

The New Friends of Bute Park

Summer Update 2023



The Visitor Centre is open and you can help us keep it that way!

This has only been possible as a result of the personal commitment of a very small group of members. However, for us to extend the operation for a longer period and be able to offer more, we need more volunteers. If you are able and would like to give a couple of hours of your time on Saturdays - it may just be once or twice a month – we would love to hear from you. Please tell your friends if you think they could be interested.



The Secret Garden Visitor Centre first opened in November 2011 and was built as part of the Heritage Lottery-funded Bute Park Restoration Project. However, in recent years, Cardiff Council has not had the requisite funds to ensure that the Centre can service the huge annual footfall through Bute Park, especially on weekends. This is a shame and has happened probably because the Centre, and the value it can contribute to the Park and Cardiff’s visitor economy, is unclear and may be seen as a significant cost in the operating budget with very little visible impact on the economy.

In order to assist the Council and the local economy, the New Friends of Bute Park offered to staff the Visitor Centre with volunteers to assess public reaction and judge the potential for the future. Successful visitor centres understand their centre is one of many touch-points that visitors are accessing to learn more about how to experience the destination.

The New Friends are discussing a strategy that will give us a better idea of :-

- Where visitors originate.
- Who our visitors are - their age, sex etc.
- What the information gaps are in our visitors’ knowledge.
- How we can address this.
- How we can recruit more people to assist with what we do.



At the moment we are opening the Centre between 10.30am and 2.30pm on Saturdays. We have been doing this since June 10th and hope to continue to do so until the end of October. Reaction from visitors has been very favourable. We have spoken to people from Cardiff, the rest of Wales and destinations as far away as Brazil and China. This has enabled us to highlight for them what is available in the Park - from its superb tree collection, natural play features, the three cafés and a wealth of horticulture and wildlife and the events taking place in the Park, Cardiff Castle and the Principality Stadium.



The Voice of the People

Bute Park is a vital part of our everyday urban life. It plays an important part in the make-up of Cardiff as a tourist destination, a pleasant way to go to a place of study or work and the spaces where children and adults play. It is where we come into contact with nature and wildlife, where we enjoy sports, walk the dog and sit at lunchtime. For those who want it, it can be somewhere quiet to get away for a moment from the bustle of the city.

Not surprisingly, people we have spoken to have become attached to the Park and they appreciate it for what it offers culturally, socially and personally. Indeed, it has a direct impact on their lives and on the way they feel. But having access to the Park is not all that matters – just as important is its planning, design and management.



Linking all of these together is the objective of acting as the voice of the people – of local residents and visitors alike. This enables the public to have a say in how the park is managed on their behalf and what should be considered in its development. The Park was given to the people of Cardiff in 1947 and was called Bute Park to commemorate the 5th Marquess of Bute who had owned the land.

To this end The New Friends of Bute Park was established with the following objectives, as set out in our Constitution:

- To protect, conserve and enhance Bute Park as a place of freedom, recreation and enjoyment for the long-term benefit of all sections of the community, by working in partnership with Cardiff County Council, other statutory bodies and voluntary bodies and gather input from local people and representative groups so that the Park may best serve the local community.
- To raise the profile of Bute Park through promotion in the local and wider community.
- To increase and protect the biodiversity of the Park.
- To promote the use of the Park for educational purposes for the benefit of the wider community.
- To work to maximise accessibility to the Park for all groups and individuals.

Because of the importance the Park holds, not only for Wales but also for Britain, we are keen to ensure that the public's views are fairly represented.

Please, if you have any ideas or concerns, get in touch and we will make sure that they are put in front of the right person and that an answer is forthcoming.





The Secret Garden Café

Most people interested in Bute Park will have seen the publicity surrounding the Secret Garden Café and the fact that the current tenant's lease has come to an end. It is an independent café in the heart of our Park that has attracted a considerable following since it opened. It specialises in sourcing local, seasonal and organic ingredients and everything is homemade.

The public reaction and subsequent petition made it clear how supportive people were of the service that has been provided over the past five years. The Council has chosen to replace the existing lease with a new format of management contract with an accompanying lease and, as a result, the process legally has to go out to competitive tender.



The New Friends were keen to ensure that the public and park users should have a say in what would be required from the next operator. As well as commercial needs, we felt it should reflect the views of its users. As a result, we sought the public's views by using surveys, our own members' input, and conversations with visitors, together with petition statements. We then sat down with the Council and submitted these for consideration.



The current situation is that the contract process was referred to the Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee on 3rd August to clarify if the process met the necessary standards and to confirm that a move away from a standard lease was the correct way to go. Although the committee findings have not yet been published, the meeting appeared to confirm that the matter should be referred back to the officers to conclude. They were told to liaise closely with the existing tenant and, subject to agreement, either continue with the current tendering process or consider holding things over for a bit longer.



The New Friends will continue to work to ensure that the process remains transparent and that the views and wishes of park users remain paramount. The key is to ensure the Secret Garden Café remains a focal point of the park and one of the most enjoyable places for light refreshments in Cardiff.



Blackfriars' Friary

For many people who regularly walk through Bute Park, the south-west corner of Coopers Field holds a collection of low walls, looking simply like the remains of walled gardens. However, if you stop to read the display boards, you can obtain some background to the site of the Blackfriars Dominican Friary.



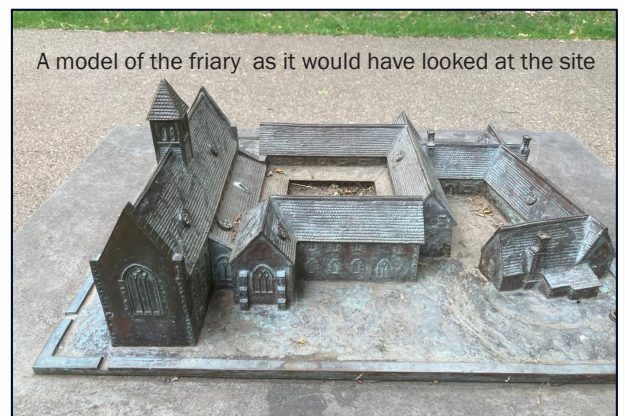
To start with - who were the Black Friars? The word friar comes from the Latin *friare*, meaning brother. And they were called black because they wore black mantles over their white robes. They were also called Dominicans because they were founded by Saint Dominic in 1216. He was a Catholic priest from Castile, who was a mystic and who later became the patron saint of astronomers and natural scientists. And just to highlight the difference between monks and friars - the word monk comes from the Greek word *monachos*, which means solitary. In fact the Welsh word *mynach* is nearer to the Greek and *Mynachdy* in Cardiff simply means monk's house. Monks normally shunned the company of ordinary people, serving God in solitude while friars saw their duty as to serve God by working within communities.

The friary was established in Cardiff in 1256, just outside of the West Gate on land near the town walls that had been granted by Richard de Clare. There was an infirmary here and, importantly, a well for fresh water. So the friary had everything that was needed - agricultural land, a river for transport and fish, together with proximity to the castle for protection. This was what was called a mendicant order - mendicants avoided owning property, did not work at a trade, and embraced a poor, often itinerant lifestyle, begging for food. They depended for their survival on the good will of the people to whom they preached. They would usually

travel in pairs, preaching, healing the sick, and helping the poor. The friars prayed in the chapel, when they were at the friary, at least seven times a day. The first service of the day was held between midnight and 3am, depending on the season. There would be a second service at daybreak, with other services at 9am, midday, 3pm, vespers at 6pm and bed at 7pm.

The principal meal of the day was served at 11am and consisted of what was begged from the inhabitants of the town. Their main foodstuffs included vegetables such as turnips or salad, dark breads, porridges, an occasional fish, cheese curds, beer, ale, or mead. As a rule, friars did not eat meat except if they were ill and on special occasions. As there was no clean water, beer and wine were the standard beverages and many friaries housed a brewery or a vineyard. Indeed, monks and friars are believed to have invented beer.

Outside of the friary, they thought that it was their duty to tell the public about God and would preach at gatherings like fairs, funerals and festivals. It seems that their own poverty and their desire to help others ensured their popularity among the majority of the population.



A model of the friary, as it would have looked at the site

King Henry VIII's decision to divorce his wife, Katherine of Aragon, in 1533 set about a series of events that would lead to the radical reformation of the Church throughout the British Isles. The subsequent formation of the Church of England led to the closure and demolition of a number of religious institutions across the UK. The closure of the monasteries was part of Henry's plan to enforce the new protestant faith, remove opponents to his power because of their adherence to the Catholic Church in Rome and, of course, seize valuable property.



Blackfriars (continued)

In 1534, following Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn, all the friaries in the kingdom were visited by two Royal Commissioners to extract an oath of obedience from the friars, who were made to acknowledge the King as the supreme head of the church and cease to recognise the Pope. A second royal commission was appointed in 1538 with powers to induce the surrender of the friaries, with the friars being promised a pension of forty shillings and a new robe on surrender. The man assigned to undertake these duties in Wales was Dr. Richard Ingworth, Bishop of Dover, and a former Dominican Prior. He visited Blackfriars on the 6th September 1538. The Prior, Sub-Prior and another friar had recently died from an illness. The remaining seven brethren were summoned to the chapter house by the church bell where they were made to sign the deed of surrender, hand over the keys and agree to make an inventory of the friary's possessions.

The Blackfriars' Friary was closed in a morning. By midday the friars were dismissed with nowhere to go and the property seized for the King. Ingworth claimed that the only item of value was a silver chalice, which he kept to cover his expenses for visiting Cardiff. This seems to be strange, as although the friars themselves were very poor, their churches were normally quite well furnished in an effort to praise the Lord. Some think that either the monks had hidden valuables in advance, or Ingworth was lining his own pockets, which must have been a great temptation, as he had total control. Whatever the case, he arranged for the distribution of the pensions to the members of the house, and he assigned the custody of the friary and its contents, pending their sale, to John Loveday, a Cardiff merchant and deputy town bailiff. A Cardiff man, Lewis Bleddyn, was appointed to sell the timber, stone, iron, glass and the tiles. We have no idea what happened to the dismissed men, who were Thomas Stanton, David Llewelyn, Richard Nicholas, Richard Thomas, John Lewis, John Thomas and Thomas Davies.

Blackfriars was then abandoned and what was left after being dismantled and sold off would have been used by local people for their own buildings.

A farm developed on the site but by 1840 it was in a bad state of repair and it was demolished. In 1887 the 3rd Marquess of Bute employed the architect William Burges to restore Cardiff Castle and nearby Castell Coch and at the same time he also had the remains of the friary excavated. The results of the excavation were described in 1889 by the Rev. John Placid Conway. He described the structure of the friary in detail and he included a plan of the site. Buildings on the site included a church, bakehouse, brewhouse, stores, guest quarters and a stable. When the work was complete the layout of the friary was marked in brickwork, which remains in the present day park, along with formal island flower beds.

The floor of the church was covered with reproduction tiles based on designs of those found during the dig. However, due to vandalism, these tiles were removed by members of the Victorian Society in 1977, but some of them can now be seen on the floor of Pettigrew Tea Rooms at the Castle Street entrance to Bute Park.



The Victorian layout was partly reproduced in 2013, using reclaimed bricks to look like the originals. The low walls are capped with turf to help water run off and protect the brickwork from frost damage.



Many local people missed the friars and monks because they were an important source of help for the poor, but many also distrusted the Catholic Church because it had become an integral part of the Anglo-Norman occupying force and there is a saying in Welsh - *Nesaf i'r eglwys, pellaf o baradwys*, which means, The nearer to church, the farther from paradise.



Indulge your love of trees with Coed Caerdydd

All About Trees - Survey

Coed Caerdydd are looking for citizens' views on tree planting in Cardiff to help them adapt their approach and ensure they are planting the right trees in the future'. They are hoping people will respond to their survey which closes on Friday 25 August 2023. If you can spare a few minutes, then please click on the link.

<https://online1.snapsurveys.com/CoedCaerdydd>



Tree and wildlife identification summer events

Would you like to improve your tree and wildlife identification skills?

Coed Caerdydd is teaming up with Local Nature Partnership and the Wildlife Trusts of South and West Wales to run free workshops on identifying trees and woodland wildlife.

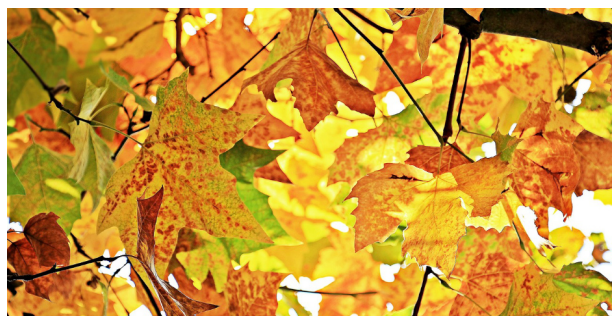
Two of the events will be family friendly and one is more suitable for adult learners.

[Friday 11th August – Forest Farm, Whitchurch \(Adult focussed\)](#)

[Friday 18th August – STAR Hub, Splott \(Family friendly\)](#)

[Friday 25th August – Forest Farm, Whitchurch \(Family friendly\)](#)

This is also a great opportunity to find out about support on offer from Coed Caerdydd and Local Nature Partnership, including free trees for households, nature enhancing resources for community groups (e.g. ponds, birdboxes, pollinator friendly plants), and nature volunteering opportunities.





Care about Bute Park? Then come and join us...

NEW FRIENDS OF BUTE PARK are an enthusiastic group of local residents committed to action that supports and enhances the iconic Bute Park in the centre of Cardiff. As well as direct initiatives we also provide a means for the public to influence how the park is operated and how it develops. We work to preserve, protect and promote this special park.

We are a relatively new group, and welcome input from new members who can help us develop our activities and increase the level of member interaction.

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. To protect, conserve and enhance Bute Park as a place of freedom, recreation and enjoyment for the long-term benefit of all sections of the community by working in partnership with Cardiff County Council, other statutory bodies and voluntary groups so that the Park may best serve the local community.
2. To raise the profile and awareness of Bute Park through promotion in the local and wider community.
3. To increase and protect the biodiversity of the park.
4. To promote the use of the park for educational and recreational purposes for the benefit of the wider community.
5. To act as a channel for views and initiatives between the interested public and the Park Management team to increase awareness, access and involvement.
6. To serve as the representative of public and Park users.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Website: Currently the group has a page on the main Bute Park website and at the same time we are developing our own independent website.

In the meantime, visit: <https://bute-park.com/friends-bute-park/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/thenewfriendsofbutepark/>

Email: General enquiries are always welcomed on admin@newfriendsofbutepark.co.uk

Facebook: Just search Facebook for New Friends of Bute Park

HOW WE OPERATE

Supported by a formal constitution, and working closely with the Bute Park Management Team, we have a small committee that is elected at the Annual General Meeting and meets monthly to direct the group's activities on behalf of the wider membership.

As a member you get:

- News and Information – a monthly update on activities
- Newsletter – quarterly colour communication
- Voting rights at the AGM
- Input and feedback on Bute Park proposals and initiatives
- Priority access to events and activities
- The opportunity to influence the way the Park is managed

We would love to have your input...

HOW TO JOIN

Initial contact should be to our email address of members@newfriendsofbutepark.co.uk to simply tell us you would like to join.

We ask members to pay £10 a year by bank transfer (see below) and to renew that every 12 months, ideally as a standing order.

Co-op Bank, sort code: 08-92-99, account no: 65527858, reference: your name.

Once payment has been made you are a member and will be added to the mailing list (copy of our GDPR policy is available on request) to receive the various updates and information.

Help us to be the public voice of Bute Park.