



FRIENDS
OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER
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JUNE 2000

Editor's Forum

By Ken Patterson

Here's hoping that this June issue coincides with a period of stable summer weather to brighten our leisure. The Country Park beckons, as always.

Most of our contributions share an upbeat note except for the news conveyed by our Chairman about the Hospital Meadows, which is a frustrating saga of delays indeed. However, our Committee remain resolute in their defence of the interests of the Country Park and Nature Reserve.

It was a pleasure for me to show the "Whitchurch in Living Memory" slide/tape to such an appreciative audience at the Friends' AGM. I have to admit to crossing my fingers and hoping that no gremlins got in the works beforehand!

For the AGM itself there was good turnout to lend support and make points for discussion. The Committee were disappointed that an additional committee member was not forthcoming. However, there's still time for someone to offer their services ...

From the membership Secretary

Noel Gale

Membership renewals for the current year are flowing in. Hopefully we will this year increase our Family Membership number over and above last year's record of 245. If any of your friends or relatives wish to join us, please let me know.

For those members whose mind it may have slipped or have mislaid their renewal form, I have arranged for a further slip to be delivered with this quarter's Newsletter.

Mr N. J. Gale
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From the Treasurer

John Harding

Hello! I would like to introduce myself. My name is **John Harding**, your new Treasurer. I'm a business man having two retail shops in Canton. My main hobby is walking (when I have the time) and for some years I have been a volunteer leader of walks for the **Caerphilly Countryside Service**.

At the last AGM I took over from Mr Eric James, who has done an excellent job of keeping the financial side of Friends of Forest Farm. This has made my job of preparing a balance sheet for the end of the last financial year a very easy one. I would like to take this opportunity personally to thank Eric James for all the time he has given.

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Reserve News

By
Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

The last couple of years have seen a warm spell at the end of February and the beginning of March. This unusually early fine weather triggers the nesting instinct in birds. But the warm spell has then been followed by a cold wet April. This has been disastrous for any birds beguiled into nesting early. **Tits** are especially vulnerable, being single-brooded and relying on caterpillars which feed on the fresh young shoots of the oak – the cold weather means that the oaks stay dormant. Let's hope we get better weather for the incoming migrants which arrive a bit later.



We have added a new bird to our breeding list on the Reserve. The **Little Grebe** (or Dabchick), which generally over-winters has bred here for the first time. I was walking the perimeter of Llyn y Brwyniog (our largest pond) one morning when I noticed a ripple, and something dived beneath the surface in front of me. After a short while I watched as a couple of chicks resurfaced. I knew that they weren't Moorhen chicks, as they are unable to dive. Their chequered bodies and gangly appearance told me that these were the Little Grebe. Only one of the chicks seems to have survived, but the mother is sitting on another clutch of eggs while the father takes on the role of feeding the youngster.

We had an injured drake **Mallard** on the canal for about a month. The lower part of its beak had been snapped at the base and was hanging twisted and useless (probably the result of being mauled by a dog). We made several unsuccessful attempts to catch the bird as it couldn't feed properly, but it became wary of us and in the end wouldn't come near us. We were receiving lots of reports from concerned members of the public about this bird, and I felt bad as I hate seeing any animal in distress, so I was delighted when one afternoon a child came running up to me saying that her mother had caught the duck. Apparently they had been feeding the bird by hand and managed to get close enough to grab the weakened duck. I took it that afternoon to a bird sanctuary in Barry, where hopefully it will be treated successfully and make a full recovery.



In the last Newsletter I promised to keep you informed on the de-silting programme being started at Tongwynlais. This project is necessary to keep a good depth of open water in the **Canal**. The work commenced in mid-March with a firm of contractors. About two thirds of the Canal was dug, removing many tons of silt. We decided not to de-silt the whole section in one go as the impact on wildlife would have been too great. We hope to finish the section in the near future.

Amongst other work being undertaken this coming summer, we shall be upgrading and resurfacing around 200 metres of the **towpath**; the Friends have kindly agreed to finance it. We don't envisage it being necessary to close the towpath while the work is in progress, but some inconvenience is inevitable. Apologies beforehand!

ST MARY'S GARDEN – WHITCHURCH – CARDIFF

BY DAVID CLARK

The recent renovation of the site of the former church in Old Church Road has enabled the grave stones placed around its wall to be seen properly. This has been made possible by the numerous trees fringing the site being cut down. I understand, however, that flowers will be planted which in due course will obscure the gravestones – but not to such a great extent.

Early History It is therefore now possible to appreciate better the great interest of the churchyard from the local history point of view. The antiquity of the site is evidenced by the existence of a 3000-year-old Bronze Age mound where Roman and Medieval age remains were found before it was cleared to make way for the erection of the Treoda block of flats near the churchyard.

It seems a new church was founded about 1266, when the **Manor of Whitchurch** or Album Monasterium was established. Mention was made in a Duchy of Lancaster record of the "*Provost of Whytchurche*" in 1492. In 1588 **William Thomas**, a Whitchurch farmer, his wife and a Julia David were imprisoned for non-attendance at church!

In 1616 Bishop Godwin of Llandaff confirmed a licence to the parishioners of Whitchurch for the celebration of christenings, marriages and burials at the chapel of Whitchurch. The earliest memorial tablet found is dated 1695 in respect of **James Williams**, who died on the 26th of July, aged 70. In 1678-9 eighty four parishioners in Llandaff and Whitchurch petitioned for a vicar "*able to officiate in the Welsh tongue*".

In 1700 it is understood that the old belfry collapsed, and the churchwarden was seriously injured. The bell was broken and later repaired. It was re-cast in 1792 and removed to St Thomas' church when it was built in 1910.

Ewen's **Cardiff Directory** of 1855 noted, "*Whitchurch: nothing worthy of remark, saving perhaps that the neat churchyard of the quaint and unpretending little church would show the healthiness of the village*" – if longevity is a proof of it; one stone records the resting place of a patriarch aged 107 (Grave number 196, Thomas Matthew, died 13.1.1839)". On the other hand, a high proportion of children died before the age of five.

[to be continued]

Recent visitors may have noticed a reduction in the litter around the Reserve. On April 8th over twenty volunteers removed more than sixty bags of litter and other assorted items from the Reserve – in fact we filled a large builders skip. However we continue to have problems especially on the Longwood Drive entrance to the Reserve with fast food drink cartons and wrappings. I have recently had a meeting with MacDonaldis management and walked the Reserve with them to highlight the problems their customers were causing. They are committed to improving the situation; we have been promised an improvement before, which has had only a limited effect.

Spring Clean A Sweeping Success

May I thank all members for their help on the day; we look forward to their continued support in future events.

Martin Chamberlain - 029 20691421 – (martin.chamberlain@virgin.net)

The Disappearing Frog-spawn

This year, as soon as the frogs had frolicked around in the pond and left a deposit, I covered the pond with wire mesh. No heron could get in there! But still the frog-spawn disappeared. It follows that there must be something in the pond eating it.

When I cleared the pond out last year there were eight **Common Newts** living in it, and they were left there. Do they hibernate over the winter, and did the warm weather in the spring wake them up and cause them to eat the only food available? Watch this space next year.

E. O. Edwards



Mrs Rita Gibson

At our AGM in April I reported the sad death of Mrs Rita Gibson of Pantmawr Road; she was a very good friend and supporter of our group. For many years, as a Trustee of the 'Joseph Strong Frazer Trust' Mrs Gibson had ensured that we received substantial grants from the Trust. I reminded members that it was these monies which made it possible for us to carry out so many tasks on the Reserve. I also said that in all probability it was Mrs Gibson's personal interest in the Reserve that had made these grants possible, and that we may not be as fortunate in the future.

Two days after our meeting I received a letter from Sir Antony Reardon Smith, Chairman of the Trust, enclosing the usual substantial cheque; he said that for the foreseeable future the Trustees will respect Mrs Gibson's wishes and will continue to support the charities she wished to help.

What a fitting memorial for a person who so obviously valued the contribution the Reserve makes to the quality of life of the neighbourhood

Dennis Davies

Ronald Lockley

Some of you will have read in the paper the obituary of Ronald Lockley, and some might well remember the article by Chris James in the Newsletter in October 1991. Chris described his meeting with Mr Lockley, having been alerted by me that he was in Heol Don hoping to visit the home of his childhood. He had appeared at my door with the Warden of the West Wales Wildlife Trust and an entourage of S4C film makers. My neighbour, who lived across the road in his old home, had not returned from work, and they wanted to wait for her.

They spied a painting of the Canal by the late Ken Kernick on my wall, and we talked about the Friends and the battle (which had just started) to preserve the Hospital Meadows from development under the hospital redevelopment plan. They went off to the Reserve to film and asked if they could come back to await the return of my neighbour.

When they returned I made them tea. It was a privilege to talk to someone with local connections who had achieved so much in his life, but I have to confess that the abiding memory of the visit was his complaint that my tea was too weak!!!

Marjorie Davies

Hospital Meadows

The saga is over but it is very reluctant to show any tangible results. Apparently the **Assembly** has decided what to do, but will not release the result of its deliberations until the **Highway Authority** has approved the plan for the new roundabout in Park Road – and so it goes on!

Before I leave this frustrating subject I would like to express the Committee's heart-felt thanks to two members who were Local Councillors during the time of the negotiations – **Mr Neil Salmon** and **Mr Victor Riley**. They were both deeply committed to preserving the Meadows in their present form and helped us greatly with the intricacies of planning procedures, keeping us up to date with what was happening. Local Councillors tend to get the blame when things don't go our way, but we must also acknowledge the good work they do daily in the background; so 'Thank you both very much. We are pleased that you are still members of the Friends. You are very much appreciated.'

E. O. Edwards

New Treasurer

For the past nine years the Friends have been fortunate in having **Eric James** as Treasurer. No-one knows this better than the Executive Committee members. Not only has he been completely reliable, and his accountancy skills unquestioned, but he has also played an active part in the work of the Committee and has always been willing to do that extra bit.

As reported at the AGM, Eric has decided to resign. He had been thinking of doing this for some time, and a lengthy stay in hospital helped him make up his mind. Happily he is now well on the road to recovery, and we look forward to seeing him in our meetings again soon.

His fellow Committee members wish to thank him for his work and for making such a good job of what is traditionally an unpopular task with such charm and good humour!

We welcome committee member **John Harding** from Llandaff as our new Treasurer, and look forward to working with him.

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