

## **STARBANK PARK**

### **LOVED BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY FOR OVER 125 YEARS**

The Friends of Starbank Park was founded in 2013 with the aim of restoring the Park to its former glory.

2016 marked the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Park to the public. It seemed timely to explore the Park's history: the Friends searched printed and online sources, and talked to many in the community who have family memories. What follows is not intended as the final history of the Park. Rather, we hope it may stimulate further memories. Please do contact us if you can add to our store of information to pass on to future generations.

Over the years the Park has hosted many activities and events, and the Friends have sought to build on and further develop these traditions. From very early days the Park has held both recreation and education dear. Indeed, James Dobbie, then the Park's Gardener, is reported as reading a short paper on public parks to the Scottish Horticultural Association in 1901. He thought it important to encourage young people to take a more intelligent interest by labelling plants with common as well as Latin names. Mr Dobbie spoke also of the beneficial results to be derived from open spaces, and of the educative influences of flowers and plants.

The main event recorded in the Park's history is the Pageant of the Five Queens held on 30 May 1953 to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. By happy coincidence the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary was in the year of the Queen's 90th birthday.

Every child in Victoria Primary School took part in the 1953 celebrations. But links with the school appear early: the school archive has an entry dated 5 February 1909 when pupils visited the Park for a nature study lesson.

In 2015 the Friends, working with the School, set about establishing a Children's Nature Trail. Hans Christian Andersen stayed at nearby Lixmount House (see plaque at 73 East Trinity Road) during his brief visit to Edinburgh in August 1847. His fairy tales have been chosen as themes for the Trail. Brownies, Rainbows and other groups of children have also helped in the Park.

One of the Friends' happiest achievements has been to see so many people, particularly children, return to the Park.

## **MAIN DATES**

- 1889 Starbank Park bought as a public park by Leith Town Council on 27 December
- 1891 Park opened to the public
- 1910 Devlin Fountain presentation ceremony on 23 May
- 1920 Last meeting of Leith Town Council
- 1920 Leith Museum transferred to Starbank House - until 1932
- 1946 Victory Day celebrations on 8 June
- 1953 Pageant of the Five Queens on 30 May
- 1955 Pageant of the Five Queens on 4 June
- 1970 Starbank House with 'fountain, boundary walls, gatepiers, railings, gates and gateposts' was B listed
- 2013 Friends of Starbank Park established in October
- 2015 Green Flag awarded for the first time, and every year to date
- 2016 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations on 18 June
- 2018 UK Neighbourhood Park of the Year

## **STARBANK PARK BECOMES A COMMUNITY HUB AGAIN**

The Friends is a group of volunteers whose aim is to restore Starbank Park after years of reduced maintenance with the aid of the local community. It has been splendidly supported by the Parks Department and local businesses, large and small. As more flats are built in green space the Park is increasingly recognised as a vital green lung not just for local but also those from a wider area.

An active group of volunteers work on Wednesdays and Saturdays constantly improving the facilities and offering opportunities to all to enjoy the boost to their mental health by working with the soil in such a beautiful environment. All are welcome, whatever the level of expertise (or none) and whatever the age (there is currently an enthusiastic group of preschoolers using the child-size tools). Raised beds have been created for the less agile and there are also long-handled tools. Many schools and community groups including Brownies, Cubs and Duke of Edinburgh participants have come to the Park to learn about the Park, about gardening and about volunteering. Royal Botanic Gardens assisted the Friends to establish a fernery in the south west corner. Links, both formal and

informal, with local churches, nursing homes and other organisations are ever increasing.

The Friends organise events to publicise the Park, and to raise funds. The now annual Easter Egg hunts and Hallowe'en parties are highlights for many children, from near and far. Grown ups perhaps enjoy Cherry Blossom afternoons more - and the 125th anniversary of the Park's opening attracted huge crowds with games for the children, Edinburgh Brass Band playing and a display about the Park's history. The Friends have also held coffee mornings in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support, and other local organisations have held their events in the Park. The Christmas wreath making sessions are very popular and the class for willow weaving was a great innovation. Catering for another market, a local fitness teacher bases some of her sessions in the fresh air overlooking the Forth.

Most of all more and more people - locals and those from much further away - come to walk and admire and perhaps pick a book from one of the 'Little Libraries'. The Park now figures on the programme of several walking groups.

The Friends would welcome your support:

Visit the Park, and visit it often

Encourage your families and friends to visit

Join the Friends - annual subscription is currently £5.00

Come and garden on a Wednesday or a Saturday morning.

For further details please see <https://friendsofstarbankpark.org/>

## **LEITH TOWN COUNCIL ESTABLISHES STARBANK PARK**

Starbank House was bought by Leith Town Council (LTC) at public roup (i.e. auction) on 27 December 1889, with an entry date of 5 January 1890. The cost of £2235 compared very favourably with the £4600 sought when it had been placed on the market earlier, in 1883. It probably failed to sell then, as the Rev. Walter Goalen continued to live there until his death in 1889.

The 1889 advertisement was for a 'Mansion House containing 3 public rooms, 6 bedrooms, besides attics, with the grounds extending to about 3 acres imperial. There is a small conservatory and a three-stalled stable ... There is a frontage of 800 feet to two existing roads, one of which is the road along the seashore. There are several small

houses occupying a portion of the property which is readily let yielding a rental of about £80'.

An official opening was planned for 30 June 1891 to be performed by Mrs Aitken, the Provost's wife. However, this was postponed as three days previously the enormous six-storey warehouse containing butter, cheese, flour and a bonded store belonging to the Provost's business had been badly damaged in a fire. This had caused severe loss as well as the death of two firemen. There is no indication that the postponed formal opening ever took place.

It is not clear when the Park was actually opened to the public. But by May 1892 the opening hours were set: in summer April-Sept. weekdays 6am to 1 hour after sunset; in winter Oct.-Mar. weekdays 8am to 1 hour after sunset; Sundays (all year) 1pm to 1 hour after sunset; with the Ladies' room in the house to be open the same hours as the Park. At a public meeting at the Free Fishermen's hall in October 1892, all three candidates for the 5th Ward were asked if they favoured closing Starbank Park on Sundays. When all three replied in the negative, the questioner said none of them were fit to stand for the council. Despite this, in 1893 the Park began to be opened at 8am on Sundays.

It had been agreed in June 1891 that once the Park opened the caretaker's wife was to sell light refreshments, such as tea, coffee, and milk, on weekdays only.

Although there were early aspirations for expansion, Leith Town Council minutes, maps and press reports do not support the accounts by Wallace and Nimmo of the grounds of Laverockbank House being added to the Park. Nimmo may even contradict himself by giving the size of the Park as 2.6 acres, which is probably about the same as the 3 acres imperial stated in the original sale. When Laverockbank House was for sale in 1908, LTC declined to extend Starbank Park in view of the amount already spent in connection with public parks in Trinity (the expansion of Victoria Park).

## **STARBANK HOUSE**

Starbank House, with an address of 17 Laverockbank Road, was B listed in 1970, along 'with fountain, boundary walls, gatepiers, railings, gates and gateposts'.

The house was built about 1815, probably by Alexander Goalen. His son Rev. Walter Goalen, who built Christ Church Episcopal Church

at 118 Trinity Road, lived there until 1889. An eminent neighbour was Sir James Y. Simpson of anaesthesia fame. William Ewart Gladstone, four times U.K. Prime Minister, was a cousin of Walter whose mother was Anne Gladstone.

When Leith Town Council bought Starbank Park in 1889/1890 it seems to have been much neglected. The first plans put forward by James Simpson, burgh architect, included gutting the house, but for financial reasons this was scaled back to essential maintenance only.

Right at the beginning, the east side was converted into a ladies' waiting room and the gardener's accommodation was on the west side. Somewhere there was also a ladies' toilet: in July 1892 the Council agreed to the ordering of a supply of towels, and the charge of 1 old penny for the use of the lavatory was to be retained by the gardener's wife for her trouble in attending to the lavatory. In June 1895 the Council agreed that the large room in the house be used as a gentlemen's room. By March 1901 the Council were discussing renewing the notice on the door indicating that there was a general waiting room, with a ladies' waiting room off it, and the large room on the north side was the gentlemen's waiting room. There is the impression that the ground floor was gradually taken over by waiting rooms and the gardener had accommodation upstairs.

### **Leith Museum**

From 1920 to 1932 there was a Leith Museum in Starbank House (which may have been located in the waiting rooms). The collection was transferred from the Leith Council Chamber after amalgamation with Edinburgh. This Leith collection was moved in 1932 to Huntly House in the Canongate, and subsequently to the Tolbooth in 1954.

### **Pensioners' Club**

There are memories of going into the house (the wooden floor in the hall was mentioned) and playing dominoes in the wee hall. Newhaven Starbank Old Age Pensioners' Club (or, according to a seat in the gardens, Starbank Senior Citizens' Club) was latterly a men's club which met once a week in the west bothy with dominoes a favourite winter pastime. It was affectionately referred to as the Old Men's Club. In summer, bowling in Victoria Park was also popular. Women were invited on domino players' trips out.

### **Toilets**

As mentioned previously there was a ladies' toilet in the house by 1892. But there is no mention of any for men. A 1957 photo shows a sign 'For Ladies Only' on the garden-facing wall of the east bothy. Memories include the wooden seat going right across the cubicle in the Ladies, and the smell 'of the worst toilets in the world'. By the time the Friends started work in 2013, there were bricked up toilets, for both Ladies and Gents, in an extension built beyond the east bothy. The Friends have now refurbished the toilets and they are opened when events are held.

## **OCCUPANTS AND GARDENERS**

The first gardener, Francis Noble, was appointed in 1890 with his wife as caretaker of the house. They occupied the west side of the house. His wage was 21 shillings per week with a free house. His wages increased as his responsibilities increased: by 1895 he supervised the other Leith parks of Leith Links, Henderson Street and North Leith. However, he was dismissed for procurement irregularities over the gardens at East Pilton hospital in 1896 - Mrs Noble lost her job and they both had to leave the house.

James Dobbie was appointed in October 1896 following an advertisement for a married gardener to take charge of and assist in all work at Starbank Park and at North Leith Park. Wages were 25 shillings per week with free house, coal and gas. His wife was to act as caretaker. He appears to have stayed in Starbank House until at least 1920 with his responsibilities increasing. He was sometimes referred to as Head Gardener and also as Park Superintendent.

W.G.S. Grant, James Nimmo and James Dickson then successively occupied the house until 1944. It is not known whether they were gardeners at Starbank Park although this is likely. The house was occupied between 1944 and 1966 by James Nisbet, his wife Mary and their family. He was Superintendent of Parks for the East area of the city, which included Joppa, Craigmillar and Silverknowes. His family generously donated a commemorative seat in 2016.

Thereafter there are memories of the Starbank House being rented out to new managerial employees of Edinburgh Council while they looked for their own accommodation. Wallace writes 'Starbank House has been converted into two flats for employees of the Parks Department of Edinburgh District Council'.

Two retired employees of the Parks Department now live in the house. Stan Dunlop has lived in the upper flat since the 1970s. For the Friends' volunteer gardeners Stan is the heart and soul of the Park, as well as being a fund of knowledge about its history and about gardening. Although long retired, Stan works early and late lovingly tending the gardens.

## **STARBANK PARK AND ITS LAYOUT**

Leith Town Council recognised the need for planning, and set up a Sub-committee, On the Laying Out of Starbank Park, but this was short-lived, possibly due to limited budgets. Although early plans were prepared by James Simpson, the burgh architect, these seem not to have survived. Bowling greens and tennis courts were ruled out both on the grounds of cost and because the ground had been bought as a public park and not for the benefit of a particular section of the community. If they put down a bowling green and a tennis court, there would be little room for the general public.

### **Seats**

These were provided early in the Park's history, with Leith Council agreeing to buy eighteen in 1891. Some of the Park's more recent social history can be found on the memorial plates on the seats: commemorating individuals, families, and organisations. Some of those bereaved find solace in leaving flowers on seats that meant a lot to their families. A report and photo in *The Scotsman* of 13 June 1972 record the presentation of a seat by the Inner Wheel Club of Leith to the Starbank Senior Citizens' Club.

### **'Model Village' or Garden Grotto**

LTC agreed to purchase this in 1897 but there are no clues where, or even if, it was sited.

### **Birdlife**

A request for a dovecot was rejected by LTC in 1894.

There are memories of birds, especially in the rose garden; including sparrows, starlings, and wood pigeons, with magpies appearing only in the last dozen years. Owls frequented the large sycamore tree facing the House. Robins are seen all year, with their own territories jealously guarded. There is a sheet on the notice board about birds currently seen in the Park.

The Friends made, painted and erected bird-boxes during 2016 and installed bird feeders. The lovely sounds of birdsong are a joy.

## **Insects**

Insect life is thriving, perhaps encouraged by the installation of insect hotels and by lots of bee-friendly planting.

## **Wildlife**

Starbank Park has been a home to hedgehogs, interbred wild and tame rabbits of varying colours, foxes and lots of squirrels. Frogs are regular visitors which is surprising given that there is no water in the Park. The recently hung bat boxes encourage the return of bats to the Park.

## **Trees**

Starbank Park has many beautiful trees and a spectacular display of cherry blossom in early May. The large sycamore tree in front of the house was planted on 22 February 1912 to commemorate the coronation of George V and Queen Mary. There are memories of the two copper beeches nearby being planted to mark the start of the Home Guard, possibly in 1940. A press-cutting from *The Scotsman* of 6 January 1938 records the felling of a tree, believed to be at least 100 years old and one of the oldest in the Park.

## **Vegetation**

Mr John T. Jeffrey, superintendent of Parks and Gardens, was reported in *The Scotsman* in 1927 and in 1932 claiming that Starbank Park vegetation was at least a week ahead of that in Princes St Gardens.

## **Upper Area**

In order to open the Park in 1891 it was decided that the grass on the south side should be cut with a scythe and pathways made through it. Over the years the upper area became home to tennis courts (from as early as 1896), greenhouses and flower beds. There are early records of budgets agreed for summer bedding plants, and tulip and narcissus bulbs.

There were many memories of the **Rose Garden**. It was also christened the 'Garden of Eden' by those finding peace and beauty there. It was well kept. There are memories of the smells of wallflowers and roses; tulips, crocuses and daffodils were also grown. The formal gardens probably date back to sometime after 1920 when

it was decided that tennis courts should be established in Victoria Park to replace those in Starbank Park. The grass in this area was cut and boxed (ie grass cuttings were removed), while in the lower area it was cut only. The Park was famous for roses growing up trellises. There was a Council policy of two rose beds to be replanted every two years.

People came and walked here on Sundays after church and Sunday School, wearing their Sunday best. There are memories of children meeting friends and sitting on the benches for a chat.

There was a **Sundial** in the centre, which was stolen. It would have taken at least 3 strong men to remove, as the base was very heavy. At one time there was an annual inventory made by the Council of artefacts in parks, but the number of thefts meant this was discontinued. The Friends are delighted that a new Sundial was erected in 2018.

The **Greenhouses** were along the east wall. There is a photo of a postcard, dated variously 1900 and 1910, showing an elegant Victorian glasshouse. In the 20th century, there were lean-tos down the east wall used by four gardeners. The Friends erected a new greenhouse in 2019 now used for bringing on seeds and other tender plants. Alongside are raised beds in boxes to aid accessibility and to encourage experimental planting

Logs for wood-burning were sawn by men working in pairs with cross-saws. Some of the logs were used in Starbank House.

Children could play hide-and-seek as the bushes were a little away from the east wall. Families often spread out rugs for picnics.

There is a memory of a postbox on the **Park Wall** in Laverockbank Road being blocked up to avoid damage by suffragettes. Wallace records that 'in the spring gales of 1982 the old retaining wall, its cement no doubt eroded by the frosts of many a severe winter long gone by, was blown down and collapsed in a rickle of stones. The charming old wall has been carefully rebuilt, and it is to be hoped that this will act as a salutary conservation precedent.' Margaret Borthwick remembers coming home to Starbank House that day, after remarking on rainwater pouring down The Mound as she set off. It was very windy and some sixth sense made her move off the pavement onto the road. The wall suddenly fell in on itself, leaving her on one side and John, the full-time Park gardener, on the other totally bemused. Although calm at the time, by the time she reached home she was hysterical and phoned her husband. The chilling memory of what might have been has never left her.

There was a **Well** with a drinking goblet in the shape of a lion's head on a chain on the wall inside the top gates and to the north. It went missing when that part of the Park wall was lowered to match the part of the wall south of the gates when it was rebuilt after it came down in the gales. The drinking goblet was not replaced and the supply of water to the well was cut off some years ago when the grass was found to be unusually wet.

### **Little Libraries**

Two wonderful library boxes have been donated - the white box next to the Hans Christian Andersen nature trail and the eye-catching blue 'Police Box' contain children's and adult books respectively. Come and browse or read with your children or take a book home. Return it later or bring another. There are no formalities like signing up or recording loans. This serendipity is much enjoyed.

### **Lower area**

As early as 1901 Leith Town Council were discussing a new **Flagpole** as the old one was then rotten. The area round the flagpole is remembered as 'The Circle' and the surrounding hedge made it a sheltered place to sit.

There was an array of flags round the hedge during the 1955 Pageant. The flagpole currently flies the Green Flag awarded to the Park for 2015/16 and for every subsequent year to date as 'the mark of a quality public park or green space. Given in recognition of achieving the national standard for parks and green spaces'.

It is uncertain how old the **Star** on the bank is - and whether or not it dates back to the building of the house. On Robert Kirkwood's 1817 map, the slope in front of the house is marked as Star Bank and the house and land behind as 'Mr Goalen'. Harris suggests that 'the name seems to have been fancy, following the fashion of the earlier *Laverock Bank* and *Christian Bank* in referring to the steep slope down to the sea...' He also writes that the landscaped star on its bank is shown in Ordnance Survey 1893 - but a photocopy of the 1893 map from the National Library of Scotland online does not show this.

Family memories are of Peter Lawrie (1869-1932), the grandfather of Elaine Higgins, cutting the first star. By 1927 he was working as a greenkeeper at Victoria Park taking care of the bowling green there. His home was at 181 Ferry Road. He collapsed and died in a tool-house in Starbank Park on 7 April 1932. This was reported

in the *Edinburgh Evening News* of 8 April in the 'Sudden Deaths' column.

Isobel Page has memories of her father, Bryce Crawford, also helping cut a star, possibly to replace a crown. Bryce Crawford worked as an under-gardener, but left the Park in 1947 to buy and run a taxi.

People remember the stars and crescent moons being planted every quarter, with seasonal plants. There are memories of geraniums and purple pansies. At one time the star is remembered as filled completely with white stones, as a landmark for ships in the Forth.

Nimmo records an eight-pointed star flanked by crescent moons. He writes the star 'depicts the "Star of the Sea", believed to be symbolic of a ship's compass and harking back to the days when Forth sailormen navigated the oceans by the stars.' However, there is no other account of this and his source is not given.

### **Devlin Fountain**

This was gifted by Thomas L. Devlin, then a major local employer as owner of a trawler net factory in Granton and a large fleet of steam trawlers. He also donated a drinking fountain at Annfield. Both were opened on the same day, with the official party travelling by special tramcar from Annfield to Starbank Park. The base of the Annfield drinking fountain was returned to Newhaven in 2019 and erected in the Newhaven Burial Ground on Main Street.

The inscription on the Starbank fountain read, 'Presented by Thomas L. Devlin, Esq., J.P., Merchant 1910 Newhaven.' The water was turned on by Mrs Devlin. A silver salver was presented to Mr Devlin with the inscription 'Presented to Thomas L. Devlin, Esq., J.P., Newhaven, Leith, by members of the Magistracy and Councillors of the Burgh, May 1910, on the occasion of the Corporation's acceptance of his gifts of an ornamental fountain in Starbank Public Park, and also a drinking fountain at Annfield, Newhaven.' That silver salver is thought to be in the current possession of his great grandson.

The highly-ornamental terracotta fountain was designed by George Simpson, who had succeeded his father, James, as burgh architect. Early photographs show an ornamental fish at the fountain head and several Grecian urns around the peripheral stonework. *The Scotsman* described it as 'of neat design'.

The fountain was switched off at the start of the Second World War, and did not play fully again. There are memories of 'problems with the pipes'. Over the years it was vandalised. In 1994 the upper

parts, some by then broken, were taken away and put into storage by the Council.

Edinburgh City Council landscaped the base in 2014 and there are now stone, sculptured blocks in the centre with a border of plants. The inner area is filled with shells.

## **MEMORIES OF THE PARK**

The Park is remembered in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century as a centre for the community, and always packed. It was a meeting place for mothers and babies. If children found no-one at home after school, then they came to find their mothers in the Park. The mothers would sit and knit, while small children rode their bikes round the Devlin fountain. Late primary age children would meet their friends there; sometimes the girls would bring neighbours' babies in prams, usually in the morning, but in afternoons too.

It was a place for walking, rather than playing, until after the Second World War. A sign to the left of the star warned 'Keep off the Grass'. This is visible in photos of the Pageant of the Five Queens. There are memories of similar signs all along the path at the foot of the Park. Although the Parkies enforced no balls, no bikes and no dogs, there are memories of some flouting of this. Garner records that girls could play rounders. One man remembers being chased for playing football. Running down the hill was also popular. The Park was a good place for slides on the flat paths on frosty days.

Despite the Parkies ruling with a rod of iron, not to mention their whistles, there was a human side; one lovely memory is of Tom, the younger Parkie who was regarded as less strict, rescuing a child who had wandered on stage during the dancing after the Pageant of the Five Queens in 1953.

Over the years, the beautiful views and the colour of the gardens have made the Park a favourite background for photos. There are post-christening photos, wedding photos and many family scenes. For a period there could be two or three wedding groups every Saturday; now there are very few, although one coach travelling between wedding and reception was seen to stop in 2015 while guests were photographed near the fountain. At least one American couple came to the Park for wedding photos. On 5 September 1914 there was a wedding in Starbank House, with three ministers present; the addresses given are local: 30 Trinity Crescent and Pitt Street, Leith.

Courting was not unknown, although the Park gates were closed at night until recent years. Garner includes a quotation, 'All the big boys at school used to take their girlfriends in to the [air raid] shelters'. [Despite this there are no clues as to where these shelters were located]. A later memory is of a grandmother being appalled by pupils from Trinity Academy canoodling on the benches.

But the loveliest memory is of Isobel Page's parents meeting through the Park. Her father, Bryce Crawford, was working as a gardener, and her mother walked daily to her work at Waterston's in Warriston Road via the Park. They married in 1939.

Isobel remembers the Park as very well looked after, with no litter. While she was young, volunteers picked up the litter to keep the Park special. If you misbehaved, your parents were sure to find out!

Sadly, the condition of the Park declined in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the gardening staff, and their duties, were reduced. Vandalism and theft took their toll. Gone were the days of up to 1300 staff working for the Parks Department; and foremen on mopeds transporting tools in side cars.

Dogs were banned from the Park until recently. There are memories of dogs on leads being allowed. Some dogs have caused damage to the plants and grass. However, Park memories indicate the presence of dog walkers may help protect against vandalism.

## **ACTIVITIES**

Although there were early ambitions for a bowling green, lawn tennis courts and even sea-water public baths, there was little money available in the 1890s after the Park had been purchased.

### **Bowls**

Despite early plans and public demand (in 1895 no fewer than 588 people signed a petition), there was no bowling green provided for reasons of space and the unsuitability of the ground.

### **Music**

There is a long history of music in the Park - see 'Concerts' below. In recent times, there are memories of a melodeon being played for an Easter Sunday service, when girls wore straw hats. A single piper practised for a few years in the south west corner of the Park.

### **Sledging**

It seems likely that the slopes made this informal activity popular from early days. There are memories of sledges of many descriptions – Starbank Road residents have found missing dustbins there. Park injuries include damaged teeth from sledging accidents.

## **Tennis**

Tennis courts are mentioned in Leith Town Council minutes from 1895/96. Their maintenance, opening hours, and charges for use were discussed over the years. However, following the merger with Edinburgh, *The Scotsman* reported Edinburgh Town Council had agreed to provide six courts in Victoria Park with the intention that these replace those in Starbank Park.

## **EVENTS**

### **Cherry Blossom Tea Party - or Hanami Picnic**

This was held for the first time on 7 May 2016 and has been repeated most years to celebrate the wonderful flowering cherry trees in the Park.

### **Church Services**

There are memories of occasional services/events in the Park over the last 20 years. In 2019 both Newhaven and Wardie churches contributed to the Park's Easter events.

### **Concerts**

LTC organised 'Music in the Parks', and the programme of music in Starbank Park dates from 1892 with announcements in *The Scotsman* until c.1907. Leith Industrial School Band played regularly; other bands included Newhaven Band, Newhaven Brass Band, Newhaven Silver Band, Leith Brass Band, Leith Celtic and Gymnasium Pipe Band, Port of Leith Band, and Leith Gymnasium Flute Band. The popularity of the bands may be gauged by Leith Industrial Band's request of 1894 for a ring of poles and ropes to prevent crushing. In 1907 LTC instructed Mr Dobbie to request more police supervision during concerts because of the noise made by children. Memories suggest that the bands played on the lower part of the Park.

In 1905 history was made when Mr T.W. Wright gave the first public demonstration in Scotland of the triplephone, the latest development of the gramophone, in the first of a series of weekly entertainments.

This tradition has been revived with Edinburgh Brass Band making a wonderful contribution to the 125th anniversary party in 2016 and other bands, including the Steamer Lane Band, playing at other events. A local harpist was a welcome addition to the Bubble Festival in 2018.

### **Devlin Fountain Presentation Ceremony**

This major event on 23 May 1910 was a very grand affair. The great and the good donned their finery, and top hats were very much in evidence. There was much coverage in the *Leith Observer*, *Leith Burghs Pilot* and *The Scotsman*.

### **Easter Egg Hunt**

This was started by the Friends on Good Friday 2015, and is now a popular annual event.

### **Egg Rolling on Easter Sunday**

As far back as anyone can remember, children and the young at heart have rolled their eggs in the Park on Easter Sunday. Eggs were coloured, then painted and might have pigtails attached. Hardboiled eggs have been joined by both chocolate and china eggs. Over the years, many from furth of Newhaven have joined local residents; there are memories of family members coming through from the west of Scotland. People poured out of trams. As children many remember new hats, clothes and shoes being bought or made for Easter; Sunday best was worn, and even rolled in along with the eggs.

This was the one day of freedom and fun. There was no Parkie with a whistle to keep you off the grass. Instead people brought picnics for a day out on the grass. There are memories of 'not being able to get going as so many people'. Then, as now, the gulls have a feast for days afterwards.

### **Hallowe'en**

Party for 3 - 8 year olds which was a Friends' innovation in 2015 is a hugely popular annual event.

### **Midsummer Madness**

Another 2015 Friends' innovation - which has been largely replaced by the Cherry Blossom Tea Party/Hanami Picnic.

### **Pageant of the Five Queens, 30 May 1953**

This is the main event recorded in the history of the Park. It was held to mark the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Every child in Victoria Primary School took part in the celebrations.

The Five Queens, all represented by Primary 7 pupils, were St. Margaret, Margaret Tudor, Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Victoria (selected as queens who had travelled through Newhaven en route to Holyrood) and the Sea Queen. The crowning was performed by Miss Mary M. Campbell, the much-loved head of the infants' department. All the banners and costumes including the queens' dresses were made by local residents. Mrs Herd made the dress for the Sea Queen. The blue velvet dress of Mary Queen of Scots is remembered as particularly opulent.

The Sea Queen was Jean Cowie (now Haigh). She was 11 years old. Although not a Newhavener, she was given the prime role as dux of the school. She and her fellow Queens stayed in touch for many years, and there were reunions in 1973 (20 years), 1993 (40 years) and 2003 (50 years). In 2013 she was thrilled to be invited to the Newhaven Gala to crown the Fisher Queen and she was the Friends' Guest of Honour at the Park's 2016 celebrations.

Boys in fishing costumes, cable-knit jerseys and sou'westers, lined the pier for the arrival of the Sea Queen on the *Gratitude*.

The pageant was a very grand event with performances on a stage of dances appropriate to the era of each queen. A piano was taken to the Park by lorry for the Coronation. The replica lighthouse, now in Victoria Primary School, was also brought to the Park. This had been built for the 1944 Pageant of Newhaven performed in the Usher Hall to mark the centenary of Victoria School.

The programme is in the Victoria Primary School collection along with many photographs. There is a video of the 1953 Pageant owned by Newhaven Heritage. The original film was filmed by a commercial company, Campbell Harper Films of South St Andrews Street and edited by Ron Cattell. He was then the P7 teacher who wrote and produced the pageant.

### **Pageant of the Five Queens, 4 June 1955**

From the programme and the photographs in Victoria Primary School archive this seems to have been very similar to the 1953 pageant. The Sea Queen again arrived on the *Gratitude* but was crowned by Mrs Henry Robb. The same queens accompanied her, similar dances were performed and most of the same songs were sung.

Again the replica lighthouse was brought to the Park. This time there was a display of flags on the hedge round the flagpole.

## **WARTIMES**

### **Air raid shelters**

Garner records that Starbank Park had two large shelters during the Second World War but there is no record of where they were located. *The Scotsman* list of trench type shelters in 1939 includes Starbank Park, Victoria Park and the Fishermen's Park.

### **Allotments**

*The Scotsman* records that Leith Town Council agreed to welcome applications for allotments towards the end of the First World War. But to date neither records nor memories of allotments actually being dug have been found.

### **Wounded soldiers**

LTC agreed that Starbank House could be used for wounded soldiers during the Boer War, but there is no record of this happening. When rain put a stop to tennis in 1901, an impromptu concert in the waiting room raised a magnificent 17 shillings for '*The Daily Telegraph* and *The Scotsman* Shilling Fund for our Soldiers' Widows and Orphans'.

## **FISHING LINKS**

The Devlin Fountain was presented by a major local employer, who is recorded as starting out in Newhaven Fishmarket before becoming owner of a large steam trawler fleet and the trawler net factory in Granton.

The star on the bank may have connections with the Star of the Sea.

The local boat, *Gratitude*, was used in the Pageants of the Five Queens in 1953 and 1955.

The Friends have planted up four boats. The two in the lower area have plaques: Friends of Starbank Park, and Newhaven Heritage.

## **OTHER LOCAL PARKS**

### **Victoria Park**

This is remembered as the place where people played. There were close links with Starbank Park, with staff working in both especially looking after the bowling greens.

### **The Fishie Park**

Now Great Michael Rise, the Fishermen's Park was where the local fisherfolk laid out the nets to dry.

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Citizen Curator – Duncan Bremner

City of Edinburgh Council:

Edinburgh City Archives

Libraries – Edinburgh and Scottish Department in Central, and Leith

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Newhaven Community History Group

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Victoria Primary School - Laura Thomson, Head Teacher and Heather Suttie, School Administrator

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