



Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links

NEWSLETTER 42

Spring 2016

Convener's Comment

Memorials round the Meadows

We are so lucky that we have many interesting memorials and sculptures round the Meadows, and we will try to visit them all and tell their stories. For a start, we have a fascinating article by Margaret Ferguson Burns about the memorial to Helen Acquoroff (see page 2). I am pleased to say that on one of our recent work parties we actually weeded round it, though as with all the sculptures the paving surrounding it needs the mortar renewing: perhaps this could be another of our projects to merit funding.

Noticeboards

We are delighted to announce that the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership unexpectedly found some money down the back of a sofa last November, and asked for applications for funding from voluntary groups. We had to put our heads together pretty swiftly to get our act sorted in time, but we managed it, and were successful in our bid for £3,086 to provide a new, double-width noticeboard for the top of Middle Meadow Walk, just below the Police Box café. As many of you have commented, the existing notice boards are rather small, and packed with too much information. We need more space to display notices and in particular the history of the Meadows, and details of wild life, to better advantage, not to mention details of our own activities. Watch these spaces!

Rachel Edmans, Park Ranger, is also working with us on improving the noticeboards, and with the addition of this new one at a crucial entry point to the Meadows, with extra space, and even a container for leaflets, we shall be able to enhance the Park experience for visitors. We should also upgrade our Park Quality Assessment, which pointed out that 'Some info out of date. Too much in notice boards. Some too small to read. Some notice boards Perspex needs changed.' In fact Mike Shields, Community Parks Officer, is already changing the Perspex covers where these are deficient, so we look forward to much improved information provision in the future.

Glyphosate

Otherwise known as Roundup, this weedkiller has been identified as a carcinogen, and is now banned in France and the Netherlands. However, it is widely used in Edinburgh parks and all over Scotland. We are delighted to announce that its use is now being reconsidered, and other strategies put in place (see *Edinburgh Evening News* 29 December 2015). This is particularly good news when we are now involving children on Meadows work parties. *Heather Goodare (Convener)*

*The Spring meeting of FOMBL will take place on Monday 22 February 2016
at the Barclay Viewforth Church at 7.30 p.m. The speaker will be
Leonie Alexander, Urban Biodiversity Project Officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens, on
'Making the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links better for biodiversity'
All are welcome. Please come and contribute your ideas.*

The memorial drinking fountain to Helen Acquroff

Helen Acquroff (12 October 1831 - 18 September 1887) was a musician, pianist, music teacher, singer and poet who was born and lived in the Newington area of Edinburgh. She was involved in the Temperance Movement.

Biography

Helen was the second eldest of ten children: Elizabeth (born 1830), Mary Ann (1833), Thomson Paul (1834), Alexander Fletcher (1836), Ann Paul (1838), John (1839), Susan Carter (1842), Sophia Sarah (1843), and Robert Wingfield (1846). Their parents were John Acquroff (1795), a Russian hairdresser born in St Petersburg (a naturalised British subject) and Sophia Campbell Fletcher (22 May 1808) from Ardelach, Nairn. They married in 1829.

Helen was visually impaired from birth and became totally blind when she was 11 years old. She attended the Blind Asylum School, which at that time would have been located at Nicolson Street, and she later taught there.

At the time of the 1841 Census the family were living at 8 Meuse Lane. She remained unmarried but had a son, James, born on 2 August 1862 at 20 Rose Street in Edinburgh. In 1871 Helen was living with her parents and son at 26 South Richmond Street and in 1881, after her father's death, she was living with her mother and her son, then an unemployed hairdresser, at 41 Clerk Street. Helen died of nephritis at 51 Clerk Street, aged 55.

Temperance Movement

Helen sang in concert halls and theatres in Edinburgh and across Scotland, being particularly involved in the Temperance Movement. She adopted the name *Sister Cathedral* (initially *Sister Helen Acquroff*), as well as a humorous irreverent style. The name *Cathedral* was given to her after an address for Glasgow Cathedral was published, warning people of Glasgow of the perils of intemperance. In *One Hundred Modern Scottish Poets* it states, 'A GREAT blank was caused in temperance circles throughout Scotland by the death, in September 1887, of Miss Helen Acquroff the talented and popular blind lady advocate of their cause.'

Poetry

As well as in *One Hundred Modern Scottish Poets: with biographical and critical notices*, Helen is mentioned in *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology*. She wrote songs, hymns, temperance music and poems, some of which appear in *Good Templar Songs*, published in 1872. They include *Polly Hopkins*, *Sabbath School Song*, *The Swiss Girl*, *When We Were Bairns Thegither* (see next page), and *The Reformed Drunkard To His Wife*.

Memorial

There is a marble memorial drinking fountain to Helen near the junction of Jawbone and Coronation Walks on the west side of the path, inside railings, near the Pavilion at the Meadows, Melville Drive. The inscription reads:

IN MEMORIAM
HELEN ACQUROFF SISTER CATHEDRAL
1889
ERECTED BY MEMBERS OF THE IOCT
AND OTHER FRIENDS

The IOGT were the Independent Order of Good Templars. (*It appears as a C on the memorial, not a G.*) A descendant on the Ancestry.com 'Acquiroff name' page states, 'I was in Edinburgh a couple of weeks ago and went past the "family birdbath" (actually it used to be a fountain dedicated to Helen Acquiroff, but the dolphin fountain disappeared years ago).' It would be wonderful if someone could find the missing dolphin 'tap', possibly lying unidentified somewhere on council premises or elsewhere. **Margaret Ferguson Burns**

When We Were Bairns Thegither

It's forty years, my ain gudeman.
Since I was made your wife;
An' nane in a' this warld can say
But [?] we've led a happy life.
But ah, waes me, it's sixty year
Since we kent ane anither
For hand in hand we gaed to schule
When we were bairns thegither.

When we were bairns, happy, happy bairns,
When we were bairns thegither;
For hand in hand we gaed to schule
When we were bairns thegither.

An' mony a time ye focht for nae,
Wi' big red-headed Jock,

An' brocht me turnips, peas, an' beans.
Snaps, muffins, pies, an' rock;
For if ye hadna ae fine thing.
Ye were sure to hae anither ;
Baith kind an' guid you've been to me
Since we were bairns thegither.

I used to greet ilk time ye got
A palmy at the schule,
An' then the maister turned on me
An' ca'd me a great fule;
An' when I think on a' the flights
We baith got frae my mither,
Hech, man, it seems like half-an-hour
Since we were bairns thegither.



Voluntary work

We had a successful series of monthly meetings during the autumn, and also four sessions on Tuesday mornings with children from George Heriot's P6 classes. One of the jobs we did with them was weeding the Sundial. A small girl told me: 'My knees are numb from kneeling on the cold stone'. This sounded like poetry to me, so I added more lines. (Ed.)

Weeding the Sundial

My knees are numb from kneeling on the cold stone:
We're pulling moss and grass out of the paving rone.
But the sun shines and I really don't mind missing maths:
When we get home we'll hopefully have sizzling hot baths.

Forthcoming Events

Meadows Marathon – 6 March 2016 run by Edinburgh Students' Charities Appeal:

Charity fundraising run consisting of a 5k, 10k, half marathon and full marathon. The races will have a staggered start and the start/finish line will be on George Square North. The route will work on a loop basis around the meadows, marked by cones and barriers.

St Thomas of Aquins Fun Run – 11 March 2016 – St Thomas of Aquins High School

Fancy dress fun/run/walk over three laps; the proposed route is Coronation Walk, North Meadow Walk.

Meadows Chamber Orchestra

The next concert will be on Saturday 6 February 2016 at Inverleith St Serf's Church, Ferry Road, at 7.45 p.m. Conducted by David Watkin, the works are: Accidental Dances by Searle (World premiere), Tchaikovsky's violin concerto in D major, Op. 35, and Brahms' Symphony No 1 in C minor, Op. 68. The solo violinist is Alexander Janiczek. Tickets from the Queen's Hall Box Office (0131 668 2019) or at the door.

Useful contacts

Mike Shields Community Parks Officer Tel.0131 529 5126; email: mike.shields@edinburgh.gov.uk

Police: Safer Neighbourhood Team. PC 4601 Yocksan Bell 0131 662 5022 or Sgt 4554 Peter Houston (same number). To report a crime: 101 (costing a flat rate of 15p per call); emergency 999; or (anonymously) to Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111. **New Police Service of Scotland website** is <http://www.scotland.police.uk>.

Anti-social behaviour (24/7): 0131 529 7050; **Litter:** 0131 529 3030

Defective lamp-post lighting: note number and ring Clarence – 0800 23 23 23

David Doig South Neighbourhood Service Manager - Environment (with responsibility for roads, parks, green spaces, and street cleaning): email david.doig@edinburgh.gov.uk Tel. 0131 529 5187

Forestry Service: email forestry.service@edinburgh.gov.uk. Tel. 0131 311 7079

Road repairs and development: Alan Dunlop, Area Roads Manager: alan.dunlop@edinburgh.gov.uk. Tel. 0131 529 3719

Complaints regarding Council vehicles driving on Links or Meadows: 0131 529 3030; Task Force Manager (responsible for street cleaning and grounds maintenance) Rab Farquhar

Graffiti: report to 0131 200 2000 or email operationdivide@lbp.pnn.police.uk

Kathy Evans: Local Community Safety Manager (tackling anti-social behaviour and joint working with the police) kathy.evans@edinburgh.gov.uk Tel. 0131 529 5106

Environmental Warden team leader: Mohamed Demnati 0131 529 5204

People Against Litter (PAL): please contact <http://www.peopleagainstlitter.org/>.

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