



ANOTHER ARSON ATTACK AT FOREST FARM



After the re-opening of the new hide, I thought that we had turned the corner at Forest Farm with reinstating a much used asset.

However, I received a call early one Sunday morning from a distressed Community Ranger to say that the stable area had been totally destroyed in an arson attack. Sadly, I was not surprised at the news as various attempts had been made to light fires inside the building.

The stables area was used for storage for both the Rangers and Cardiff Conservation Volunteers. It includes a bird hide and a covered area used for



open days and educational visits. Tools belonging to the Rangers and the Conservation Volunteers, as well as their records over the last 20 years, have been destroyed.



Photographs

Martin Chamberlain. Stable area from the road.

Steven Turner. detail from the above and

Right: Back, near the bog area, orchard and pond.

The rain run-off from the stables roof was also used to maintain the wetland area (the Mary Gillham Memorial Fields) and pond.

As I write this article, clearance of the stables has not started, and an assessment has yet to be undertaken.

We have had - and are very grateful for - offers of support and help to replace the barn area. However, as you know, the Reserve is owned by the Council. Whilst the building is insured by them, there is a major decision on what the future holds for the area and what, if anything, will replace it.

We will keep you informed of any developments.

Martin Chamberlain Secretary

The Friends of Forest Farm Open Day 2021 - hopefully

At the time of writing, we are still unsure if it will go ahead but hope springs eternal! Should we be able to go ahead, things will have to be a little different not least due to what you can see above. The whole stable area is currently fenced off. Also, it would depend on what restrictions may be in place at the time.

Our Open Day would normally be on the first Saturday in October i.e **3rd October**.

Any information will be on our website and notices will be up on the notice boards.

Editorial,

Hello again! I hope this finds you well and able to get out and about a bit more - though still, stay safe.

It saddens me to include news of yet another fire here. I simply do not understand this sort of destruction and it is very disheartening. It seems as though the Friends have been fighting against what Mary Gillham called "piecemeal encroachments", major developments and vandalism since its inception. Now we have the Council's plans for Forest Farm. We hope they will take on board the views of those of us who have worked so hard at and care about Forest Farm as a Nature Reserve.

However, thanks to your support, practical help and contributions, there is much to be happy about and the Reserve is still a haven for many. In this edition, we focus on woodlands which are home to so many creatures. They inspire photos, drawings and poems. Volunteering has re-started which will help the Rangers with the backlog of work to be done on the Reserve.

Sincere thanks for your help and the goodwill shown in so many ways, we really do appreciate it.,

Hope to see you at the Whitchurch and Tongwynlais Festival, 18th Sept and maybe on 3rd October for our Open Day ?

Sheila Austin

Membership.

We are delighted to welcome the new members who have joined over recent months. Thank you for your support. You are now part of a group of getting on for 500 Friends, some of whom have supported us wonderfully over many years.

Database

As has been notified to members before, we have been working on compiling a database of our membership. The details we hold are your name, address and contact details, (email address if receiving the newsletter electronically or pay via Paypal); also the date you joined, your method of payment and how you receive your newsletter. GDPR rules will be strictly adhered to. For further information, check out our Privacy policy at <https://forestfarm.org.uk/privacy-policy/>

The database has been a marathon task which was carried out by the son of one of our committee. I think he deserves a medal! It is now complete, but being checked.

Membership used to date from April 1st annually, but now new members can join at any time during the year. This made it more complicated to keep track of renewals. The database will help.

We know that from time to time, members have not got their email copies of the newsletter, so if this happens, please do get in touch via info@forestfarm.org.uk

Deadline for articles for next newsletter - 10th November 2021

See back page for contact details

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Reserve Report

Alec Stewart - Community Ranger

We have had rather a mixed bag of weather this season with wet, warm, cold, storms and excessive heat. So a usual Welsh summer then! Good numbers of butterflies have been seen around the Reserve including what I thought could have been a silver washed fritillary but I can't confirm that sadly. The meadows, woodland glades, ponds and wet areas have all been buzzing with Dragonflies

Female Banded Demoiselle



Photographs: Charis White



Golden Ringed Dragonfly

and Damselflies. Beautiful and Banded demoiselle, azure and emerald Damselflies along with Emperor, Four spot chaser, Common darter and Golden ringed dragonflies have all been evident. Someone mentioned to me that they had also spotted a Keeled skimmer dragonfly at the Warden Centre pond.

The usual suspects have been around with a very tame heron posing for pictures and the foxes on show with cubs. I also had a weasel running across my path and disappearing quickly.

Unfortunately, we have had reports of photographers accessing sections of the Reserve they should not be in, to get pictures of the wildlife. We ask people not to do this. This Reserve is a haven in a busy city allowing wildlife to flourish and be seen by visitors. We would like to keep it like this but continued disturbance is a problem and the fenced and other areas set aside for wildlife gives them space to flourish and grow. Please respect this and stay on the public paths. We provide hides so all can benefit, wildlife and people. We are lucky to have such a place on our doorstep so let's look after it.



We have also installed some new signs along the canal and feeder reminding people to keep dogs on a lead and no cycling in that section. The area is the most sensitive section of the Nature Reserve and protecting it is our objective. Doing so will help with conserving the wildlife, ensuring the bankside erosion is kept to a minimum and ensuring people can have an enjoyable experience visiting the reserve. I would like to thank all who are respecting and abiding by this, especially the people we have talked to on our patrols. Unfortunately some of the signs have been ripped down but have been put back. We will also be changing them to more permanent metal ones.

Once again, thank you for showing consideration for the nature and visitors of Forest Farm Nature Reserve.

Velindre Update

I expect, like a lot of people locally, you will have received a letter from the Planning Department of Cardiff Council about the next stage in the planning process for the New Cancer Centre. This concerns an application for the "Discharge of Condition 17 (Construction Environmental Plan) of 17/01/1735/MJR ". You can access these online using the link:

<http://planningonline.cardiff.gov.uk/online-applications/>

The conditions referred to include an aboricultural method statement, tree protection plan, soft landscaping plan, ecological management plan and finally air monitoring unit. These sign-offs are required for work to start and contractors have been on the site assessing what is required.

If work on the site does start in the Autumn, it will be over 30 years since the Health Authority proposed developing the site, over 20 years since the public enquiry and 5 years since Velindre started planning the new hospital.

We will continue to do everything we can to minimise the effect on the Reserve.

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary
Friends Of Forest Farm



The **Green Flag** awarded to Forest Farm Nature Reserve is in situ at the entrance to the car park in Forest Farm Rd

The trees mean the flag doesn't show up that well in the photo, but I thought you would like to see it. Ed

Volunteering has re-started!

In our first session since March 2020, nine volunteers spent a hot and sunny morning on Sunday 18th July pulling Himalayan balsam in the Scout field at Forest Farm. It really was an extremely hot day, but thankfully there was plenty of balsam growing under the shade of some large trees.

August's session, on Sunday 15th, was also Himalayan balsam pulling. We know it's not the most exciting activity, but it needs doing, especially since we couldn't do it last year. And it does make a difference if it's done regularly. But we'll definitely be doing something different in September, and will include a variety of tasks in future months.

Because of Covid-19, our volunteer sessions are having to be run somewhat differently for the time being, to help ensure the safety of all involved. The main change is the need to book a place for each session, plus the inevitable form-filling, in case track-and-trace is ever necessary.

Also, because of increased demands on the Park Rangers, who are having to deal with a large backlog due to Covid-19, we will need to be more flexible. So our sessions may not always be on the second Sunday of the month any longer, and may even be on a Saturday sometimes. They will also only be 2 hours long (10-12), rather than the usual 3 hours.

Volunteering sessions will be publicised by email and on Facebook, a week ahead of each event.

The various additional requirements and procedures were put in place before Covid-19 regulations were relaxed in Wales at the beginning of August, so we're hopeful that the council will review them in due course, and that volunteering will eventually get back to as close to normal as possible.

Jon Wallis

"Wonderful Woodlands"



What are woodlands?

These leafy, magical wonderlands provide solace, are home to wildlife and soak up carbon from the atmosphere making them an important natural solution to the climate crisis.

They are habitats dominated by trees and other foliage. In the UK, the woodlands we see today have been shaped by thousands of years of human history, including the planting of many coniferous plantations for timber in the 20th Century.

Why are woodlands important?

Woodlands hold an important cultural heritage - with the woodlands we see today almost in their entirety shaped by human history. For many they remain a place to connect with the natural world, and are increasingly being used for the outdoor education of children, through the Forest Schools initiative.

Our woodlands are a key tool in the box when addressing climate change for their carbon storage potential, but are less well known for their potential to limit flooding events, with wet woodlands providing a great service in slowing the flow of water downstream after extreme rain events.

Woodlands are also essential habitat for much of our wildlife, from woodland flowers to birds and butterflies.

A natural solution to the climate crisis

Our woodlands are often talked about for their carbon storing ability. What's not always known is that whilst trees and other plants lock up carbon, nearly three times as much is stored in the woodland soils that support them!

UK woodlands cover approximately 13% of land area and are estimated to soak up around 21 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. That's around a third of the carbon dioxide emitted by cars every year in the UK.

Threats and pressures

Britain remains one of the least-wooded countries in Europe and remaining areas of woodland are still under threat from development and other pressures. Woodland birds and butterflies continue their long-term declines.

Traditional ways of managing woodlands, such as coppicing (a system of periodically cutting a tree down to ground level to stimulate growth) declined significantly as demand for wood for tools and crafts fell. As a result, many woodlands have either been left unmanaged or managed for timber. This has led to structural changes within the wood, a lack of trees at different stages of growth and less suitable habitat for animals to thrive.

The arrival of new diseases like ash dieback also have far reaching consequences, changing the make-up of our woodlands. Climate change may increase vulnerability through changes in temperature, in rainfall and in the frequency and severity of storm events.

Conservation and recovery

Protecting existing woodland and expanding tree cover is vital, so that we continue to lock up more carbon naturally. But it also has other benefits: more woodland for people to enjoy, cleaner air and a natural air conditioning system in cities where urban trees are planted, reduced flood risk and - of course - more homes for wildlife!

But it's really important that new woodland creation is planned carefully to make sure it's in the right place and not planted over the top of other valuable habitats like peatland or grassland, as this can lead to the release of carbon, rather than the opposite. The type of woodland is also important, with mixed native woodland better for climate change and wildlife than plantations of single tree species. Where the trees are regularly harvested for timber as in the latter, they will only store carbon for a short time.

* Title last time should have been **Wild Wetlands** (not Wonderful Wetlands). Ed

In the last edition, I included the Wetlands article from the Wildlife Trusts Wales website. Forest Farm Nature Reserve has several wetlands; two ponds, the bog area (The Mary Gillham Memorial Field), the wetlands where the bird hides are sited, the Melingriffith Feeder from the River Taff and of course, part of the Glamorganshire canal. Each of these contribute differently to the biodiversity of the Reserve.

*The following is taken from **Dr Mary E Gillham's book "A Natural History of Cardiff. Exploring, along the River Taff."** (Lazy Cat Publishing 2002). Forest Farm features significantly in it (Mary was a founder member of the Friends). I have taken extracts about the woodland and trees from Chapter 13 - Forest, Farm and Field in the Country Park - because in this edition, we are focussing on 'Wonderful Woodlands'. After 19 years, do we still have this variety of trees I wonder?*

"The nucleus the Nature Reserve before the granting of country park status consisted of the canal, the LONG WOOD, occupying the steep scarp rising from its eastern bank and the Sheep's Bane alder carr.

The Long Wood, an integral part of the SSSI, is classified as ancient woodland but, like most such, has been intensively managed through the ages.

An 1876 map showed the wood to be a mixture of coniferous and deciduous trees at that time.

Sycamores - (around since the 15th or 16th century; a lot planted at the end of the 18th century). Each year more are felled and replaced with natives, mostly oaks.

Beech, sometimes rowan are also used as replacement trees.

Lime trees occur in the middle of Long Wood and birches as an early recuperative stage in clearings. Hazel, willow and elder are present; field maple, dogwood and guelder rose less common.

Rarer trees bringing diversity to the wood include yew, rowan, wild cherry and bird-sown gooseberry bushes.

Alder wood has changed little over the years. The Sheep's Bane enclave projecting from the towpath into one of the meadows, has been enlarged by raising the level of the canal and with it a large water table alongside. Some of the willows have toppled to sprout vertical branches ... their upended root balls a new habitat for wildflowers.

Because of piecemeal encroachment of light industry over the precious acres that had survived as a green corridor through the industrial era, only to be built over now, trees were most often introduced as a screen. ... One of the first was that between the upper section of the canal and Amersham International. This is more a sizeable spinney than a mere screen. Soil preparation had the effect of activating a vast concourse of dormant field poppy seeds, which can remain inert in the soil for at least 20 years.



Coppicing. Photographer unknown.

The winter 1985-86 saw the mammoth task of thinning out ten year old trees. These had been planted much too close (1m apart) and were now spindly. (They were used for poles and posts and habitat piles... invaluable for woodland animals.)

Field maple, sweet chestnut and hazel were to be kept coppiced and sixty percent of the Norway maple was taken out. Oak, beech, ash and most of the hybrid black poplars were left as standards, the result a welcome ingress of light.



Not seasonal(!) but a photo of Long Wood - Jon Wallis

A flooded Sheep's Bane Wood - Sheila Austin (Canal behind photographer)



Whitchurch and Tongwynlais Mini Festival.

17th - 19th September 2021

After missing the Festival last year, a 'Mini' event is on for this year. Well done to those organising it.

Programmes will probably be out by the time you get this but this is just to let you know the

Friends will be there, on **Saturday 18th** at our stand on the **Common**. So do come along to support the event - and pop along to see us too.

This (below) might look just decorative but it is in fact a bee and insect hotel. It is encompassed in the numbers marking 20 years since the National Botanic Gardens of Wales opened. We had a recent visit there and spotted this on our way out.

Our 'bee hotel' has disappeared - presumed to have been dragged into the stable area and destroyed in the fire

I had thought it would be a nice idea to copy, for the Friends 30 years, but, would that go the same ways our previous one?

Sheila Austin



Apology.

Sincere apologies to **Colin Simper** for getting his surname wrong.

Colin took a photograph of a Kingfisher at Forest Farm which was in the 'Highly Commended' section of pictures (featured in the last edition) submitted for the 2020 Forest Farm Calendar.

Sheila Austin (Editor)

This is the
front cover of our
48 page booklet
to celebrate

...



The Friends of Forest Farm
1990 - 2020



30 years of The Friends of Forest Farm.

Sales have been going well, and feedback is positive! A minimum of £1 donation per copy is requested.

It is a wide ranging mix about the history, development, biodiversity and people who know the Reserve, including some stories - and a lot of photographs. Each 'snippet' is an extract from previous editions of the newsletter, with the reference (e.g. FFNL1 or FFNL46) All the newsletters are on our website so that you can read the full article if you wish.

Copies are still available and will be on sale at our stand at the Whitchurch Festival on the Common on **Saturday 18th September**.

If you can't wait (!), John Harding, Martin Chamberlain or Sheila Austin (contact details on the back page) can supply you with copies.

Our concern about Forest Farm

The Nature Reserve, as you know, is owned by the Council. For many years the Friends have been asking for major improvements to the canal at Forest Farm. This obviously requires a large amount of money. We had hoped for a response to our requests from the Council, perhaps together with an application for Lottery Funding which has facilitated great improvements in several of Cardiff's Parks.

*Recent correspondence to the Council from our Secretary, **Martin Chamberlain**, raised our concerns about Forest Farm generally and, more specifically, about Cardiff Council's Facebook statement in June for "a new nature-focussed, family-friendly, visitor attraction in the north of the city at the Forest Farm Country Park that showcases the best of outdoor Cardiff."*

This is part of the latest communication dated 27th July from Huw Thomas, Cardiff Council Leader, in reply to Martin's letter Ed.

"Unfortunately the specific National Heritage Lottery Funding streams used to fund the Flat Holm project and historical parks projects are no longer available and the ability to access current NHLF funding streams is far more challenging and competitive than previous.

I am very aware of the importance and value of the Forest Farm Estate and do believe that an opportunity exists to secure investment aligned to the management plan that has been developed for the site and the wider priority of the Council in investing in existing and establishing new green spaces. While the prospect of securing significant funding from NHLF is very much diminished, there are opportunities to work collaboratively with partners in pursuit of multiple funding streams and the Council is committed to achieving this aim over time.

I also understand and recognise the importance and critical role that our parks, Friends of Groups play in the management of our sites and, indeed how they can support in accessing external funding to secure improvements. With this in mind, the Council is committed to working with and consulting the Friends of Forest Farm in developing any proposals coming forward, I would however confirm that there are no current detailed plans for development."

Martin has submitted a 'Freedom of Information' request to the Council in order to ascertain further information.

Towpath repairs

In recent years, there have been a lot of problems, and complaints about the state of the towpath. More frequently, water has overflowed the canal, across the towpath and into the Melingriffith feeder. It is not going to get any better with wetter winters forecast.

The situation has been made worse by the covid pandemic affecting the Rangers and lack of volunteer help with maintenance.

As you see, the Rangers have carried out these temporary 'repairs' to a stretch of the canal edge.

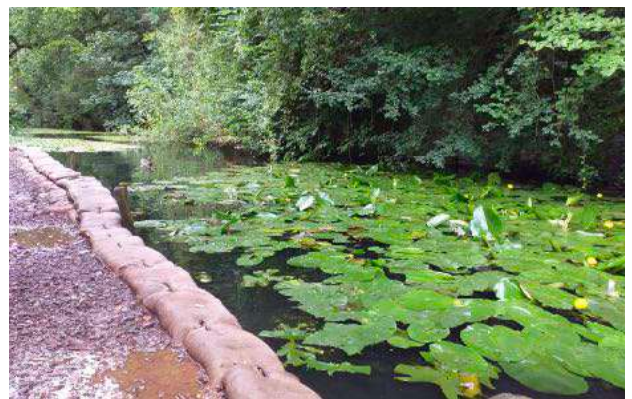


Photo taken 7th August 2021. **Sheila Austin**

... talking of the canal ...

Signs Of The Times

New and larger signs are being put up in Forest Farm to remind people that cycling isn't permitted and dogs must be kept on leads along the entire length of the canal towpath, and the two gated paths that go up to the canal from the feeder.



The canal is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) so it's important to protect the wildlife from unnecessary disturbance. In addition, dogs going in and out of the canal have caused serious erosion to the towpath, which has contributed to the severe silting-up of the canal, as ever-increasing amounts of soil get washed into it.

The water may only look a couple of feet deep, but there's another couple of feet of thick silt below that. This reduces the amount of water the canal can hold, which leads to it flooding over the towpath during prolonged wet weather, which leads to more erosion... and so on. If the erosion isn't drastically reduced the towpath will end up impassable in places.

Please also see our pages about dogs and cycling at Forest Farm on the "Visit" menu on our website at ForestFarm.org.uk

Taken from our website

A chance meeting

On Saturday 7th August I went for a walk in Forest Farm. It was quite late in the afternoon and not many people about.

As I was walking down the canal from the Ty Mawr end, I saw about 20 ducks all swimming northwards from the bridge. It was like 'follow my leader'!



A little further along I noticed a photographer crouched on the towpath and trying to get photos. On getting closer, I saw what he was looking at, a mother Moorhen and her chick. We chatted a bit - as you do. At my request, he (Alex White) kindly sent me the result of his patience! It must be a second brood at this time of year.



For good measure he included this lovely picture of a bank vole.

You never know what you are going to be lucky enough to see at Forest Farm.



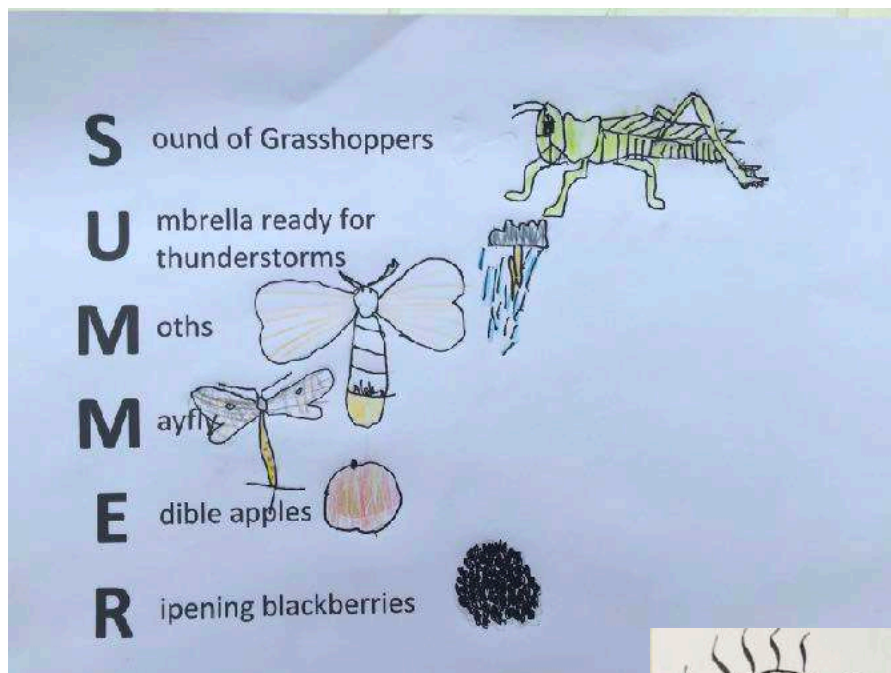
The best photos here, the Moorhen and chick and the Bank Vole, (my circle) are from **Alex White**. The general shot of the ducks from me!

Sheila Austin

Just the thing to cheer us up;

two lovely contributions from young visitors to Forest Farm.

Well done to them both and thank you for sharing them with us.



James Harwood is 5 years old. This is his contribution for the Forest Farm newsletter.

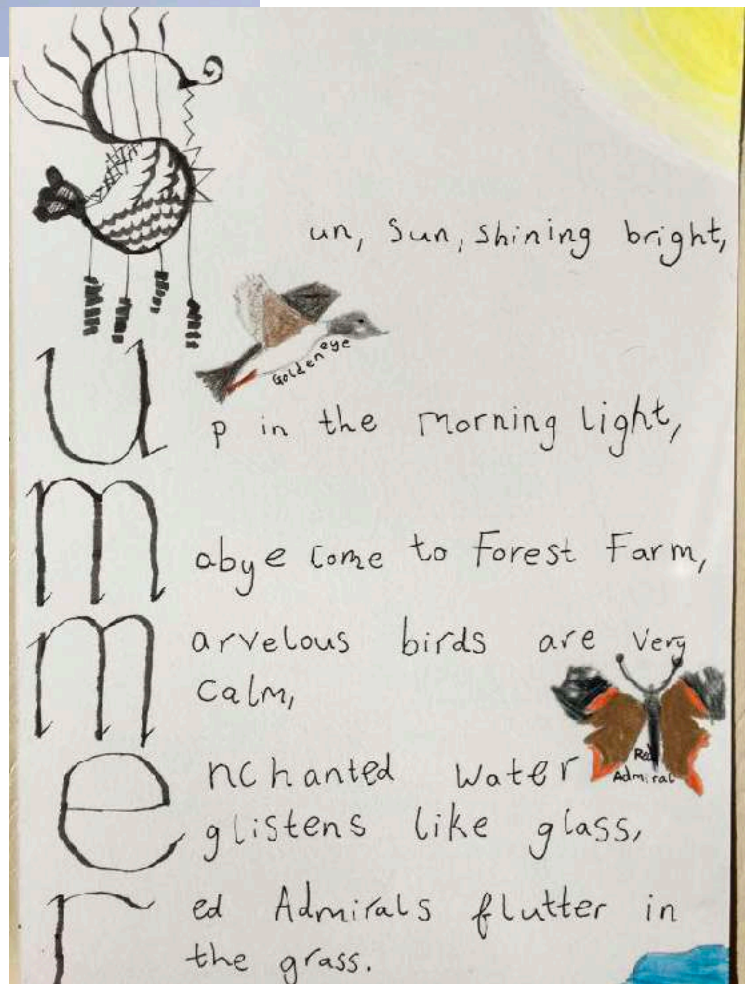
He is an amazing artist. These drawings are entirely his own work.

Using 'Summer', he thought of all the words as the family walked round Forest Farm last week thinking about what they could see, hear and smell.

This is another contribution from **Grace Harwood** aged 8.

It is her first attempt at calligraphy, and she has written a poem and illustrated it with some beautiful drawings.

Her Mum said she sat by the pond at Forest Farm for ages composing her poem.



SEWER IMPROVEMENTS AT FOREST FARM

It may not be apparent, but there is a major sewer under Forest Farm - although there are some areas where the smell is a give away!



Photo showing the area blocked off for the work.: **Martin Chamberlain**

Earlier in the year, contractors for Welsh Water started clearing an area between Longwood Drive and the M4 which is known as 'the middle section' of the Reserve.

This is part of a multi million pound project to increase the capacity of the sewer and reduce the amount of untreated waste overflowing into the River Taff when there has been a storm. If you look at the trees alongside the Taff you can see what happens.

Similar work has been undertaken at Hailey Park and alongside the Taff In Morganstown.

The contractors have now returned and have started the excavations. When the work is completed they will reinstate the area.

For those like myself who remember the River Taff when it was severely polluted, we look forward to the improvements being made.

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary.

A seasonal photograph
by Raj Chettri.

Bramble.

We have already found some
suitable for picking ...



it seems that capturing memories is very much in vogue lately. AWEN (at Whitchurch Library) have run a Reminiscence session for some time and, through that, the start of an interesting series of publications from Nigel Lewis entitled "101 things you (probably) didn't know about Whitchurch".

If you have been a long-time member of the Friends, or have read the 30th Anniversary Booklet of the Friends of Forest Farm, you will be aware that, over the years, the newsletters have printed stories and memories of people raised in Whitchurch.

I am not a 'native' of Whitchurch or even Cardiff (but I am Welsh!), but when putting together the booklet, I found their stories really interesting; so much has changed.

In conversation with a new acquaintance (hopefully friend) **Joy Harrison**, she mentioned that she was born in Whitchurch and would send me some of her memories.

Here are a couple of extracts relating to Forest Farm.

" As I walked down Pantmawr Rd ...(and) at the junction where the golf club entrance is on the the left, there was no A470, only a small road up to Tongwynlais; no M4, no hotels, all green belt. Looking across the junction, I could see FOREST FARM DAIRY, with the shop high up on the bank on the right."

" My schoolteacher encouraged us to collect, press and identify wild flowers. We would go 'in crocodile' from the school, down Velindre Road to the feeder, canal and Melingriffith Tin Plate Works. When I was 10, I caught Scarlet Fever after collecting frogspawn from the stagnant water near the feeder. We were studying tadpoles; it was 1950"

If you Have any memories you would like to share, please send them in.

Sheila Austin

Ronald Lockley

In the next (December) edition, there will be an article about Ronald Lockley, the famous naturalist born in Cardiff. He wrote over fifty books on natural history.

I was delighted to hear from one of our members, David Saunders, that he had spent 'an epic' day with Ronald during which he visited Forest Farm in 1991. He also sent me some photographs of him. It seemed a shame to squeeze a space now, so I have asked David to write his 'few words' so that we can do it justice.

Sheila Austin

Events from September 2021

As you see, some events are re-starting. Some uncertainties remain but this is what we have so far with some still to be confirmed.

DATE	EVENT
SEPTEMBER	
Saturday 18th Sept 12.00 - 16.00	The Festival Fete. There will be plenty of action on the Common as part of the Whitchurch and Tongwynlais Mini Festival 17th - 20th September . The Friends will have a stand there, so do come along and see us. Copies of the 30th Anniversary booklet will be on sale.
OCTOBER	
Saturday 2nd Oct??	POSSIBLY we will be able to hold a smaller Open Day event on our usual date, the first Saturday in October. Given the uncertainties Covid has brought, and the fire at the stable block, check out our website just in case. www.forestfarm.org.uk
Monthly Date - TBA 10.00 - 12.00	Volunteering at Forest Farm. See the article on Page 4 . Due to the need for flexibility and to catch up on the backlog, details of each volunteering event will be publicised via our website www.forestfarm.org.uk
<p>Please also look out for details of re-starting our <i>Monthly Nature Walks</i>.</p> <p>Also, planning is underway for <i>Cardiff Wildlife Detectives</i> to re-start, so keep an eye out for that.</p>	

Published on behalf of The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve by
Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1PP Tel: 02920 614245 email: editor@forestfarm.org.uk
The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.