

# FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK  
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL  
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 49

SEPTEMBER 2003

## *Editor's Forum*

## **Ken Patterson**

*Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter, and another season for our Country Park to demonstrate its many hues for our enjoyment.*

*Many thanks to Matthew Franciska for his inspiring article about his allotment experience. It may encourage others, as he says, to have a go.*

*Also, a fascinating account by Harry Davies of his life at Sunnybanks, with a photo provided by Les Gibbon. Les also gives an insight into Jack Morgan's life, nearing 90 but very active. All items much appreciated.*

*I have been informed by Sue Walters that, regretfully, her RSPB Explorers group have been forced to finish. This is due to administration problems. Sue confirmed her continued support of the Friends, however.*

*Is there anyone out there who could provide useful ideas on how to stop squirrels from taking our bird food? Quite a challenge, because they are such clever creatures, and we do not wish to harm them in the process.*

*Detailed in full elsewhere by our Chairman, I found the Country Park Survey on my shift an enjoyable experience, and the visitors very cooperative.*

## Extract from a member's letter

*Once again we have derived enormous pleasure from our walks along the canal and the river. Each year improvements are made. Thank you.*

Eileen Wolfle

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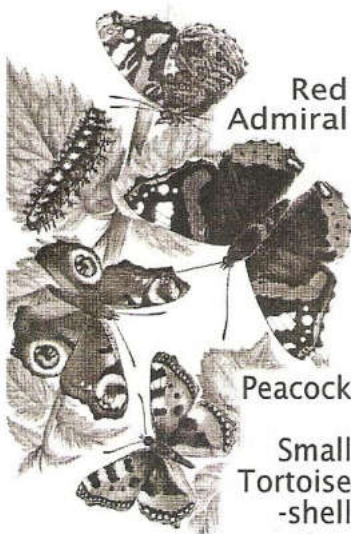


## Reserve News

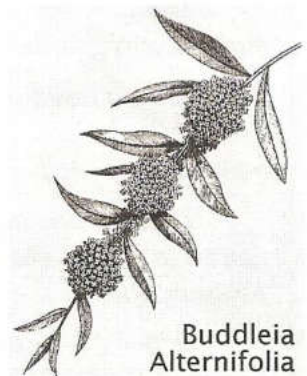
by **Mike Wiley**  
**Countryside Warden**

I'm writing this article in the middle of a heat-wave (mid -August), but when you get to read it I expect the weather will be back to normal—i.e. cold and wet. This hot spell has been a boon to butterflies. Nothing rare has turned up, but the so called commoner butterflies have been in profusion.

Recently on a walk around the Reserve I counted twelve species, consisting of **Red Admiral**, **Peacock**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Comma**, **Gatekeeper**, **Meadow Brown**, **Speckled Wood**, **Green Veined White**, **Small White**, **Large White**, **Brimstone** and **Painted Lady**. Most of these can be seen in your gardens if you have the right plants such as **Buddleia** (also known as *Butterfly Bush*), **Sedum**, **Hebe** and **Hyssop**. These are just a few of the plants which attract butterflies.



Earlier this summer we were busy with the **BTCV** (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) pulling **Ragwort** (*Senecio Jacobaea*) from the meadows around the Reserve. This native biennial is very attractive with its discs of yellow daisy-like florets, and is much loved by the **Cinnabar** moth, which lays its eggs on this plant. The caterpillars which emerge are black and yellow striped (a warning to predators of their toxicity); this is gained by eating the plants.



Un fortunately this plant is also poisonous to animals, especially horses which are long-lived. It isn't normally an instant killer but has an accumulative effect on the liver, eventually killing the animal. There is no cure for this poison. The toxicity remains in the plant even when dried, and can be very dangerous if fed to animals inadvertently in hay. For this reason we ensure that all the pulled plants are bagged and taken off one of our meadows I was aghast to find then casually discarded—obviously there before us. This is a case of 'a thing' - someone was trying to help by without realising how vital it is to take



the 10th of August, saw me working with the Cardiff Conservation Volunteers, dressed in rubber waders thinning reed from one of our ponds. The water level was down, making the reed very difficult to pull, and the frequent breaks essential. One of the volunteers—**Calum McIntosh**—had brought a Welsh coracle along, resembling half a walnut shell. This made for a bit of light relief as everyone took a turn to try and manoeuvre this difficult little craft.

The hottest day of the year, Sunday with the Cardiff Conservation and shoulder-length rubber gloves, The water level was down, making the scorching sun on our backs made the volunteers—**Calum McIntosh**—had brought a Welsh coracle along, resembling half a walnut shell. This made for a bit of light relief as everyone took a turn to try and manoeuvre this difficult little craft.

The Cardiff Conservation Volunteers are holding their twenty fifth anniversary party this October, which I hope to attend. They have been helping us to manage the Reserve from their first year and, looking back over the last twenty five years, you come to appreciate how much they have done, with work including hedge laying, tree thinning, coppicing, meadow management and clearance of the canal and ponds. We wish them well and thank them for all their help.



## Forest Farm Country Park Entrance Improvements .... by E.O.Edwards

It was reported at our ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING that **Chris Powell**, the Conservation Officer, was applying for a **grant** from a fund set up by the **Wales Tourist Board** to help tourism recover after the devastation caused by the Foot and Mouth epidemic.

The grant has now been approved, and the Friends have agreed to donate £3,000 towards the project on which work is due to commence this Autumn.

One of the conditions applying to the grant was that a **Visitor Survey** had to be carried out; the first of these was done on 13th August 2003 by members of Cardiff County Council and Friends of Forest Farm. It is hoped to do another one in September; if any of you would like to volunteer to help, please let **Martin Chamberlain** know on **20658488**.

The Project is described as follows:-

'Forest Farm Country Park is under-promoted at present, and the aim is to provide better visitor information and direction signs as well as making the approach to the Park more inviting and presentable. This will be achieved by providing Tourist Information Boards and Direct Signs on the Taff Trail, and from Radyr Station. The main approach from Forest Farm Road will also be upgraded by planting, laying a hedge, and removal of overgrown vegetation, making the site more visible.

The Car Park is isolated and prone to vandalism at present. This will be improved by resurfacing and improvements to the approach. It is proposed to make the Car Park more visible, and to improve access to Forest Farm Country Park by provision of a new Footpath linked to the Conservation Pond and Conservation Centre. New Picnic Tables will be provided, including two for wheel-chair users. Part of the Car Park will be landscaped to prevent circuiting by joy riders.'

## Newsletter Distribution

**Martin Camberlain    Jacqueline Dell    Howard Davies    Ted Edwards    Ceri Fackrell**  
**John Harding    Chris James    Alan Jennings    Pauline Linck    Olive Rawsthorne**  
**Stephen Theobald**                      Who are these people?

The answer is that they, along with myself, organise and distribute some 280 Newsletters every quarter. I would like to thank them all for giving their time. I would also like to thank those of you who responded to my request for help to distribute when the occasion arises. I have a few names on the 'subs bench', and might well call on you in the future.

Thank you ... Noel Gale

**T-shirts                      Sweatshirts                      Polos**  
**with    FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM    logo**

Good quality                      Raglan sleeve                      Price: **£16.5**    Children's: **£10.75**

**PAULINE LINCK                      029-2061 7012**

## A BOUNTIFUL LARDER – FOREST FARM ALLOTMENTS ...

by Matthew Franciska

As I sit back into my welcoming deckchair, my back is aching and my hands a little sore. I survey the view ahead of me and smile contentedly at my achievements that day; a neatly dug bed of potatoes, regimented rows of lettuces, carrots, onions and radishes and at my feet a bag brimming with fresh strawberries, raspberries and plums—all ready to take home to enjoy with my family. This, I remind myself, is why a few tired bones are a small price to pay when you have your own allotment plot.

I became the proud owner of my allotment plot just over three years ago. In that short space of time I have created my very own *Eden*—a garden of bountiful produce, all fresh, organically grown and brimming with flavour—a flavour lost in the shelf-worn produce of the supermarket.

My *Eden* has four large beds, raised up to aid the growth and drainage of my root crops, salads and legumes. A greenhouse, tucked away in the corner, brims with more tender plants such as Peppers, Aubergines and Courgettes, whilst the bottom third of the plot is a designated Fruit Orchard supplying me with three varieties each of Apple, Plum, Pear, Peach, Cherry, and my favourite—Figs! The front of the plot is for more leisurely pursuits like sitting back and having a short snooze! I am usually lulled to sleep by the aroma of the herb and wild flower garden thriving at the edge of the patio.

Forest Farm allotments are fortunate to be surrounded by beautiful woodland and farmland, which bring with them a plethora of wildlife—most advantageous to the gardener—bees and butterflies to help with pollination, hedgehogs and frogs to keep down the slugs and snails, and last but not least an abundance of birds of varied species that keep the aphids at bay. Robin Red Breast is never far away when you are digging over a new bed; it eagerly gobbles up the freshly exposed grubs and worms, sometimes even boldly taking them from an offering hand! Along with the tranquil singing of the Song Thrush and gentle hum of the bees busy collecting pollen, the city seems to be a long way away.

With such glorious surroundings, friendly advice and chit chat with fellow growers, and excellent growing conditions, it baffles me why so many plots remain untaken at the site.

For a small token fee each year you can have yourself a fine place of retreat, a place of gentle exercise, and the added bonus of growing your own crops easily and cheaply; best of all it is chemical-free, giving you the great satisfaction of eating safe and delicious fruit and vegetables in season.

So go on—try it for a season; I guarantee that you too will be an allotment addict!

## RSPB / PHOENIX CONSERVATION GROUP .... by Hugh Harrison

Active the group has been ... very much so at Forest Farm Longwood Drive ...

Late March, putting in a final **Coppicing** before the nesting season really got underway.

April, the clean up before Easter. **Litter picking** not the most absorbing task, but one that is necessary; the amount of rubbish that is generated by the customers of the retail area nearby is staggering.

In May, our turn to tackle the problematic **Japanese Knotweed**—unexpected, with a task force of eleven. We are making progress after many years of cutting twice during the season; the weed is being confined to a couple of areas.

In June, checking the **Nest Boxes** showed a better occupancy than last year, though the task of struggling through the undergrowth often shoulder high took some time, due to a wet Spring.





## MEMBERSHIP

NOEL GALE

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Our current membership to date stands at **239** Families and **2** Groups.

This is slightly down on last year's figure but hopefully with a few families still to renew, I am confident we will once again be close to last year's record number of 260.

## OUT OF THE WOODS FESTIVAL      FOREST FARM

SUNDAY OCTOBER 12th      1 - 4.30 p.m.      FREE

The woodland skills day offers the opportunity to see demonstrations of traditional and modern woodland crafts.

See how Cardiff County Council recycle damaged trees to supply timber for future parks projects.

The day also includes interactive fun for all the family, with traditional celtic music and dance to help create a magical atmosphere.

This event is organised in association with BTCV (Wales) and Coed Cymru, and supported by Amersham plc.

## JACK MORGAN

The 90-year-old "Regular at the Reserve"

by Les Gibbon

Born at Pembroke - came to Rhiwbina at 10 years of age - moved to Tongwynlais in 1946. Married Rachel Hedges, whose great grandfather kept the Ton Lock about 1860. His name was Morgan Morgan, and he was known as 'Mog the Lock'.

Jack was stationed in India during the war, where he spent five years as a sergeant in R.E.M.E.

He is a very popular man, who is well-liked by everyone he comes into contact with; he can be seen most days walking around Ton and Melingriffith with his dog Ben.

He will be ninety this September.

If you saw him chasing Ben when he runs away, you would honestly believe he could beat Seb Coe!!

All the very best, Jack,  
from Les and all your friends  
at Forest Farm.





## THE MAGIC OF SUNNYBANKS

by Harry Davies

Mine was an idyllic childhood; I was born in one of the Sunnybanks houses in 1915. I was the youngest of four children—all boys, except my lovely sister Elsie.

My father was a furnace man in the Melingriffith Tin works. He worked shifts, and it was hard, hot work; he drank a flagon of amber ale as soon as he came home. His shirt stuck to his back with sweat—I used to pull it off him.

My mother was Mary Ann Thomas from Tongwynlais—well known, and loved by all who knew her.

Our parents were happy with each other, and with all of us. Our neighbours in the other six houses in the terrace were like an extended family. We were all equal, and everyone rallied round to help each other.



The houses had six rooms—two at ground level, two upstairs, and two below. The pantry and only tap was across the 'Bailey', built into the hospital boundary wall. The toilets were built there too—one toilet for every two houses. Water was carried in buckets into the house for washing, bathing, cooking, etc.



Friday night was bath night; water was heated on the coal fire, the tin bath was half filled and I, being the youngest, had my bath first. Then I was sent to bed, and the rest of the family had their baths.

About a dozen of the children in Sunnybanks trooped to school together; there were no parents escorting us in those days. We had no fear of attack, and we were always quite safe on our journeys, and when we played in the Longwoods and in the canal. We all learned to swim in the canal; when we were good enough, we swam into the Feeder and the river. One morning, some of us boys went picking mushrooms early. On our way back there was 'Steam' oozing from the Feeder. "Oh great!" we thought, "lovely warm water!" We stripped off and jumped in. But it wasn't steam; it was morning mist, and the water was nearly freezing.

When we went swimming we had no towels; we just put our clothes back on our wet bodies, and we never caught cold. This was just as well because, if we were playing ball on the bottom 'Bailey', and the ball fell over into the canal, we would climb down a chain into the water to retrieve it.

Our mother was nearly always at home. She would walk to Llandaff North to shop in Doddingtons. A Mr Evans would come around weekly with his horse and cart, and sell vegetables. Mr Atkins would come weekly from Splott with vinegar and salt.

Our medical care was covered by my father's weekly contributions at the works. We weren't ill very often; life was too busy and happy. Some children in the new houses had diphtheria and were taken to the isolation hospital. None of us caught it.

We attended the Methodist church—Mam and us children on Sundays. Sunday School was a 'must' for the children. Mam went to the sisterhood meeting on Thursday. Dad was too tired on Sunday to do ought but rest.

We always had plenty to eat—plenty of home cooking, pies and cakes cooked by Mam. Our clothes were bought from a 'Packi' (not a Pakistani), who called for weekly payments.

We all had new outfits for Whitsun, and we all went to the church 'Whitsun Treat' in a field near Radyr. It meant a ride on a lorry—a treat in itself! There was also a camp holiday organised by the Tin works for the children of those employed. Our fathers paid weekly toward the holiday, which was in Cornwall, if I remember correctly. It was a great holiday.

Our reading matter was mainly 'Chips' and 'Funny Wonder' comics, and reading the adventures of 'Tarzan of the Apes'.

The Rialto cinema had Saturday matinees at two pence a time; we were regularly left in suspense with the 'Pearl White Serial' films. Talkies didn't reach us until 1927 or so. The Charlie Chaplin films were silent, and the resident pianist supplied the background music.

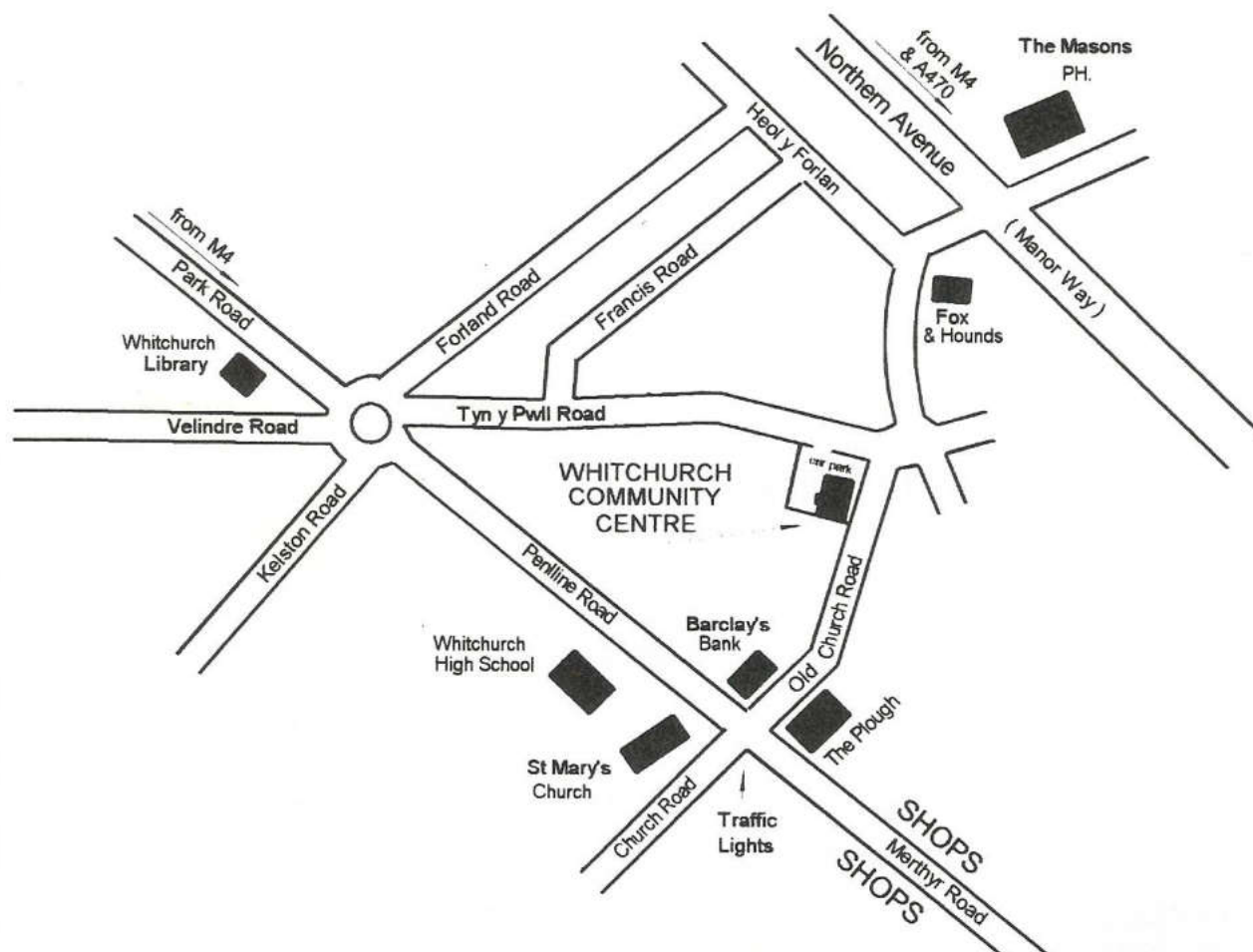
When I was fourteen I was grown-up; I went to work at Bell & Nicholson Warehouse in North Edward Street, close to Queen Street station. At first I used to cycle to work.

So, as children our playgrounds were the Longwoods, the Canal Feeder, and the sports ground near Forest Farm. What more could a child want? The days were full; we ate 'like Trojans', and we slept like 'like logs'. We had no worries, no rows or quarrels at home; a happy home we accepted as normal.

We enjoyed our lives, and we never realised that we were a truly blessed community living in 'God's Acre', Sunnybanks.

## INDOOR MEETINGS – NEW VENUE

The venue for future meetings will be at the **WHITCHURCH COMMUNITY CENTRE**.



Meetings, on **Wednesdays at 7.30 p.m.** as your membership card shows ...

<b>November 12th 2003</b>	Illustrated talk on the	<b>National Wetlands Centre.</b>
<b>February 11th 2004</b>	Illustrated talk on the	<b>Glamorgan Heritage Coast.</b>
<b>April 14th 2004</b>	Illustrated talk on the	<b>National Cycle Network,</b> followed by a cup of tea and the <b>A.G.M.</b>

I am grateful to **Harry Linck** for his expertise in providing the guide map.

Ken Patterson

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

Published on behalf of ... **The Friends of Forest Farm and  
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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.