

FRIENDS OF VERULAMIUM PARK



NEWSLETTER 21
APRIL 2008

*Our aim is to preserve the natural
beauty of this precious space*

www.fvp.org.uk

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FVP Newsletter 21

April 2008

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FVP Newsletter 21



From the chair ...

The bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the Verulamium Heritage Park Project should be on their desk by the time you read this. We shall have to wait until September to learn whether or not the bid for £2m is successful.

In the meantime council officers are looking for different ways of raising an additional £600k to make up the shortfall. Sometimes, when I am having a 'dark moment', I wonder what we will do if the £2m is not forthcoming. What we have so far is a comprehensive plan for the whole of the park and a management plan to go with it. That is of inestimable value in steering us forward albeit far, far slower than we'd like to go.

The timetable for preparing the bid has been a tight one. Six weeks before the deadline the council were informed by the HLF local case officer at Cambridge that all bids were now to be made to the national board. This, together with a slight change in emphasis - more towards people and a little less on the Heritage element - has kept officers busy to the last moment.

Trees in the park's English Heritage guardianship area

Robin Bain, land manager for the English Heritage guardianship site (this is the area within the railings surrounding the Roman wall and ditch which is a scheduled monument) has completed a survey of the condition of all the trees in this special area. I understand that 24 dead or dying trees have been identified as being unsafe and at risk of falling where people walk.

The loss of trees is of concern, however sound the reason. English Heritage are supportive of proposals to plant trees to replace those that have been lost, but formal approval has not yet been given.

They hope to start planting in September when the birds have finished nesting, the students gone back to school and the ground conditions drier. Some of the felled wood will remain on the site.

Another opportunity to work on the Roman wall

We shall be having another morning cleaning the Roman wall on Saturday June 28th between 10.00am and 12.30pm. During the year quite a lot of

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leaf litter, twigs and detritus has collected. The wet conditions have also favoured the growth of moss. All this gives seeds and weeds a foothold and they, in their turn, damage the mortar holding the wall together. The cleaning operation is not onerous. All one needs is a bristle washing up brush to remove the detritus and pair of gloves to protect the fingers. Quite a number of children from our three local primary schools joined us for last year's clean and we shall be inviting them again. Two legionaries from the Legion XIII (I'm assured that's how they write it!) will also attend to make sure we keep working and to tell us about Roman life. It is possible that afterwards the Legionaries will teach the children some drill. Waitrose very kindly provided sandwiches and drinks last year and I feel sure they will do so again. Please put this date in your diary and come and join us.

Important as the bid is, there is a lot else going on in the park as you will see when you read on. This Newsletter has a lot about birds, the next will have history

Madeleine Sansom

NEWS

Verulamium Park

Where do we go from here?

Hopefully regular readers of this newsletter will be, by now, aware of the Council's plans to develop a new master plan for Verulamium Park. An extensive consultation and planning process has been under way since last summer, to produce a visionary plan, supported by a raft of documents. These documents will be made available for public inspection from April onwards, both at the council's offices and at the Maltings library.

The master plan includes a comprehensive funding strategy, as the council realises that the implementation of the complete plan will take many years, and will require a considerable financial investment. As a first step an application is being made to the Heritage Lottery Fund, under their *Parks for People* project. A stage one application was submitted at the end of March. We will now have to wait until September to learn if we will be allowed to progress to stage two, which is where the detailed design work starts.

In the meantime the council wishes to move forward on small affordable improvements, that have been recognised already as being part of the master plan. For 2008 these include applying for scheduled monument consent to carry out a second stage of hedge reinstatement, and to install

a hard surface path between the Inn on the Park and the children's play area. The new path will be constructed on top of the recent excavation, that was carried out to improve the electrical supply to the Hypocaust. The hedge planting will follow the same successful format as last year.

To keep up the battle to control wildfowl numbers around the lake, the council is working with the Friends on two schemes for the autumn. The first project involves adding fence and planting barriers to the large island, to stop nesting geese. We will also be planting some larch trees to improve the tree structure for the heronry. The second project has the mysterious working title of *Mother a Goose 2*. For those of you with memories of the first successful scheme to find adoptive homes for the farmyard geese species, this may not be so mysterious. See the next article for details.

Jim Bennie, SACDC parks and green spaces manager

Mother a Goose 2

Friday October 3rd, 2008

The number of farmyard geese in the park continues to increase. It is difficult to get the exact number from one day's count. Every time you are in the park you see more! Some years ago Jim Bennie, the parks manager, organized a scheme whereby people who had smallholdings (or sufficiently large gardens) and who were willing to give a home to one or two of the park's farmyard geese were invited to do so.



On that occasion about thirty were re-homed. Farmyard geese, as you will know, were used by the Romans as burglar alarms. These geese are the descendants of those that belonged once to St Germain's Farm, so I am told. Whether they have inherited the guard dog qualities of their Roman forebears, I leave you to judge.

They are demonstrably good at cutting the grass, but this comes at a price as we know when walking on the footpath round the lake.

As part of a plan to contain the number of farmyard geese in the park (see also the articles about Stanborough Park and the Park Forum meeting in

this Newsletter) Jim Bennie will be organizing another *Mother a Goose* scheme. In September adverts will be put in the local paper inviting prospective 'parents' to contact him. The farmyard geese will be lured into a pen and the new parents will then collect their geese at 10am, taking them off to their cars in the museum car park.

Jim has mentioned grain as the lure, chestnut paling for the pen, but how the new parent will get their adoptees to the car park and home I don't know. If you or friends would like to adopt a farmyard goose please contact me (01727 846761). Jim Bennie will be doing home visits!

More details later ...

Madeleine Sansom

Too many Canada geese?

What can be done to effectively contain the numbers of Canada geese in the park? With this in mind we went to see the manager of Stanborough Park, Welwyn Garden City, Andrew Johnson.

Canada geese were introduced in the late 17th Century. In the 1970s the population estimate was 17,000 and today it is nearer 100,000. You may think most are now resident in the park! Whilst the Canada (and farmyard) geese give pleasure we also recognize that they destroy the grass, pollute the water and paths with their droppings, some of which could contain pathogens and be harmful to people. They become aggressive in the nesting season. They, like other wild birds, are protected by law. Whilst licences are issued for culling and egg pricking, this is not a desirable, humane or effective method of control. So what can be done?

Andrew Johnson (you may remember, spoke to us at a public meeting) is a Green Flag judge and his Park has had Green Flag status for eight years. He explained Stanborough's effective goose strategy to us.

Firstly, they have adjusted the habitat. The perimeters of the lake islands have been fenced thus denying the geese access to safe nesting sites, and opening their nests to natural predators.

In addition large sections of the lake edges have been planted to break up the open vistas which are preferred by geese. With the exception of a few viewing platforms the lake edge planting was also fenced on the bank and path sides. This fencing, whilst deterring geese, was aimed more at preventing visitors from falling into the water – the banks are steep.

The second line of action is to discourage feeding by the public. No feeding is allowed on the North Lake. The public have accepted this restriction as the lake is used for sailing and canoeing. Andrew explained that shortly



feeding may also be banned on the South Lake to preserve the water quality, protect the health of the birds and deter rats. At present notices are posted around the South Lake, which set out the consequences of feeding wildfowl. We were interested in the explicit statement about feeding and rats. This is something we are concerned about in Verulamium Park.



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Are these strategies relevant to Verulamium Park? The efficacy of the current policy of egg pricking, which is time consuming and expensive (getting the licence, rowing to the island etc) need reviewing. It is possible to fence the lake islands. The fence, however, would have to be fairly high and would, especially initially, not look particularly attractive.

Above all, serious thought needs to be given to further raising the awareness of the public to the consequences of feeding. This seemingly simple activity creates serious problems – faeces, pathogens, obese geese, rats. What do you think?

Jette Evans and Madeleine Sansom

Update on nest boxes

In January members David Burleigh, Jonathon Hinkins, Flo Stone and Richard Blossom inspected and cleaned out the nest boxes which were made, and attached to trees, in February 2007.

Our findings on the use of the boxes were:

Those located to the west of the Roman wall and the Causeway

- * tawny owl box – used and one unhatched egg found
- * woodpecker box – inconclusive. It contained much mouldy sawdust and shavings which we had been advised to put into the box when it was hung so that a woodpecker could 'hollow out' its nest. The box had been checked and chewed extensively around the access hole, possibly by woodpeckers or squirrels
- * small boxes for tits, sparrows and starlings – all three located in this area had been used

Boxes located to the east of the Causeway on the perimeter of the golf course

- * kestrel box – not used
- * flycatcher box – not used
- * small bird boxes – three used and one vandalised, presumably by humans!
- * All the boxes have been cleaned out and have been left *in situ* for the coming breeding season. A new tawny owl box has been attached high up in a tree in the south western corner of the park.

Richard Blossom

The heronry

Monitoring and Ringing, 2007

I estimate that 19 nests were occupied – a good increase from the 12 of 2006 and the highest total so far. Twenty three chicks were ringed from 11 nests that could be reached

In view of the difficulty of observing some of the nests it is difficult to estimate the productivity of all the occupied nests but if each pair was successful in raising two young each this would give a possible of 38 chicks raised in all.

One late nest was built on the north island and raised one chick (included in totals above).

I have received details from the British Trust for Ornithology of one 'recovery' of a ringed bird. This was of a heron ringed as a chick on May 8th, 2000 and found dead in an artificial water container (containing Koi carp) at Hertfordshire Fisheries, St Albans on May 7th, 2007.

Barry Trevis

Park monitoring

Last year we set up a monitoring scheme, where volunteers took responsibility for overseeing a section of the park. More recently committee members have been meeting council and contractor's staff every two or three weeks to walk round the park. From April these visits will take place once a month.



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At the end of each visit the contractor is given a list of 'rectifications' recording where action is needed and a time scale for its completion. Progress is supervised by council officers and can lead to a fine if the work isn't completed on time. We have not got to the stage where there are no rectifications yet, but the list is getting shorter.

Many park users have remarked recently that the park is looking better. There is less rubbish, the lakes are cleaner, the cone has gone from the river, the toilet windows have been cleaned, and benches are being cleaned for spring.

Madeleine Sansom

Verulamium Forum

March 6th 2008

The meeting was chaired by Jim Bennie, parks and green spaces manager. Richard Shwe, head of culture and community development, was also present.

Lottery Bid Amanda Renshaw from The Landscape Partnership gave an update on the Verulamium Park Heritage Lottery Fund Bid. (FVP plans to show their presentation at the AGM on May 22nd.)

Westminster Lodge Richard Shwe explained that funding is now available. It is anticipated that a new leisure centre will be completed by 2012. The council is advertising for a project manager. Managing the project will be demanding.

Police matters Inspector Hanson and PC Snook reported that they haven't yet received bicycles for use in the park due to unresolved health and safety issues – this created some hilarity! Inspector Hanson believed that it will improve their operational efficiency, but he was worried about the public's attitude to the use of bicycles by police in view of the debate about cycling in the park. It was agreed that it was a positive move and that explanatory notices would allay any fears the public may have.

In general, the park and the Abbey Orchard are not currently crime hot-spots. CCTV has proved an important means of reducing anti-social behaviour, as has the ranger's direct radio link. Clearing shrubbery around the trees in the Abbey Orchard has also helped. Furthermore, PCs are now in contact with local schools and are aware of important dates (for example, half-terms, and study leave before examinations). Carol Borrás, representing the Abbey, asked the police to liaise with the Abbey as they could ask staff to help with monitoring the orchard. The police asked that the public continue to report incidents, however minor.

Park manager's report

Grounds maintenance contract: annual plan This will be given to Forum members when the final details have been agreed with John O'Conner Ltd.

Change of staff There has been a recent change of JO'C staff. Ken Oakey is the new contract manager. John Stevens has replaced Michael Jacks as park ranger.



Maps on notice boards These should be in place in the next couple of weeks.

Hedge planting by Seabrook's Field The first section has been planted. Unfortunately, there has been some vandalism and some supports have been removed. FVP has asked for nettles to be removed and the area to be mulched. Planting the next section is now planned for November 28th, 2008. In the meantime Jim Bennie is going to make sure that the ground is cleared and rabbits kept out.

New paths It is hoped that the path between the Inn on the Park and the children's play area will be completed by the end of June. Scheduled monument consent is needed. Chris Green, museums and heritage officer, said it was now an urgent matter as the existing muddy 'path' is getting deeper and threatens to damage the underlying Roman remains. The access path into the park behind the Abbey Theatre will be improved as the slope can become very slippery. Don Hayward, Abbey Theatre, said that improving the path was necessary. On occasions such as the fireworks display a huge number of people use it. The steps leading from the car park to the pavement opposite the Abbey Station will also be repaired.

Selling ice cream A three-year franchise, starting on April 1st, has been put out to tender. It was requested that the vans use mains electricity rather than running their engines.

Labyrinth garden This is next to Grebe House, at one of the park's main entrances. Groundwork Hertfordshire will produce detailed drawings and costings for this project. The design, previously presented to the Forum, has already been accepted. Funds are needed and much depends on the HLF bid. FVP has co-opted Gillian Reid to the Committee who is exploring possible sources of funding for this project.

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Tree planting Jim Bennie will identify all possible tree planting locations on a map. This information will then be sent to English Heritage for comment and comparison with their records. This should lead to the production of a proper tree planting plan.

Lakes, islands and geese Proposals are being considered to add a fence to the edge of the islands to prevent geese gaining access and nesting. FVP members will be helping to plant hawthorn and larch on this island in October. These activities will be led by Barry Trevis, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

River clearance The council and the Environment Agency have worked together to clear debris from the river. EA accept their responsibility to clear the river to prevent flood risk. The council accepts its responsibility to remove debris and rubbish from the river – this includes the area by the Marlborough Arms. Jane Gardiner, Ver Valley Society, was concerned about the large number of trees overhanging the river, in some cases reaching the path. These trees are on private land and are the responsibility of the land owners. The council will consider contacting them. St Michael's Manor Hotel has been contacted about a tree on their land. They have agreed to investigate.

Public toilets on the causeway Jim Bennie has asked the council's building surveyor to prepare a costed scheme of internal refurbishment works. However, there is no funding available yet, it would have to wait for the revenue budget in 2009-2010.

Items raised by members

Ice rink It was hoped that 'lessons had been learnt' from this year's experience. Restitution work is being carried out at the Council's expense (£1,500) and are expected to be completed by May.

Bins Two recycling bins and a dog droppings bin will be installed in the near future.

Mosaic/'mosiac' The spelling error on the door has not been corrected. Chris Green said that he was looking into it. Other notices in the hypocast building are now out of date and would also have to be replaced. Unfortunately the artist who was to do the work had been ill.

Cycling in the park This subject was raised by Clare Ellis, Councillor for Verulam Ward, and led to a heated discussion. Richard Shwe said that cycling is not encouraged in the park. We all know it goes on and sometimes visitors feel frightened by irresponsible cyclists. The bye laws state that cycling is not permitted, but the police will not enforce them. Madeleine Sansom made a formal request to have the 'no cycling' signs on paths repainted. Jim Bennie agreed to give a formal answer later.

Jette Evans

Verulam ward police meeting

February 19th, 2008

Ward meetings are held regularly with the police throughout St Albans so they can meet with councillors and community groups such as the Friends. We regularly attend the meetings for Verulam ward.

We have been very concerned about the area at the bottom of the Abbey Orchard. The fencing has collapsed, providing a hideaway for rough sleepers, drug users and troublemakers, especially during the summer months. The council via Councillor Frearson reported that despite requests from the Friends nothing had been done to use their influence and approach the freeholders of this troublesome plot of land with a view to securing it effectively. He did, however, agree to press harder on the issue and would report back at the next meeting.

In the meantime the police will coordinate letters to the freeholders from themselves, the Friends, the Abbey, SACDC and other interested groups. The police will also obtain costings of installing effective fencing. It was noted that a local resident had offered to pay one-third. Another issue of concern is the large number of fallen trees throughout the park which attract fire raisers and litter. Continued pressure is required on the council's park management.

The police reported that they had caught boys lighting a fire in the Causeway ditch. Crime continued in the park, albeit at a low level, and no robberies had been reported in the past three months. Most of the trouble is fights between inebriated youths late at night. The police did not have earlier data for crime in the park so it was not possible to gauge the effectiveness of patrols and security cameras. This information was requested for future meetings.

The cycling issue was discussed. The police were not optimistic that the CPS would authorise prosecution for infringements of the bye-law prohibiting cycling in the park. New and clearer signs were requested. Some present felt that sooner or later there would be a nasty accident as none of the paths, which are shared by walkers, their children and their pets are suitable for cycling. It is regrettable that a law made to protect park users cannot be implemented.

These meetings are hosted by Waitrose who also provide delicious cookies and we thank them for their hospitality.

Tony Mason

Welcome

Gillian Reid: new co-opted committee member!

Gillian has written this to introduce herself ...

I first contacted FVP towards the end of autumn last year, when I was very concerned about a beautiful poplar tree that was being cut down. This tree was on the Old Dairy development in Branch Road and was part of a beautiful skyline of trees that could be seen from my back garden. Sadly the tree has now gone but I got great support from FVP in my attempts to stop it being removed. On talking further with the Chair, Madeline Sansom, about trees, the park and how much the park was an integral part of my life in St Albans (a trip there is made nearly every day with my two very young children), I was keen to get involved with FVP. My work background has for many years been in fund-raising, regeneration and charity work and I offered any help I could. I was very privileged to be asked to attend a committee meeting and then to be co-opted onto the committee.

I am currently gathering background information on FVP and ideas for future projects which I will assemble into one comprehensive document. Once this is approved by the committee, I will then be researching potential funders, including trusts and corporate bodies and preparing fund-raising bids to submit to them. Progress is not as fast as I would like due to the 'help' my two year old wants to give whenever the laptop appears, but it is going well. I am really enjoying the opportunity to contribute to the preservation of such a beautiful park and hope that some success comes from our fund-raising effort.

John Stevens: new park ranger



John has replaced Michael Jacks as the park ranger. He is very enthusiastic about his new job, having grown up in St Albans and used the park as a boy. He was telling me recently about park keepers in those days. He and his friends liked to fish for roach off the bridge, but the park keeper insisted that they shouldn't do this. As a compromise they were allowed to fish without hooks!

John has been working hard. The photo shows him clearing that mucky corner of the large lake, by the Abbey Mills bridge.

Janet Ouston

ACTIVITIES

Clearing the ancient ditch

Friday January 18th, 2008

Friday February 1st, 2008

January 18th was a totally miserable day, very muddy and slimy underfoot. The turnout from English Heritage's contractors, however, was excellent. They worked hard all day, clearing elder growth and poisoning tree stumps. St Albans School conservation group were equally abundant in their numbers so as a result four large fires were lit and a huge amount of clearance was achieved leaving a good half of the ditch walkable again. Two weeks later the work continued, in much better weather.



Tony Mason

The annual litter pick

Sunday March 16th, 2008

We chose a really cold, wet and windy day this year! Not as many people came as usual, but brave folk still joined us with their carrier bags and protective gloves. A special thanks to the Brownies and young people from St Michael's and Prae Wood primary schools. For the first time we removed litter from the unused site at the bottom of the Abbey Orchard, between Pondwicks Close and Abbey Lane End. The other areas cleared were the Causeway and the hedge alongside King Harry Lane, the Abbey Orchard, the Museum car park, and the ancient ditch. But there was much less litter in the central area of the Park, thanks to the hard work over the winter of our park rangers.

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The main purpose of the litter pick is to give the park a spring clean before new growth hides litter, or makes it inaccessible. But the other reason for doing it is to show that when something is 'thrown away' it doesn't just disappear, it just becomes a problem for someone else. This was particularly evident on the football pitches, which were littered with plastic bottles after the footballers had left. We will try to persuade them to take their rubbish home!

Janet Ouston

Being a tree warden

The Tree Council, in partnership with SACDC has recruited volunteer tree wardens to take an interest in trees in the district.

The tree wardens scheme gives people who feel that trees matter an opportunity to champion their local trees and woods by carrying out or encouraging tree surveys and practical projects in their chosen area. Wardens report to the Trees and Woodlands section of the council.

Tree wardens are expected to join the training programme which covers the following topics: trees and the law, summer tree identification, veteran trees and tree survey skills, identifying tree pests and diseases, woodland management and tree planting, and trees and wildlife.

The scheme is run by David Curry, in the trees and woodlands section of the council.

Richard Blossom

Watching herons with the RSPB

Many visitors to the park may have noticed, and hopefully visited, the RSPB stand that has been set up at the Abbey Mills end of the lake. As part of the *Aren't Birds Brilliant!* campaign, the RSPB secured funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund, to set up a viewpoint in the park until April 27th. Here anyone who wishes to view the herons nesting on the islands can do so and it is an excellent chance to see the herons, as well as a many other spectacular water birds, up close and personal!

The caravan houses a wide range of information about the RSPB, some fabulous viewing equipment and a very friendly and knowledgeable RSPB helper. It has been open and manned every weekend during March and will continue to be open for the rest of April. These two months are the expected period when the herons nest and hopefully hatch their chicks.

The herons construct 'tree basket' nests in the tree tops on the islands. The binoculars offer a fantastic view of the herons sitting proudly on their nests. If all goes well, then it will be possible to see the herons balancing high up in the trees tending to their chicks when they hatch. In addition, if you are lucky you may also catch sight of bright chestnut pochards or great crested grebes performing their weed-dancing courtship rituals.

Gillian Reid



MEETINGS

Review of park maintenance – one year on January 17th, 2008

Members were asked to give their views on the first year of the new maintenance contract. A full report was given to SACDC to contribute to their own review. Successes and concerns were recorded, and suggestions made. The main suggestions were:

- * The ranger should be a council employee. The funding for this should be removed from the contract and passed to the council. At present the park ranger 'supervises' himself.
- * More staff should be employed during peak periods, particularly in the summer and at weekends.

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* Cleaning the toilets should not be the responsibility of the park ranger. They take several hours of his time, which would be better used on other tasks, talking to the public and supervising the park.

* Wheeler's 'finds hut' (the cricket pavilion) should also be used as a rangers' base. It is centrally placed in the park, and in good condition with a kitchen and toilets. The contractor's office at the back of Westminster Lodge is inaccessible and not welcoming to the public.

* The public should be told how to contact the ranger, and where to leave messages for him.

* More litter bins and dog bins are needed, especially in the Westminster Lodge area.

Janet Ouston

The Cowbridge physic garden

A lesson in civic pride?

Thursday February 21st

For some time your Committee has been discussing undertaking a regeneration project within the park. Areas such as the Labyrinth Garden or the area in front of the mosaic seem to be of the size and scale which the Friends could manage. Funding would be required so it was good news when Lynn Richards agreed to speak to us on the successful regeneration of a piece of land in his home town of Cowbridge in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Lynn had first encountered the half acre plot when he attended the local school in 1944. In those days it was a vegetable plot feeding the school boarders. When the school closed the local council planted a tree nursery then failed to maintain it, thus turning it into an overgrown wilderness.

In 2004 as part of the 750th anniversary of the Cowbridge Borough Charter it was decided that something had to be done about the eyesore which lay in the centre of the town. A committee of volunteers was established by the chairman of the Welsh National Botanical Garden in Carmarthen. The committee comprised two local landowners who were both members of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust and a number of local businessmen. It was then decided to upgrade the status of the organisation to a charitable trust and trustees were selected from the committee. This quickly opened doors and led to planning permission and a lease from the council.

Money became the real challenge and the services of a fund raising organisation called Creative Rural Communities was utilised. In the first year £200k raised with the help of the council followed by European funding totalling £140k. This was matched by the Trust largely from local

contributions and the membership. The Heritage Lottery Fund provided a further £46k which they used specifically for professional leadership, training of volunteers and tools.

The design and layout of the physic garden was undertaken on a professional basis by Andrew Jellard who is a leading Welsh garden designer. The work of clearing the site, building a wall to enclose the garden, laying out the paths, building small buildings and a pergola was undertaken by a firm of landscape contractors leaving the planting-out mainly to trained and supervised volunteers. The work took about two years to complete and the gardens were opened to the public in the summer of 2007, on time and on budget. In order to maintain the physic garden on-going funding is estimated to be between £8k and £10k per annum. This will be derived from some 350 membership fees and events. Admission is free to the public although a collecting box does create some income from visitors.

So, what have we learnt? Firstly the concept has to be sound and headed up by someone who has a clear vision of the end result. Secondly the project needs to be funded sufficiently to utilise professional and expert designers and contractors and thirdly volunteer work needs to be managed in a businesslike manner. Cowbridge is a small town which might more easily find itself able to inspire its prosperous population to part with their money and give the help needed. There's no question in my mind that the citizens of St Albans would support a project such as this to enhance their already very special Verulamium Park. Suggestions from the membership will be welcome.

Tony Mason

Subscriptions

If you haven't yet paid your subscription for 2008, please complete the enclosed form and return it to Richard Blossom with your cheque.

Letter

In the last Newsletter Geoff Kirk wrote:

'In recent issues of the FVP Newsletter, the part of the park between the St Michael's entrance and the small lake has been referred to as Belle Meadow. I understand that there is an ancient map showing this spelling of Belle Meadow but I suggest that this is an error and the correct spelling is Bell Meadow.

In medieval times, transporting heavy loads over long distances was very difficult so new bells for a church were often not cast at a foundry remote

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from the church, but were cast in a pit dug in a field close to the church. It is clear from St Michael's church records that in the 16th century the church had four bells and it is possible that they might have been cast in what has become known as Bell Meadow.'

Tony Mason has replied:

'The Friends had for a long time felt the park needed segmenting in some way principally because there was no easy way of describing to the council and our membership where problems existed within the park. Most of the park was originally agricultural land and having noted that the Ordnance Survey map of 1869 gave the most comprehensive nomenclature for the various fields and plots so we decided to use the names on this map, which showed Belle Meadow spelled in that way. Previous maps from the 17th and 18th century show the area as just a field, without a name.

Geoff's theory is an interesting one and may be correct although it would have been a significant distance on a rising gradient to haul those weighty church bells up to St Michael's Church.'

FVP committee May 2007 to May 2008

Chair	Madeleine Sansom
Vice chair	Tony Mason
Treasurer	Richard Blossom
Secretary	Jette Evans
Park monitoring co-ordinator	Anthony Oliver
Newsletter and website editor	Janet Ouston
Committee member	Flo Stone
Co-opted committee member	Gillian Reid

May to December 2008

Friday May 2nd *Clearing the Labyrinth Garden.* Meet at the Verulamium Museum steps, 1.45pm. Please bring a rake, fork or loppers and wear gloves.

Thursday May 22nd St Michael's Parish Centre, 8.00pm. *AGM and a presentation of the progress of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid.*

Saturday June 28th *Roman wall cleaning with Legion XIII.* Meet at the London Gate, 10am to 12.30pm. Please wear gloves and bring a small soft brush.

Thursday July 10th *A walk in Verulamium Park: strategies to develop the habitat and ecology of the park.* Led by Jon Green, SACDC green spaces officer. Meet at the Verulamium Museum steps, 7.00pm. Please wear suitable footwear.

Friday September 12th *Broadcasting yellow rattle seeds in Seabrook's Meadow to reduce fertility in the grass and encourage wild flowers.* Meet at 1.45pm at the Verulamium Museum steps.

Friday September 19th *Moving the brash (fallen and cut branches) on the lake island to the island edges. This will deter geese from landing and nesting.* Meet by the loos on the lake, 2.00pm, waders will be provided. Wear stout shoes and gloves. Please phone 01727 846 761 if you wish to take part.

Thursday September 25th Isabel Crozier, CMS, St Michael's Parish Centre, 8.00pm. *Conserving our Living Heritage.*

Friday October 3rd *Mother a goose 2.* Helpers meet at the museum car park at 7.30am. New parents meet at the museum steps at 10am.

Friday October 10th *Planting hawthorn and larch on the lake island.* Meet by the loos on the lake, 1.30pm. Waders will be provided. Wear stout shoes and gloved. Please phone 01727 846 761 if you wish to take part.

Friday November 28th *Replanting the hedge.* Meet at the Verulamium Museum steps, 1.45pm. Bring a spade and wear gloves and stout shoes.