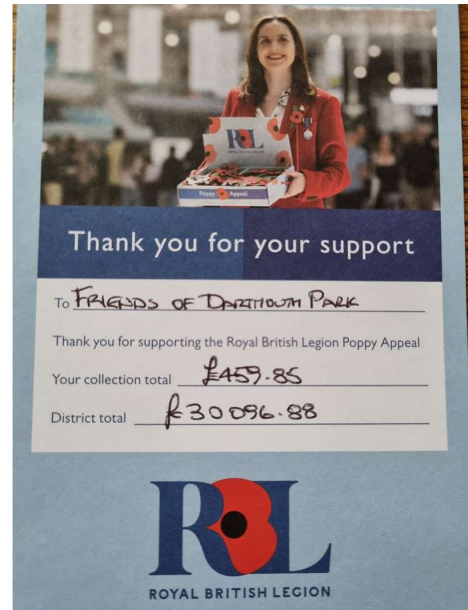




Friends of Dartmouth Park
Patron: 10th Earl of Dartmouth

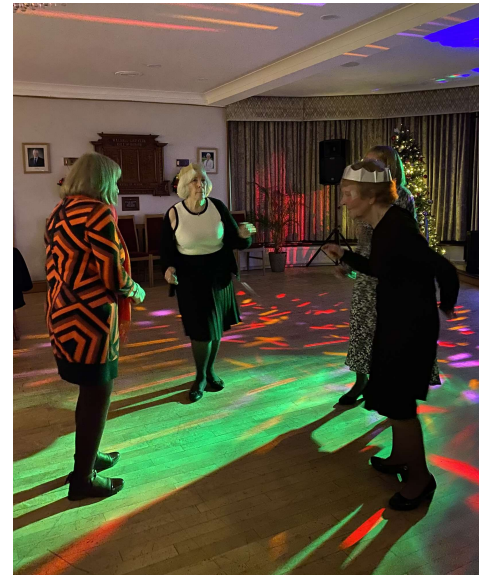
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Remembrance Day, November 10 2024



A big thank-you to the Friends of Dartmouth Park volunteers and the people who donated to the 2024 Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal

Some Festive Photographs from our Christmas Event



Storm Darragh



Storm Darragh descended on the United Kingdom between the 5th and 9th December 2024. West Bromwich did not fare as badly as some other areas of the country—but the storm nevertheless left quite a bit of clearing up to do in Dartmouth Park. The ground was littered with small and large branches and at least one whole tree was uprooted. Our thanks go to the Council staff who were quick to respond and very soon had the Park both tidy and safe again.



Mystery visitors to Dartmouth Park



Since being a regular user of Dartmouth Park one of my mantras has been “You never know what you will see next!” That was certainly the case here on a very cold December day just five days before Christmas.

These gentlemen were sitting under a tree singing and playing their musical instruments. There was a lady with them who seemed to be taking film/ photographs but unfortunately her English was not good enough to explain the reason they were there.

It will have to remain a mystery for now but if anyone can throw any light please let us know!



West Bromwich Harriers

“Boxing Day Challenge” in Dartmouth Park



A long-standing event in Dartmouth Park is the Boxing Day Challenge organised by the West Bromwich Harriers running club.

The Harriers club is over 100 years old having been established in the early 1920s. Their current base is at the Dartmouth Central Club in Devonshire Drive, just outside the perimeter fence of Dartmouth Park, and they use the Park for some of their training activities. The most notable occasion in their history occurred in 1960 when they helped to bring the English Cross Country Championships to West Bromwich. It was a great honour for a relatively small club and brought some 1500 athletes to the town. The competition took place in Dartmouth Park and the surrounding area.

The Boxing Day Challenge probably dates back to 1927. The original trophy was described in the local press as the Civic Week cup and West Bromwich had held its only civic week in 1927.

The race involves four circuits of the central section of the Park—making a total distance of 3.4 miles. It is a “handicap” race whereby the slower runners start first followed by the faster runners (based on their recent competitive performances). Guest runners are allowed to participate but only club members can compete for the trophy.

The 2024 winner was Harriers Chairman Karl Moore—closely followed by his son Oli.

The Harriers are online at <https://westbromwichharriers.wordpress.com/> also Facebook & Instagram

Runners and supporters prepare for the start



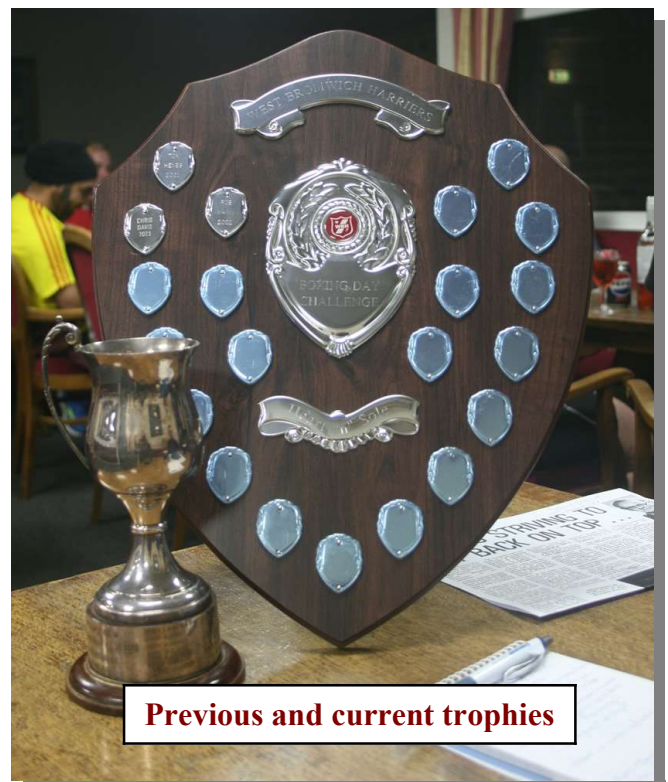
Timekeeper John Buckby alongside “Blind Dave”



1st place Karl Moore 2nd place Oli Moore



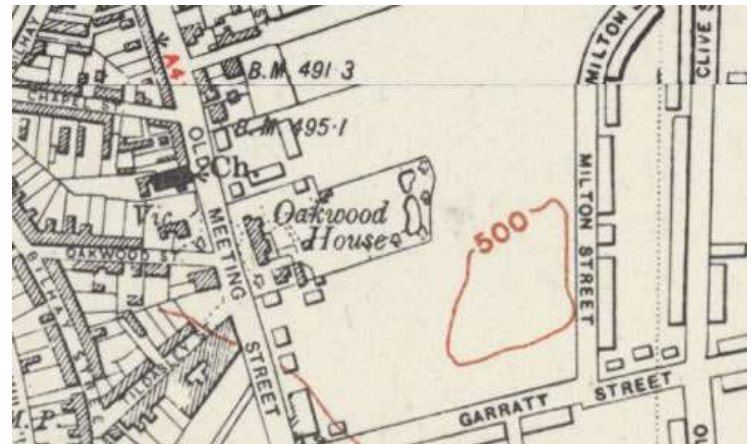
Previous and current trophies



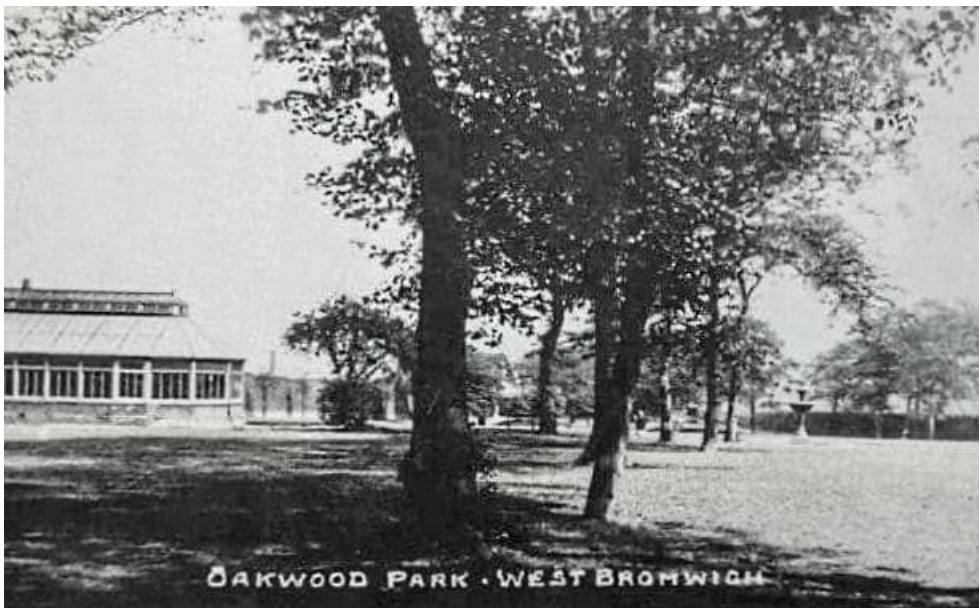
The origins of West Bromwich's other parks

by Mark Barrett

6. Oakwood Park & Jesson Playing Fields



The name Jesson can be traced back many centuries in the business, religious and social life of West Bromwich. The family became wealthy from the traditional industries of coal and iron and in turn they became land and property owners. A Thomas Jesson who died in 1703 built the house which



became known as Oakwood on Old Meeting Street. By 1845 a descendant owned 45 acres of land in West Bromwich, mostly around Oakwood and this passed in turn to his son Rev. Thomas Jesson. By 1912 Rev Jesson no longer lived at Oakwood and he donated the house, grounds, a cottage and approximately 15 acres of land to the Borough of West Bromwich. No conditions of use were attached but *it was decided by the Corporation to use the garden as a small public park, and the remaining lands as a recreation ground and playing fields for organised games by the elementary school children of the Borough.* The national publication Teachers' World said *"fortunate West Bromwich"* and spoke of a *"new era in school games."*

The Mayor issued an appeal for £1500 to cover the laying out costs of a recreation ground and playing fields. However it was not until 1922 that a formal opening ceremony took place - with a football match

between elementary school boys and a netball match between girls. A local newspaper said that *the playing fields are possessed of features which make them almost ideal and here in future the children of the elementary schools . . . will henceforth have plenty of*

opportunity for indulging games calculated both to improve the physique and to instil the finer qualities of character.

The event was extraordinarily popular and some 5000 spectators were estimated to be present. The dignitaries included *the Mayor, a full muster of the Education Committee and the Medical Officer of Health. Around the ropes were Mr Fred Everiss and H Keys of West Bromwich Albion along with a number of Albion players. Jesse Pennington refereed the match.*

Oakwood House was allowed to remain and it was intended for it to be used as a reading room and/or museum. But by 1937 it had become the headquarters of the local branch of the St. John Ambulance Brigade. It housed three ambulance and one nursing divisions with a total strength of 120. By the mid-1950s the house was in a dangerous condition, and following the removal of the SJAB to new headquarters it was demolished.