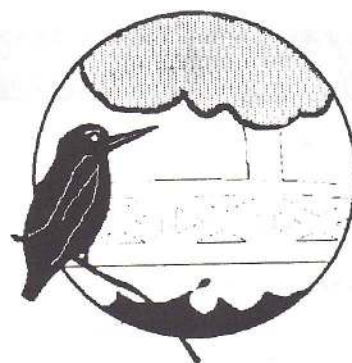


FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM



SUMMER 1992

and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

ONCE again on the occasion of the Country Craft Fair we link Friends and non-members with this issue of the *Newsletter*.

We are steadily working towards Country Park status and our objectives of protecting and enjoying this area. The support of everyone who shares these aspirations is vital.

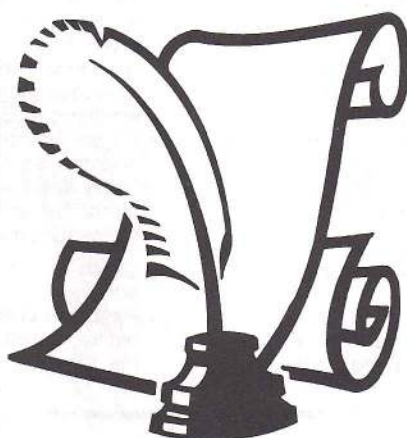
For the benefit of our new readers we have a full programme of events throughout the year, covering both talks and practical projects. Many of these are featured by our contributors in this

issue. Their efforts are much appreciated. A series of talks were held at Bethel Hall. These included: the improvement of quality

in local rivers; the development of Glamorganshire and other canals in South Wales; bird-ringing studies in the county; and finally, the history of the Melingriffith works.

Walks feature as a regular activity and the Friends have been welcome on the R.S.P.B. monthly bird walks.

A barbeque evening is organised jointly with the Watch Group each year and is enjoyed by all ages.



EDITOR'S FORUM

Making the Reserve visitable

PROBABLY many of us overlook the fact that people in wheelchairs and mothers with pushchairs are denied the pleasure of visiting the Reserve.

In collaboration with the City Council, we are making a start on the project to improve the visitability of the Reserve.

Our first task is building an access ramp at the Melingriffith entrance which will enable all of us to get on to the towpath.

A gradient of 1:20 requires a long ramp and a long retaining wall which is being built, in stone, by Warden Mike Wiley and his colleague Paul. A few of us from the Friends, supported by young people from British Conservation Volunteers, have been

labouring and generally helping out. To date we have had financial assistance from the Welsh Office backed by Environment Wales and from the Lord Mayor's Fund. We still need more help. Hiring plant for the heavy work and the massive amount of materials needed, makes this particular ramp an expensive exercise, despite the fact that there are no labour charges.

Maybe we will not be able to make every corner of the Reserve visitable by all members of the community. Provided we get the financial backing and practical help from the Friends and others, there is a great deal we can and will do. To make sure that monies donated for this purpose are not used in any other way we have set up a special "Visitability Fund" — D.D.

CYCLING IN THE RESERVE IS PROHIBITED ...

... say the small green notices fixed high up on trees near some of the entrances to the Reserve. We have had complaints of the danger to walkers on the narrow towpath when cyclists of all ages use it and of the damage to the Longwood paths in particular from mountain bikes.

We made representations to the Leisure Services Department and some additional notices have been erected. Now that there is a cycle-hire facility at Forest Farm there is an even greater danger of the cyclists taking over the Reserve paths.

WHILST walking the Reserve one afternoon, I heard what I thought to be the distinctive call of a tawny owl, followed by the mobbing cries of a blackbird.

Searching through the upper branches of a large oak with my binoculars, I was surprised to find that I had been fooled. The call I heard was that of a jay mimicking a tawny owl and getting mobbed for its pains.

There is a fair bit of mimicry in the bird world. (This wasn't the first time that I had been caught out, but it is usually by a starling imitating a buzzard). Why a jay, which can be a hunting bird and consequently gets its fair share of being mobbed, should mimic a tawny owl, thus ensuring that it is mobbed yet again, beats me.

BIRD BOXES

THE Voluntary wardens have done a marvellous job surveying our bird boxes this spring, risking life and limb to check and record every box. Howard Davies related

Fooled by a mimic

to me how he was attacked and almost knocked off the ladder by a ferocious blue tit. To hear him tell the tale you would have thought the attacker to be an eagle owl at

least. The vast majority of the boxes contained nests and the results of the findings were as follows:

- 33 nesting blue tits.
- 17 nesting great tits.
- 1 nesting robin (open box).

With more than 400 chicks raised in our boxes, all our efforts were obviously well worth while. Alas no pied flycatchers this year, but maybe next?

Vixen calmly turned tail

ON THE whole the Reserve is in good shape. The mallard and moorhens have done well with families being seen everywhere. Our scrape (winter wetland), is still surprisingly holding water after eight months.

There have been numerous sightings of foxes on the Reserve, with ages ranging from an old dog fox to a vixen and a couple of

very small cubs. I came to within five yards of the vixen. Ensuring that I was down wind, I crouched motionless watching it as it scraped the soil for earthworms and beetles. When it finally saw me, it just turned tail and loped off, seemingly unperturbed.

With June comes our annual cull of canal vegetation. A central channel is cleared, leaving the marginal vegetation

on both sides. The work will be carried out by the Cardiff Conservation Volunteers, a group which helps with a lot of the reserve management. The surplus vegetation will not be wasted, but it will go to schools which are setting up their own wildlife ponds.

Finally, many thanks to the Friends who have been helping the construction of our towpath access.

Forest Farm country park project

THE City Council recently reaffirmed its intention to designate a Country Park on land surrounding Forest Farm and including the Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve.

An earlier proposal approved in 1989 which had been agreed with the South Glamorgan County Council was held up pending further consultations with the Countryside Commission and the newly formed Countryside Council for Wales.

The Commission wished to seek clarification on future access and car parking arrangements and to determine the future uses of Forest Farm currently leased to British Trust for Conservation Volunteers.

A feasibility study was proposed and the firm of outside consultants, Chris Blandford & Associates, based at St Mellons, were appointed to carry out the study which they concluded in April 1992.

In order to achieve the objectives arising out of the study, the City Council are investigating the financial and planning implications in providing the park and its facilities. These objectives will concentrate initially on the need to provide road access from the north from the M4 and avoid congestion on the existing Forest Farm road.

A letter confirming the council's intention will also be sent to the Countryside Council for Wales.

Chris Powell

THE HOSPITAL MEADOWS

ON April 30th, 1992, the City Planning Committee considered and approved the final draft of the LOCAL PLAN before it is formally deposited. This final draft no longer allocated the meadows for housing—a direct result of our determined fight and the 5400 Petition. Of course, we know that the Health Authority can still seek planning consent by direct approach to the Welsh Office.

At the same time, we argued strongly that developments well beyond a Site of Special Scientific Interest or a Nature Reserve can have serious repercussions within the site, possibly destroying its scientific value. We are delighted that this is now recognised by the Planning Authority and is actually written into the Local Plan.

It is of local interest that Whitchurch Hospital may become the location of a new Neighbourhood Hospital.

Dennis Davies

MEMBERSHIP enquiries to Ms Esther Jennings, 5 Alfreda Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF4 2EH. Tel: (0222) 625021



VOLUNTEERS at work: on the building of the ramp at the south end of the canal



Volunteers help to build the access ramp

THOSE of you who have visited the Nature Reserve since the middle of May cannot have failed to notice the work in progress in building a ramp at the south end of the canal to allow for easier access to the Reserve for wheelchair and pushchair users.

Most of the skilled work is being done by the Reserves' full-time staff but, as mentioned in the article in *Newsletter No 9*, grants are made subject to some of the work being done on a voluntary basis.

Howard Davies has taken on the responsibility of Voluntary Work Organiser, so if you can spare a few hours between Sundays and Thursdays, please ring Howard on Cardiff 561656 to offer your assistance.

Most of the voluntary work done so far, has been done by your committee. New faces would be welcome.

Following the dinosaur footprints

WATCH, the junior section of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, has been active at Forest Farm since the early 1980's.

The group is an environmentally conscious club for young people interested in natural history.

Membership is open to eight to 18-year-olds; younger children are welcome if accompanied by adults.

Meetings are normally held on

FOREST FARM WATCH CLUB

Saturday mornings from 10.00am until noon, meeting at the Glamorgan Canal L.N.R. Warden Centre, Forest Farm.

Recent meetings have included pond dipping, river survey work, tree planting, manufacture of bird boxes, and visits to the Wentlooge levels to see flocks of winter visiting wading birds and the Bendricks rocks to examine dinosaur foot-

prints. The programme for the second half of 1992 includes a visit to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Llanelli, Cardiff City Farm, a bat watch, tree planting and an evening boat trip on Roath Park Lake.

Further information from:

Mr Mike Wiley (0222) 612213 (daytime). Mr Chris James (0222) 611342 (evenings).

OUR VISITOR SURVEY

LAST summer many of our members helped with the Visitor Survey which, in collaboration with South Glamorgan County Council, we undertook in Forest Farm and the Nature Reserve.

For various reasons the final report has only become available recently and the following are some of the findings:

Where did they come from?

Nearly half came from Whitchurch and Radyr. They also came from all over Cardiff but Cardiff North accounted for about three-quarters of all visitors. Some came from the Vale

and 6.5 per cent came from Mid-Glamorgan. The longest traveller came from Blackpool.

Who were they?

Two-thirds were adults mainly between 35 and 59. Only one person was disabled which is evidence of the urgent need to improve the visitability of the site. Nearly 80 per cent had access to a car.

How did they find out about Forest Farm?

More than two-thirds knew of it from local knowledge and 11 per cent from friends.

How often do they visit?

Half came more than once a week and a quarter came daily.

Why did they visit?

More than 85 per cent visited because of the quiet and scenic views and do not want this changed in any way.

The most unpopular feature was the recent industrial development.

More than one-third did not want any improvements but some wanted toilets and others path improvements and some cleaning up of the canal.

Half the visitors thought display boards giving information would be helpful. **D.D.**

How the Melingriffith got its name

THE naming of the new housing estate on the site of the old Melingriffith Tinplate works, "Millbrook Estate" prompted the Friends to write to the developers to alert them to the historical significance of the name Melingriffith.

Since the 12th century, records show a corn mill on the site. In 1158, IFOR ap MEURIG, Lord of Senghenydd, raided Cardiff Castle and carried off William, the then Earl of Gloucester and Lord of Glamorgan, his wife and son, and forced him to return land and property rightly belonging to Ifor.

It is surmised that it was then that Griffith, his son, was given the mill, hence the name Melingriffith, Welsh being the predominating language at the time.

There are recorded references to a corn mill on this site in 1188, 1294, 1316, 1578, and the last in 1715 is a record of a Grist mill

E. O. EDWARDS looks at the historical significance of the site

there leased to William Jenkins of Plasturton.

So we can all be pretty certain that corn milling continued on and off until 1740, when Rees Powell of Llanharan adapted the mill and water courses for iron working.

In 1750 the Melingriffith forge was owned by a Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers who about 1760 erected an adjoining Tinplate factory, assisted by the Hanbury family of Pontypool who were then the foremost in the art of tinplate working.

The Tinplate works flourished, supplied with iron from the Pentyrch Ironworks, brought down initially by barge from a landing stage near Gelyns Farm, along the river Taf and through the

lock at Radyr weir on to the feeder which took the water from the Radyr weir to drive the water wheel at the works. In 1815 this method was replaced by a tramroad to link the ironworks and the mill directly. The route of this tramroad can still be seen as part of the cycle track which runs alongside the river Taf past Radyr weir.

The Melingriffith works continued working until about 1957 and many many people of Cardiff have either worked there or had relatives working there, and the name Melingriffith is part and parcel of Whitchurch and part of South Wales history.

The developers assured the Friends that the name Millbrook was only for promotional purposes and would disappear once the estate was complete. So let us preserve this link with the past and continue to refer to this area as The Melingriffith.

SUNLIGHT ON THE RESERVE
The dancing shafts of gleaming light
As if released from bonds, take flight.
The response of summer to the sun
Illumines joy and sparks off fun. — K. P.

PUBLISHED on behalf of Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve by Mr Ken Patterson, 12 Manor Court, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF4 1BJ. Tel: (0222) 627077. THE Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.