

ROUNDHAY PARK BICENTENARY

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Can you imagine Roundhay without Roundhay Park, - no Mansion, no lakes, no Canal Gardens? How many houses and shops would there be on Soldiers Field and what would there be instead of Waterloo Lake, a small industrial estate maybe, or a shopping centre? Roundhay would be just another built-up suburban part of Leeds like in many northern cities. Fortunately the reality is quite different. Roundhay Park is special. For most people Roundhay Park is Roundhay. It's the only part of Roundhay they really know and appreciate.

This year, Leeds City Council, with the help of 6 million pounds from the Lottery Fund, are starting a major restoration of the Park. By a wonderful coincidence, 2003 is the bicentenary of the year 1803 when Quakers Thomas Nicholson and Samuel Elam purchased Lord Stourton's Roundhay estate. Thomas Nicholson was faced with a far more daunting task than the major work which is to start this year. He created the main features of the Park as we know it today, including the Mansion and the Waterloo Lake. Even after his death his influence continued when his half brother Stephen Nicholson built St. John's Church, the school and almshouses in the south eastern corner of the Park using funds Thomas had left him and apparently in accordance with Thomas's intentions. However, when the Nicholson's estate was put up for sale in 1871, it was thanks to the vision of John Barran that Roundhay Park, much as it is today, was secured by Leeds Council as a park for the people.

We are glad to see this restoration work being started, and thanks go to the local groups of volunteers including Roundhay Conservation Society, Leeds Civic Trust and Friends of Roundhay Park, who are helping the City Council to keep this unique open space for everyone's enjoyment.

In Oak Leaves Part 1, the fascinating story of Thomas Nicholson, a remarkable man, was described. Now, we commemorate this book to him in recognition of the decisive role he played in the events which led to securing Roundhay Park for future generations, a process which is being continued today, by people like us, who value and respect this beautiful heritage from bygone days. Thomas Nicholson would still recognise the country estate he created, and perhaps be pleased that such a large open space still exists to be appreciated and enjoyed today two hundred years later.