that takes you on a walk around many of Pittville's architectural surprises.

This has been developed by Andrea Creedon, a member of our group, and we'd love you to try it out and send us feedback. You need to download the PocketSights app from your mobile app store, make

sure your GPS is activated (allowing your phone to know your location), and start walking! The walk starts at Pittville Gates, and continues into the Squares, around Pittville Circus, along Albert Road, and back to the Gates. It covers 1.8 miles with 34 stops and takes around two hours, but you can 'hop on' and 'hop off' along the route whenever you want. (The app will know where you are.) You'll see architectural features you never knew existed, and soon you'll start to spot them on buildings that aren't even on the route. Please send your feedback to info@pittvillehistory.org.uk.

Hilary Simpson



Heritage Open Days Covid-style

Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on Heritage Open Days (HODs), run in England by the National Trust. Cheltenham has risen to the challenge and is, for the first time, offering online presentations and videos. These will be available for the whole festival (11-20 September).

This year's theme is *Hidden Nature* (very apt!) and Friends of Pittville's contribution is Desmond Marshall's study of the several amateur botanists who lived in or near Pittville.

There are two other nature-related events. The first is a guided walk taking in the many fine specimen trees in Montpellier Gardens, led by Cheltenham Borough Council's Senior Trees Officer, Chris Chavasse. The second relates to Pilley Bridge Nature Reserve, which will be the subject of a short audio-visual presentation that illustrates the Reserve's history and its remarkable variety of wildlife.

Cheltenham Playhouse is always a very popular open building, but this year it can be only virtually visited through some short films about the history of the Grade II listed building, from a salts laboratory in 1807 to slipper baths, swimming pool, medical spa and now theatre.

And a final highlight – a filmed discussion between FoP member Rob Rimell and Chair of Friends of The Wilson, Adrian Barlow, about how Pate's Grammar School got and managed to retain its stained glass window.

Check out the website now and from 11 September. cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk/events/hods/

Fiona Clarke

FRIENDS OF PITTVILLE Annual General Meeting

In the current circumstances it will not be possible to hold the AGM as a meeting.

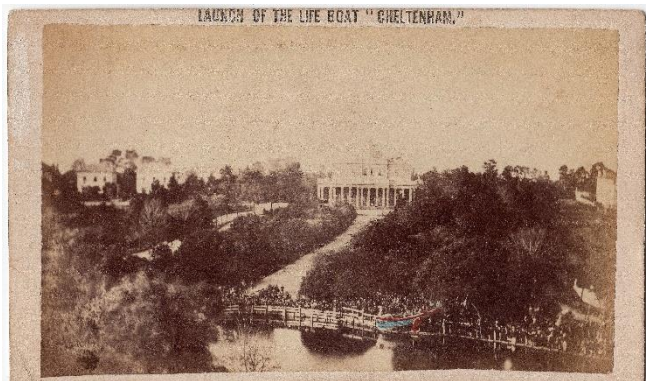
The Trustees have decided that annual reports will be circulated to members for their approval by email (or post if required) by the end of October 2020.

Further details to follow.

Jolly boating weather

An unusual discovery on eBay has left more questions up in the air about the October 1866 launch on Pittville Lake of the Burnham-on-Sea lifeboat *Cheltenham*.

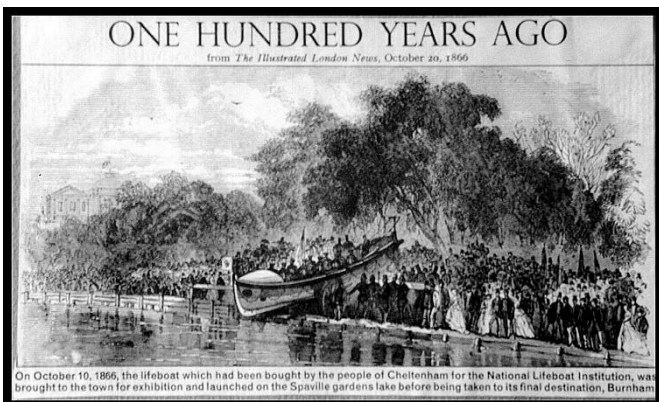
The craft was 32 feet long and was wheeled from the station for the ceremonial launch. Several photographs and lithographs exist showing the boat in the same position and angle as shown in the larger eBay panorama seen here. But these other images, like the second photograph below, have the Pump Room much further around to the left. Here's the eBay photo.



Notice the position of the lifeboat (blue) in relation to the Pump Room.

Explaining this by trying to establish the exact location of the photographer was my first thought.

The Cheltenham Chronicle of 16 October 1866 put it like this: 'Immediately facing the Committee's position, Mr Pottinger was stationed to photograph the group; while Mr Alder occupied a neighbouring spot, and several other artists were stationed on the roofs of the houses immediately overlooking the scene.'



We can just make out the Pump Room on the far left above.

The eBay 1866 photograph was by Slade Bros and so one of them must have been one of the 'other artists' on the nearby roof (probably no. 91 at the corner of Pittville Lawn). Benjamin Slade practised as a photographer from the High St. during 1865-1892 and, less likely as the photographer, Lionel Slade & Co. from Grosvenor Place in 1865.

But is the scene behind the boat really a true record?
Tom Clarke

From our Membership Secretary

As members will know, the Friends of Pittville newsletter is produced quarterly. The distribution for members goes to around 350 households. Every alternate edition is 'Pittville-wide' and involves a print run of 2,200 copies. The vast majority of these are delivered by hand, thanks to the small army of volunteers who brave the weather, the geography, the dogs and the letterboxes of Pittville. In June this year, the Trustees reluctantly decided to send out the newsletter by email. A thorough check was undertaken to establish if there were any members who did not have internet access; there are only 15 individuals from our entire membership of 450 to whom we needed to send a hard copy.

The lockdown situation now is less restricted. However, we gave careful consideration to the extent and numbers of this current print run. Could we distribute a Pittville-wide newsletter? The usual locations (such as the library) where multiple copies are left are no longer able to distribute literature on an ad hoc basis. This is true for the Municipal Offices, doctors' and dentists' surgeries, hairdressers and restaurants. There is a certain amount of concern from residents who don't want to receive unsolicited flyers. Most importantly, the majority of our volunteer deliverers had some reservations, and the decision was made that this September edition of the newsletter would also be distributed via email (with the few hard copies as mentioned above).

We know that people enjoy receiving a printed newsletter, but you will appreciate we are also very mindful of the current challenging circumstances. As ever, many, many thanks to all our delivery volunteers – and please be assured that you will be hearing from me as soon as normal service can be resumed!

Janina Kay

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Andy Hopkins

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