

The Butts in Alton

Timeline through the Centuries

The Butts (also historically known as 'The Robin Hood Butts') is a pleasant triangular green edged with Chestnut trees and benches. Today it is owned and maintained by Alton Town Council and is enjoyed by the public for informal gatherings and picnics, visits from the Circus and Fun Fair, and hosts the popular Victorian Cricket charity tournament. The Butts however has a long and interesting timeline...



11TH-13TH Century

Ownership of the Butts

Historically, The Butts was a part of the Manor of Alton Westbrook with its western side being along the Alton/Chawton boundary. From before 1066 until about 1331, the manor was held by the Crown.

The Crown passed The Butts to the relations of Edmund of Woodstock, changing ownership over the years to the Tichborne family, the Chaffins, the Sherbornes and Henry Dutton of Hinton Ampner.



14TH-17TH Century

1320 - Alton Fairs

Alton historically had two fairs. In 1320, the privilege of holding a 9-day fair in Alton Westbrook was granted to the Lord of the Manor, Edmund of Woodstock.

The Eastbrook Fair was originally held on St Lawrence's day but it was changed to Michaelmas in the mid-1700s. It has no charter as it was a patronal fair.

These both began to be held on The Butts in the 1800s.

Archery on The Butts

It was decreed by Edward IV (1442-1483) that every Englishman should have a bow of his own height and that each town should have a Butts so that target practice could take place every Sunday and feast day. Although the word Butts also had other meanings, it seems likely that this area was used for archery.

Early 1600's - Musters

In the early 1600's musters were held on The Butts.



18TH Century

1700's - Bowles, Beer Houses and Cricket

In the early 1700's James Arnoe had a bowling green 'at Alton Butts'.

Butts House was built in the 1730's on the northern side and became the 'Star' beer house, trading until a turnpike was created on the southern side about 20 years later, taking away trade.

Cricket was played on The Butts and when a match took all day, a cold collation would be provided.

The French Horn premises were described in 1779 as 'lately erected' and John French, a hollow turner, later opened his beer house here. The nearby cottages were rebuilt c1798.



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19TH Century

1840 - Great Lamb Fair & Circus

The first Great Lamb Fair was held on The Butts in July 1840 with a large number of animals on show and several cups being awarded by Edward Knight of Chawton.

Six years later, Mr White and his equestrian troop and celebrated lions, tigers and leopards visited here at the same time as the Lamb Fair!

Other events which took place here included meetings of the Hampshire Hunt, the inspection of the 21st Hants Volunteers and the annual dinner of Chawton Club which was followed by dancing.

The 1860's - Mid Hants Railway 'Watercress Line'

In the 1860's the railway was extended past The Butts towards Winchester. Ten years later, more houses began to be built along the north side of The Butts.

1884 - Trees, Benches & Quoits

1884 saw a meeting held where it was decided that trees should be planted around The Butts - the expense to be met by public subscription. Seats were also erected and the pond near the town was filled in. Alton Butts Quoit Club held meetings here (Quoits is a traditional game, throwing metal, rope or rubber rings over posts.)



20TH Century

1913 - Alton Urban District Council Byelaws Introduced for the Butts

Scan this QR code for the Alton Town Council Butts webpage including the Byelaws



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1919 - Peace Thanksgiving

Led by Rev.C.E.Bond on The Butts attended by over 3,000 people.

1971 - Common Land

The Butts covers just over 4 acres and was registered as a Town or Village Green - but this was withdrawn in 1971. It was designated as common land and its principal function is for the informal enjoyment of the public.

Common land is land the public have the right to roam on, meaning you can use it for certain informal sports and recreation activities like walking, playing football or dog walking. You cannot - camp on common land without the owner's permission, light a fire or have a barbecue, hold a festival or other event without permission, drive across it without permission.

1981 - Alton Town Council Open Space

The Butts was leased to the Council as an open space, until the freehold was presented to the town by Henry Dutton, the Lord of the Manor in 1981. This is commemorated by the stone plinth near the north-eastern end of The Butts.

With thanks to Jane Hurst for contributing to the text and photographs for this project.

For more information on the history of Alton please visit the Curtis Museum, High Street, Alton GU34 1BA for more information Tel: 01420 82802 or visit www.hampshireculture.org.uk/curtis-museum

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