



Friends of Smithills Hall



Patron: The Duke of Norfolk President: Sir William Goring Bt.
Smithills Hall*Smithills Dean Road* Bolton*Lancashire*BL1 7NP
Tel (01204) 338722 Registered Charity No. 1038507

www.friendsofsmithillshall.co.uk



FRIENDS BULLETIN 43 *Spring* 2021

Friends of Smithills Hall Executive Committee

Chairman: David Williams, **Vice Chairman:** Joan Sheppard, **Secretary:** Sue Priest, **Treasurer:** Wendy Edwards, **Members:** Ruth Ellison, Dorothy Lee, Elaine Fletcher-Cowen, Margaret Koppens

“All through the long winter, I dream of my garden. On the first day of spring, I dig my fingers deep into the soft earth. I can feel its energy, and my spirits soar.” ~Helen Hayes

Contents

- Introduction
- Garden Volunteers
- Hall Café
- The Stag and the Squirrel at Smithills Hall
- Memories of Old Smithills
- Some Trivia

Introduction

Welcome to the Spring edition of your quarterly Bulletin. It is at this time of the year that our hopes for longer and warmer days start to become more realistic. There is therefore a certain irony in the poem which follows later, which was kindly donated to us; of cold times past.

Reopening

19th MAY 2021 is the expected opening date for Smithills Hall visitors if no café is available, otherwise it would be expected to open on 17th May 2021. Normal opening days are Wednesday to Friday **10am to 4pm** and Sunday 12 to 4pm.

Confirmed opening date will be shown on the website when it is known.

www.friendsofsmithillshall.co.uk

I hope you are well and that, as the measures taken to keep the virus at bay start to bite, we will again enjoy the freedoms we have previously taken for granted. In particular we are looking forward to the Hall reopening to visitors, although it will be too late for the Annual Garden Party as there is insufficient time for it to be organised.

When we are able the Friends of Smithills Hall will restart our normal activities including, we hope, having an AGM in or around June. We will, of course, support any other events based on the Hall including guided tours. The Friends' Executive Committee has continued to meet monthly on Zoom and remains in close contact with Hall and Council staff.

Garden Volunteers Report

You will be aware that our volunteers continue to work on the garden borders. A report follows: -



Janine, Janette, Ann, Alun, Paul, Alison (photograph Sue)

During various lockdowns over the past year, we have seen a huge increase in the number of visitors to the grounds around the Hall. We have seen the Elf and Santa trail at Christmas and the Easter bunny trail this

Easter. Catherine, the Hall Manager, has many plans for outside activities this summer. These gardens are maintained by a hardworking group of volunteers, Paul, Alison, Janette, Sue, Ann-Marie and Alun.



Gardens Spring 2021

They have worked hard to clear the Parterre and the beds and it should look lovely again this year. Paul has done a tremendous job on the back breaking work on the paths and borders amongst other things. Paul is busy transplanting to the front beds of the Hall from a kind donation and has sowed wild flower seeds by the benches on the path down to the river. We are just coming into the replanting season so watch out for some lovely displays later this Spring, Summer and Autumn. All volunteers are welcome no matter how long or short the time you have to offer.

Hall Café

We now await the reopening of the Hall Café, which is a key visitor attraction. With the previous proprietors having left, the Council is now busy looking to secure a new proprietor; with some enquiries coming through the Friends' website. We hope the café will be reopened as soon as possible for the benefit of all.

The Stag and the Squirrel of Smithills Hall

A story donated to the Friends of Smithills Hall

By **Petra Wilcockson**

Tw'as the coldest night as all agreed,
When two old friends in direst need,
Trudged across the frozen moor, Seeking
alms for the poor.
Deer was squirrel's loyal friend,
He'd stand by squirrel until the end,
The friends had little, no food or fare,
But whatever they had they'd always share.



Squirrel had but one last pleasure,
A prized acorn, his only treasure,
That nut he pinned his hopes upon,
Without that nut, all hope was gone.

They came at last to Smithills Hall,
And to a hole within the wall,
But though the snow lay thick around,
No light shone, there was no sound.

Deer sighed and wiped a tear,
"There's no-one home, there's no help here."
But Squirrel secretly worried how,
They'd last the night if they gave up now.

With that thought the squirrel stole,
Up the wall and through the hole,
A moment later the door swung wide,
And squirrel let his friend inside.

Embers burned in the vast great hall,
So someone lived there after all!
The friends warmed up both hoof and paw,
Then on they wandered to explore.

Soon they found the withdrawing room,
With carved wood faces in the gloom,

Squirrel pulled some faces too,
Deer laughed loud, and so would you!

The Chapel was the next room found,
Poor church mice scurried all around,
Squirrel held his acorn tight,
In case they tried to take a bite!

Deer was hungry for a meal,
(Just to borrow not to steal!)
To the kitchen squirrel pointed,
But soon both friends were disappointed.

They peered around the kitchen door,
To empty shelves and dusty floor,
For all the pots and pans were bare,
No morsal could they find in there.

In the buttery they found no drink,
No butts were stored, no bottles clinked,
The pantry too was just as bad,
No food was there to be had.

"This house is poor as me and you!
No food to see the winter through,"
And with that thought they climbed the stair,
To see what poor soul was sleeping there.

Squirrel was silent as a mouse,
(Though deer's clip clop could wake the
house!)
He did his best his hooves to muffle,
And soon developed a softer shuffle.

In the solar they looked ahead,
And there they found a loaf of bread!
Squirrel grinned, this loaf confirmed,
That, at last, their luck had turned!

He was just about to take a bite,
But something didn't feel quite right,
Deer was looking at a bed,
And who it was that owned that bread.

"Whoever sleeps there is poor as us,
To take their bread feels treacherous!"
They drew the curtain and took a peep,
And found three small children fast asleep.

With breath that froze within the air,
They felt sad for the children there,
With just a loaf for winter's storm,
A threadbare blanket to keep them warm.

With heavy hearts they turned to go,
But before they went back to the snow,
Squirrel paused, he bowed his head,
Then placed the acorn by the bed.

"Those children need hope more than me,
I have my friend for company."
And then they headed through the door,
And afterwards were seen no more.

They left no sign at Smithills Hall,
But if you look upon the wall,
You'll see the wooden panels adorned,
With a carved stag's head and a squirrel's acorn.



Memories of Old Smithills

By **James France** as told to Christine Southern
– date unknown

Mr James France of the Cottage, Smithills Park can recall a great deal of history concerning the area from the turn of the century. Until his retirement he was a ranger at Smithills Hall for 21 years and remembers when Smithills Hall was part of a vast estate which consisted of 19 farms. Mr France, now 72, told me "The land was sold piece by piece, the last land being sold in 1948. The largest slice was sold to Smithills School; this was a 4.1/2-acre field."

Mr France recalls some unusual tales about the one-time owner of the Hall, the late Colonel Ainsworth. He was in command of the local Yeomanry and on occasions paraded his troops at the Hall to impress guests. Unfortunately, on one occasion he was enjoying his party so much that he forgot to dismiss his men and kept them standing to attention for some hours.

It is said all the men resigned from the Yeomanry – though whether that is true, no one is certain. Mr France said that the Colonel was well known for his eccentricities, he kept one man fully employed to make sure that the road from Forest Road to Barrow Bridge was swept thoroughly each day. Croft Road was impassable because of the Toll Bar and Mr France said that the Colonel engaged a man to take money at the Toll Bar. It is said that one day the Colonel dressed in old and patched clothes demanded to be let through without paying the toll. The faithful employee told him "If tha'd bint boss himself tha wouldn't 'ha gotten through" and he steadfastly refused to let the Colonel pass until he had paid. Far from being annoyed, the Colonel was very impressed and, it is said, gave him a good pay rise.

Some Trivia

'Have you ever wondered why'.

You may be aware that during the time the Ainsworths lived at the Hall they had a tennis Court on the eastern side of the Hall. No doubt the players called a zero score 'love'. Why?

In France, where tennis became popular, the round zero on the scoreboard looked like an egg and was called 'l'oeuf', which is of course, the French for 'the egg'. When tennis was introduced in the US, Americans (naturally), mispronounced it 'love'.