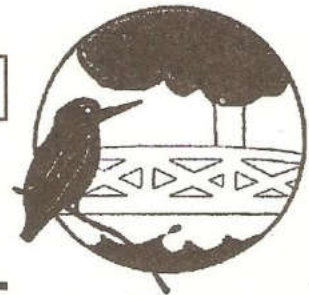


FRIENDS **O**F **F**OREST **A**RM

Newsletter No. 23

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November 1996



and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

EDITORIAL'S FORUM

A warm welcome to new **Friends!**

We are still faced with a fight to defend the Country Park against the encroachment of unnecessary housing development. However, your voices have been heard. You will be aware from the report that the will to succeed is as strong as ever. We have to thank our representatives at the meetings for their submissions. This has helped to prevent measures being bulldozed through.

You will see there has been a change in our publishing date. This is under review, to strike a balance between giving out information on time and the demands on contributors and the production of the Newsletter.

With signs of the festive season all around, here's wishing you all ...

A Joyful Christmas and Happy New Year!

Ken Patterson

HOSPITAL MEADOWS

(an UPDATE)

The Planning Application was debated by the Council Planning Committee early in July. More than 50 residents (including some 'Friends') lobbied councillors attending the planning meeting. Ted Edwards addressed the meeting on behalf of the Friends, and Victor Riley spoke on behalf of the Velindre Residents Association. Our local councillors also spoke against it. The Planning Committee ignored a recommendation to approve the scheme, and voted by 9 votes to 2 to throw it out. This delighted all the supporters who had managed to crowd into the room and who had restrained themselves very well during 1½ hours of debate. This decision was later endorsed by the full City Council.

The Hospital Managers have indicated that they intend to appeal to the Welsh Office, who could overturn the decision and allow the plan to proceed; so we are not out of the woods yet!

The Friends, together with the Velindre Residents Association, are trying to reach a compromise that would be acceptable to the Trust, so please continue to give us your full support.

PAINTED LADY CYNTHIA
 (OR WAS IT VANESSA?)
 SEEN IN PARK 1 (P. 2)

MEMBERSHIP

The majority of our members have now renewed their membership for the 1996/97 season.

For the remainder who wish to renew before our interesting winter session of evening meetings commences (see back page), please send your subscription (£3 per family) to our Membership Secretary:

NOEL GALE
8 HEATH PARK DRIVE
CARDIFF CF4 3QJ

RSPB / FRIENDS WALK ...

... takes place on the morning of the first **Saturday of the month**, and has been going since at least 1979.

An average of 68 species is recorded over the year, October to October, but in 94/95 it dropped to 57 and crept up to 61 in 95/96.

The young branch of the RSPB, the Young Ornithological Club (YOC), are joining us occasionally this year; with their sharp young eyes they are able to spot a Goldcrest at 100 yards! We hope that the count will be a record this year.

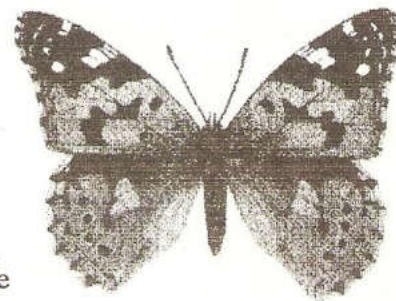
E.O. Edwards

RESERVE NEWS

THE PAINTED LADY

This year's summer has been an exceptional one for butterflies, with a mass invasion of the **Painted Lady** (*Cynthia Cardui*). Small numbers of this migratory butterfly can be seen most years, but this summer has seen literally many hundreds of thousands cross from North Africa to our shores.

I first came across the species whilst taking the Forest Farm 'Watch' group on an insect safari. We entered a wild-flower meadow and counted at least 50 Painted Ladies, where on the previous day there were none.

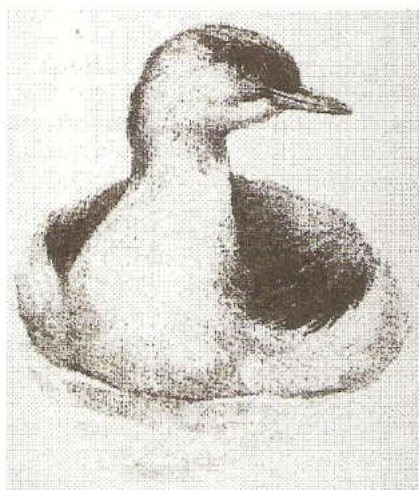


This butterfly lays its eggs on thistles, the caterpillar's food plant. Because they are also an important source of seed for such birds as the Goldfinch, thistles are never cut down on the Nature Reserve. Unfortunately this beautiful butterfly is unable to withstand our winters in any of its stages, so many will attempt the return journey to Africa.

RABBITS ON THE RESERVE

It's not just the butterflies that have had a good summer - the rabbit population went through the roof! Although rabbit is a valuable food source for Buzzard and Fox, etc. - and an important grazing animal in its own right - there are drawbacks in having so many. Young trees have been killed by 'ringbarking' (chewing the bark in a complete circle around the base of a tree); the newly planted reed around our new Wetland has also all but vanished.

DABCHICKS AND YOUNG KINGFISHERS



The Coots I mentioned in the last Newsletter breeding for the first time on the Reserve, successfully raised three young. Along with their parents they have since moved on, being replaced by a **'Dabchick'** or **Little Grebe** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), still in summer plumage.

On the downside, I received three separate telephone calls in one week from British Telecom (our newish neighbour), saying that a **Kingfisher** had flown into their windows and been killed. I couldn't believe it - **THREE IN A WEEK!** All were juvenile birds, so the whole of this year's young have been wiped out. Unfortunately it is all too common to hear stories of birds doing this, but as the Reserve is only large enough to hold one pair of Kingfishers, this is a catastrophe. I am currently negotiating with BT to place plastic silhouettes of birds of prey in their windows to try and alleviate this problem. Fortunately I have seen the adult pair together on the Reserve, so all is not lost.

MISCELLANEOUS

Vandalism goes on. A bench from the new Bird Hide has been stolen. Why on earth would anyone want to pinch something like this is beyond me (probably because it was there?).

On a happier note, Peter Bailey and his wife Pauline have rejoined us as voluntary wardens. Peter was a voluntary warden here many years ago. Now retired, he wants to take an active role on the Reserve.

Mike Wiley (Reserve Warden)

ACTIVITY AT RADYR WEIR

Autumn is the time of year when the **Salmon** will start to swim upstream and should be seen at Radyr Weir, where you can still see the original underground fishery. Built in 1775, and in operation until around 1890, it has taken Salmon stocks on the Taff almost 100 years to recover to their present levels.

Martin Chamberlain

WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL LAND

In **August 1889** part of the Velindre estate of Mrs Caroline Booker was offered to the Corporation of Cardiff as a site for the proposed new **Lunatic Asylum**. The site was approved, and in October 1889 the purchase of the land for a price in excess of £200 an acre was formally authorised by the Cardiff Corporation. The **120-acre site** included the old mansion of **Velindre**, home of successive proprietors of the nearby **Melingriffith Tinplate Works**, and two farms, **Ty Clyd** and **Llwyn Mallt** - the latter being an acquisition from the Cory family.

The main hospital building occupied a site of $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres; it was designed to provide accommodation for 750 patients and medical and other staff and was formally opened on **15th April 1908**.

Within a year of the opening, all the available farm and garden land was under cultivation, the farm buildings stocked with pigs, cows and horses, and both farm and garden produce was being supplied to the new institution. There were 27 acres of cultivated gardens and glass-houses looked after by 5 gardeners, 3 attendants and about 25 male patients. The farm foreman had charge of 97 acres of land producing oats, wheat, barley, root crops, hay and grazing; he was also in charge of the pigs, milking cows, store cattle and poultry raised at Ty Clyd and Llwyn Mallt. Six men were employed on the farms, helped by an average of 19 male patients and an attendant.

In **November 1954**, following a national change of policy with regard to hospital farms, operations at Whitchurch were drastically curtailed. The entire Ty Clyd herd was sold at auction; pig farming continued at Llwyn Mallt until 1968, when the entire piggery was sold, ending a long tradition of hospital farming.

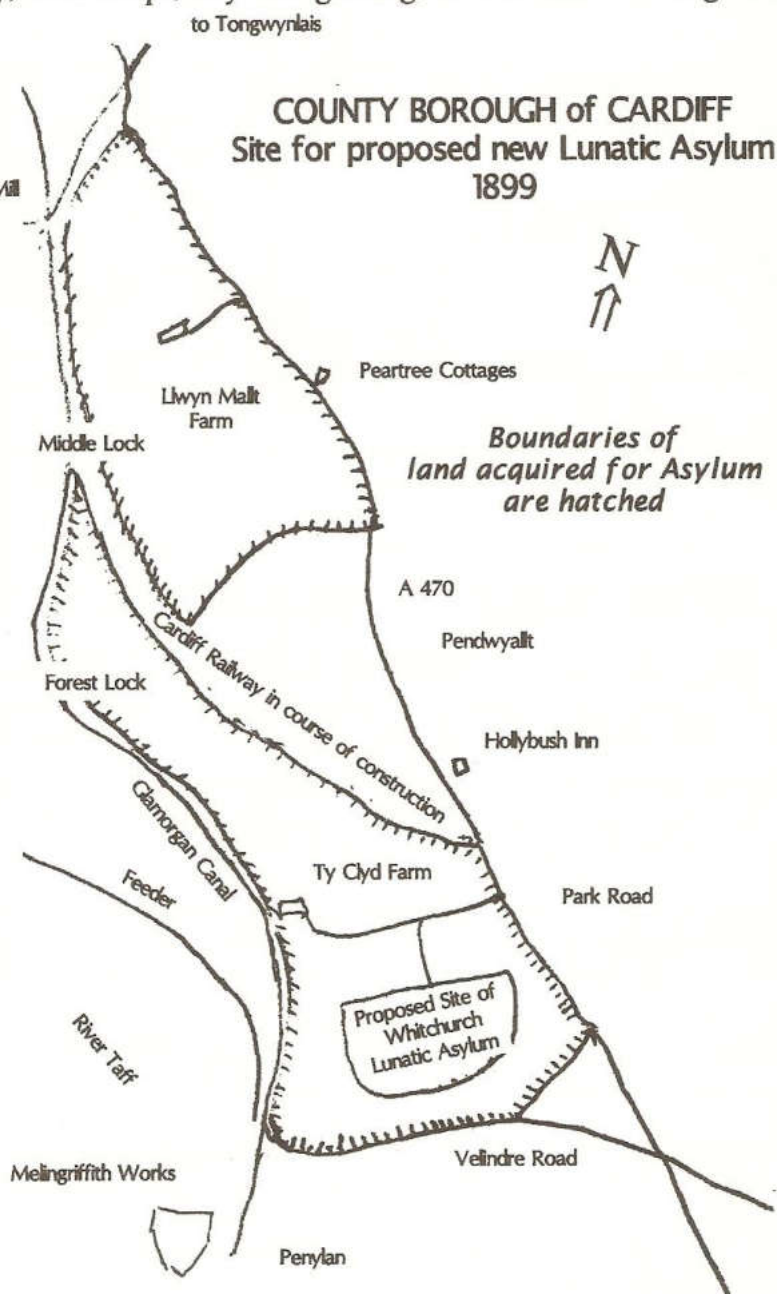
Llwyn Mallt farm was demolished. Part of the land was used for the Coryton roundabout. The remainder has become a housing estate on the south side of Tongwynlais; one of the roads on the estate bears the name Llwyn Mallt. Ty Clyd is more or less in ruins; part of the land has been incorporated into the Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve, the remainder is subject to a planning application for housing.

The 'Friends' have been fighting over this land since 1991. The last round could soon be coming up if the Trust appeals to the Welsh Office against the rejection of their planning application.

References:

'Whitchurch Hospital, 1908-1983' by Hilary M. Thomas and Western Mail, 1908.

E.O.Edwards



RSPB PHOENIX

A Fallen Oak

The second Knotweed Cut of the season was planned for Monday 22nd July, but a few days prior to that date a blustery wind brought down half a large Oak tree near the Middle Lock, blocking the path and the steps leading up to the north end of the Long Wood. As the Warden, Mike Wiley, needed help with the urgent task of clearing the debris, we directed our energy into helping to cut the wood into manageable pieces and stacking it in a pile under Mike's direction. Our team of eight were cheerful and hard-working, and the task was completed by lunchtime.

Knotweed

On 14th August we assembled a team of six to cut the Knotweed and check some of the nest-boxes. The knotweed growth is much weaker this year - presumably the result of the programme of twice-yearly cuts.

Nestboxes

There was only time to check six nest-boxes; another date will be arranged soon, to look at the remainder. Three of those checked had been used for nesting and, as they were empty, we assume the birds were reared successfully. One box contained a nest with six dead Blue Tit chicks. Sadly the chicks were quite well developed; we can only guess that the parents failed to find enough food for their growing family. One box had been vandalised by a Squirrel and will need repairing. The Woodpecker box held another surprise for us. Last time it contained a sleeping squirrel - this time an active Wasps' nest caused a hurried retreat down the ladder!

'FORTY' FRIENDS AT BBQ

At this year's summer BBQ we invited groups from F.O.R.T. (Friends of the River Taff) for a walk around our Reserve. Animals that turned out on cue were Kingfisher, Heron, Coot and plenty of Rabbits. Our visitors were suitably impressed by the new Hide.

For these groups - which have only been formed for two years - Forest Farm is an example of what is possible when everyone works together.

Martin Chamberlain

Our Autumn programme includes plans for some coppicing and the repair of some steps - both will be a new learning experience for the group.

Pauline Linck (Leader)

INDOOR MEETINGS - TABERNACLE CHURCH HALL - WEDNESDAYS - 7.30 pm

13th November 'Cardiff History through Old Postcards', an illustrated talk by Peter Best, starts off our Winter Programme. Postcards in their heyday were extremely popular and give a vivid pictorial record of the period; this, coupled with Peter's amusing and informative talk, is not to be missed.

22nd January An illustrated talk on 'Aviation in Cardiff'. You will be amazed how much pioneering work was carried out in Cardiff on airships and aircraft. Come and learn of the courage and dedication of those early pioneers.

12th March An illustrated talk on the 'Cathays Heritage Trail' takes us through the second largest Cemetery in the country. Featured on TV a short time ago, it showed that the layout and monuments have a story to tell that is interesting and must not be allowed to be forgotten.

The last talk will be on 'The Environment Agency' and 'Otter Conservation' - but more on that in the next Newsletter. The support for the indoor meetings last year was disappointing. If there is no improvement during this session, there may not be any more!

E.O. Edwards

Thanks to Robin Sotheby for the layout of the Newsletter.

Published on behalf of Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve by

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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.

