

Horsham Society

with Nigel Friswell



Nellie Laughton's dream lives on

Way back in 1930 the People's Garden of Remembrance, below St Mary's Church down by the River Arun in Horsham, was built by Mrs Nellie Vesta Laughton in remembrance of her husband and all who had died in the First World War. Her husband had died in 1925 so the reason for the somewhat tenuous link with the Great War is not clear.

Mrs Laughton was born in Redditch, Worcestershire, in 1867 but she lived at The Croft in Brighton Road, Horsham, for 40 years. When her husband was alive she took an interest in local affairs but, after his death, she devoted all her time to Horsham and its people.

She was a leading light in many local organisations and was a magistrate. In spite of her also being a district councillor, the council refused to accept her offer of the Remembrance Garden as a gift to the town.

It had cost her some £500 (you could buy a substantial house for £750 then) but the council did not want to be saddled with the cost of maintenance. It was only after she died in 1953 that the council did take over the garden.



Work to restore the Remembrance Garden in 1986

Clearly Mrs Laughton did not see her Remembrance Garden as being a sad place. It included a bandstand, a children's paddling pool and swings and seesaws.

There are pictures of the paddling pool being well used by the local children but I have not seen a picture of the bandstand so I do not know how long it survived.

With no formal arrangement for

maintenance it was inevitable that the garden fell into disuse. From time to time bands of volunteers tidied it up and did various work.

Volunteers from the Horsham Society worked in the 1980s to restore the garden. The original plaque was found and a new plinth built for the rededication on Saturday 6th December 1991.

By this time the latest group of volunteers had moved on or had become too elderly to maintain the garden. So another cycle of intermittent maintenance started. The garden is still quite respectable but its age is showing.

The benches with their own memorial inscriptions need replacing and a general smartening up is required.

This time, the knights riding to the rescue are the HDC Parks & Countryside department and Denne Neighbourhood Council. Plans are afoot to tidy up the garden and the adjacent Mill Bay Green.

Vegetation will be cut back, damaged paths relaid and rotting seats replaced. The idea is to renew the garden in a traditional style for a Garden of Remembrance, improving the quality to attract more visitors, which it deserves.

It is hoped to keep the banks of the stream natural, improve the planting and renew the two wooden bridges. The funds for this work will come mainly from 'Section 106' money; that is the money which developers put into the community pot for works such as this.

Even the relatively recent history of the garden was forgotten until the Parks Department people and Denne Neighbourhood Council inspected the area and then realised from the bench memorials that the Horsham Society had been involved 30 years ago.

So, once again, we will have a hand in the restoration of one of Horsham's assets, thanks to Denne Neighbourhood Council and to HDC now taking an interest in a town feature which their predecessors did not want in 1930.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 261905.