



Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm  
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### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for this year (£5) became due in January. To those of you who have renewed Thank You. To those who haven't yet renewed, please will you think about it. We need your support. It's not the money. The fact is, as a formal group, we carry some might when it comes to lobbying Wirral Borough Council for our resources for the Hill. The more members we have, the more weight we carry. Pressure on Council resources is not likely to get any easier in the near future so we need to try harder not to get forgotten about. It would be helpful if all members could fill in our new membership form (enclosed), so we can update all our records. In particular, it would be useful to have your E. Mail address (if you have got one) so we can keep you up to date with events as they unfold.

**Peter Vincent**

### Friends of Bidston Hill

#### Membership Application / Renewal Form for 2014

Name:	Payment by Cheque or Cash (£5) to <i>Friends of Bidston Hill</i>
Address:	
Tel:	Please send to: Secretary Friends of Bidston Hill Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm Bidston, CH43 7PD
Email:	

EVENTS for 2014: **Windmill** will be open to the public from 10am-Noon on the **first Saturday** – April to September. **Bidston Lighthouse** will be open Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April from 10.30am to 1pm. **Three tours** of the trees and rhododendrons of Park Wood Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> April, 24<sup>th</sup> May and 21<sup>st</sup> June, meet at Windmill at 2pm.

## FRIENDS OF BIDSTON HILL



KING GEORGES WAY  
CENTENARY EDITION

## Chairman's Report

Well, it's springtime again!

Apart from the terrible storms, we don't really seem to have had much winter at all this year and milder weather is upon us already. We are busy working on future events to see us through to summer!



After the success of our Windmill openings, Teddy Bears' picnic, Rhododendron Walk and Fungal Foray last summer, we enjoyed a well attended (scary) Ghost Walk followed by a very interesting Tree Walk. I would like to thank all of the committee members and Friends for participating and making these events possible. I would like to say a special thank you to Mandy and Stephen Pickles for kindly opening up the Lighthouse for the benefit of Friends to enjoy.

At the Teddy Bears' Picnic in particular, parents were telling us how delighted they were that their children so much enjoyed time in the woods and we certainly intend to repeat this event during the summer holiday. Thanks to the efforts of our Ranger Nic, several schools are participating in Forest Schools on the Hill and the young people are learning outdoor skills which we hope will give them a positive grounding to respect and enjoy the countryside around the area.

You may be aware that Bidston Hill once again achieved the Green Flag status for another year, this shows how hard everybody has been working in order to maintain the required standards for the granting of this meritorious award.

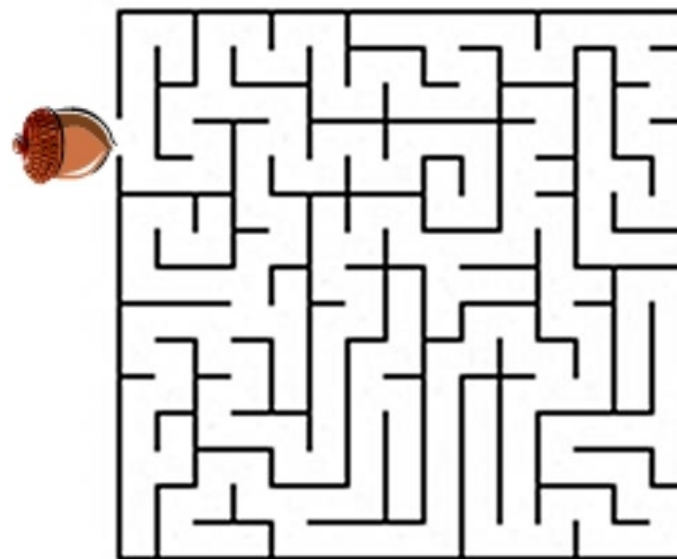
I recently attended a Civic Reception at Wallasey Town Hall in recognition of the various local Friends Groups that helped to acquire this honour for their parks and open spaces. The Mayor & Mayoress of Wirral were in attendance and I am delighted to advise that they have agreed to our request to be present at the centenary of King George V's opening of King George's Way, to perform the unveiling of the renovated sign placed there all those years ago. This will take place at 2:00pm, Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> March next year.

Finally, I want to thank Terry for taking over the production of our Newsletter, this is his first edition and I think he has made a splendid job of it. Hope you enjoy reading the publication and for keeping up to date with news and events, keep checking our website which is continually evolving. You can leave any comments at [www.bidstonhill.org.uk](http://www.bidstonhill.org.uk)

Roy Caligari

Chair

## HELP SAM THE SQUIRREL FIND HIS ACORN



**FRIENDS  
OF  
BIDSTON  
HILL  
MAZE**



1. When was the first Bidston Lighthouse completed?
2. Who was Edmund Taylor?
3. What is the name of the Ranger?
4. When was King George's Way opened?
5. What was the quarry on Flaybrick Hill called?
6. How many new trees are to be planted on Bidston Hill?

Thanks Paris



## Rangers Report

Yet another interesting season, we have had hundreds of children through our Forest School Programme on Bidston Hill, with many spontaneous dens appearing all around the park. It is great to see children (and parents) having fun, and being creative like I did when I was growing up.

We will be having a Green Family Programme tree plant on Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> March with over 1000 trees being planted on the hill in the woods to replace some of those we must remove from the heathland to keep it open and some of our Forest Schools children will be raring to take part in the activities. The Green family programme is funded by the Public health outcomes fund to help children reach a healthy potential in life.

The £9k funding from Awards for All has been nearly all spent with a few outstanding bits to finish up, it has been an excellent pilot lots of fun to deliver and we succeeded in getting a further £82,625 funding on the back of the success of our small scale pilot, we have since expanded Forest school delivery to mid and south Wirral constituencies which is down to our Forest school staff and Volunteers.

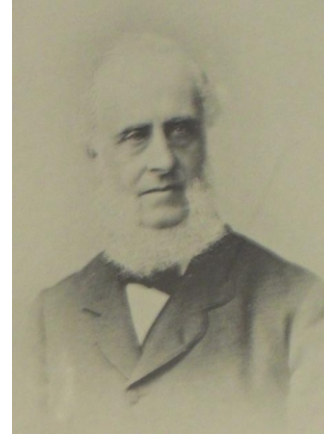
The Wirral Mind Project has run successfully throughout the winter and sadly only has a few weeks left with Russ helping the guys work on the hill and create woodcraft articles in their centre. This project is something I would love to continue especially as the group has bonded so well with Russ.

I am still based at Birkenhead Park so please feel free to pop in to see me or telephone on 0151 652 5197. Our newly suffering newsletter editor has limited me to half a page so I will sign off with a simple thank you to everyone who has helped this season.

Nic the Ranger  
The Ranger Forest School Leaders in training.



## Edmund Taylor



The greatest service rendered to the community by Edmund Taylor was his leading role in securing Bidston Hill for the public.

Movements in favour of public acquisition of Bidston Hill were first made in 1883, and a second attempt started in 1893 with nine men, "The Bidston Hill Committee". They finally succeeded in 1897, in connection with Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

The hill formed part of the estate of Robert Charles de Grey Vyner who conducted negotiations in a handsome manner by taking the lowest of three valuations making his own.

In 1907 steps were made to secure another portion of the Hill, which was "on the market". It was feared that the land might be used for building purposes. The area in question was an area of 22 acres on the south eastern slope of the hill, known as the "Pine Woods". The Pine Woods cost a staggering £10,500 in 1907 and was acquired as a memorial to the late Mr Edmund Taylor whose hard work and influence made its purchase possible. The woods were later named Taylor's Wood, in honour and memory of his 25 years of service to the area. The wood now appears as a large area of Scots pines with some Corsican Pines, Oaks and a large number of feral Holly bushes.



# BIDSTON LIGHTHOUSE



(Courtesy of Williamson Art Gallery & Museum)

1763 was a busy year for Liverpool Dockmaster, William Hutchinson, a former privateer. Under his direction, four lighthouses were built on the Wirral coast, to help ships negotiate the sandbanks in Liverpool Bay. By aligning the two Sea Lights at Leasowe, mariners bound for Liverpool could set a safe course through the Horse Channel. Likewise, the two Lake Lights marked the safe passage into Hoyle Lake.

Meanwhile on Bidston Hill, the signals station was thriving. When a lookout at the signal station identified an approaching ship, he would send a runner along the ridge of the hill to hoist a flag on the ship owner's flagpole, giving merchants watching from Liverpool plenty of time to prepare to unload their cargoes. At their peak, the Bidston Signals were a landmark important enough to inspire a range of souvenir items. You can still find traces of the holes where more than 100 flagpoles once stood, all the way from the windmill to some distance north of the lighthouse.

It was at the signals station that William Hutchinson conducted his famous experiments with parabolic reflectors, revolutionising lighthouse design. A light placed at the focus of one of his reflectors could be seen at unprecedented distances. So when the lower light at Leasowe was destroyed by storms, it was feasible to replace it by a new lighthouse atop Bidston Hill in the same alignment, but away from the ravages of the sea. The first Bidston Lighthouse, an octagonal tower featuring a single massive parabolic reflector nearly 14 feet in diameter, was completed in 1771. The other Wirral lights were upgraded about this time.

A single family operated Bidston Lighthouse for the next century. Richard Wilding was Bidston's first Lighthouse keeper. His widow, Elizabeth, succeeded him in 1797, becoming Liverpool's first female lighthouse keeper. Elizabeth's son-in-law, Captain William Urmson, took over in 1800. Ann Urmson succeeded her father in 1835. They all died in service. In 2013, the road leading to the Lighthouse was named Wilding Way, in memory of Bidston's first lighthouse keepers.

In 1866, the expansion of Waterloo Dock forced Liverpool Observatory to relocate to a new building on Bidston Hill near the lighthouse, which by now had fallen into disrepair. A fire in 1868 made matters worse. So the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board demolished the old lighthouse and drew up plans for a new one. Work began in 1872 and was completed in 1873 at a total cost of £4295, more than £350,000 at today's prices. The new structure, still standing today, consisted of a four-storey circular sandstone tower and three attached cottages for the use of the resident keepers.

Just as the 1771 Lighthouse had featured a state-of-the-art catoptric light, so the new one was equipped with a sophisticated dioptric installation by Chance Brothers of Birmingham. Experts in glass manufacturing, Chance's had glazed the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1858, and supplied glass for the Palace of Westminster and ornamental windows for the White House. The cost of the Lighthouse's

## Bidston Hill and Surroundings

### in the 1872 Flora of Liverpool

The 1872 Flora of Liverpool offers more than just a picture of our local flora. By giving locations for many plants it also tells the story of the dramatic upheaval that was taking place at this time, especially in Birkenhead as the docks were rapidly extended almost the full length of Wallasey Pool along with the roads and dwellings needed to house the new labour force. Ordinance Survey maps show that Birkenhead Park and the roads from Hamilton Square to St James' Church had already been laid out by 1840-43. In the years 1841-46 the population of Birkenhead rose from 8223 to over 40,000.

In earlier "Floras" from 1839 and 1851 the quarry on Flaybrick Hill (Tollemache Road) was called Bidston Stone Quarry. By 1872 two plants - Red Wortleberry (Cowberry) and Lily of the Valley had disappeared - "eradicated by recent change" - probably referring to the creation of the cemetery on the site, open in 1864.

In Claughton several plants were found "amongst the macadam of the new-made road," 1863 and 1866 are mentioned, and other plants "which occurred as ballast plants on the new-made roads." The later 1933 Flora explains; "In the ballast of ships arriving from various countries there are often introduced plants which are foreign to the district." It seems that this ballast was often used in the process of road building and brought in new plants.

A note in 1872 referring to Buckbean (Bogbean) says: "Herb collectors have almost eradicated this plant from the neighbourhood of towns. By the sides of the pits in the brick-fields behind Claughton Village (Norman Street) it still grows in plenty" - along with Water Crowfoot, Least Water-parsnip, greater Bladderwort and Soapwort. The brickworks are still on the map in 1909. There are also several references to Upton Road "from Claughton to the Tollgate" - which was at the start of the bend just beyond Nocturn Lane.

In Bidston Village the restoration of St Oswald's Church in 1856 led to the loss of Calamint which had been growing there and Butterbur had been growing "by the road to Leasowe about 100 yards past the public house" (the Ring O'Bells on the corner of School Lane opposite the church).

The Pleasure Grounds, presumably the Rhododendron Gardens between Boundary Road and Hoyle Road, ceased around 1855 and bequeathed to the town in the 1930's, was a location for Upright or Heath Cudweed.

On Bidston Hill itself both windmill and telegraph station are mentioned. At the time of the 1872 Flora a new lighthouse was being built opened in 1873. Fenugreek - very rare on Merseyside - was growing "in the close turf extending ten to twenty yards around the windmill".

Marsh Gentian, Bog Asphodel and Round-leaved Sundew were three specialities in the boggy parts of Bidston Heath and Oxtan Moor (the area around the golf course). But where was Theobald's Field on Bidston Hill? - in 1872 one of only three sites on Merseyside for the very rare Frog Orchid. Sadly none of these last four mentioned plants are to be found on the hill today.

Bob Hughes 2013

## King George's Way

Most of us are familiar with the story of the opening of King George's Way – The King pressed a button at the town hall and a ribbon was cut at the beginning of King Georges way, he was then chauffer driven up to Bidston Hill were he paused waved to the waiting crowd then carried on his way to Wallasey to open a hospital.

These young women were enjoying themselves helping out for the King's Visit to Bidston Hill, they were unaware that in a few months the Great War would begin and the contribution they would make not only in this country but abroad in the war effort.



Courtesy of Birkenhead reference library

The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) founded in 1909, a voluntary organisation providing field nursing services. Most VADs were of the middle and upper classes and unaccustomed to hardship and traditional hospital discipline.

I look at their faces and wonder if they, like me needed to go for a walk on Bidston Hill just to escape, to try and make sense of this world we live in: given the chance I feel they would have enjoyed some of the activities arranged by the friends of Bidston Hill and mentioned later in this booklet

Bidston Hill is my hill...it is your hill...it is our hill and the Friends of Bidston Hill aim is to protect the Hill for all of us so please show your support by filling in the membership form that comes with this booklet.

Terry McKenna.

Editor



(Courtesy of Williamson Art Gallery & Museum)

optics, £1600, exceeded by more than £500 the cost of the tower in which it would sit, and represented the single most expensive part of the construction.

In addition to the light, the keepers at the Bidston Lighthouse were also responsible for the signals system. Although the signals were in decline by 1873, due mainly to the advent of the electric telegraph, a dedicated signals room was included in the design of the Lighthouse, and telescope mounts were fitted in its windows.

By contrast to the 1771 light, which shone for a century, the current structure saw only some 40 years of operational service. Improvements in navigation and the placing of marker buoys in the Mersey rendered Bidston Lighthouse redundant. The light was finally switched off in October of 1913.

Ownership of the lighthouse and its grounds passed from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board to the Birkenhead Corporation in 1935, for the discounted price of £1000. The Corporation used the cottages as accommodation. The Sea Cadets used the tower to practise semaphore in the post-war years. A fire in 1950 did considerable damage to the lamp-room.

In 1974 the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) acquired a 99 year lease on the lighthouse's kitchen gardens, where they constructed the Joseph Proudman Building. The Lighthouse, Observatory and the wall enclosing them became Grade-II listed buildings in 1989. In 2000, Wirral Borough Council and NERC conducted much-needed repairs as part of the 'Light up Bidston Hill' millennium project. But when the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory relocated to the University of Liverpool a few years later, the site was all but abandoned. Attempts to find a viable use for the Joseph Proudman Building failed, and it was finally demolished in February of 2013. The Observatory is currently occupied by live-in guardians.

In 2010, NERC sold the lighthouse to Dr Stephen and Mrs Mandy Pickles, who have begun a programme of restoration that will take several years to complete. The new owners have opened the Lighthouse to the Friends of Bidston Hill on several occasions, including windmill open days.

By Joseph Davies and Stephen Pickles

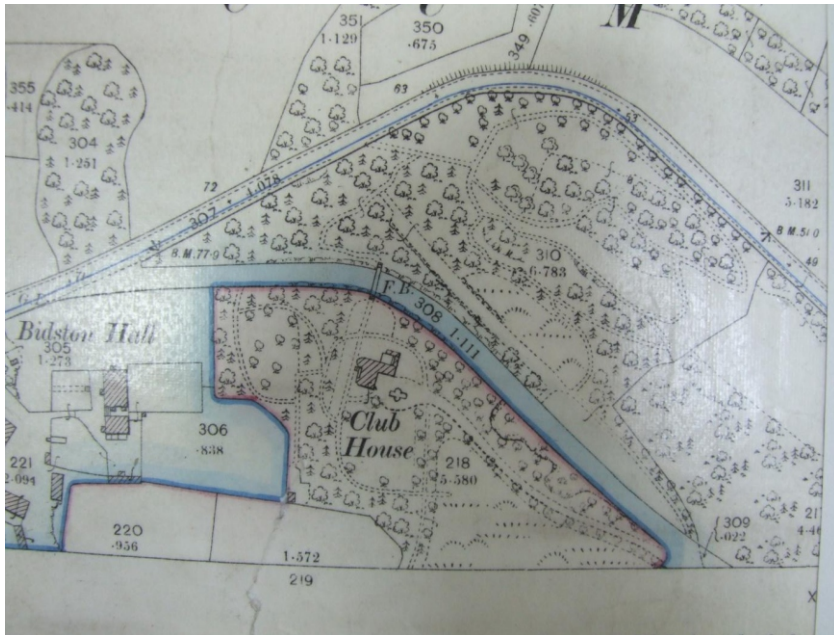
More information about Bidston Lighthouse is available on its website:  
<http://www.bidstonlighthouse.org.uk/>



## Bidston Hill's Rhododendrons

Once Bidston Hill was purchased by Birkenhead Borough Council in 1894, a budget was provided each year to their Park Superintendent to buy trees to plant in Park Wood. Between 1897 and 1910 many hundreds of Hardy Hybrid Rhododendrons were bought with this money and these are the ones we can still see flowering today. Unfortunately, the records do not say which varieties were bought so over recent years Morna Knottenbelt spent a lot of effort trying to identify those that still exist. It is well worth visiting Park Wood between April and June to see their spectacular displays. Next year I plan to give a guided walk in each of those months as different varieties peak at different times.

There may be some of our members that can remember visiting the "Rhododendron Gardens" that Robert Vyner planted in the 1850's? They were situated in the area between Boundary Road and Bidston Village Road as shown in this map of 1912.



Nowadays this space is completely overgrown, but we have managed to acquire two postcards from the early 1900's (which can be seen on our new website: [www.bidstonhill.org.uk](http://www.bidstonhill.org.uk)). These give an idea of the size of these plants. We would very much like to see any other postcards or personal photos that you may have. I look forward to meeting you all on these walks next year.

By Steve Lyus

## Bidston Hill – King George's Way



On 25<sup>th</sup> March 1914 King George V and Queen Mary visited Birkenhead. Amongst his other duties The King formerly opened the Hill to the public. A signpost was erected at the traffic light end of King George's Way giving the footpath its name. The sign also carried a metal plate giving details of the event and mentioned the Mayor at the time.

That sign lasted until the 1970's when it succumbed to old age and the weather.

In 1989 a local locksmith Mr Cassidy had a replica made at his own expense and this carried the original metal plate.

Vandals damaged the sign some few years later and it went back to Mr Cassidy for repair. Sadly he died before the work was done.

This autumn John Jakeman traced his son who, by a stroke of luck, still had part of the replacement sign in his shed, together with the metal plate.

Russ Cottrell, a talented wood carver who some of you might know from the Friday group has agreed to make a new sign out of re-claimed mahogany and it is hoped that this will be in place by the centenary of the Royal Visit.

It may not be an exact replica but he will do his best. Let's see how long this one lasts.

Peter Vincent 2013



Mr James Moon JP, the Mayor of Birkenhead, in 1914. For many years he resided at "Westwood", Bidston a residence which he built on being first struck with the charms of Bidston.