



A Story of Bygone Times in Preston Park

“In the austerity years immediately following World War 2, amidst the scarring and rubble of reconstruction, children and young people of Yeovil could find a quiet playground of paradise in Preston Park. Entering this former garden of Preston Park House through the imposing gateway on Preston Road, the park was spread out on a lower level. Descending the steps or pathway either to the left or right, one arrived on the perimeter path which encircled a large pond, which provided a varied source of expectation, fun and games.

At its northern end the pond appeared to be fairly deep, and a fence protected the people using the perimeter path from falling in whilst the southern end of the pond was “shallow”, so the path, unprotected by the fence, ran close to its edge. This made for a stable base from which small boys could dip in their jam jars and collect the miniature pond life. Small fish and newts were plentiful, and, at the appropriate time of year, frog spawn and tadpoles were caught to stock local fishponds.

Some distance “offshore” in the shallow end was a small island, in the middle of which, grew a large tree so getting to the island was a crowning but damp triumph for the youngsters. Many miniature sailing yachts were floated out on this water and because it was in the days before radio control, it was often an agonizing wait until they made landfall, and, hopefully not getting snarled up on the island or old branches sticking up out of the water.

By the allotments at the very bottom of the park grew many enormous trees which presented challenging but exciting climbs, the view from the swaying upper branches was quite exceptional. To the south views over the houses of Westbourne Grove towards the Westland factory were clear and northwards the expanse of the Larkhill estate with its large number of new “prefabs” was predominant.

But the pond was the centre of attention and fun, thus it was a great disappointment when sometime in the 1950's the Fire Service turned up and via a long length of connected pipes drained the pond into Preston Brook at the bottom of Watercombe Lane. The “story” circulating in some quarters for this action was that some clothing had been observed floating in the water and it was thought that someone may have succumbed in the murk. Although no evidence was apparently found, the pond was filled in and grassed over and remains this way until the present time. The old perimeter path now follows a shorter route winding over what once was water. Just like the filling in of the ornamental fountain pond in Sydney Gardens, another adventurous place succumbed to the onslaught of health and safety legislation”.

By Bob Brookes

