

Postcard from Victoria Park, Stretford

By Shelly Quinton-Hulme – May 2009



This park is the heart and lungs of Stretford, although there are still people who live here and don't know about this gem. To me it is one of the best things about Stretford and certainly makes living here better – but then I am biased, as I am the chairperson of the Friends of Victoria Park, Stretford community group [www.fovps.org.uk].

I have enjoyed this park ever since I moved to Stretford when I was 6 years old [30 years ago !] and I've seen quite a lot of changes through these years – some for the better and many for the worse in my opinion – but I still love the place and can only urge you to come and have a look yourself.

http://maps.google.co.uk/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=victoria+Park,+Stretford&sll=53.800651,-4.064941&sspn=12.240319,28.125&ie=UTF8&view=map&ei=f88KSv26GIqsogPdJiBDA&attrid=&ll=53.448385,-2.309103&spn=0.005712,0.013733&t=h&z=16

My favourite things in the park are our chainsaw sculptures – these have been done over the last 5 years by Mick Burns [www.chainsawsculpture.co.uk] and paid for by the Friends group – everyone seems to love them. We have 3 totems in the under 5's play area, a friendly snake, a woodpecker and one showing the lifecycle of a butterfly topped off with an owl which was designed by local schoolchildren. Also in the under 5's area we have a crocodile called 'Snappers' that the children like to climb all over and feed with sticks, a mushroom table and stools, and a boat that the kids can climb into and pretend to row.



In our bird feeding station we have a fantastic sculpture of a heron that marks out this area by standing proudly showing off Mick's skill as this is a delicately carved sculpture that has never been subjected to vandalism. In point of fact – surprisingly, none of the sculptures have ever been vandalized, testament to their popularity I guess. In our wildlife garden we have two benches that Mick carved – they are truly magnificent. One has a squirrel and one has a wren carved on top of the seating area so you feel like you are sat next to the creatures. We have plans for more sculptures within the park and are awaiting a decision on a funding application to carry out this work later in the year.



My next favourite part of the park is the avenue of Cherry trees, especially in the spring when the blossoms are out – it is a stunning reminder of nature's beauty – although it is equally beautiful when it is covered in snow.



My 22 month old son's favourite part of the park is the moat within the under 5's play area. It is not filled with water – except after very heavy rain – but him and his friends love to race up and down it, and 'trip trap' over the wooden bridge. The whole under 5's area is well loved and well used by the community, the equipment may be old, but the feel of it is like a large garden rather than that of a playground and it just seems cozy.



The bird feeding station is a place where the grass grows a bit longer, trees have been planted to encourage the birds, a birdbath and bird feeding table have been created and spring bulbs planted in abundance. There are bird feeders and bird boxes made by schoolchildren in the trees and disabled access bench and bin are nestled in here at the end of a path to encourage birdwatchers. We also have some plaques which are for blind or visually impaired people next to this path which show common bird shapes in raised outline so that their size, shape and name can be appreciated.



We have 3 tennis courts which are useable but could do with improving – although they still get very busy once Wimbledon starts and tennis fever hits the UK! We also have a five aside hard surface court and basketball court which are also well used – especially in winter when the football field is a bit soggy! The main football field has two permanent goal posts which can be turned to allow even pitch use, and this field also has a rounders diamond marked on it and the Friends often have rounders games in the summer with anyone turning up for a game. There are two bowling greens which unfortunately are behind locked railings and gates to protect them from vandalism – but this means that they are currently inaccessible to the general public – a system the Friends would like to change.

A new addition to the park in 2007 was the Garden of Tranquility which is a lovely area to sit and enjoy a sensory experience. There is the refreshing scent of mint and lavender in the air, sounds of the bamboo swishing in the breeze, birds singing and splashing in the birdbath, wildlife and flowers to look at, but unfortunately there is nothing good to eat here – so make sure you bring your own food, and sit on the benches to eat it. The information boards tell you about the principles of Feng Sui that were used to design the planting of this area.



The park has a number of notice boards which are maintained by the Friends groups and we make sure that all the park information is contained in them.



Over the years 2 of the bowling greens have been altered into other uses. One has become a rose garden and this was created in 2002 – it is a lovely place to come and sit and look great in the summer. The other bowling green is opposite the over 5's play area and has been left as grass. This area is always busy with children playing football. Overlooking this old bowling green are two park buildings. One of the buildings [the brick built one] is currently the home of the ladies bowling club and the men's veteran club. The other building is currently a community building which is in a state of disrepair. The Friends group is seeking funding to refurbish this building and open it up for the whole community to use. Fingers crossed we can make this happen this year before the roof collapses and the Friends run out of steam – we've been fighting for this building since 2002!

The over 5's play area is a much more traditional playground that was totally redone in 2007 with all new surfacing, equipment and fencing. This area is very busy every evening after school and at weekends especially if the weather is fine.

The wildlife garden was created in 2003 and again is a nice place to sit and think or watch the wildlife. There are bird and bat and butterfly boxes in the trees, information boards to read, benches to sit on, and even a hedgehog house [though this is well hidden]. We also have two owl boxes within the park, of which we know one has been used.



We are very proud of our Green Flag status which we have held since 2004 and it flies on the flagpole near the heritage gates of Victoria Road.



Our two sets of heritage gates are magnificent – but they both need some TLC and the Friends group hopes to get some funding to carry out this work also to celebrate our Victorian history.



Our main field is called Victoria's Lawn and is a lovely place to put a blanket down and have a picnic in the sun. The outskirts of the field have been allowed to become nature havens by selective mowing and one of these areas houses the bird feeding station. Over the years we have planted thousands of spring bulbs in these nature havens which look fantastic when in flower. We recently planted drifts of crocus along one of the outer tree bordered banks of the perimeter which was very effective this year.

There are a number of special trees that I love within the park – our Indian Bean tree on the old putting green, our Ginkgo Bilobas in the wildlife garden, and our central avenue of Sycamores which looks stunning in the snow. Unfortunately my favourite trees from childhood have both been lost over the years – a huge Weeping Willow stood very near to where our flagpole is now – you can still see it's indent in the ground - I used to sit under its branches and read. The other tree we called the 'Monkey Tree' but it was not a Monkey Puzzle tree – it was just that we all used to climb it and be Monkeys!



I hope that after reading this you can see why this park is such a special place and I hope to see you here soon.

Love Shelly x