

# The History of Hollycroft Park



Official opening in 1935

## Pre Park Construction

Archaeological finds in the vicinity of the park suggest human habitation from around 5,000 years ago. Flints and animal bones have been found, with a number of these being exhibited in the Hinckley and District Museum, which is just five minutes walk from the park on Upper Bond Street.



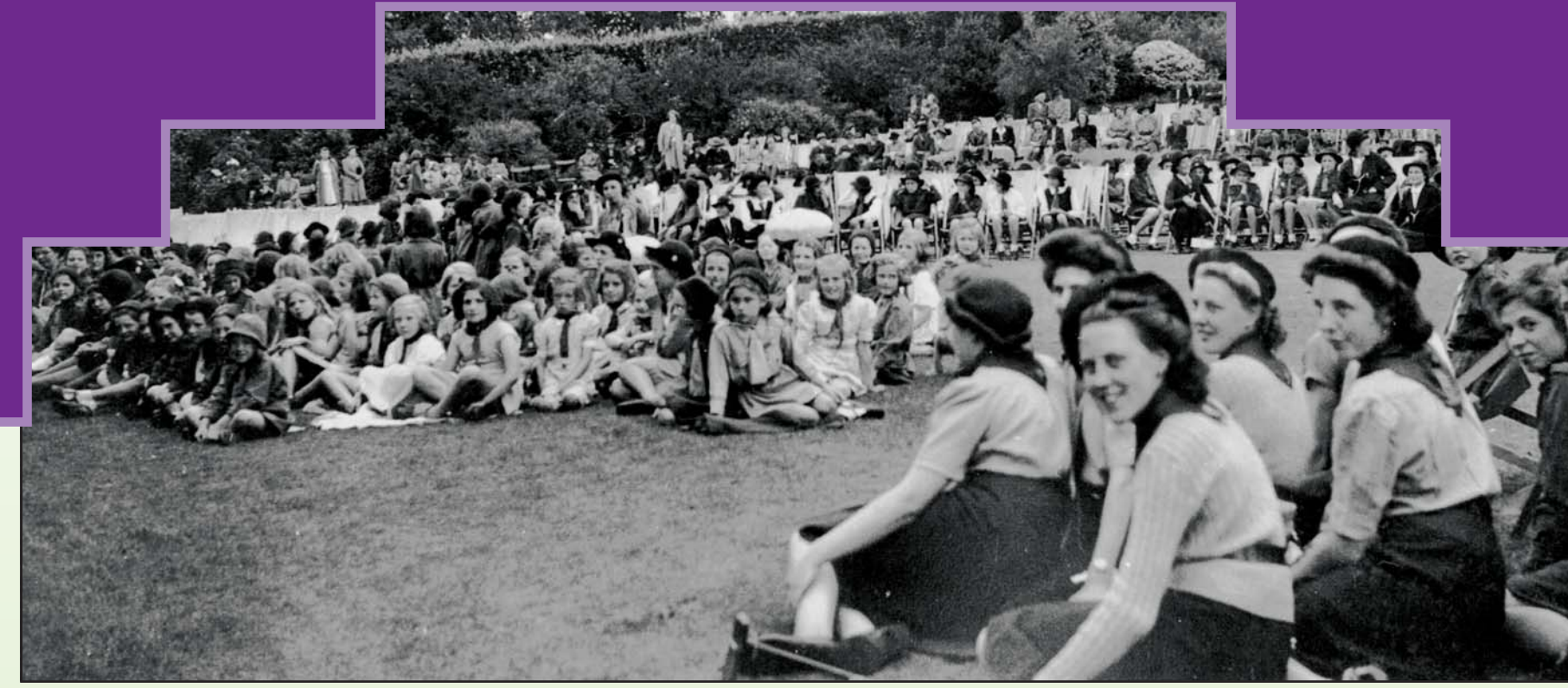
Prior to park construction the area was farmland which was bought from the estate of the late Thomas Atkins, Esq, of Hollycroft. The name Hollycroft comes from 'Hollow Craeft' a field at the bottom of the hill, in which there was a reed bed, used for thatching buildings in Hinckley.

In May 1930, the council bought a field of approximately five hectares in size situated at the top of Hollycroft Hill, for the sum of £2,700. A road was constructed along the southern portion of the land, now known as Shakespeare Drive, to connect with Canning Walk (now Hollycroft), named after the Prime Minister, George Canning, who lived at Burbage from 1811 until 1814 and who would walk daily along this road out towards the fields of Wykin and Stoke Golding. The remainder of the land, approximately four hectares, was allocated as public open space.

## Park Construction and Opening

The design for Hollycroft Park was based on the Happy Valley Park in North Wales, which was created in the late 19th century, and listed as a historic garden of excellence in the 1930s. Work started on Hollycroft Park in 1933 and the main features included an arena area and bandstand, two hard tennis courts, a bowling green with pavilion and a four acre pitch and putt golf course.

Most of the works were completed in 1935 and the park was opened as part of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of King George V and Queen Mary. Mr A.S. Atkins who had been the Town Clerk for 35 years performed the opening ceremony. He was given a silver key to open the gates at the Shakespeare Drive entrance.



Concerts at the bandstand

## The Early Years

The ladies and men's bowling clubs were formed in 1936 and weekly band concerts also started at this time. During holiday periods there were concert parties and pageants.

When the war started in 1939 some of the gardeners were called to duty and the flowerbeds became vegetable growing beds and the conservatory grew tomatoes and lettuces. Much of the produce was used by the British restaurant in Wood Street that provided economic meals for factory workers. Second World War home defence emplacements were also erected in the park, in case of an invasion by German forces they were designed to fire Spigot's Mortars (an anti tank mortar), which were manned by contingents of the local Home Guard.

Towards the end of the war concerts once again started in the park and Fred Perry came to give tennis tuition. When the war ended the expansion of the parks and open spaces began and the Parks Department was formed to cope with the extra maintenance required.



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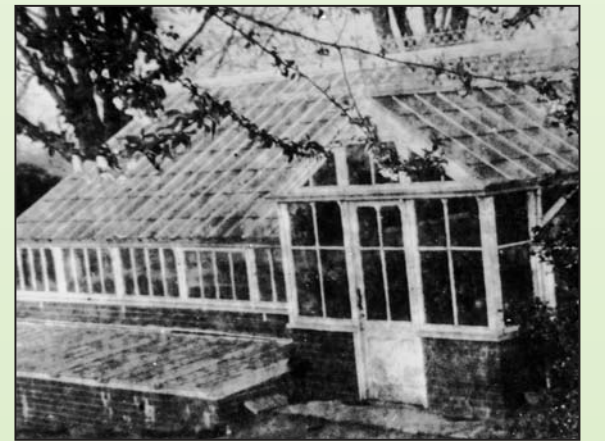
Bandstand arena 1945



Bandstand arena 2013

## Post War to Present

Over the next few years more glasshouses were built at Hollycroft Park to produce bedding and decorative plants. The council had some success in horticultural shows in the Midlands, including a gold medal at the Leicestershire Agricultural Show. The glasshouses became redundant at the onset of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) in the 1980s, when councils were forced to open up their horticultural services to competition from the private sector. The glasshouses were later demolished.



The original layout of the park has been retained in the main, although some changes have taken place to meet changing public needs. The majority of the ponds were filled in and some of the flowerbeds have been grassed over. However, there is still an abundance of shrubberies and formal beds. A series of band concerts continue throughout the summer months, together with a number of other park events.

In 2000 to celebrate the Millennium, two features were added to the park, the Millennium Sundial at the main entrance to the park at Shakespeare Drive, and the labyrinth in the picnic area near the entrance at Hollycroft. The Friends of Hollycroft Park group was also established in 2000, the group has gone from strength to strength, and are now responsible for the majority of the events that take place in the park, and in 2007 received a National Lottery Breathing Spaces grant award to create a wildlife area in the park.



## Green Flag Award

In July 2010 Hollycroft Park received the first of its Green Flag awards for the site. Green Flag awards are awarded on an annual basis, they recognise and reward the best green spaces in the country.

