Chairman`s Ramble

Major challenges lie ahead.
Last Autumn I wrote of the subtle ways in which the government`s financial squeeze was affecting our small corner of the country. In the case of Ropner Park the changes meant that the floral displays were less ambitious; no more butterflies in the beds and no more floral tapestries behind the fountain.
Even so, the park is still maintained to a very high standard.

The cuts are now affecting FoRP
Up until now we have been able to hold our events in the knowledge that we would make a profit which would go a long way towards paying for the band concerts. A grant of £450 from Stockton Borough Council towards the concerts has now ceased and the cost of Gazebos has now risen to the point that our events, which are free to the public, are likely to lose money. Unless we change there will be a big gap in our budget.

Red Tape
Stockton Council, like all organisations these days, has to be very careful about health and safety issues so that accidents are avoided wherever possible. This has meant an increase in paperwork and changes to our
organisation. Vicki Nicholson and Barbara Charles have spent an enormous amount of time this year getting to grips with the new demands but now that the first year of the new system has been negotiated, we should find it much easier to cope in the future.

**Marquees**

One factor which must be taken into account is the forecast wind speed. This is why we chose to use a marquee to house the stalls in the FoRP Harvest Fair. A marquee can cope with higher winds therefore there was much less chance of the event being cancelled. However marquees cost more than gazebos.

**The Ropner Park Café**

FoRP also runs the cafe in Ropner Park. It is open all year round, weather permitting, and is finely balanced financially. The cafe makes a profit in the summer and runs at a loss over the winter. The staff manage to create a friendly atmosphere and serve quality food and drink. We are fortunate to have such loyal and hardworking employees.

For more details of the cafe operations over the winter see page 8.

**Looking to the Future**

If we continue to promote events and concerts as we have done until now, we need to find considerably more funding. The Board is looking at many options such as sponsorship and help from other charities to give us a new way of operating.

We have organised a members meeting in Elmwood Community Centre on Wed. 18th. Nov. This will give members an opportunity to air views and make suggestions.

**Members input at this time is most important.**

Please do your best to be there and if you can offer particular skills or help on events days we will be very grateful.

Brian Scrafton
Stoptober

Do you want to Stop Smoking? Stockton Council is taking part in a national programme to help people to give up.

The publicity photos for this event were taken in Ropner Park and we include one of them here.

Smokers across the country are being urged to sign up to Stoptober, the country’s 28-day campaign to help people to stop smoking. Public Health England (PHE) will offer support and encouragement every step of the way.

Research suggests that those who give up smoking for 28 days are likely to quit the habit for good.

To stand an even better chance of quitting, they are encouraged to sign up with their friends, family and colleagues, as evidence reveals that this type of ‘social quitting’ can dramatically improve people’s chances of successfully stopping.

For more information, please contact Ruby Poppleton on 01642 526697 email ruby.poppleton@stockton.gov.uk
Sir John Ropner

Last year a group from FoRP visited the arboretum at Thorp Perrow which is owned and run by our patron Sir John Ropner. Sir John entertained us with a very interesting talk. He has kindly agreed to give an interview for our newsletter. Here is the first part.

Robert Ropner
Once upon a time there was a gentleman called Robert Ropner who was my great grandfather who lived in Magdeburgh in East Germany. He was a penniless glove maker and had heard on the grapevine that the way to make a fortune was to go to Australia and so he decided to leave Germany and go to Australia. In 1856 he packed his bags and slowly but surely walked his way from Magdeburgh to Hamburg where he was a stowaway on a ship heading for Australia.

Sea Sickness
The ship had to pick up cargo on the east coast of England and the first port of call was West Hartlepool. Luckily, or unluckily, my great grandfather was so seasick crossing the North Sea that he decided that enough was enough so he jumped off the ship in West Hartlepool and that`s where the trouble began.

Settling in the North East
He married a local baker`s daughter and between them they had 13 children so she must have been a remarkable lady. My great grandfather became the Lord Mayor of Stockton and a Member of Parliament. He did not speak a word of English when he arrived and I suppose that was quite a good thing really.
And so he prospered in shipping and went into business with a man called Mr. Appleyard. In those days the Industrial Revolution was up and running, a huge amount of cargo was leaving the North East of England and the shipping business thrived.

**Magnanimous gesture**

He obviously made a shed load of money and it was during this time that he made the magnanimous gesture. He handed over the 60 acres which is now Ropner Park in Stockton. I keep checking with the deeds to make sure that it doesn’t revert to the family after a certain period of time but I’m sure you’ll all be very pleased to hear that there is no such small print so your future is totally secure.

**Two more generations**

My grandfather was born in 1864 and was also an astute business man and he nursed our business through World War one. Our first ship was sunk in 1915 and only 21 out of the 57 ships that we owned at the time survived. Even so the business thrived and the Arboretum at Thorp Perrow was bought in 1927.

My father was born in 1895 and so you can work out by rapid calculations that he was about 31 years old when he came to live at Thorp Perrow. He went through the first world war; he was a politician.

His major claim to fame was to win the Sedgefield constituency in the massive Labour landslide in the 1920s. I think I’m right in saying that he was the only Conservative gain at that election.

*(to be continued)*
The Ranger Reports...

Every gardener knows that Autumn is a surprisingly busy time of year and the same is true for the Council’s parks, gardens and nature reserves across the Borough.

Depending on the weather, the grass can continue to be cut until late in October and this overlaps with the removal of the summer bedding displays so you may well see a lot of activity around Ropner as the days get shorter. Once the summer plants are removed, the beds are soon restocked with the spring flowering ones, which themselves can take several weeks to plant.

**Winter Maintenance**

Shrub bed maintenance follows the planting, although that runs through into the winter when the park lies dormant for several months. The wildflower area has been partly cut with a reciprocating mower, which allows the plants to be gathered up while leaving their seeds behind – although this was very heavy going in places and may well be followed up by a cut with a rotary machine which will tidy the area up at the end of the growing season.

The wildlife continues to thrive though and many visitors have noticed the kingfisher on the lake, the sparrow hawk hunting in the meadow and of course the ducks and swans that continue to delight young and old visitors alike. The ducks on the lake have been joined this year by little grebes and three cygnets – two of which have been ringed with one as yet to do.

Other work that prepares the park for the winter is the emptying and servicing of the fountain and the lake aeration system going on to its winter setting of just an hour per day. This keeps the system in good order and prevents it seizing in cold weather as well as helping to break up the ice if the winter proves to be particularly cold.
The Ranger Reports (contd.)

We also associate the falling of the leaves with the autumn and you may well see Tony, the Park Keeper doing what he can to stay on top of them with the assistance of two apprentices, who are with the Council in Ropner as part of an agreement with Surestart.

Work at the main entrance
Further work that is planned for the near future around Ropner is the replacement of the bollards at the main entrance on Hartburn Lane. Parking in the main entrance can be a problem as it affects larger delivery vehicles and the emergency services that need to come in that way. It can also block the way for wedding cars that can come into the park by special arrangement for photos. This has happened a number of times throughout the summer - including a horse and carriage, which is always a welcome sight in what is after all a Victorian Park.

Sporting activities
The park has also been busy with other events over the summer months and continues to be popular for sporting activities. There have been over sixty women sign up to start a ten week beginner running programme over the past six months, who have all taken in the scenic views of Ropner Park whilst learning how to run. Over 180 participants also turned up to run the 5km Summer Series race in Ropner Park earlier this year.

Orienteering maps
Anyone wishing to take in the park at their own pace though is reminded that they can get hold of an orienteering map in the café for the course laid out in the park, which has also been checked over the summer. One of the posts by the bowls club was found to be missing and has been replaced.

David Askey
The Ropner Park café

Winter Opening Hours

Weekdays 11a.m.-2p.m. Weekends 10.30a.m.-3.p.m.

Sunday Lunches

Adults £5.50   Children £4.00   Pensioners £4.50

The Sunday lunches are very popular. Reservations required.

Wednesday Lunches

Adults £4.50   Pensioners £3.50

Afternoon Teas

Price £5.50 per person
Reservations required

Christmas Lunches

The Ropner Park Cafe will be serving Christmas Lunches on Wednesdays and Fridays in December. These have been very popular over the years with groups large and small. The menu and booking form can be downloaded from the FoRP website.

Price for 3 courses £17.99   2 courses £13.99   Children £8.99

For Reservations.......... Book at the café or ring 01642 633767
Sunday Afternoon in Ropner Park

My friends and I had the most wonderful few hours in the park last Sunday. We wandered up to the bandstand admiring the floral displays and well kept manicured lawns.

Then for the next couple of hours we had the pleasure of listening to the Ukelele Band who worked so hard to get everyone singing and it was as we were watching the little ones playing around and dancing to the music and seeing children playing on the grass, rolling down the slopes laughing that we said to each other how lucky we were.

To have this beautiful park on our doorstep with its fabulous floral displays and the trees of many years standing and the well kept lawns and the lake with its swans and ducks all at our disposal to be walked around at any time and looked after so well by the gardeners: a little corner of England.

We do appreciate the work that goes on behind the scenes so to speak and when we now and then pass the gardeners we tell them what a good job they are doing.

Could you pass on our thanks to all concerned and we look forward to (next) Sunday’s concert.

Best wishes, Marjorie McDonnell. (written in August)
The Eid Fusion Festival is a joint event organised by FoRP and the Community Welfare Trust. The first festival was in 2014 and entailed a steep learning curve. We were grateful both in 2014 and 2015 for the help of the Stockton Borough Council’s events team who guided us through the red tape hoops and had people on hand on the day in case of problems. Because our events are free our income does not go anywhere close to offsetting the expenses. This year the Cleveland Police Crime Commissioners Office awarded a grant which paid for the hiring of the marquees. Stockton Borough Council matched this funding which we used for the cost of the food and some of the entertainment and Tees Valley Community Foundation supported some of the fairground attractions.

We must also thank Naz Khan of Jennings Motors in Middlesbrough who sponsored the Park and Ride scheme. Without this level of support we would not be able to run an event like this so we are hugely grateful.
Food Glorious Food
One of the most important parts of the festival is the food. This year we decided to have one marquee dedicated purely for food, with a seating area and space for children’s entertainment if it rained. We also needed another marquee for visiting crafts people and those selling Asian clothes and accessories. This worked well, most stallholders commenting on the improvement which they felt led to a very relaxed experience.

Victorian Atmosphere
The gazebos, which add to the Victorian feel of the event, housed promotion stalls, charities, children’s craft activities and face painting. Children loved the entertainers.

Friendships Grow
FoRP and CWT have now been working together for a year and a half and we feel very comfortable working in tandem. A lot of goodwill and a mutual understanding of each others cultures and ways of working have been generated and we hope this will continue.

The entertainers
Last of all, this event would not have been possible without our dedicated band of volunteers from FoRP and the CWT so a big thank you to all who helped.

Vicki Nicholson      Barbara Charles
Wildflowers

Wildflowers alongside the A689 road to Hartlepool have been stunning this year. We would love to create the same effect in the Ropner Park wildflower area. To do that we need to remove much of the nourishment from the soil by cutting and removing the autumn vegetation each year. The council cut the grass at the end of September but because of a heavy dew, the cut wasn’t very efficient. A further cut is planned after which Abdul Rashid will organise a team of helpers to rake up the cut vegetation which the council will remove.

Rose Bed

Many words have been spoken and written about the original rose garden in Ropner Park. Because the trees are now so tall it would be impossible to re-create that haven. Stockton Council have however planted a bed of roses in a triangle of land behind the café.

Thanks
Harvest Fair

The British are renowned for making the weather their main talking point. As we near an event we follow every forecast. Not without good reason. The success or failure of our events depends to a large extent on the likelihood of sun, wind and rain.

On Sept. 27th. We had glorious sunshine.

Kick boxers prepare for their demonstration.

Who`s for candy floss?

Victorian or Elizabethan? Enjoying a concert in Ropner Park
Calendar
The Friends of Ropner Park are considering the idea of publishing a calendar ready for 2017. If we are to proceed with this project we need to have quality photographs of the park taken at different times of the year. Please contact us if you can help.

Quality photographs needed

Thank You to our Sponsors

Friends of Ropner Park would like to thank the following businesses for sponsoring the gazebos at our Spring Fair 2015:

Fiona’s Sewing and Alterations – Harper Terrace, Hartburn
The Cutting Lounge – Harper Parade, Hartburn
Hartburn Sandwich Bar – Harper Parade
Hartburn Garage – Darlington Road
NISA Store - Oxbridge
David’s Hairdressers – Oxbridge Lane
Hatties – Oxbridge Lane
Happy Autos – Riley Street, Oxbridge
Premium Tyres and Autocare – Light Pipe Hall Road Oxbridge
CGG – Small engines – Light Pipe Hall Road, Oxbridge
Hines Wardrobes – Mary Street, Oxbridge
Motortech – Mary Street, Oxbridge
Madina Pak Food Store – Northcote Street
Bowesfield Lane Dry Cleaners and Launderette
Ahmed Foods – Northcote Street
Elizabeth’s Embroidery – Richardson Road
Rocco’s at Caruso – Varo Terrrace
Hodgson Fish – Danby Wynd, Yarm
Notices

**Members meeting**  
Wednesday November 18th.  7.00 at Elmwood Community Centre

**Ceilidh**  
Stockton Cricket Club  on  
Friday November 13th.  7.30—11.00  
Price £7  
Live music with the  Endeavour Ceilidh Band  
Pie and Peas or Vegetarian option prepared by the Ropner Park Café  
Bottle Tombola  
Whisky Roll

**Christmas fair**  
Sunday 13th. December  11.00—1.00

**Trail Races**  
Sunday 17th. Jan. in Ropner Park  
2km for youths and 5km for seniors as part of the winter series.  
Registration is in the café from 9am .

**Sunday Lunches in the café**

The café is serving Sunday Lunches over the winter months

**Christmas Lunches**  
The café staff are taking bookings for  
Wednesdays and Fridays in December. Menus and booking forms are available from the café or on the website.

**FoRP Craft Group**  
The craft group meets once a month in the café at 9-30. The days vary to give everyone a chance of attending. As well as making craft products to sell at our events the group enjoys a good social scene.  
Check the FoRP website for craft club dates.  
The next craft group meeting will be on Tuesday 1st. Dec. at 9.30.
Please feel free to contact members of the Forp board with any ideas for improving Ropner Park. You could well spot things that we have missed.

Friends of Ropner Park Limited
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Company No: 06247357
Registered Charity No: 1125093