

# BOULTHAM PARK THROUGH THE YEARS





# BOULTHAM LAKE



Boultham Park

Boultham Park is listed in English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens as Grade 2 and therefore 'of special interest which warrants every effort being made to preserve it'. The Park is a Critical Natural Asset and has been designated by Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust as a 'site of nature conservation importance'. It is one of the largest areas of woodland within Lincoln and one of nine predominantly woodland sites within the city and in a local context the site supports some rare and endangered species.



The Boultham Estate underwent a period of development under Colonel Richard Ellison, who was a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, there is a record dating from 1851 of discussions surrounding incorporating a lake into the parkland close to the hall, and this came to fruition in 1857 when the large ornamental lake was excavated. The lake took its feed water from Pike Drain (Pike Drain is fed from the lakes at Whisby, you can see this drain alongside Newark Road opposite the Ruston Sports Ground, it then runs through Boultham Moor skirting The Witham Academy crossing Rookery Lane at the end of Westwick Drive) the overspill water from the lake was diverted by a catchwater into the River Witham.

The original lake was constructed in a 'serpentine' shape (looks like a goose neck) and was excavated by hand, the majority of the soil removed was deposited round the site to produce garden areas and raise the ground level at the east side of the lake up to the River Witham.

There was also once an old boathouse from when the Ellison's owned the estate. It was situated just beyond where the serpentine was, with a path being built from the fountain garden down to it within the woodland.

At the time of construction the park covered an area of over 1,000 acres and the lake covered 4 acres. Richard Ellison used to spend a lot of time at their home in London and became quite a socialite, he wanted to 'show off' his estate in Lincoln and to encourage his friends to visit he rebuilt and enlarged the hall during 1874 and once completed, it was thrown open for garden parties, galas and fetes, fishing and boating on the lake being one of the highlights.

In May 1929 the park was purchased by Lincoln Corporation. In 1934/35 the land along the west side of the park was re-purposed and an extensive house building project took place resulting in over 1,600 new homes along Skellingthorpe Road and the Westwick Drive. Between 1932 and 1950 there had been flooding along the course of Pike Drain and to improve the water flow the drain was straightened and connected with the River Witham (close to Russell Street bridge) but to achieve this the lake was altered and the distinctive serpentine shape was lost.

The reshaping of the lake reduced its size from 4 acres to 2.5 acres and represents 5% of the total wetlands habitat in Lincoln; by the early 1930's the Park's overall area became 50 acres. In 1936 public boating was introduced onto the lake and remained popular all the way through to the mid 1960's.



# BOATING ON THE LAKE



Boultham Park

There are many locals that have fond memories of rowing boats on the lake; introduced in the 1930s, hundreds and thousands would flock to Boultham Lake to buy their ticket for a boat ride. You would buy a ticket from the kiosk, and when it was your turn you would be given a numbered boat. Once your time was up they would shout your number and you would be called to come back. Many remember trying to prolong their go as long as possible, or even avoiding having to come back in altogether!

"Of course with the rowing boats, we would go out on them and when it was our turn to come in we got ourselves down at the other end round the island, sometimes she would have to come and face us, they were all numbered so she would have to shout us."

"They'd say come back come in your half an hour is up, like hell we did. Sometimes they'd get in a boat and come after you, if they did, you'd leg it as quick as you could, but if you went to the other side of the island, pitch the boat and run off."

"Remember the rowing boats well, you always made sure you were near the island when your time was up so you got a bit of extra time, happy days."

"When it became time to be called back rowing to the far side of the island and pretending you could not hear the boat keeper shouting your number".



Some came up with ingenious ways of getting a free go:

"The lady would sell the tickets at the kiosk, and you'd give the gentleman the ticket and he'd tear it then throw it down, but sometimes if they were busy he didn't tear it and just threw it down in the lake downstream, so we used to go further down the stream and wait for these tickets to come down, we'd get a stick, take it out, take it home and dry it, then wait till it's nice weather when there's a lot of people, go past the kiosk, hand your ticket in and get a free ride."

You weren't allowed onto the island, but of course many would row around the back and sneak up onto it for an explore. And of course despite safety precautions, accidents still happened!

"In 1946 my Dear Dad was rowing with his back to me, age 3, and my younger sister, my sister over reaching hand in the lake and fell in, baby in water said I, Dad jumped in and scooped her off the bottom, poor dad kaki trousers sopping wet struggled to the bank, it ended well but I have never forgotten this event."



Boating on the lake stopped in 1977, in part due to the fact that boats frequently went 'missing', and soon afterwards the model railway came out of use. After a period of investment and development, the park was starting to lose many of its features. Despite this it remained a popular visiting place amongst local people.

As part of the Lake Restoration Project, we have committed to bringing back occasional boating on the lake. We look forward to being able to provide this activity and can't wait to see so many reliving their memories from over 50 years ago!

"Remember going out on the rowing boats being so proud that I could row."

"When you're little, all you're concerned about is getting in the boat, and then of course you feel like you've been in the boat for all of 5 minutes before they're calling your boat back in."



# BOULTHAM PARK'S JOHN PYE



Boultham Park

John Pye was the Chairman of BPAG (Boultham Park Advisory Group) for many years and a lover and carer of Boultham Park Lake even longer; John is the man responsible for both the Beacon and the Weir/Gully. He was much loved and well known by all regulars at the park, often seen riding his bike along the paths, or knee deep in the lake clearing debris.



Photo by: Margaret Corson

John built the base for the Beacon in his garden, and made the basket at a local forge, ready for the Boultham Park Music and Arts Festival in 2002 to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee, and it has been there ever since. All of the materials were donated by local businesses and John designed and built it for free. He was always passionate about the park and in particular, always wanted the water quality of the lake to be addressed, therefore he drew up plans for the Gully and got the Council's permission to build and install it. Once again, he got local businesses to help as well as some financial support from the Council for essentials.

He did all of it because he wanted to make a difference to the lake and to give people somewhere to visit and enjoy. It was an awful lot of physical labour, especially for a man in his 70s but everyday you would find him in the park. Whether it was building or caring for the Gully, or cleaning out debris from various outlets to allow the water to flow, he was always keeping an eye on the general wellbeing of the park. One Christmas he even pulled on his waders and climbed into freezing water as it snowed, in order to pull some massive logs out of the water which were blocking the Pike Drain.

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**“Why do I do it?”**

**The truth is I can't not, & a few others are now finding that very same thing. There is a lot more to The Park than a lake, trees, woodland, wildlife & it's history right back to Victorian times & beyond.**

**If you have sat quietly, when no one is around, or at night by the Lake, especially on a starlit moonlit night & closed your eyes & relaxed your racing mind, the more time you spend there, the more you will feel it. After which hopefully you, as I have, become unbreakably connected. Your appreciation & enjoyment of that magical place will multiply tenfold.”**

**-John Pye**

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Photo by: Margaret Corson

When John built the Gully, he didn't expect it to have pennies dropped down it. So he decided if those were the wishes of the children, he should collect them up and make the wishes come true, with the aim of using the money to benefit the children of the park. He wanted the children/families of the area to have free things to interact with at the park and have opportunities they might not get elsewhere. To have a better understanding of the park and feel part of a community, so its looked after by visitors maybe better than it had been in the past. Margaret Corson has since taken over this dream, and runs the Mini Explorers group for children and families, holding free activities as well as maintaining the Gully and helping the council look after the lake.

Unfortunately, John died in April 2019. There was a vigil at the Gully where people whose lives John had touched, lit candles, cracked jokes and even handed around his favourite sweets: Cadbury's Chocolate Eclairs. John left his mark on the lake and we hope we have done him proud through our work as part of the Lake Restoration Project.



# THE WAR YEARS



Boultham Park

During the First World War the Boultham Hall was lent to the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and was developed as a hospital and convalescence home for soldiers in October-November 1914. The first patients were admitted on 12th November, becoming the first of 1,360 to pass through its doors. The Hall Drive Bridge became known as Soldiers Bridge as this was as far as the residents were permitted to walk. The soldiers used to congregate at the bridge to exchange cigarettes and chocolate for alcohol and a 'peck on the cheek' from the local girls. The hospital ceased activities in late December 1918.



The nature of the fighting during the Great War led to a huge number of injured soldiers and the existing Military medical facilities in the United Kingdom were soon overwhelmed. As demand for beds grew, large buildings such as Universities and hotels were transformed into hospitals, and wooden huts sprang up in hospital grounds and at army camps to cope with the huge numbers.

A soldier who was injured in the field would be treated firstly in the trenches and then moved to an Advanced Dressing Station close to the front line. If further treatment was needed he would be moved to a tented camp behind the lines and then if required moved to one of the base hospitals usually by train, the seriously wounded were taken back to Britain by Hospital Ship and onto the relevant hospital for further treatment. With the wide range of serious injuries never before faced, hospitals began to specialise in certain types of injury in order to provide the best treatment, with soldiers being sent by train to the relevant hospital. Many large houses such as the hall in Boultham Park and hotels were used as Convalescent Hospitals or Class B hospitals; they usually accepted patients from Class A Hospitals once the man had recovered sufficiently.

One positive outcome of the often honorific injuries suffered, was the advance in medical science. Innovative and often desperate solutions which would not have been considered in peace time were attempted; those showing promise were developed further.

On the site of the larger original estate, the first tanks were developed. To maintain secrecy they were called 'water carriers for the people of Mesopotamia'. Local people struggled with this name and referred to them as 'tanks', and this name remains today.

The workers at Fosters astounded everyone when in early January 1916, they announced that a prototype machine was now ready for whatever the military could throw at it - named Little Willie. Testing was undertaken in the peaceful surroundings of Boultham Park near Lincoln and then the machine was sent for official tests in Hatfield Park in Hertfordshire. The orders started to come in and Lincoln became known as 'Tank Town'. Machines were soon leaving Lincoln for use in the world's first tank battle on 15th September 1916.

During World War Two, areas of the park were planted with sugar beet, leeks, cabbages and cauliflowers as part of the Dig for Victory campaign. The Dig for Victory campaign was launched in October 1939, and people were urged to become self-sufficient by using every spare piece of land to grow vegetables. Hundreds of young people headed to Harvest Camps to volunteer for a week or more working outside harvesting vegetables or flax. The well-stocked Victory Garden became a symbol of resilience. The range and availability of seeds was occasionally limited, however the greenhouses on the estate in Boultham Park were used to propagate seedlings for the next harvest, supplying stock to other plantings across the country.



# ROB APPELYARD - BOULTHAM PARK KEEPER FOR 45 YEARS



Rob Appleyard started work in the Boultham Park greenhouse in 1971, cultivating plants for 6 months before becoming groundsman for the park. And that's where he stayed until he retired in 2017. In 2012 he was recognised for his 40+ years of service in the park, with a cherry tree planted in his name. We spoke with Rob about his time caring for the beautiful Boultham Park.

## What was your involvement in the park over the years?

"I started in the greenhouse and helped cultivate the plants that we used in the bedding schemes in around the city. I was only in the nursery for about a year and then I was redeployed in the park itself. I used to look after the bowling green and the putting green and the tennis courts during the summer, and all what's required in the winter in regards to scarification, and top resting, and all that. I used to do litter picking in the park, looking after that and looking after the shrubs and well we had bedding plants, I used to look after the flower beds, we used to have quite a few flower beds in the park at one time.

"We was alright until 1989 and then all the work had to be put out to tender, so from 1994 there was a procession of different contractors that were in charge of the grounds maintenance, so I just got handed over to each different contractor basically."

## What are some of your favourite memories of the park?

"I would say meeting the people actually, over the years I got to know quite a lot of people and well some close friends really, and also at one stage Lincoln city football club used to do a bit of pre-season training in the park so I got to talk to some of the managers, Graham Taylor and Keith Alexander and Jon Schofield. "When the first Boultham park summer fair took place, I bought a raffle ticket and actually won a rocking horse, which funnily enough was actually made by the prisoners at Lincoln prison. I wasn't there when it was delivered but apparently it was delivered in a police van, handcuffed to sort of one of the seats."



## What was it like witnessing the park changing over the years?

"I mean when I first was in the park, there was someone who used to look after the conservatory and then someone on the boats, there was around about 4 or 5 of us all together in sort of the park itself, and that got whittled down to in the end just me. Of course the flower beds were removed so there wasn't all that maintenance to do. "We used to have rowing boats on the lake at one time. We always used to bring these, they were wooden boats at the time, we always used to store them in our yard which is next to, near to the health centre, someone used to come down every spring and repair them, and then we used to fill them with water to make the wood swell again. When the actual boats were on the lake, you could guarantee that everyday first things, we used to go down to the lake and round them all up again, because someone had let them all loose on the lake, so we had to go round them all up again and tie them to the side of the landing space."

## What have you been up to since your retirement?

"Enjoying my own garden which isn't particularly big, but big enough for me to manage and enjoy, and growing a few different plants I wouldn't normally have grown.

"I always call down at the park for the summer fair, but this year I called down a few weeks ago just to look at the cherry tree that was planted on my retirement. Its normally flowering at this time of year."



# THE GREENHOUSE



Boultham Park

Many people will remember the greenhouse within Boultham Park and, in most cases, it will bring back many happy memories.

"The greenhouse was a delight even as a child I loved going in there the smell was intoxicating"

"I remember my Dad taking me in there, loved the smell of the plants"

"Loved it as a child"

"I loved the cacti"

"Used to love going in there as a child, late 40s/50s, lots of plants which seemed enormous to little me"

In the 12th century the original estate of Boultham, which stretched to over 1210 acres, belonged to the Priory of St Catherine's. There are records of it being farmed, but we have to move forward in time to 1874 before we see an actual greenhouse structure appearing on the site. The new structure was erected by the Ellison family as the hall was rebuilt and enlarged. It is shown on maps as a sprawling 3 storey brick house with stone dressings and 7 chimney stacks. There was a large glasshouse on the south side of the house surrounded by a rockery garden from which they hosted garden parties, weddings, galas and fetes.



Between 1874 and 1909 the greenhouse was used to provide flowers and shrubs for the gardens and propagate the Ellison rose and a strain of apple. In 1909 Col Ellison died and the hall became vacant. Between 1909 and 1929 the Ellison family were forced to sell off large swathes of their land to cover family debt. In 1929 Lincoln Corporation bought the land with a view to turning it into a public park. This change of use prompted the erection of a substantial heated greenhouse in 1936. The firm of Duncan Tucker Ltd were commissioned to do the work and part of the original glass house was incorporated into the structure. The greenhouse was used by the council to produce flora and fauna for all of the parks and open spaces in the City along with the roundabouts and council estates, Pennells nursery helped with this as it included outside.

Sadly the Hall continued to deteriorate and in the spring of 1959 the roof had to be repaired to keep it water-tight, six months later and after a thorough survey it was decided, due to serious safety issues, to demolish the building, however the majority of the original glasshouse and the greenhouse remained intact.

The Council continued to use this site right up to 1996 at which time the greenhouse was dismantled and moved to a site off Monks Road where it was eventually broken up.



# BOULTHAM BESTIES



Boultham Park

Mary Bilham and Jo Gadd were best friends for 60 years, they met up every week whenever they could, and they always went to Boultham Park. Mike Bilham and Tony Gadd became friends through work, and when their wives Mary and Jo met they just clicked, and became life-long friends.



They began to meet every Monday in Boultham Park in 1962, Mary lived on Bristol Drive, and Jo lived on Skellingthorpe road, naturally Boultham Park became the meeting point. They would walk up to the park with their pushchairs and continue to meet every week with the children. Once the kids started going to school, they would meet every Friday just the two of them, come rain or shine they would always meet, and they often used the greenhouse to shelter from poor weather "They went every week, unless we were on holiday or they were on holiday, they went there". They loved the chance to get out and about in the fresh air, and "it was a way of getting out of the house with our children to enjoy the park."

When the greenhouse was no longer being used by the park and was closed it to the public, the two ladies complained to the park keeper one day that it was raining and said that they couldn't get into the summer house because it was locked. He said oh I'll do something about that, and he gave them their own key. From then on, until the glasshouse was demolished, the ladies had their own key and two folding chairs waiting for them inside for their weekly visit and their cup of coffee together that they brought with them. They knew everyone that worked in the park, and they knew them very well. "That Park was integral to their relationship".

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**"We always take a flask of coffee with us – and a drop of something stronger, If the weather is a bit cold you need something to warm you up inside." - Mary**

**"It's quite simple really – we shall go while we still can," - Jo.**

**"We don't just sit and chat, we like to have a walk around. Boultham Park is quite beautiful, it has some very unusual trees." – Mary**

**"One summer we decided we were going to have a go at all the sporty things, we played bowling, tennis and also used the little golf putting green. "In fact, we still do the putting. We had a couple of sessions last summer – I think it's rather good to do these things." - Jo**

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**'Our 40-year friendship began in this park, and we've been back once a week ever since'**

"I mean I can remember all round the lake, there still are some, but there used to be masses of daffodils. Well, you used to get people from over the other side of the road coming in and picking them. And I can remember Mary and Jo said to a woman one afternoon, and she said we will never do it again, they said to her you shouldn't be picking those and they were politely told, what has it got to do with them, and seeing as they weren't paid money and they didn't work in the park, she was taking some home, and they got quite a mouthful for their pain, but it was taken in good par."

Mary and Jo met even when they were poorly or not very well, Mike would bring Mary to the Ghadd's house, and Tony would bring Jo to the Bilham's house. Mary and Mike were God parents to Tony and Jo's sons, and Tony and Jo were God parents to Mary and Mike's daughters, they even had Christmas parties at each other's homes. "They helped each other out, they were always there for each other". In 2004, Mary and Jo were presented with their own bench in Boultham Park to commemorate their 40 plus years of friendship.

Sadly, Mary and Jo passed in 2020/21, after continuing to use the park to sustain their 60 year long friendship until the end.



# ST HELENS CHURCH



Boultham Park

St Helens Church sits on the eastern side of the park at the end of Hall Drive and has occupied that plot since the 13th century, over the years it has hosted many events and has had some tasteful modifications.

The Anglican parish church in Boultham, now a district of Lincoln but once an outlying hamlet mentioned in the Domesday Book, is dedicated to St Helen. The first church is mentioned when Gilbert of Ghent, a nephew of William the Conqueror, endowed the newly founded Bardney Abbey with the Manor or Estate of Boultham. In about 1150 Gilbert's grandson, Robert, Earl of Lincoln, gave the care of the church and the appointment of a Rector to the Abbott and Convent of Bardney. A new church was built in the early 13th century of which only parts remain after the church was totally restored, lengthened and had new windows added in 1887 by the Ellisons in memory of various members of their family.



# SUMMER HOUSES & ICE CREAM KIOSK

One of the most popular features of the park decades ago was the ice cream kiosk. The concrete base still remains on the left of the path as you walk towards the lake. Many remember going to get their favourite ice creams from there during the summer days.



"You had two wafers and a block of ice cream, so you had to eat it flipping quick or it was melting, and they used to sell cornetts with a block of walls ice cream in a square cornett, and then we had ice lollies."

"they had a little ice cream concession thing, which was great fun to go get your ice cream and sit by the lake and enjoy the scenery."

Next to the ice cream kiosk was one of the park's summer houses, designed for the public to shelter and have a sit down in, one of them was next to the old ice cream kiosk made of tree branches and a slate roof, and another near Lake View Road. They were made of dark coloured wood resembling thick tree branches, with 3 sides and one open and a bench that ran along the inside for people to sit down.

# MODEL RAILWAY

In 1945 a miniature railway track was built around where the Hall Drive car park is now and was run by the Lincoln Miniature Railway Club. The railway was open for rides to the public and was a much-loved feature by the community for many decades. It was a black and green steam train raised on a little platform, the track was an oval shape and was driven by a man dressed like a traditional train driver who sat at the engine, whilst the children sat astride the carriages that followed it.

"It was shaded by the big old trees and there was a large area of nettles to be avoided!! Many a happy weekend spent with family either watching or riding, then a walk in the park to the ice-cream kiosk the other side of the churchyard."

"Having to tuck your left knee in as it went round to avoid the tree."

"I loved riding on the model railway and it was a highlight of my park visit. I was so excited one time I fell off the platform into a bed of nettles ouch! It didn't put me off further rides as it was such fun."





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