



Friends of Bidston Hill

Newsletter, Autumn 2016

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Chairman's Report

I am pleased to advise that our efforts for maintenance of the Hill by our hard working volunteers has paid off! Once again, it has achieved the coveted Green Flag Status Award for 2016/2017.

Bidston Hill

Winner 2016/2017



The mark of a quality park or green space.
Given in recognition of achieving the national
standard for parks and green spaces.

The aim of the Friends of Bidston Hill is to support the development of the Hill for the local and wider community, whilst striving to maintain the Hill's unique character. The 'Friends' work in partnership with Wirral Council Parks and Countryside Service creating new ideas

and projects for the benefit of the Hill and its users. Much credit for the continued green flag status should go to our Friday Group that works all year through, irrespective of what the weather is throwing at them! It is through such dedication and love for the Hill that makes it possible for us all to enjoy the benefits of this beautiful conservation area throughout the seasons.

If you are interested in joining our volunteers please let me know by email info@bidstonhill.org.uk and I will let you have further information or, call John on 07887 665120.

Now that darker evening skies are on the way, for all budding and long-standing enthusiasts, we are planning to hold an astronomy event on the Hill, So wrap up well and bring along your telescopes, binoculars, cameras, star charts etc for a truly invigorating experience. Whether your interests lie in the moon, planets, galaxies or even deep space objects, this is a night not to be missed! We will let you have further details shortly.

During March next year we will be participating in the 'Great British Spring Clean', this follows on from earlier this year when we had our 'Clean for the Queen' tidy up campaign on the Hill. The volunteers gathered at Tam O' Shanter Farm to collect litter-pickers, refuse sacks, and maps of the area to be covered. Bidston Hill alone covers 100 acres, and our brave volunteers tackled Flaybrick Cemetery and the Rhododendron Gardens as well.

If you are interested in helping us out we would love to see you, we will provide further information nearer the time. However, you may care to visit the Great British Spring Clean website at: www.greatbritishspringclean.org.uk

You can keep abreast of all of what we are up to on the Hill by visiting the 'events calendar' on our website: www.bidstonhill.org.uk/events/

Roy Caligari – Chair

Disney for Dogs?

There are many dog walkers who use Bidston Hill (in fact that is why Roy and I joined the Friend's group as we use the Hill so regularly), and the 'regulars' tend to stop for a natter whilst the dogs scamper around. One lady I met a year or so back described the Hill as 'Disney for dogs' and it certainly is! There are exciting things to chase whether thrown by the owner or of the natural variety (fox or squirrel!) Most dogs are off lead and so it proves an excellent dog socialisation environment for puppies to learn 'the ropes' too.

As probably know, the Friends open up the Windmill monthly during the summer. Just to let you know, we usually have enough volunteers on hand to mind dogs whilst their owners visit the mill, so don't think you will have to miss the fantastic views from the top if you have your dog(s) with you!

I have a plea though: what is the logic of so carefully picking up dog poo and then leaving the poo bag either lying on the ground or hanging on a tree? This makes no sense at all and I just wish people would stop doing it! There are bins at the car park or carry it home!!

Angela Caligari

Tales of the Hill

Bidston Hill is one of the highest points on Wirral and also one of the most mysterious. There are numerous stories of witches covens, satanic rites, haunting and werewolves. It is also classified by many investigators of UFOs as a "window area", a hot spot of UFO activity where strange craft and lights appear in the sky.

Local legend tells that the windmill on Bidston Hill has claimed the lives of three men and a child, decapitating them when they came out of the wrong door.

Several ghosts are said to haunt the vicinity of the mill. One, the shadowy figure of a man, has been seen many times over the years and has even been photographed. Some say he is the ghost of a miller murdered at the beginning of the 19th century or maybe he is one of the millers killed by the sails.

Another ghost who haunts the area around the windmill is Richard Tilly who is buried in a secret grave somewhere close by. His coffin was unearthed in a Victorian house in Bidston in 1922. He had died in 1730 and because he was a known Satanist, he was not buried in consecrated ground. He had been lecherous in life and remains lecherous now, sometimes attacking young ladies foolish enough to cross the hill after dark.

Bidston Hill also has its own werewolf. The son of the first miller and her married lover, he grew up wild after his mother died in childbirth and his father lost interest in him. For many years, animals were found torn to shreds and howling was heard especially when there was a full moon. Many attempts have been made to rid the hill of its werewolf but blood-curdling howls can still be heard today.

On the sandstone ridge by the Observatory a young man called Oliver Milton and his friends summoned Lucifer. Apparently, the devil materialised just after midnight as a man in black with a charming voice. The young men swore allegiance to him and had good fortune for a while. However, the good fortune seemed to be full of snags and Oliver summoned the devil once again to try to break his pact with him. The next morning his charred body was found in his bed with the sheets and mattress untouched.

Bidston Hill has long been associated with witchcraft perhaps because of the carvings of the sun goddess and moon god. There is a story of a coven of witches who were found hanged in the woods after the local men decided to rid the area of witchcraft and those involved in it. Legend says that over the next couple of years each of the men were found hanging in the same woods.

These are just a few of the stories of Bidston Hill which have been passed down through the generations. If you know of any more we would love to hear from you.

Compiled by Mandy Pickles

New beginnings for Bidston Observatory

Stephen Pickles, at Bidston Lighthouse, October 2016

A new chapter in the history of Bidston Observatory has begun.

In September, we hosted a tea party at the Lighthouse to commemorate the Observatory being 150 years old. When we started planning, we didn't know whether the event would turn out to be a celebration or the launch of yet another campaign to save the Observatory from unsympathetic developers. It could have gone either way. But we couldn't let 2016 pass without doing something to commemorate the Observatory's sesquicentenary.

The day turned out to be a celebration. Former Observatory staff, outgoing guardians, representatives of local organisations (including the Friends of Bidston Hill, the Bidston Preservation Trust, Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm, the Wirral History and Heritage Association, and the Wirral Society), local councillors, artists, and many others, all had a chance to meet the new owners and hear about their plans.

The new owners of Bidston Observatory are artists Edward Clive and his wife Fiona James. Working with their friend and colleague Kymberley Ward, they plan to renovate the Observatory and to operate it as a not-for-profit artists research centre. They also hope to set up a small, permanent exhibition space dedicated to the Observatory's history and heritage, and to open it to the public on occasional open days.



Ed Clive, Fi James and Kym Ward.

Photo courtesy Living Wirral magazine.

We could not have hoped for a better outcome for Bidston Hill. After twelve years of uncertainty since the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory quit Bidston Hill for the University of Liverpool, the Observatory is finally in the hands of sympathetic owners. Ed, Fi and Kym (as they like to be known) are already inspiring us with their energy and enthusiasm. They will need every ounce of it, for many challenges lie ahead: extensive repair, renovation and restoration work, planning permission, listed buildings consent, ...



**Friends of Bidston Hill (John Lee, Angela & Roy Caligari) at the tea party.
Photo courtesy Living Wirral Magazine.**

More about Bidston Observatory

150 years ago, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board completed the construction of a new Observatory on Bidston Hill, after Liverpool's original Observatory was forced to relocate due to the expansion of Waterloo Dock. George Fosbery Lyster, engineer-in-chief to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, was the architect. The same man re-built Bidston Lighthouse in 1872-3. Lyster also takes the credit for Great Ormes' Head Lighthouse and Hoylake Upper Lighthouse, not to mention many acres of Liverpool's and Birkenhead's docks.

The first director, John Hartnup, got the keys on the 22nd of December, 1866. Observations began the following year, away from the smog of Victorian Liverpool.

The original purpose of the Observatory was to provide a service to mariners. Astronomical observations were taken in order to determine Greenwich Mean Time precisely, which in turn was essential for the accurate determination of longitude at sea. Ships calling at the port of Liverpool would wait for the one-o'clock gun to be fired remotely by an electric cable connecting Bidston Observatory to Morpeth Dock, then synchronise their chronometers before heading back out to sea. Another function of the Observatory was the rating of chronometers. Bidston was the first place to calibrate chronometers at two different, carefully controlled temperatures.

After World War I, this emphasis of the work at Bidston shifted from the measurement of time to the study of tide. Ever since Liverpool's harbour-master William Hutchinson (the same fellow who pioneered the use of parabolic reflectors in lighthouses on Bidston Hill) measured the height and time of high tide at the Old Dock gates for nearly thirty years, Liverpool had led the world in tidal studies. This work became centred at Bidston

Observatory when the Liverpool Tidal Institute was set up there under Joseph Proudman's direction during the 1920s. Arthur Doodson used mechanical computers to predict tides all around the world, including the tides for the D-Day landings.

The Observatory's research expanded into oceanography, until the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory (as it was then known) outgrew Bidston Hill and moved to a new building on the University of Liverpool campus in 2004. It still continues today under the guise of the National Oceanography Centre.

The departure of the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory from Bidston Hill began a 12-year limbo. The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) originally hoped to sell the site to a developer, but thanks to opposition from local pressure groups, the spectre of an eleven-story high-rise residential development was averted. In 2012, NERC applied for and obtained planning permission and listed buildings consent (now lapsed) to convert the Observatory into four residential apartments. Later that year, the Joseph Proudman Building on Bidston Hill was demolished, having seen less than 30 years of productive use. Having put the Observatory to the market on several occasions, NERC finally sold it in 2015 to another developer (Bidston Observatory Developments Limited), who had outbid a community-led consortium. This was the lowest point in the Observatory's history. A period of systematic neglect saw a rapid deterioration of the fabric of the building and the appearance of the grounds, exacerbated by water ingress, unpaid bills and a winter with no heating, and the Observatory was nominated to the Victorian Society's list of the top ten endangered buildings of 2016.

Now the Observatory begins a new chapter under the stewardship of Ed, Fi and Kym. It will still be a place of research, but for the arts, not the sciences.

More about the artistic research centre

Ed, Fi and Kym met while studying fine arts in Rotterdam. They have been searching for the right site for an artists' research centre for three years, and rejected fifty other buildings before falling in love with Bidston Observatory.

Ed, Fi and Kym released a statement of intent on 17th September. In it they say:

"Our intention is to set up a not-for-profit study centre focused on providing artists, writers, academics, performers etc. with a cheap, temporary place to dictate their own methods of work, allowing them to stay and come together to develop projects that are of social value and require time and space in an unpressured environment in order to be realised."

They add:

"Recognising the social significance of the site's heritage we also intend to establish a museum space that makes its history available to the public; we are currently considering how the atrium on the ground floor could be opened up to visitors at set times. We very much hope to involve the various groups associated with Bidston Observatory in the development process enlisting their personal knowledge of the site and its history in order to do the task justice.

"While we have set intentions for how the building will function and priorities to maintain it as a site for artistic production, we also intend to host public open days,

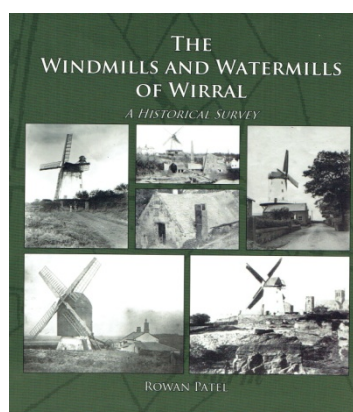
allowing tours of the building on set dates so visitors can see its key features. Though we do not view public events to be our primary focus, as a cultural forum we envision the hosting of open lectures, seminars and workshops will arise as part of the work carried out at the Observatory and that these should attract an external audience to the site.

“Viewing ourselves as accountable guardians of the site and its legacy, it is also our intention to be based at the Observatory to oversee the project’s development and future running.”

Book reviews

Stephen Pickles

This year, lovers of Bidston Hill have been treated to three new publications, all of which deserve a place in our bookshelves.



The Windmills and Watermills of Wirral – A Historical Survey, by Rowan Patel, 2015. Paperback, 282pp, ISBN 978-1-910352-10-6. RRP £19.95.

The most complete survey of the windmills and watermills of Wirral ever undertaken, this carefully researched volume is an important contribution to Wirral’s local history. It’s not surprising that it was eight years in the making.

But it is surprising that the author was still at high school when he started researching it. Don’t let that put you off. Rowan’s scholarship and attention to detail is a match for any local historian worthy of the name.

The book is available from the author: Rowan Patel, 50 Brookhurst Avenue, Bromborough, Wirral, CH63 0HU. Price £19.95 + £3.50 P&P, with cheques to be payable to Rowan Patel, or arrange for local collection.

Email: rowangp@yahoo.co.uk Phone: 07546 280 991

Bidston Hill Heritage Trail, by the Friends of Bidston Hill, 2nd edition, 2016. Paperback, A5, 16pp. RRP 50p.

This is the revised edition of the classic Bidston Hill Heritage Trail booklet, first published in 2006. Text, illustrations and the centrefold map have been updated to 2016.

Copies are available for 50p from Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm. Copies are also available on open days at Bidston Windmill and Bidston Lighthouse. All proceeds go to the Friends of Bidston Hill.

One day I went a-walking – a ghostly tale from Bidston Hill, by Robert Hughes, 2016. Paperback, illustrated, A5, 76pp. RRP £2.00.

“They had called off the search some time ago now. It was over two years since Bob had disappeared, disappeared into thin air, it seemed. Sally had carried on looking, hoping. Up on Bidston Hill mainly. It was there that Bob had gone walking.”

Then Sally discovers a manuscript hidden in Bob's bottom drawer. Something strange and magical had happened to Bob before his mysterious disappearance on Bidston Hill, as the manuscript reveals...

Robert Hughes is steeped in the history of Bidston Hill and has an intimate knowledge of its bird life. He also has a gift for the pen. Every page is infused with the author's love of Bidston Hill, and his delightful illustrations bring its history to life.

I hope that Robert Hughes has more tales to tell us, before the Hill absorbs him completely.

A few copies are available for £2 from Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm. Copies are also available on open days at Bidston Windmill and Bidston Lighthouse. All proceeds go to the Friends of Bidston Hill.

Membership renewals

Memberships of the Friends of Bidston Hill became due for renewal on 1st January 2016. The annual fee of £5 covers a whole family for a year. If you haven't renewed your membership, or want to join, you can download the membership form from our website (or collect one from the Ranger's office at Tam O'Shanter Farm). Payment can be made by cheque, payable to Friends of Bidston Hill and sent to Tam O'Shanter Farm, or transfer, our bank details are: **A/C No: 71507958. Sort Code: 40-10-26.** It is important **you use your name as a reference** so that we can ensure we allocate your payment correctly.

