

Before the Millennium Green - Reclaiming the Land (2000)

Before Woodcote Millennium Green became the much-loved community space we know today, the area was very different.

By early 2000, the land that would become the Green had fallen into neglect. The open grassed area was no longer being cut, and much of the site had become an impenetrable tangle of brambles, scrub and hundreds of dead elm trees. What is now open space and welcoming pathways was then closer to a jungle.

While much of the early work to establish the Millennium Green Trust was being handled behind the scenes by dedicated volunteers dealing with the paperwork and formalities, practical work on the ground also began.

A commercial mower was hired from a local shop near Sainsbury's, and the first task was simply to cut the overgrown grass. This had to be done on several occasions to bring the space back under control. Beyond the grassed area, however, lay a far greater challenge.

Those brave enough to venture deep into the brambles could just about reach what is now known as The Glade. There they would find an enormous bonfire site - a long-standing dumping ground for pallets, office furniture, beds, mattresses and anything else combustible. These had been regularly set alight over the years, until eventually the fire brigade arrived to offer firm advice about the wisdom of continuing such activities.

The next phase required heavier equipment. A bramble-clearing machine was hired - powerful enough to "guzzle" its way through dense scrub. Clad in protective clothing, including a crash helmet, a full day was spent cutting back and clearing large sections of the site. Gradually, the hidden shape of the land began to re-emerge.

With the undergrowth cleared, attention turned to marking out the future paths shown on the original plans. Tape measures in hand, volunteers began at Woodcote Hurst, opposite the post box. As a short stretch was cleared, the

pond came back into view - evidence that this route had once been used many years before.

For one newly retired member of the team, fresh from the Coroner's Office, June and July 2000 became devoted to this new and rather different occupation - transforming the future Woodcote Millennium Green.

The Grand Opening

Later that year, the transformation was celebrated with a grand opening in The Glade. The area was decorated with bunting and filled with music and activity - a steel band, Morris dancers, tug of war and a coconut shy. It was a true community celebration.

Among those attending were the Harwood brothers, the two nonagenarian benefactors connected with the land. After surveying the scene and taking in all that had been achieved, they delivered a wonderfully memorable remark:

"There's nowhere to have a bonfire now!"

It was, in its own way, the perfect acknowledgment of just how much had changed.