

Happy New Year
everyone and here's to a
better one than the last!

Wolvercote
Commoners'
NEWSLETTER
January 2021

During 2020, a rather unusual year to say the least, many of us have been out exploring different places to walk as an alternative to the tedium of lockdown. Luckily the summer weather was kind and Port Meadow became the new 'Costa Brava' as it was no longer possible to travel abroad. Whilst Port Meadow was the main focus for many, some will have also enjoyed the Wolvercote Lakes, perhaps finding them for the first time. But how many newcomers, as well as regulars, know of its rather unusual history before it became a beautiful place to walk and relax? There are two lakes, one is open to the public and another, at the north end, which is a restricted nature reserve. They were once known as the 'Pleasure Lakes' and the 'Gullet', and belonged to one person, Viv Kirk, whose family owned them for two generations. Mr Kirk lived in Walton Well Road and, until his last days, would be seen walking across Port Meadow daily, coming from his house in Jericho to spend the day where he felt most at home, amongst the trees and birds whilst spending many happy hours fishing. Although long gone, there was a house on stilts that stood on the site which, at times of flooding, could only be reached by punt. Over the years the lakes also became the home for his collection of steam engines and fairground-related items. Viv was an expert on fairground history and wrote in the National Traction Engine



Photo: Nick Malden



One Viv's treasures off to a new home and probably restoration

Trust magazine *Steaming*, later reprinted as a book, *Memories of St. Giles Fair**. However, the safety of his historic collection meant that the site had to be locked, gated and barred behind high fencing, making the lakes invisible from the road, so many people weren't even aware of their existence. Viv was a wonderful Oxford character and he wanted to make sure the lakes were cared for after his death. To this end he contacted the Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT) about their preservation. He kept his word and, following his death in 2004, left everything to the Trust which set about creating a nature reserve. The Trust's first job was to re-home his collection. The task of removing it was painstaking and did a great job of holding up the traffic on Godstow Road! For years the Lakes languished behind fencing, overgrown and inaccessible. The OPT then set about landscaping the area bordering the

front lake, so people were able walk around it, but left the back lake undisturbed as a nature reserve. This was to find a balance of creating beautiful public spaces, whilst keeping things natural. The lakes now host a variety of different species, including tufted ducks, coots, kingfishers, swans, grass snakes and, it is hoped, eventually even otters. It has taken several years and around £80,000 to transform the habitat, but now the lake is accessible to everyone via the gate on Godstow Road. Since 2010 the OPT has been helped by a band of volunteers to transform the eight-acre site and this continues to this day**. The lake is now open 24-hours a day, every day of the year, and has become a thriving natural habitat.

* *Memories of St. Giles Fair* is available at: www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Memories-of-St-Giles-Fair-by-Viv-Kirk/282914354751

** If you would like to volunteer, please complete a volunteer form (www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/content/volunteer) or, for further information, contact Stephen on 01865 242918 or email s.dawson@oxfordpreservation.org.uk (Please note that due to COVID there are no volunteer sessions at present but these will resume as soon as restrictions are lifted)

BAD news for some but GOOD news for others?

If everything goes to plan, speed cushions are due to be installed on Godstow Road in 2021. This follows an initiative four years ago by the Bike Clinic (previously held at our Sunday Market). They wanted to do something about speeding cars through the village. Initially speed indicator signs were proposed but these were not approved by the Council so speed cushions were investigated. Speed cushions are, perhaps, not that popular, hence the BAD news header! However, the proposed speed cushions are very different to the dreaded speed bumps, which everyone hates. When the 20mph is observed the cushions have no effect, it is only when 20mph is exceeded that they make their presence felt. So that's the GOOD news bit! The Council has planned (COVID permitting) for the cushions to be installed in January 2021.

Work Mornings have been suspended until further notice



www.wolvercotecommoners.co.uk – wolvercote.commoners@yahoo.co.uk

Chair: Mary Brown (01865 236897) Secretary: Eleanor Woods (07815 548351)

