

Some information from the Friends of the Hampden Park 2008

Prior to 1901 the land now called Hampden Park was part of the Ratton Estate owned by Lord Willingdon. Ratton is mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1087 and for a long time the woodland and lake had been a decoy attracting wild fowl for the estate kitchens. By the end of the 19th century the lake had probably fallen into disuse. Lord Willingdon agreed to sell 78 acres to Eastbourne Corporation on condition that a new main road, Kings Drive, was built from Eastbourne to Willingdon.

Hampden Park, named after Lord Willingdon's grandfather, Viscount Hampden, was opened by Lord Rosebery on the 12th August 1902 and was the first corporation owned park in Eastbourne. Today the Park has many attractions. The northern section is dominated by the Decoy Lake and surrounding woodland with many pleasant paths.

There are numerous fine specimen trees and during the early spring crocuses and daffodils appear in profusion. The park facilities include a children's playground, outdoor tennis courts and two bowls clubs. To the south there are playing fields and on the perimeter the sports park.

The Friends of Hampden Park were formed in early 2005 by interested residents. We work with the local authority parks department closely, our aim ultimately is to restore and renovate the Decoy Pond and park to their former glory and numerous areas and projects await finance and approval. Regular newsletters and meetings keep members informed of progress and achievements.

Over the years we have funded a guide for the park which has been updated and reprinted in 2008; funded new park signs including maps and informative material on trees, etc.; had members working on scrub clearance, planting not only flower beds but new woodland areas; created a bluebell dell and snowdrop bank with help from the local infant schoolchildren; weeded and litter picked. The Friends run social events in the park and in the nearby hall with talks on the park, its history, its flora, fauna and birds. The Friends work with the RSPB regularly through the year on surveys. A project for a local school woodwork class was making nesting boxes which were erected in the park in time for the nesting season in 2008.

We have worked with South Downs College a group of whose students not only designed the renovated water garden area but sowed the seeds, grew them on and planted them out to their own design. This is an ongoing project.

We have worked with the Probation Service having teams of youngsters on community service restoring the old bus shelter, the railings around the lake and the hardwood seating and posts, plus taking part in the continuing litter picking campaign with members of the Friends.

In addition, the Friends have set up a working group to liaise with surrounding commercial operations including Sainsbury's to encourage them to assist with our campaign to keep litter contained.

The sensory garden has been replanted in 2007 and MENCAP have taken over the weeding and maintenance which is of great interest to them and of benefit to all visitors.

The latest project the Friends have undertaken has been providing an Arboretum on the old bowling green site. This has been funded by grant aid and has a theme, a history of trees through the centuries together with shrubs etc., as companion plants which are complimentary to the relevant century. This is to be another ongoing project with further planting planned for the autumn when suitable material has been sourced. But the prime aim will be for it to be an outdoor history classroom for local school children with a coloured printed guide and plant identification booklet, educational material, quizzes, etc., provided by the Friends in hard copy and for downloading from websites. We are also hoping to involve local children in raising plants from seeds and/or adopting plugs that they can grow on and then help plant out. This is all aimed at getting the community involved even from a very young age.

There are many more projects the Friends have prioritised which wait funding but they continue to be committed to protecting the park we know and love and improving when able this great community facility. If you would like to join the Friends, the cost of membership is £2 per person as a one off joining payment. All new members are invited to take part in the various activities planned by the Friends throughout the year.

In order to join or to obtain further information about the Friends of Hampden Park, please telephone 07802 884088 or e-mail friendsofhampdenpark@hotmail.co.uk. Alternatively, you can write to Friends of the Hampden Park, Courtmead, Walnut Tree Walk, Eastbourne BN20 9BP.

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