

# King George Recreation Ground

Celebrating 100 years

1912-2012



# Bushey 1910 - 1912

By 1912 Bushey's population had grown to over 7,000 from well under 1,000 in 1812. King George V had succeeded to the throne in May 1910 and there was a mood of optimism in the air. There was growing awareness of the importance of access to outdoor exercise in clean, fresh air for the benefit of overall public health and well-being.



*The principal celebrations of the Coronation of George V in Bushey were a carnival and bonfire.*

Bushey Urban District Council (BUDC), newly formed in 1906, made one of their first major projects the acquisition of land in Bushey for use as a public recreation ground. Two fields at the bottom of the north-facing slope to the south-east of Coldharbour Lane were chosen – Biggs Mead Field and the field next to it totalled about 13 acres. The fields had been used for hay production and rough grazing, but were always too wet in winter and too dry in summer. For many years, the tenant farmer had allowed children to use the fields for ball games.

The council negotiated a price of £2,000 with the Church Commissioners. Contractors then put in land drains and footpaths, marked out football and cricket pitches, installed play equipment and built a refreshment hut, bandstand, changing rooms and a caretaker's lodge at the entrance to the site in King George Avenue. The work was begun in the summer of 1911.

*In 1912, King George Recreation Ground comprised the two fields in the foreground of this 1990s photograph. The two fields beyond were added in the early 1920s.*





*Bushey Brass Band was formed in 1911. Its instruments were paid for by the surplus from the collection made for the celebration of the Coronation of George V. The band practised at London Road School three times a week and operated until 1924.*

## Opening Ceremony

After the scorching summer of 1911, the year 1912 was very different and it was touch-and-go to get everything ready for the opening ceremony on Saturday 5 May. Bushey Brass Band, along with the Boy Scouts and a group of local children, formed up outside the new Council Offices in Rudolph Road (now the Museum). Followed by councillors, officials and other dignitaries, the band struck up and, watched by a large crowd, the

procession set off along the High Street towards Melbourne Road and the new Recreation Ground. By the time they arrived, steady rain was falling and the planned children's fete and sports had to be postponed.



*Catsey Lane proved very convenient when the Rec was laid out in 1912.*

*"Healthy boys or girls are not satisfied with spending their leisure hours indoors; they must get out in the open air and have something to do. If not, they are liable to get into mischief and who could blame them?"*

**Extract from Chairman's speech**

# Glory Years 1912 - 1988

In 1912 a bowling green was created for public use and is now home to the Bushey Bowling Club. Then, in August 1914 the unthinkable happened. England declared war on Germany. By 1916, the sports pitches were turned over to allotments. They were cultivated by the older men and the women while the young men were by now being conscripted to fight in the battlefields of France and Belgium.

In the early 1920s, two more fields were acquired, thus doubling the Rec to 22 acres. An open-air swimming pool was built, filled with chlorinated water, and in July 1925 opened amid much civic ceremony. Tennis courts and a putting green were installed and extra play equipment was placed at the high end of the enlarged Rec.



*Swimmers enjoyed the cold water of the pool, late 1920s.*

Between the two World Wars, and for some years after, many summer events were held in the Rec. Later, in the 1940s and 50s, the annual show of the Bushey Horticultural Society attracted large crowds. Every August, a travelling fair was a regular visitor and still comes every year. The central refreshment pavilion plied visitors with teas, biscuits and confectionery. Sadly, due partly to vandalism, it was forced to close in the 1960s and remained so until refurbishment and enlargement in the 1990s.

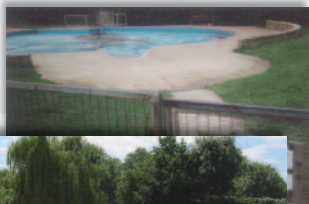
By the 1950s a purification and filtration system was installed in the pool. This resulted in much increased use, and by the hot summer of 1959, time-limited sessions were needed to cope with the crowds. A popular event was the end-of-season swimming gala held each August.

The exceptionally hot summer of 1976 was the high point in the popularity of the open-air pool. By the late 1970s the heating and filtration system was creaking with age. The run of bad summers and ever-rising maintenance and running costs eventually led to closure of the pool in 1989. It was demolished and the site levelled and grassed over in 1993.

# Decline and Rebirth

From the mid-1960s, lack of public money affected the ability of BUDC and (from 1974) Hertsmere Borough Council, to maintain the Rec. The play equipment, installed in 1911, had long since ended its useful life. In winter many of the paths were waterlogged due to blocked drains. Vandalism frequently disfigured the shuttered pavilion, and dog mess littered the paths and grass.

But dramatic change for the better was around the corner! In the early 1990s, local authorities were authorised to use part of the money from 'The Right to Buy' scheme to improve and renew local infrastructure. Hertsmere decided to allocate £526,000 to improvement works for the Rec. After a few years of muddy chaos, the result in 1998 was a complete transformation of what had by now become known as The Park.



*The paddling pool before and after the refurbishment.*

The land drains were renewed and extended and the old footpaths were widened and relaid. From the main entrance up to and beyond the old pavilion, the avenue of lime, oak and beech trees was extended up to the south-east entrance in Somers Way flanked by plane trees.

Two pairs of county-standard tennis courts replaced the dilapidated 1920s courts. The courts are now a centre of excellence for tennis. An enclosed and much-enlarged children's play area with excellent equipment was installed. For toddlers and young children, the paddling pool was rebuilt to the best modern standards and a sandpit provided.

Secure public toilets were also installed and, for the first time, outdoor art was introduced into the park. The old pavilion was rebuilt as a fully-equipped café and is now called La Dolce Vita.

*The 'Caterpillar Column'*



# The Park Today

At the time of the refurbishment in the 1990s, a management plan was seen as an integral part of the park and tenders were invited from landscape contractors for the care and maintenance of the area in accordance with the plan. The council appointed a parks officer to supervise the contractor's performance.

A key feature of the management plan was the establishment of a 'Friends' organisation' to represent residents and users and to act as a conduit between them and the council. An inaugural meeting was held in 1997, a committee elected, a constitution adopted and the Friends of King George Recreation Ground was born.



*The park received the prestigious Green Flag Award in 1999/2000.*

The Friends have been successful in raising funds for several projects including a unique and beautiful wrought iron circular seat around an old oak tree, commissioned from Stephen Rook, a local artist-blacksmith. The Friends regularly help with workdays and events in the park.

King George Recreation Ground was one of the first parks in England to be granted a Green Flag Award in 1999 in recognition of its high standards. In summer, visitors come from far and near to visit a place of recreation, now among the very best in Hertfordshire and the surrounding areas.

Recent additions to the park include fitness equipment, table tennis and challenging equipment for teenagers. A wide events programme continues, including the annual dog show, marathon, teddy bears' picnic and family fun days. Regular activities are held with charities and local community groups such as Mencap and Herts Inclusive Theatre.



*One of the popular children's events held in the park each year.*

# Conservation

There is still evidence today of the park's historical use as farmland. The ancient field boundaries of hedgerow and mature 250 year old oak trees can still be seen. Conservation of features within the park is a key part of the management plan.

## Concentric rings

There is evidence of two or possibly three concentric ditches and banks in the meadow area at the top end of the park near the copse. These are approximately 40 metres in diameter and although clearly manmade, their date is unknown.

## Pit

The Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Records show that the site below the copse and meadow area is slightly undulating, possibly terraced or merely disturbed by some earlier activity such as clay digging. The nearby deep hollow in the copse area may have been an old clay or gravel pit.

## Farm use

Once the area was used for pasture meadow (hay making) and arable farming. The ridge and furrow marks in the second field clearly show that arable crops were grown here sometime between the 12th and 16th centuries. The lower fields are likely to have changed from arable to meadow while the steep clay slopes of the top field and the strip of land along the stream were used for grazing as the ground is not ideal for growing crops.

## Wildflower meadow

The meadow was reintroduced in 1998 following a wildflower survey. It was designated a site of county importance in 2000 and provides a valuable habitat for insects and small mammals. It is managed in the traditional way by a cut once a year in late

summer. More information about the meadow can be seen on an interpretation panel nearby.



# General information

## Open times

The park is open 24 hours but some of the facilities are only open at certain times of year. Please see the map on the inside pages for further details.

## How to find the park

There are five pedestrian entrances into King George Recreation Ground, including King George Avenue and Chiltern Avenue.

**By car:** King George Recreation Ground is situated 10 minutes from junction 5 of the M1 and 20 minutes from the M25 and A1(M). Please contact us if you would like detailed directions.

**Parking:** The main car park is located in King George Avenue with an additional car park in Chiltern Avenue. Please can we ask that you respect our neighbours and not park in the surrounding areas.

**By train and bus:** The nearest station is Bushey main line station (operates in and out of London Euston). The park is approximately 1.5km/1 mile from the station. The 142 and 258 buses stop at the station and in Bushey High Street and Melbourne Road. The 500, 550 and 551 buses stop in Chiltern Avenue.

**Cycling:** Bike racks are provided near the café and multi sports court for cyclists to secure their bikes.

## Contact us

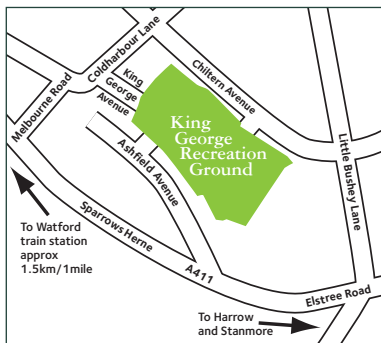
For further information about the park or the Friends please contact us as follows:

Phone: 0800 731 1810 (office hours)

020 8207 2277 (24 hours)

Email: [parks@hertsmer.gov.uk](mailto:parks@hertsmer.gov.uk)

Website: [www.hertsmer.gov.uk](http://www.hertsmer.gov.uk)





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Opening hours are subject to change.

For updates please visit [www.hertsmere.gov.uk](http://www.hertsmere.gov.uk) or call 0800 731 1810

## Park events



For up to date events in the park please visit [www.hertsmereleisure.co.uk](http://www.hertsmereleisure.co.uk) and click on 'park events' or call 020 8236 3100