



Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links

Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organization (SCIO) SC045955

NEWSLETTER 44

Autumn 2016

Convener's Comment

Demise of MABLAG

MABLAG stands for the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links Advisory Group, which in recent years has facilitated liaison between community groups and Edinburgh City Council. The South Central Neighbourhood Partnership, of which MABLAG has been a 'sub-group', has now decided that FOMBL can take over the role of MABLAG. This is something of a challenge, but we made a start by inviting representatives of local community councils to a meeting on 1st August, which seems to have been appreciated, and we are meeting again on 24 October.

We are encouraging community councils to be organisational members of FOMBL, and it is true that several individual members of councils are also members of FOMBL, but we need to work on ways of making sure that all local voices, including those of community councils, are heard through our committee.

Sport on the Meadows

It seems that even though sport is much played on the Meadows, our youngest football players have been missing out recently. How did it happen that the local school football competition somehow lost its continuity and even its cup? Please see the article on page 4 and do all you can to make sure that the cup is found, and the competition started again. If young players don't make a start on the Meadows, a great opportunity is lost. **In the aftermath of the Olympics, sport will feature in our next public meeting: see page 3.**

Lichens in the Meadows

With the welcome influx of Wrights Houses students as members we have acquired a great deal of scholarship and expertise on botanical subjects, from students who are studying environmental sciences. I knew nothing about lichens until Yusef sent in his article (p. 2), which I found fascinating. We are hugely enriched by the addition of students as members, not just as an additional voluntary workforce, but also with their scientific knowledge.

Ian Murray MP: our AGM speaker

It was a great pleasure to welcome Ian to our AGM: he spoke interestingly about various local environmental issues, on an evening when we were also mourning the loss of his parliamentary colleague Jo Cox. Ian is on our list of volunteers, though he is usually too busy to come along: and now we are also more aware of security issues on our own account. Volunteers are welcome on the last Saturday of every month: 10.00 a.m. at the Pavilion.

Heather Goodare, Convener

Lichens in the Meadows

While walking through the Meadows, you may (or may not) have noticed some curious, strange-looking... *things*... growing from many of the trunks and branches of the trees. These are not mosses, parasites, or even stains from unruly pigeons – they are a bizarre and bewildering form of life called *lichens*.

A lichen is not an individual organism, but in fact two life-forms living as one, in an intricate union known as *symbiosis*. The visible body of the lichen is formed by a fungus. However, just below the skin of the fungus dwell huge colonies of algae – simple, one-celled organisms that derive their energy from photosynthesis, like plants. These tiny solar cells use the energy from sunlight to combine carbon dioxide and water to form sugar, some of which is passed on to their fungal partner. In return, some claim the algae receive vital minerals like nitrate and phosphate from the fungus, or that the fungal body provides protection from the elements, but these claims have yet to be proved.

Lichens are hardy organisms

Notice them once, and you will notice them anywhere – from tree branches to street signs to car windscreens. Many of the public litter-bins in the Meadows are decorated with lichens. Among the hardiest of all organisms, lichens are found in all habitats from the desert to the arctic tundra. Indeed, lichens are so tough that they are one of the only organisms known to have survived in the vacuum of outer space! A human being exposed in outer space would instantly freeze in the -100°C temperatures: their bodies would swell like balloons as each capillary burst in the zero-pressure environment, all while being bombarded with every kind of cosmic radiation in every direction. Lichens, fixed to the outside of the International Space Station for an experiment, endured these conditions in a dormant state for a whopping *eighteen months*, before kicking back into action as if nothing happened when they were returned inside.

Despite this apparent invincibility to physical pressures, most lichens are extremely sensitive to air pollution. Some are more sensitive than others to different forms of pollution, and because of this, many useful indices have been developed that gauge the air pollution of an area based on the mix of lichens present there. The main air pollutants in current times are nitrogen compounds from agriculture, car exhausts, and fossil fuel production. These pollutants settle in the atmosphere and swamp lowland Britain, leading to the majority of towns and lowland countryside being dominated by nitrogen-tolerant lichens – particularly the conspicuous bright yellow *Xanthoria*.

The Meadows and the Links possess surprisingly diverse lichen flora, with many species generally considered to be restricted to upland, pure-air habitats. In particular, try taking a look at the young ash trunks next time you stroll along Leamington Walk - you'll find them festooned with a lush vertical jungle. Keep an eye out for the thin, beardlike *Usnea* species and the weird and warty *Ramalina*, or the branching, bushy *Evernia*. More common is *Parmelia sulcata* – also known as 'blue crottle' – once frequently used by humans to make dye. Next time you stroll through the Meadows, take a moment to appreciate some of the interesting sights that normally go unnoticed. You might never stop! **Yusef Samari**



Why I travel from Livingston to join the FOMBLs

Heather Goodare was surprised to find out that I travel some way when I join you for voluntary work parties, and asked if I could write a note to explain. I am afraid that I have to go back a very long way to do so.

When World War Two started, I was living in the Channel Islands. I was a small, sickly child, but when I was well enough, I loved to play outside, explore the beautiful countryside, run about on the beach, or search for life in the rocky pools.

Escaping from Hitler

But then Adolf Hitler declared war and his armies swept across Europe. Soon we could hear gunfire from the French coast nearby. My father was a Trade Union official of Jewish descent. He knew that this would condemn us to the gas chambers if we stayed. My mother, sister and I were able to escape by boat two weeks before the Germans invaded. My father followed a week later. So we became refugees with virtually no possessions.

An Olympic runner

Eventually kind folks found us places to stay, but schooling was a problem. I went to ten different schools, some of them makeshift arrangements in church halls, and I was often bullied. But I continued to escape to the countryside, to run about and explore. I discovered that there were things called running races, so I had a go. I was not much good at first, but I slowly got fitter and stronger. I continued to improve every year for more than twenty years. I became super fit and only had four days' illness in all my working life. I was asked to compete for Great Britain in the Olympics and ran in 36 countries all round the world. I did so well that the governing body of athletics asked me and my friend to write a coaching manual on *Long Distance Running*.

Training in the Meadows

So folk were asking for advice and I became an Honorary Coach. When I came to Scotland, thirty-five years ago, three members of the British Orienteering Squad, who lived in Edinburgh, asked me to show them how to do a particularly beneficial form of training. I said 'You say where and when and I'll be there'. 'The Meadows at 7.55 pm on a Tuesday', they replied. (I have no idea why, but anyway we have gone ahead every Tuesday ever since.) Soon they asked if their friends could come too, and casual pedestrians and joggers asked to join in. Thirty to forty folk usually come, though there have been only two on one Christmas Day. We even have a permit issued by the Council.

Anyway, I am a passionate advocate of the benefits of exercise, in improving the length and quality of life, and I think that the Meadows is an exceptionally attractive place for outdoor exercise, so I am delighted to see it so well used by informal strollers and organised groups. When Robin Morris, who trains with us, told me about the FOMBLs and suggested that I join, of course I said 'yes'. I have been very kindly received, but unfortunately I do a lot of coaching and event organising on Saturdays, so can't often make it. *Martin Hyman*

We are delighted to announce that Martin will be the speaker at our next public meeting, which will be held on Friday 18 November at the German-speaking Church, 1 Chalmers Crescent, Edinburgh. Please tell your friends to come: all are welcome.

Football in the Meadows

Meadows Festival Primary Schools Football Competition

Up until 2014 there was a local school football competition for about 20 years, with many cups donated in the past, which are available each year to winners and runners up, which the schools then hold for a year and give back for the next year's competition.

Restarting the competition

I would like to help to restart this again for June 2017, as the cups are just lying in the various schools' glass cabinets, which was not what they were donated for. Especially I would like to find out which school has the *Douglas Love Memorial Cup*, which was donated by his family about six years ago for the Festival Football to play for each year. Douglas Love was well known in the Meadows: for 50 years he helped the youngsters and students playing football, and has a memorial bench at the east end of the Meadows.

There is also the *Keith Taylor Fun Fair Runners Up Cup*, donated by the Meadows Festival fun-fair among many others. Seven cups were presented for year 2014, but I have no record of who won them. The local schools are Gillespie's, Sciennes, Bruntsfield, Preston Street, South Morningside, St Peter's, and I think Craiglockhart. Restarting the competition would help increase the Festival numbers with all the players and families coming to watch. I feel the Festival would benefit this primary 5 to 7 age group. who at the moment have not heard of the previous football competitions.

Douglas Paul (douglasnpaul@tiscali.co.uk)



Bamboobelly bandstand

Many thanks to Fernando and friends for putting on a charming programme to open the new Bamboobelly performance space at the top of Middle Meadow Walk (our latest project to receive funding from the Council). We were treated to spirited Brazilian classical guitar tunes played by Leon and some poems read by John while small children ran about, reaching for giant bubbles.

The next item was a fascinating talk on cast iron bandstands, given by veteran foundrymen Andrew and Alistair Laing, who brought some forms and cast pieces, and other interesting things to look at. Photos of historical bandstands, especially the former bandstand in the Meadows, were on display, and many people stopped to look.

Naming of paths

The third item on the programme was an extended version by Graeme Cruickshank of his AGM talk on the naming of paths on the Meadows and Links. This whole project will need a lot more thought and discussion. Then our Convener read some poems by Robert Burns, to follow Graeme's mention of Robbie's father William Burnes, who helped with the original drainage of the loch to make what is now the whole of the east Meadows, and the subsequent landscaping. Further impromptu poetry recitals followed. The audience was delighted to be present at the opening of this new, improved outdoor venue. Warm thanks indeed to Fernando for his enterprise in getting this project going, and for his hard work in making it a reality.

Sarah Tolley

Volunteering

Below is a photo of the Cricket Pavilion, built around 1904. We have a responsibility to keep this historic listed building well maintained. In the past few months we have been working on the grassy areas in front of it, to make sure that muddy patches are converted as soon as possible into green sward. Do join us if you can on our next voluntary work party: Saturday 24 September, 10.00 a.m. at the Pavilion.



Park Quality Assessment Result 2016

We are delighted to announce that our Park Quality Assessment result for this year is several points better than last year, at 73%, which is classified as **Good+**. What lets us down is the litter, which our own best efforts and the park cleansing department still don't seem to be able to get on top of. It was also noted that we need more signage, and educational interpretation boards. This is very much on our agenda for new projects. However, it has been noted that 'The Friends group have a very active web site page also facebook and twitter. They also have quarterly newsletter . . . ' (Actually it's only three times a year at present - perhaps we could squeeze in one more?) Our contribution to voluntary work has also been noted, and 'Community involvement' gets a mark of 9 out of 10. So well done, everybody! (*Ed.*)

Events on the Meadows

Sadly, our deputation to the Transport and Environment Committee asking for the Meadows to be treated like all other Edinburgh parks except for Princes Street Gardens, and have no event lasting for more than 15 days, was unsuccessful. We have to wait three years for this issue to be revisited. But there could be an opportunity to comment in the Open Space Strategy 2021 consultation: see our website (www.fombl.org.uk).

Forthcoming Events

Meadows Chamber Orchestra: 17 September, 7.45 pm Inverleith St Serf's Church, Alec Frank-Gemmill conducts and is also the soloist in Neruda's Concertino for Horn and Orchestra. Other works: Haydn Symphony No. 82: 'The Bear' and Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3, The 'Scottish' (inspired by a visit to Holyrood House). 19 November, same time, same venue: David Watkin conducts Brahms's Fourth Symphony and Sibelius' Violin Concerto (soloist Alexander Janiczek).

Virgin Media Pop up Stand: 15 September. Virgin Media are going to promote Virgin Broadband to students and passers-by.

Army Recruitment – This is to promote positions within the army for the campus students and members of the public. An interactive technical IT will be shown. From 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., 3 October 2016.

CHAS (Children's Hospice Association Scotland) Devil Dash - Sponsored run/walk - family friendly event 6.66 km across the park. 11am start 30 October: 1pm finish (off site at 3pm) 100% for Charity: CHAS SCO 19724.

Useful Contacts

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

Police Insp Graeme Nisbet – Graeme.Nisbet@scotland.pnn.police.uk 0131 662 5000

Community Officer, Meadows and Morningside, PC Sasha Ponniah – sasha.ponniah@scotland.pnn.police.uk

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): Tel. 0131 529 7050; **Litter:** 0131 529 3030

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

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

Road repairs and development: Alan Dunlop, Senior Transport Team Leader: Tel. 0131 529 3719; email alan.dunlop@edinburgh.gov.uk

Complaints regarding Council vehicles driving on Links or Meadows: Tel. 0131 529 3030

Task Force Manager (responsible for street cleaning and grounds maintenance) Rab Farquhar:

Tel. 07786 110 377; email rab.farquhar@edinburgh.gov.uk

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

Locality Waste and Cleansing Officer : Gareth Thomas

Environmental Warden team leader: Paul Baxter Tel. 0131 529 5204

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

FOMBL Committee members

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