

MEMORIES

How things have changed in Waterlow park in living memory

Here are some extracts from notes taken during two memories sessions run by FoWP in May and September 2010, supplemented by information provided by letters, emails and through our website. Please do keep sending in your memories.

Park Keepers kept children in order and thought nothing of *'giving us a clip round the ear'*. Kids would go off scrumping in the orchards for apples and plums and sometimes get caught. Children were in awe of the keepers who might lead them off by the ear to remonstrate with them. *'The park keepers would pick us children up by the ears.'*

They had 'little booths' in the park. There were a number of keeper booths in the shrubberies and one was by the upper pond. There were lots of keepers and you had to behave yourself. They were 'Monarchs of all they surveyed' from their booths. They would take the law into their own hands. They wore brown suits and hats and each keeper had a different section of the park.

Notices at edge sections said: Please Keep off the Grass. Railings were a foot high. Keepers would fence off the crocuses with string. There were notices saying: 'Dogs must be kept on a lead'.

Ball games were played during the week but forbidden on Sundays. Keepers would inspect bags to make sure that balls were not being brought into the park. On Sundays 'girls had Sunday dolls and boys had hoops.' There was 'bowl a hoop' along the paths. Some said ball games were forbidden, so they did not want to visit the park. Putting was cheap (6d) for balls and club. 'Youngsters were allowed to play' as part of the junior club.

As the son and nephew of Waterlow park keepers, Norman Cude had a rather different perspective:

'My earliest recollection is of a family Christmas party held by my aunt and uncle who was then Head Keeper in the keeper's lodge in Dartmouth Park Hill in about 1943 or 1944. My uncle Jo sang 'Bless This House', accompanied by my mother on the piano in the front room.

After the war, my father became a gardener in the park. One of his friends also a gardener, invited the family to Sunday afternoon tea in his flatlet in Lauderdale House. At this time the whole house had been converted to flatlets, mainly for park gardeners or keepers. His particular flatlet was situated upstairs at the back of the house overlooking the garden with the sun dial and it was a lovely afternoon.

In the winter of 1947, I remember skating, or perhaps walking with my father, on the ice in the middle lake which had frozen solid and attracted a lot of people trying to skate.'

Catharine Wells 2011