



NEWSLETTER November 2023

November 20th

**Spital Cemetery – From Gray’s
Elegy to Churchill’s Hysteria**

Andy Miles



Meetings are held at the St Thomas’ Centre, Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield S40 3AW
starting at 7:30pm. Members free, £3

Chesterfield Parish Church Christmas Tree Festival

Saturday 18th November – Sunday 3rd December

This year our tree celebrates the much loved Queen’s Park. The article below was first published in the CADLHS Newsletter of September 2005.

Why Did It Take So Long

If the advocates of the establishment of a public recreation ground as a fitting way to commemorate Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, had known how difficult it would be to bring the scheme to fruition, they might well have thought again.

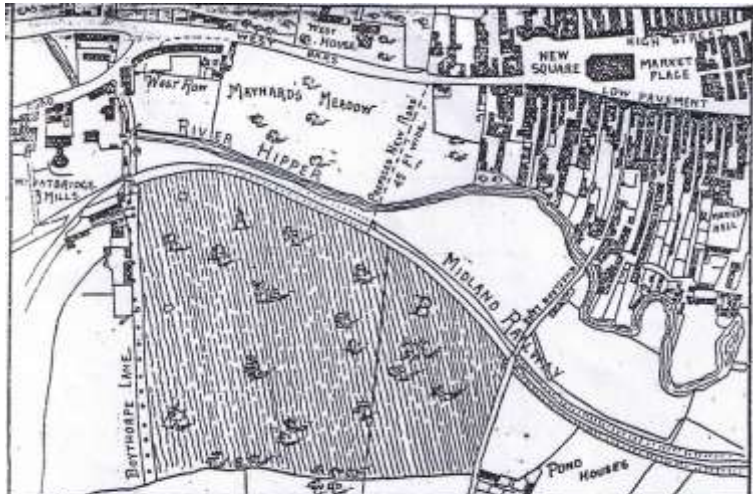
In February 1887 the majority of a meeting consisting of councillors and other prominent local inhabitants, voted for the scheme; yet it wasn’t until 2nd August 1893 that a flower show marked the opening to the public of the newly laid out park.

In 1887, the Borough of Chesterfield covered just over ½ square mile. The amount of money required to pay for the essential improvements to the town, and which could be raised from the rates, was limited because most of the growth in local industry had taken place outside the Borough boundary. The occasion of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee provided the opportunity to raise a substantial sum of money by public subscription for a lasting memorial.

The meeting voted for a recreation ground rather than paying off the £4,000 debt on the Stephenson Memorial Hall or building a medical wing at the hospital. Three possible sites were found, two belonging to

the Duke of Devonshire at Durrant Meadows and Crow Lane; the third was on Maynard's Meadows. The latter site, which consisted of two fields lying to the south of the River Hipper and the Brampton branch of the Midland Railway, was on offer for £4,000, plus a further £250 for a strip of land 40 feet wide for access to the ground from West Bars. It had the added advantage; that Mr Maynard was prepared to sell the larger 17 acre field for £3,000; the smaller field would remain for two years. This was the site chosen.

A public meeting was held on 31st March to explain the scheme to the inhabitants of Chesterfield and the Mayor Alderman T.P. Wood, open the list of subscriptions with £500. This was provisional upon sufficient



The portion marked A, with the roadway 40 feet wide from West Bars, is the land already acquired by the Corporation for a Recreation Ground for the people of Chesterfield for ever, and consists of about 17 acres. The portion marked B, consisting of five acres, they have on offer for two years for the sum of £1,000, and it is hoped the funds will be raised for purchasing this during that time, as it would enable the governing body to give much greater facilities for the recreation of the public.

money being raised for the scheme within six months. A year later, at the final meeting of the committee set up to organise the celebrations for the Jubilee, the Mayor confessed that he had had his doubts about whether the money could be raised. His fears were justified. Although the working men of the town gave their pennies, the landed proprietors and business were not very forthcoming. It was August before the amount of the money promised had reached £3,114 6s 3d, and it was decided to go ahead with the purchase of the 17 acre field and the land for the road.

Consequently Chesterfield celebrated the Queen's Golden Jubilee later than most and it was not until 21st September that a 'Monster Procession' wended its way along a circuitous route through the town from the Market Place to a temporary entrance to the land on Boythorpe Lane. The Sherwood Rangers provided an escort of cavalry for the 24 days, representing the trades of the town, and five carriages, bearing the members of the Jubilee Committee. Making up the rest of the procession were children from the schools and members of the local Friendly Societies.

It was not until November that all the money was collected and a memorandum and agreement to purchase the 17 acres was signed. The land was handed over to the Corporation for the people of Chesterfield and fund raising began for money to purchase the remaining five acres. Money for laying out of the park had to be found by the Council.

A Parks Committee was formed. Councillor Robinson, who was a local architect, and the Borough Surveyor drew up a plan for the 'lay-out and ornamenting' of the park, at an estimated cost of £3,500. This was to cover the cost of swimming baths, reservoir, caretaker's house, roads and a bridge over the railway and river, an approach road from West Bars and a surrounding wall. And then the problems began.

The Public Health Act of 1875 allowed councils to borrow money from public funds to purchase and maintain land for recreational use. An application was made to the Local Government Board, a public enquiry was held and permission to borrow money was granted. To produce additional income to offset the costs, the Council proposed to close the park to the public for several days each year to charge in order admission to events in the park and for skating on the lake in winter. However, when the draft bye-laws were submitted, the council was told it could not close the park, thus losing hoped for income.

Nor was the planned access from West Bars progressing. The Council wanted the Midland Railway Company to pay and the dispute dragged on.

In November 1888, a year after the appeal had begun, just £250 had been raised towards the purchase of the other five acres, leaving £750 to be raised by the following April when the option to purchase would expire. Desperate measures were required and the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Booth, appealed to the ladies of the town to organise a bazaar to raise the additional funds required. Presumably Mr Maynard agreed to an extension of the option as it was not until 21st May 1889 that the bazaar opened. It was held at the Stephenson Memorial Hall, lasted five days and took £1102 18s 8d. The money was passed to the Corporation and the purchase of the land completed on October 12th 1899.

A second application for a loan was made to the Local Government Board. This time the plan was for swimming baths only at a cost of £2010. The application was made under the Baths and Washhouses Act. The cost of laying out the rest of the park would be met from council funds. By doing this the council was led to believe that they would be able to close the park when it wished. The public enquiry found in favour of the Council. This time when the draft bye-laws were submitted, the letter from the Local Government Board was so ambiguous that half the Parks Committee thought they had permission to close and the other thought they hadn't. Further amplification was called for.

The Council did make a small amount of money from the park. The Derbyshire Union of Mineworkers held its first rally in the park in 1889 followed by another one the following year and the local militia took over the park for a month in June 1890. The grass was let out for grazing and the annual hay crop was sold.

There was increasing pressure on the Parks Committee to act, particularly as there were movements for shorter working hours and the half-day closing of the shops in the town on a Wednesday. The breakthrough came with the passing of the Public Health Amendment Act of 1890, which allowed parks to be closed for up to twelve days a year. The swimming baths were dropped from the proposals which had two advantages, it saved considerable amount of money and ended a dispute which had long occupied the Parks Committee – whether the water should be hot or cold.

Tenders were invited for the building of a caretaker's cottage and the Council offered a premium of £25 for the best design for the layout of the park, at a cost of not more than £2,500. Six plans were received and displayed for public view in the Corn Exchange. William Barron was an eminent landscape gardener who had laid out the gardens at Elvaston near Derby and had designed several parks. Despite his death, aged 85, shortly after the plan had been submitted, his was the one chosen; his son overseeing the work.

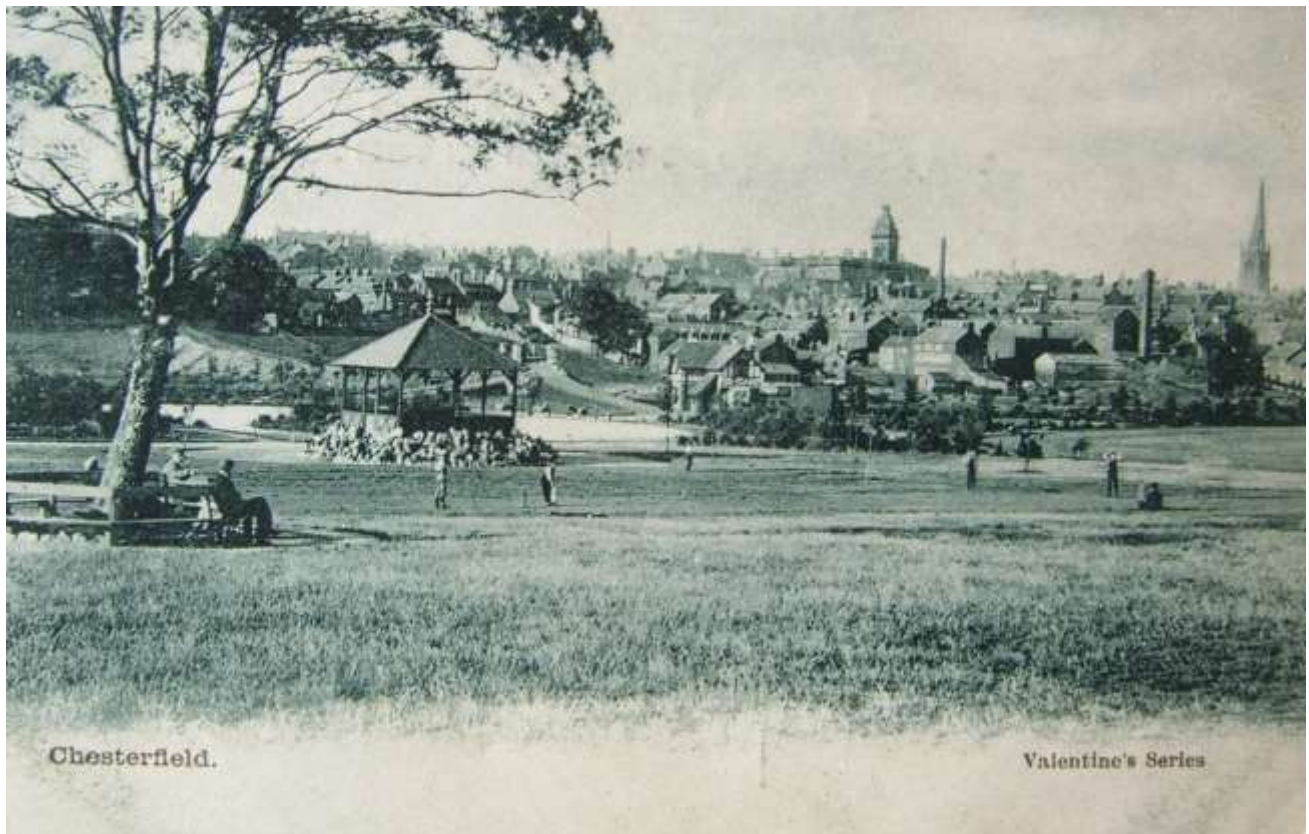
A third public enquiry was held and again the Council received permission to borrow the money and the scheme could go ahead, A compromise was reached whereby the Midland Railway constructed a footbridge with the Council contributing half the cost, but still the problems continued.

The proposals for the Lancashire, Derbyshire and East Coast Railway were published in 1891. The railway company could not acquire any land from the park because Mr Maynard had stipulated that the land was for the people of Chesterfield and could not be sold for development. Initially the company had to agree to a forty foot wide road from West Bars to the entrance to the park. They had to agree to pay any costs the Council might incur in making the approach to Queen's Park and moving the caretaker's house if necessary. It became obvious that the proposed embankment and the Market Place station would block the main access to the park from West Bars. Instead the company had to make a new road from the Market Place down Froggatt's Yard and Wheeldon Lane to a new entrance on Park Road.

Unfortunately the expenditure on the wall around the park, the caretaker's cottage, the footbridge and the cost of laying out the park came to more than the Corporation was authorised to borrow. Minor amendments were made to the plan and the amount of money set aside for planting reduced. The shortfall was made up with money from the Borough Suspense Account, which was mainly made up from profits from the market. Members of the Market Committee were not amused.

Finally in March 1892 a mortgage for £2,500 was taken out with the Yorkshire Penny Bank. The park was closed to the public a month later in order for work to begin. The problems continued. The contractor had to replace some of the roadway deemed unsatisfactory, the Midland Railway Company was very slow to lay water mains under its track, workmen from the Chesterfield Water Works and Gas Light Company used force to prevent council workmen from connecting the pipe at the cottage to the Company's main and the Lancashire, Derbyshire and East Coast Railway Company had to construct a temporary bridge to allow access from West Bars.

At long last, everything was ready and the Corporation exercised its statutory right to close the park in order for the Chesterfield Horticultural Society to hold a flower show on 2nd August 1893. More than four thousand people paid for admission and Queen's Park immediately became an important part of town life.



Alderman T.P. Wood was elected Mayor at a meeting of the Council in November 1886 and expressed the wish that funds might be raised for a local project to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. He hoped that his friend Councillor Wardle might get his wish and they would have a Queen's Bath if they did not get a Queen's Recreation Ground. Six years and a half later the town had a park but no swimming baths. He was made a Freeman of the Borough for his services as chairman of the Jubilee Committee. Instead of a silver casket to hold the scroll, he requested that the money be used to establish a fund for a bandstand.

The arguments about money were soon forgotten. The park was rented out for events for up to twelve days a year; facilities were let to cricket, cycling and lawn tennis clubs and boats were available for hire on the lake. In 1896 the Parks Committee was planning a mass planting of 4,000 trees and shrubs, a cricket pavilion and a new Park Keeper's cottage. How different from a few years earlier. The cottage was funded by £500 paid by the Lancashire, Derbyshire and East Coast Railway Company because of damage caused during the construction of the railway embankment. It was decided to repair the original cottage and build a new one for the Park Keeper on the south side of the park. This why Queen's Park has two lodges whereas most parks have only one.