



FRIENDS *of* PITTVILLE

March 2022

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.

A word from the Chair

Spring is on its way, and it's always a joy to see the snowdrops appear in the park; indeed we have had a wonderful display this year.



Let's hope this heralds a more exciting year for us and that we will be able to enjoy many of the activities that we did pre-Covid. Within Friends of Pittville, we are working on identifying new projects

that we think might benefit the park and surrounding areas, and looking at how what we do has value for our members.

Our efforts are valued by the local community, and we seek to address local issues in addition to helping the council provide an enjoyable experience for all park users.

New projects and new ideas require resources, so we need your help. We are short of IT and social media knowledge, fundraising and administrative skills, and event organisers. If you – or anyone you know – is interested, and has time to give in helping us out or becoming a trustee, please contact me at chairman@friendsofpittville.org.uk

There has recently been a 'mystery shop' – a secret visit – by the Green Flag Award team, and we are delighted that our assessment was good, so we have the award for yet another year. Thank you to all those who made this happen.



*Sally
Thomas*

Our new Community Ranger

Lucy Wise has recently been recruited by the Green Space team at CBC and we thought you'd like to get to know her a little.

How are you finding your new role as Community Ranger so far?

I started my new job on 10 December, and I've been busy getting stuck in wherever I can. One of my roles is to support



the Friends groups and Green Space Volunteers across Cheltenham's parks. I have received such a warm welcome from all volunteers, some of whom have been involved in their local group for many years. The passion, pride and sense of community is great and I have already seen how these groups work together to tackle anything thrown at them: pruning, weeding, mulching, lopping, cutting, burning, digging, wheeling, planting. The phrase 'many hands make light work' couldn't be truer.

What do you hope to bring to the role?

I've always had a passion for engaging and inspiring people in outdoor spaces, and as a Community Ranger I will be able to inspire more people to get outside and learn, connect and be inspired by what our outside spaces have to offer. I've been working with people in the outdoors for the last ten years and have seen first-hand the significant short- and long-term benefits of this kind of activity. Over the past few years I have been a volunteer myself within conservation and am excited that many of Cheltenham's parks and green spaces have a wild area, or specifically chosen planting, to support our local wildlife. I look forward not only to supporting the legacy of the beautiful Regency parks and gardens of Cheltenham, but also to helping to maintain and encourage more biodiversity across the parks.

Thank you for taking the time to learn a bit more about me. If this has inspired you to come out and join Friends of Pittville please get in touch! There is a task for everyone; whether you come to learn a new skill, make new friends, network or simply for a bit of fun. We meet on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month at 9.15 until 11.15. Please email volunteer@friendsofpittville.org.uk. I hope to see you in the park soon. (Give me a wave!)

Lucy Wise

St Vincent's and St George's

I walk past the Phoenix on Winchcombe Street most days, but have never called in. Friends of Pittville has a number of links with St Vincent's and St George's Association, so I thought I would talk to some members of staff and find out a bit more about the scope of the charity's work. I spoke to Karen Whyte, Activities Coordinator, and Chloe Bushell, responsible for fundraising and marketing.



Can you tell me a little about what St Vincent's and St George's does?

We're a local charity – we operate in Cheltenham and Gloucester – and we are a supported living provider. That means that all our work is directed to the support of people who have challenging and often complex needs, so that they are able to live their lives as independently as possible. They use our services and we refer to them as service users.

The Phoenix, which some may remember as a department store, opened over ten years ago, and is our activity centre. People who use the Phoenix may have learning disabilities, or mental health problems, or may be vulnerable in some way. They may live with their parents, in supported living or independently. Any vulnerable person who comes through our door and wants to spend the day here is welcome. We're open from 9am to 3pm on weekdays.

Do you have residential units?

We have accommodation that we rent to people who would benefit from supported independent living; we have a range of properties that are let to people who need a supported living arrangement. They have a tenancy agreement for the house and a supported living package.

Do you provide care for people who live in their own homes?

Yes, we also provide domiciliary care, where our trained staff go into people's houses. This could be to help with getting up, or showering, or perhaps with shopping. We also do outreach where people go out into the community and do different activities or go to places they want to go.

I was surprised to hear that you run the Portland Guesthouse on Portland Street.

Yes, we run it as a social enterprise. It's a seven-bedroom guesthouse and you wouldn't know anything about it being different in any way if we didn't put information in the rooms. The idea is that people with difficulties (perhaps because of long term unemployment, disability, mental health issues) can be provided with work experience of six to eight weeks in anything related to the running of the guesthouse: serving breakfast, cleaning, doing laundry, greeting guests etc. Some people do a college course endorsed by the Institute of Hospitality which is offered over 12-18 months and covers food hygiene, customer service etc. We then support students by helping with applications and interviews to find paid employment. Our first successful student has just begun work at a local hotel.

Are there opportunities to volunteer with St Vincent's and St George's?

Volunteers are very welcome at the Phoenix. We also run a garden project at Well Close House on Lansdown Parade; there we always need help with



fixing things, painting, weeding, planting etc alongside service users. Gardening days are twice a week – Wednesday and one other day, depending on the weather. There's no age preference for volunteers; our service users are of all ages and have a wide variety of interests. If volunteers have a hobby they can bring and share – perhaps music or arts and crafts – that would be very welcome. I should say that all volunteers need to be double-vaccinated.

There are quite a few links with Friends of Pittville, aren't there?

Yes, first, there's the maintenance of the duck feeder. We look after it during the week – keeping it topped up and removing foreign coins (!) while a FoP volunteer (Philippa Howell) looks after it on the weekend.



And we're meeting with the new ranger at Pittville Park to arrange for service users to work alongside Friends of Pittville GSVs on park maintenance.

We also have rooms here which I understand Friends of Pittville is interested in using for meetings, and perhaps for public talks.

If you're interested in volunteering for St Vincent's and St George's, read about them on their website: www.stvsandstgs.co.uk. You can find the Phoenix at 86-90 Winchcombe Street, Cheltenham GL52 2NW or call 01242 511237.

Andy Hopkins

Cheltenham Horticultural Society

The Spring Flower Show will take place on Sunday 20 March at Pittville Pump Rooms from 12.30-3.30pm. Admission £2.00.

Friends of Pittville Plant Sale

Our next fundraising plant sale will be on Saturday 7 May 2022 from 10am to noon. As usual, it will be held in front of the Scout Hut at Central Cross Drive in the park.

Nurseries supporting the event are Hoo House, Malcom Allison and Ireley Hardy Plants, so there will be a wide variety of perennials and alpines available.

We would be grateful to receive donations of plants to supplement those which will be brought along by members of Friends of Pittville and Cheltenham Horticultural Society. We also hope to have a variety of bedding plants for sale.

Please contact the organiser, Philippa Howell, for further information. You can email her at philippahowell@yahoo.co.uk or call 07564 521516.

The Green Space Volunteers

It has been a good start to the new year: the weather has been very kind and we have had an average of 29 volunteers at the first four working parties. It sounds a lot but the park is over 33 hectares and there is a lot to do with the maintenance and the projects we are working on. The volunteers have just begun on the restoration of the east end of the rockery adjacent to the upper lake in conjunction with CBC. Hopefully, over the next couple of years we can make this part of the rockery look as good as the west end, which has now been planted with attractive rockery plants.

If you have been in the west side of the park recently, you will have seen the 'snowdrop bank' near the underpass entrance, which has a really good show of snowdrops this year. This was a volunteer project from about seven years ago. There are also primroses, cyclamen, geraniums and wild hellebores.

Three replacement information boards, two at the gates and one in the east side of the park, have now been installed as the original boards were looking the worse for wear. FoP have also been successful in their bid to GCC for a 'Build Back Better' grant to enable the design and erection of two new information boards on habitats in the west side of the park, based on the lake and the wildflower areas. These will be designed in conjunction with CBC, the University and other interested parties.

The volunteers will be operating the Albemarle car park during the Festival race week (15 - 18 March) as they did for several years before Covid. All of the money raised is ring-fenced for projects to improve the park. There has been a good response to the call for volunteers but if anyone can spare a couple of hours we would welcome the help.

Chris Archibald

Call the Midwife: Pittville's two maternity homes

During the 1940s and early 1950s, many Cheltenham residents were born in one of Pittville's two maternity homes, Sunnyside in Pittville Circus Road and Pittville Maternity Home (later St Catherine's) in Pittville Lawn.

Sunnyside, Pittville Circus Road, 1940 – 54

In 1938 Gloucestershire County Council acquired the house known as Sunnyside (below – first image: now Byron Court), together with its neighbour Pengwern College (below – second image: now Berkhamstead Nursery), intending to turn them into an old people's home.



However, the Second World War intervened and the buildings became a Ministry of Health Maternity Home under the Emergency Hospital Scheme. The home was up and running by 1940 and included beds for 'expectant mothers evacuated from threatened areas', mainly London. The local newspapers of the time make it clear that there was some disquiet about the preferential service being provided for evacuees and the shortage of beds for local mothers.

In 1946 the County Council asked for the return of Sunnyside so that it could be converted into an old people's home, as originally planned; but with the creation of the National Health Service, all the Cheltenham hospitals came under the administration of the South West Regional Board.

There was a local shortage of maternity beds, and – in the face of local opposition – the Board retained Sunnyside as a maternity home for a further five years. A maternity hospital was eventually provided on the St Paul's site in Swindon Road, and Sunnyside became an old people's home in 1954.

Pittville Maternity Home, Pittville Lawn, 1944 – 49



Pittville Maternity Home was at 21 Pittville Lawn. For most of the Second World War the building was a nursing home (known as Pittville Nursing Home), caring mainly for elderly people; but for a period of about five years, from

1944 to 1949, it was a maternity home. In 1949 the building was bought by the Church, and became a Mother and Baby home for unmarried mothers; at this point it began to be called St Catherine's, as it replaced a previous home in Cheltenham with that name. Later it became a doctor's surgery, also known as St Catherine's; this surgery eventually moved to St Paul's Medical Centre, where the name lives on.

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