

# FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY  
PARK  
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL  
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 43

MARCH 2002

## Editor's Forum Ken Patterson

I would like to express my appreciation for the response to the request for contributions to the Newsletter. This issue features informative items from Mr Tucker and Mr Rhys, which relate to queries raised in the last issue. More power to the pens of anyone who has queries or answers which will be of interest to our readers.

"Biodiversity" is a current buzzword in environmental planning. The UK Steering Group Report 1995 defined it as "All living things, from the tiny garden ant to the giant Redwood tree. You will find biodiversity everywhere, in window boxes and wild woods, roadside and rainforests, snow fields and seashore."

Despite Cardiff's conurbation there is an immense amount of wildlife with birds, foxes and rare plants to be found in and around the city. Much needs to be done to arrest the decline in the variety of plant and animal species.

However, we can be confident that our Country Park is playing a vital role in maintaining and enhancing its unique biodiversity for Cardiff.

A letter from ... ERIC TUCKER ... of Manor Rise, Whitchurch

Re ... E.O.Edwards article in Newsletter No. 42

## THE IRON BRIDGE AT SUNNYBANK

The *curved* side of the bridge—that is the side nearest the Canal was to enable unrestricted passage for the barge tow rope. If the surface of the curve is examined it will be seen to be highly polished by the passage of thousands of ropes, and to this day there is very little rust, thanks to the skill of the iron workers and the unique formula used in the casting. (\*)

## THE COTTAGES AT SUNNYBANK

To my knowledge these cottages were never flats but separate dwellings, seven in number, and two stories on what was known as the *Top Bailey*, that is the road that ran between the then *Mental Hospital* wall and the cottages, and three stories on the *Bottom Bailey*, the space between the cottages and the Canal wall.

Because of the design of these cottages it would have been difficult to divide them into flats, and it must be remembered that there was a tendency to have large families in those days (Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary defines a *Bailey* as any courtyard between walls).

There was neither gas nor electricity. Cooking was by means of coal or coke fires, and paraffin oil lamps were the only source of light. The nearest street lamp - gas - was on Velindre Road, half a mile away.

(continued on Page 3)

\* Please see also further notes with reference to the Iron Bridge in Mr Ted Edwards article on page 5

There is also a letter from Mr Gwyn Rhys on page 4 concerning Sunny Banks.

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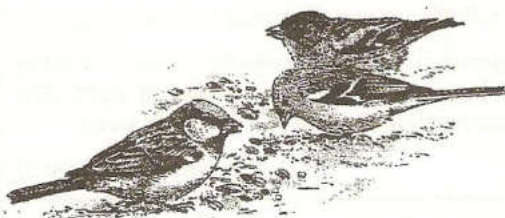
## Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**  
**Countryside Warden**

**O**n the 12th of January, the **Forest Farm Watch Club** (the junior wing of the **National Wildlife Trust** for children aged between five and twelve) were busy constructing new bird boxes to replace some of the old and damaged ones. Another task that morning for the children was to lay down seed at the Winter Feeding Station. As we approached the area a large bird of prey was seen to come off the reed bed of the large pond. The bird was flying away from us, so we could only see a silhouette of its back, but its wings clearly formed a V-shape as it flew—a tell tale sign that the bird in question was a Harrier.

This glimpse wasn't enough to identify the species, but the probability was that of a **Hen Harrier**, a large graceful bird of prey with a wing span of up to 125 centimetres, or just over 4 feet. This majestic bird isn't generally seen in this area as its haunts are the boggy uplands of mid-Wales. The Hen Harrier generally hunts slowly and waveringly low over the ground, pouncing on its prey, which consists of birds, rodents, etc.

The following day at the feeding station I noticed something floating at the water's edge. It was a dear Moorhen with its neck broken. Obviously we had cheated the harrier of its food. I laid the dead bird at the foot of a tree. The next day it was gone, probably taken by a fox. All part of the food chain.



The feeding station itself has been a great success, with sometimes over twenty species feeding at one time, including the odd **Brambling** and **Water Rail**, which is normally a secretive bird that comes out of hiding to feed regularly on the seed, affording bird watchers good views from the hide.

on the Reserve. The first holt built some years ago still looks good and, although we have no proof of its ever being used, there's no reason why it shouldn't be. As **Otters** are on the increase in Wales we should be doing everything we can to encourage them.

Another forthcoming task will see us working with **SAFE** (Safety and Facilities for Equestrians). As part of their ongoing programme to upgrade the horse routes we intend to excavate and surface with stone a section of some 120 metres of well used track near Forest Farm. So if you see a JCB digging away, don't be alarmed!



Meanwhile as I write this article on the 4th of February early signs of spring are already showing, with **Song Thrushes** and **Dunnocks** singing away and **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** drumming. As February can be a treacherous month, let's hope they're not being too premature.





(Mr Tucker's letter continued from page 1)

From the age of about two years I lived at No. 2 Sunnybank along with my parents and eventually three brothers, my grandfather (maternal), my grandmother until she died, an aunt and a few uncles. The numbers decreased over the years as they married.

We lived there until 1935 when the cottages were condemned, and demolished a few later. We were, in fact, one of the last two families to live there before being re-housed in Whitchurch.

The Bottom Bailey at Sunnybank was used mainly for housing chickens and for the washing lines.

The Top Bailey consisted of wash houses and outside toilets, these being sited against the Hospital wall. A pantry was built into the wall and the bank behind. The site of these pantries can still be seen where they were bricked up.

The wash houses had a copper boiler heated by a coal fire and complete with scrubbing board. What luxury!

Wash day was Monday. The boiler had to be filled, usually by the older children. The water was carried from the Bottom Bailey in one-gallon Tate & Lyle syrup cans—although some cottages had piped water.

From the age of five years we had to walk from Sunnybank to the Infants School in Glan y Nant Road, and later to the girls school in the same road or the boys school in Tyn y Pwll Road. This we did twice each day on school days.

Looking back I know life was not easy, but we did enjoy a freedom that I feel is not possible today.

We had a swimming pool on the doorstep—i.e. the Canal, or alternatively the Melingriffith Works Feeder, which we called *The Pound*. How it got this name I don't know because a pound is actually a stretch of water between two locks on a canal.

It is interesting to note that the Feeder water was taken from the River Taff at Radyr Weir, and at that time was full of coal dust. Surprisingly we were never dirty coming out of the water.

Our playground was Longwood. The Melingriffith Sports Ground (now Cardiff H.S.O.B.) was across the Canal and Feeder—and of course all the children from new houses to play with. New houses were condemned and demolished at the same time as Sunnybank.

The Melingriffith Sports Ground had soccer and rugby in the winter, and cricket and athletics in the summer. Sports Day was the highlight, as this usually included a game of *Pushball* using a huge football approximately six feet in diameter.

About a hundred yards from the Canal and Feeder bridge, on the left hand side of the road to Forest Farm and opposite the original site of new houses is the remains of a spring water well. I believe some signs of the site (they did a couple of years ago) remain today.

This well, which was a hole in the ground with stone walls to about three above ground level, and six to eight stone steps down into the well. There was a pipe fitted in the wall at the bottom from which flowed a constant supply of cold, clear water. It was perfectly safe to drink and had a most refreshing taste. (A missed chance to put Melingriffith Spring Water on the nation's table!) The supply dried up when the factory that has been demolished was originally erected.

A little further along, just past the remaining cottages, was the gate to the sports ground. On the right-hand side as you passed through was a brook, which ran alongside the sports field. Near the gate the brook went underground to the river. Just before going underground there was a source of some excellent water cress.

The surviving members of the Sunnybank community number, as far as I can ascertain, about seven including myself. The oldest is Harry Davies of 1 Heol Blakemore, Whitchurch. Harry is 86 years young. He was my next door neighbour at Sunnybank. Three of the remaining five were babies in 1935, one being my brother and the rest cousins. Harry Davies jogged my memory and remedied my errors.

My apologies if this has been a little long, but once started the memories flooded back.

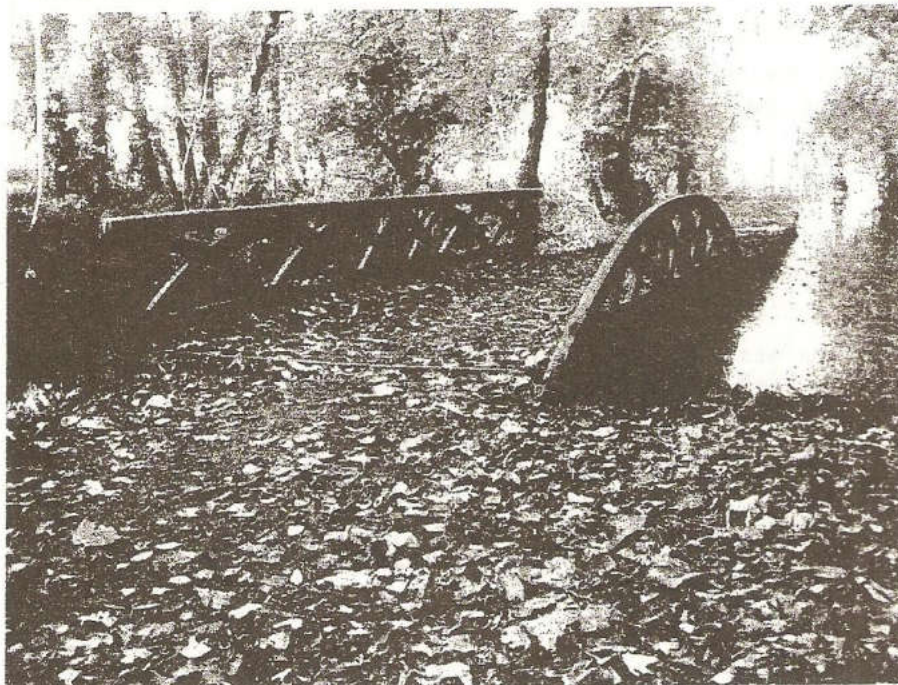


## THE IRON BRIDGE

In the December issue one of the questions I posed was, *"Why has this bridge got a curved rail on one side and square ends on the other side?"*

**Mr David Davies**, well known in Whitchurch for his knowledge of local history, suggests this was to allow the rope between the barge and the horse to pass over without snagging. Mr Davies then puts another question: *"Why make the other side with square ends? Surely it would be easier to make both sides the same."*

I would suggest that the square-ended bridge was the standard pattern for all bridges, and this was a *one off*. It was normal practice to have a bridge on the towpath, so this bridge must have been built for a purpose. It was built fifty six years after the Canal was opened, when the Canal was in use night and day with two hundred barges going up and down. So you can imagine the disruption. Breeching the canal wall and constructing the supports must have taken quite some time, so what was the gain?



I believe that it was to gain more water passing through Melingriffith Tinplate Works to drive the large water wheel. This wheel drove the six mills and then, after passing through the Works, it would be pumped back into the Canal by the pump which was driven by an undershot water wheel. That pump and water wheel can still be seen today on the south side of the new housing estate.

Every time a lock was used, water was drawn from the Canal above to raise or lower the boats, and then released back into the canal below the lock. This would flow past the other locks using the bypass or through the lock on its way to the sea.

The Iron Bridge allowed some of this water to be siphoned off. The amount could be regulated by raising the level under the bridge, and that is the method still used today to control the level of water on the Reserve.

With fifty three locks in use night and day a large volume of water was needed. It came from holding ponds alongside the canal. These were supplied by local streams and/or the River Taff. No canal could be allowed unless it had a guaranteed water supply.

In summer there were problems with the water supply. Every effort was made to make full use of the water available, and I believe that is the reason why this bridge was built. Am I right, or is there an alternative explanation? ...

Here is a question children love to ask ...

"How do two horse-drawn barges pass each other without snagging the ropes?" ...

Answer please ...

E.O. Edwards



## The Sunny Bank Census

A letter from ... **MR GWYN REES** ... of 12 The Green Radyr

**A**s a keen family historian, I was browsing through the **1881 Census** returns today when I came across ... entries relating to '**Sunny Bank**', mentioned by Ted Edwards in the recent Forest Farm Friends' Newsletter. I don't think it answers the question he raised about the size of the cottages, but it shows that there were ten households living there in 1881 and three houses uninhabited. The numbers of occupants may give something of a clue as to size, and could provide some useful material for further research into these houses.

May I take this opportunity to say how much we appreciate your work in producing the Newsletter, which keeps us abreast of things at the Reserve and gives us points to look out for on our occasional strolls there.



### Extracts from the **1881 British Census** relating to **Sunny Banks**

<b>EDWARD HOWELL</b>	<i>Annuitant Retired Roller</i>
Fanny Howell	
<b>EDMUND THOMAS</b>	<i>Weigher in Tin Works</i>
Mary Ann Thomas	
Edward Thomas ( <i>Carpenter</i> )	
<b>JOHN WILLIAMS</b>	<i>Tin Plate Assorter</i>
Mary Williams	
Isabella, David John & Florence Elizabeth Williams	
<b>THOMAS BIRD</b>	<i>Tin Doubler</i>
Mary Bird	
Sarah Hannah, William & Anne Bird	
<b>JOHN LEWIS</b>	<i>Shearer in Tin Works</i>
Julia H Lewis	Elizabeth & Edward Jones Lewis
John Thomas & Alexander H Lewis	
Alexander H Jones ( <i>Furnace Man</i> )	
<b>HENRY H JONES</b>	<i>Tinplate Worker</i>
Sarah Jones	Caroline Jones
Henry Hathaway Jones ( <i>Tin Furnace Man</i> )	
Septimus Hathaway Jones ( <i>Tin Polisher</i> )	
<b>THOMAS HUMPHREY</b>	<i>Iron Furnace Man</i>
Ann Humphrey	Anne & Eliza Humphrey
<b>DAVID WILLIAMS</b>	<i>White Pickler</i>
Ann Williams	Ann Williams
<b>WILLIAM WALKER</b>	<i>Tin Washman</i>
Alice Walker	Mary Ellen Walker
<b>THOMAS LLOYD</b>	<i>Tin Doubler</i>
Rhoda Lloyd	



## **Bird Feeding Station**

The new location either side of the **Sandmartin Cliff** has proved to be an outstanding success. It has added to the interest of the 'Friends' hide and enabled a wide variety of people to enjoy really close-up views of birds they had never seen before..

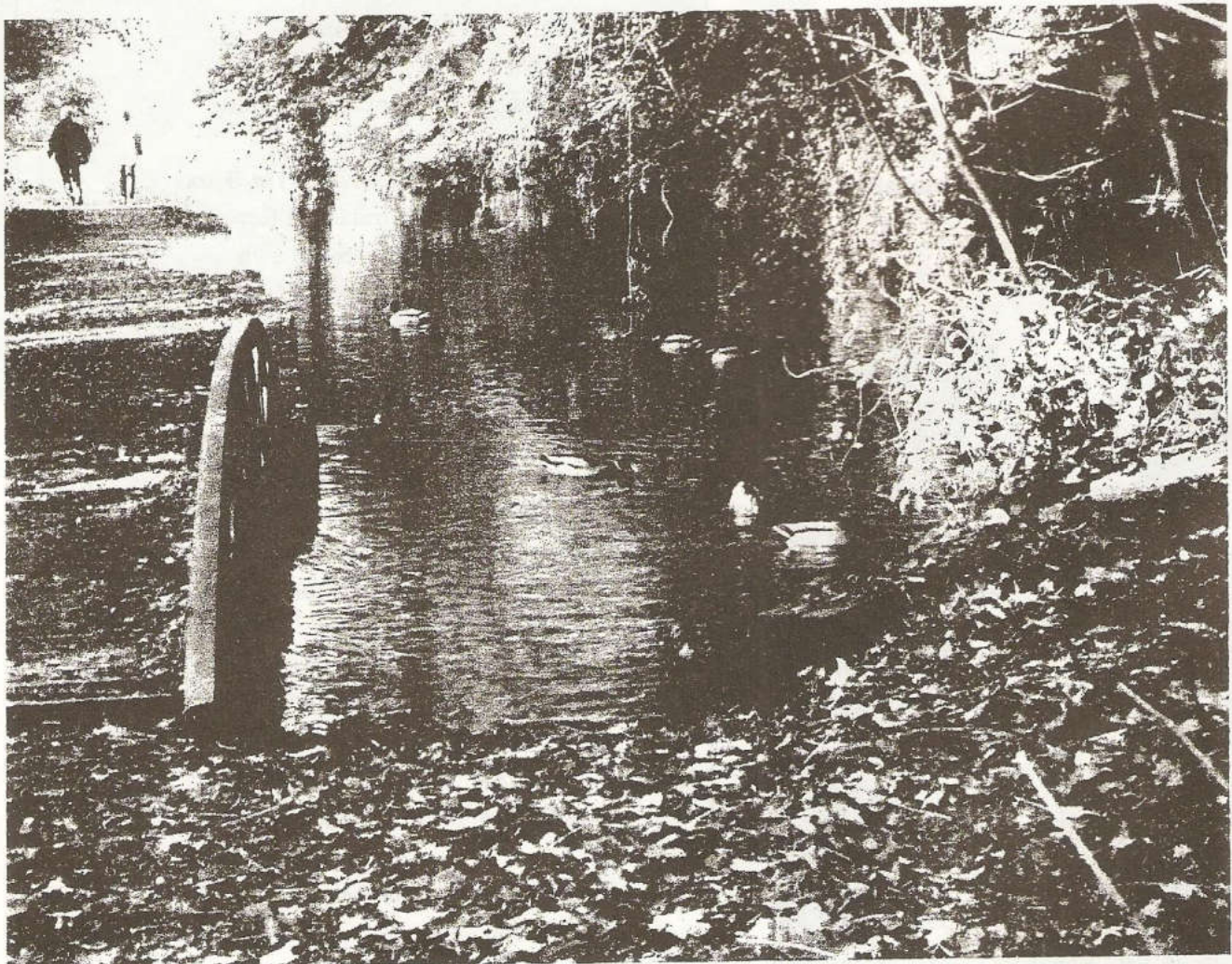
To feed from Mid-November to about the end of March is costing in the region of £400—depending on the discount we can squeeze out of the suppliers.

Last year we paid £1000 for footpath repair, plus small amounts for sundries.

We managed to extract £500 from the Principality B.S.

Membership subscriptions came to approximately £680, which meant we had a shortfall and had to draw on our reserves.

E.O.Edwards





## Cardiff Unitary Development Plan

(See June 2001 Newsletter)

Nearly two hundred responses have been received from a range of organisations and individuals. It is important for the Council to review the key elements of its proposals, bearing in mind these responses before continuing with full plan preparation, which is likely to be placed on deposit in Autumn 2002.

Our concern is the extension of the railway line from Coryton through the Reserve across the river, to link up with the railway at Radyr.

A summary of consultation comments state:

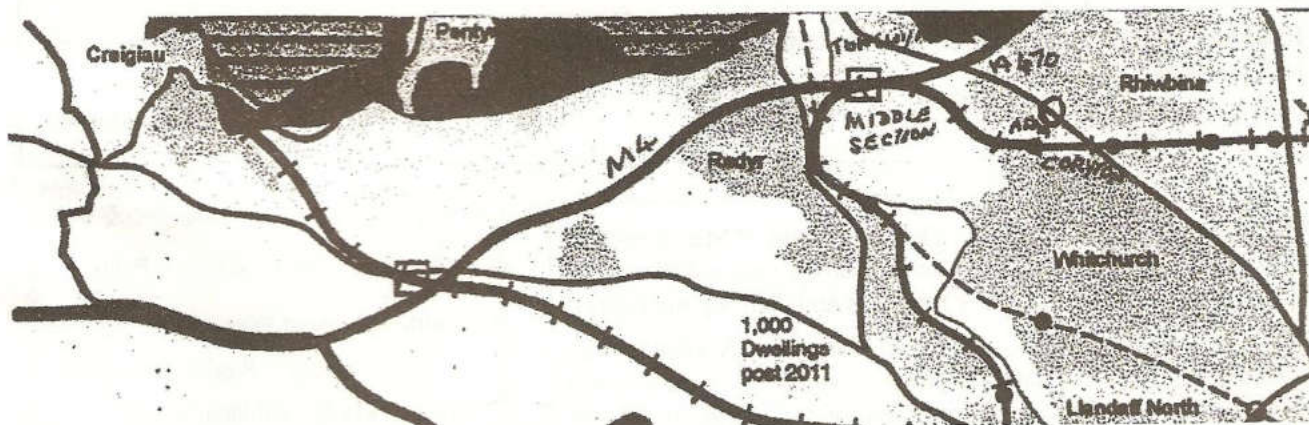
Railtrack and other users support the rail-related proposals in principle, although Cardiff Bus Company considers that they are unrealistic. Cardiff Railway Company supports the proposals for light rail, and seeks its extension to areas not currently well served by bus or rail.

Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal L.N.R. oppose the rail connection between Radyr and Coryton because of its impact on the Reserve, its cost and its limited benefit.

The proposed Council response is that it will continue to investigate the feasibility of the proposed schemes, acknowledging that in all cases it will be necessary to demonstrate that the advantages of schemes outweigh any possible harm to interests of conservation or other importance.

This proposed rail extension could take away as much as one quarter of the acreage of the Reserve, so I hope that all conservationists in Cardiff will be keeping a close eye on developments, and will help to safeguard the viability of the Reserve should the need arise.

E.O. Edwards



### Annual General Meeting

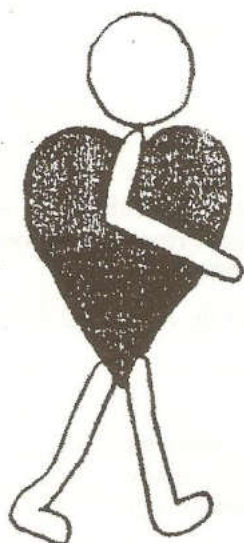
Do please attend the A.G.M. so that we can have a discussion on the way forward.

At the A.G.M. you will have the pleasure of hearing Mrs Mairead Sutherland give an illustrated talk on "A different view of Ireland". It will be refreshing to see another side to what is a very beautiful island.

Mairead was one of those who in 1967 fought so hard to establish a L.N.R. on this remaining bit of canal which we all enjoy so much today.

E.O. Edwards





### WALKING FOR HEALTH

by Ken Patterson

The R.S.V.P. (Retired and Senior Volunteer) organisation has joined together with the British Heart Foundation and the Cardiff Local Health Group in trying to recruit walk leaders.

This is to assist people recovering from illness by offering them the facility to join in a local walk around one of our beautiful Cardiff parks. G.P. surgeries and local hospitals will tell their patients where the walks start from, and the timetable. It worked well in a couple of parks last year, and the scheme is now being expanded across Cardiff.

The walks will take place at the following sites:

<b>Radyr and Forest Farm, Whitchurch</b>	<b>Victoria Park</b>	<b>Llandaff Fields</b>
<b>Bute Park</b>	<b>Splott Park</b>	<b>Rumney Fields</b>
<b>Roath Park</b>	<b>Cardiff Bay</b>	
<b>Cathcob Woods, St Mellons</b>	<b>Grange Gardens</b>	

The walks begin in April. If anyone is interested in leading a walk, please ring R.S.V.P. on 029-2039 0477.

### INDOOR MEETINGS

It has become difficult to find speakers whom most of our members have not heard in the various Groups that they belong to, and also to avoid clashing with other group meetings.

In next year's programme there will be only one indoor meeting. That will be in April, and the A.G.M. will be held after the speaker.

The **Saturday Morning Walks** will continue, and there will be a full list of walks and events from April to December.

If anyone would like to arrange indoor meetings, or if you have any other suggestions, please bring them along to the A.G.M.

E.O.Edwards

### MEMBERSHIP

The latest count of Membership for the current year is **228**  
(226 Family members and 2 Group members).

Our new year (2002/2003) will shortly be on us. A *Membership Renewal Form* can be found on the A.G.M. notice enclosed with your Newsletter. The annual subscription is kept at £3 for Families and £5 for Firms and Societies.

Thank you all for your continued support.

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