

# FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK  
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL  
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER  
38  
DECEMBER 2000

*Editor's Forum*  
By Ken Patterson

It is always a pleasure to receive new contributions to this Newsletter from our members. This month we have to thank Mary Gillham, Owen Hooker and David Moffat for their interesting and informative articles.

Please feel at ease about sending in any snippets of information or comments which you have from your observations. I will welcome them as confirming this is your Newsletter.

The Committee join me in wishing you all a most happy and peaceful Festive Season and New Year.

**MEMBERSHIP of the FRIENDS 237**  
Noel Gale (Mem. Sec.)


**A TERRAPIN SIGHTING AT FOREST FARM**  
by **David Moffat**

On the afternoon of 16th September my wife and I were in the larger of the two hides when we were surprised to see a Terrapin swimming past.

The size of an average tortoise, with white markings on the face and a prominent rectangular red stripe on each side of the neck, it had some difficulty in struggling through the water lilies. In clear water the greenish legs could be seen, paddling vigorously. We watched for about thirty minutes until it swam towards the hide and was lost to view under the bank.

I have been told that there were at one time terrapins in the Canal, but I believe that this is the first sighting of one in one of the ponds. It must surely be bad news for future Moorhen and Little Grebe chicks.

**The Garth Countryside**  
part of CARDIFF'S GREEN MANTLE by Mary E. Gillham



This fascinating book combines natural history, narrative and social observation. Presented with over 100 illustrations – 70 colour and 30 mono photographs by the author.

The first edition, limited to 1,100 copies, is priced at £12.95. Cheques or postal orders should be made payable to LAZY CAT and sent to Lazy Cat Publishing, 19 Tabor Street, Taff's Well, CF15 7PS. Please add £1.80 for post and packaging if not collected.

Also available from selected outlets in Taffs Well, Gwaelod-y-Garth, Pentyrch, Creigiau, Radyr and Morganstown.

Phone 07974 115626 for your nearest point to arrange a delivery.

**IN THIS ISSUE**

<b>Front page</b>	<b>A terrapin in Forest Farm</b>
<b>Page 2</b>	<b>Membership Sweatshirts</b>
<b>Page 3</b>	<b>The Garth Countryside</b>
<b>Page 4</b>	<b>Reserve News</b>
	<b>Holly and Ivy</b>
	<b>With the bats</b>
	<b>Radyr Woods</b>
	<b>Next Indoor Meeting</b>

**Sweatshirts for sale**

Carrying the Friends of Forest Farm logo, they are good quality and have a raglan sleeve to give a comfortable fit. A choice of sizes and colours is available.

Price: £16.50      Children's sizes at £10.75

Please contact:      Tel. No.  
**Pauline Linck**      **029 – 20617012**



# Reserve News

By  
Mike Wiley  
Countryside Warden

## A Little Bit of History

Early one morning in mid-September there came a knock on the door of the Warden's Centre. It was a chap calling to say that his dog had disappeared down a hole in the car park at Forest Farm, but fortunately he had managed to retrieve it. My first thought was that the dog had probably gone down a rabbit hole; still, I had better go and check.

A hole had certainly appeared, but this was no rabbit hole. It was a circular hole about one foot in diameter. On closer inspection the hole radiated out as it went down, leaving only a crust of a few inches on the surface. If a car had parked near it, its wheel would certainly have dropped down.

In my experience, this type of hole is usually caused by running water, but as there was no water in the vicinity I was a bit at a loss. After securing the area a JCB was called in. As we excavated to enlarge the hole, a circular stone wall some feet in diameter began to appear. I realised that we were uncovering the old well belonging to Forest Hall, a large house demolished in the 1960s; it had stood where the car park is now. The well had just been filled in with loose rubble, and the exceptionally wet weather had raised the water table sufficiently to dislodge the in-fill.

We dug down inside the well, being careful not to dislodge any of the stonework. It was certainly WELL built! As we excavated, the loose rubble inside the well was seen to drop. After about ten feet we had to call a halt, as the digger's arm was at maximum reach. We were only about a third of the way down, as the well would certainly have been about thirty feet deep. It seemed a shame, but there was nothing for it but to refill the hole and make it safe. However, before doing this we recovered a large shaped piece of red Radyr stone some three feet by eighteen inches by six inches from the bottom of the excavation. This was obviously a stone from Forest Hall itself, as we know the hall was built from local stone. Finally we placed two large heavy steel plates over the filled well in case any more subsidence occurred. Then we covered them with a thin layer of stone dust.

A bit of history had been uncovered and preserved for the future. The block of Radyr stone was taken to the nearby Forest Farm, where it will be kept – the only surviving fragment of Forest Hall.

If you drive down into the car park now you wouldn't know the well was there, but if you look around the area you can still see the remnants of the old garden. A large Redwood, a Walnut and several Sweet Chestnuts still survive.

## THE HOLLY AND THE IVY

In the depths of winter when nearly all other trees and shrubs had lost their leaves, the HOLLY and the IVY would stand alone. These plants have long been associated with magical properties.

Branches of holly and ivy would be cut on Christmas Eve, intertwined, and placed both inside and outside the house (usually over the entrance), as is still the custom in some houses today. These decorations would protect the inhabitants over the Christmas period, and would be taken down without fail on Candlemas Eve – to leave them up would bring ill luck! Sometimes cups fashioned out of the wood would be used, and drinks taken from them as cures for various ailments.

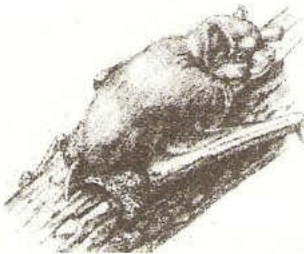
[continued on next page]

## A NIGHT OUT WITH THE BATS BY MARY E. GILLHAM

Bats' sonar beam is of limited breadth, so bat detectors do not register sound when the animal is headed away. Fortunately, their back and forth feeding flights offer plenty of opportunity for Chris James's and Mike Wiley's apparatus to identify them on the occasional Bat Safaris which they lead.

I joined one such excursion on 30th August 2000. Swallows swooped back and forth outside the warden's barn, while basic bat biology was being elucidated to the assembled crowd, whose ages ranged from eight to eighty. For those of us who dislike midges, it was good to know that winged cohorts are busy scooping them out of the air by both day and night.

When we sallied forth into the summer dusk the swallows had gone to roost and the sunset-flushed sky seemed devoid of life. Not all birds had retired however. As we trooped onto the footbridge over the Taff a small contingent of Mallard flew by. More were paddling around some rocks in mid-river, and urgent quacks accompanied our later progress downstream.

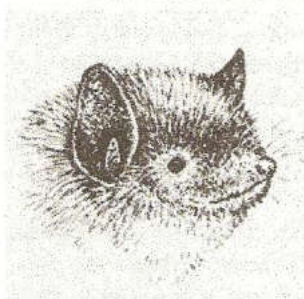


The big **Noctule** bats did not disappoint us, flying high and very visible against the pale sky above the bridge, or less visibly as they shot underneath it, to reappear against the shimmering surface upstream. These were the first to emerge.

By the time we withdrew to the riverside path the **Pipistrelles** were out, flitting rapidly back and forth across the corridor of light between the trees. Wildly waving torch beams intercepting their flight paths highlighted sleek undersides that seemed white in the prevailing gloom. Their passing drew a different pattern of staccato sounds from the bat detectors. The occasional cricket had a specific rhythm of its own.



Two bat boxes set quite high on a tree trunk were pointed out. A medium-sized moth was perched blatantly on the front of one. It looked risky, so close to the hereditary foe, but was quite safe so long as it remained still. Bats' sonar is geared to recognise flying morsels as prey, not uncompromising slabs of timber with or without that little extra.



Strangely, neither moths nor bats were attracted to the tall light standards by the bridge. **Daubentons** bats prefer to hunt over the quieter waters of the canal. Calm stretches of the Taff do attract them, but there was too much ruffle here. My way home was enlivened by the calling of **Tawny Owls**. So much is going on after dark. It would be good to have night vision, like them.

Another plant associated with Christmas is the **MISTLETOE**, an evergreen semi-parasitic plant. It is usually to be found growing on poplar or apple trees. It is a plant with strong pagan and Druid connections and, when found growing on an oak tree (which is rare), it was gathered with great ceremony by the light of a full moon using a gold dagger. The oak tree from which it was taken was then much revered.

Like the holly and the ivy, the mistletoe was believed to have mystical connections, and was used as protection against evil. Mistletoe was also thought to be a cure for the heart – not altogether wrongly, as it does contain properties for reducing high blood pressure. It was also thought to be an aphrodisiac, and a fertility drug – hence the custom of kissing under the mistletoe!

Mike Wiley (Countryside Warden)

## Radyr Woods by Owen Hooker

Two hundred yards south of Radyr Station lie Radyr Woods, covering the western escarpment overlooking the old floodplain of the River Taff, just as the Long Wood at Whitchurch forms its eastern boundary. At Whitchurch the fields below are cut through by the canal; similarly the Radyr Woods are now bounded by the City railway line and the former marshalling yards.

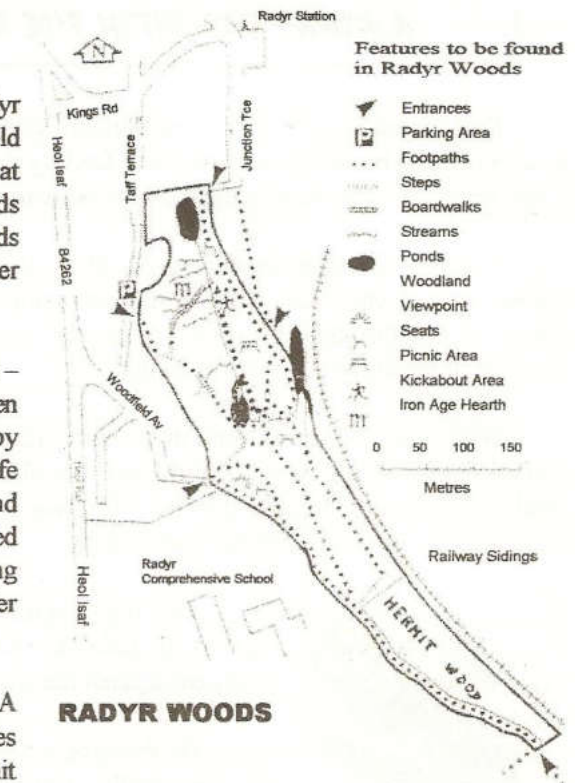
Radyr Woods cover about fourteen acres, part of which – **Hermitage Wood** – is a local Nature Reserve not generally open to the public. But most of the area is readily accessible by footpaths and boardwalks. It contains a wide variety of wildlife habitats, including ponds, springs, grassy areas and woodland shade. Over fifty species of wildflowers have been identified there, while it is visited by a wide variety of birds, including duck, heron, kingfisher, woodpeckers and numerous smaller species.

The Woods also contain a number of historical features. A mound covers the site of an **Iron Age** hearth where hot pebbles were used in an ancient cooking process. Within the Hermit Wood are the remains of the **Pistyll Golen**, an ancient Holy Well. In mediaeval times the Woods formed part of the walled Deer Park of **Radyr Court**; the remains of the old **Lodge Farm** – probably the former verders lodge – has recently been cleared as a picnic area. Beside the Hermit Wood stand the cliffs of stone quarries, once providing materials for Llandaff Cathedral and Penarth Docks; they were also used for prominent local decorative dressings.

The Woods were officially opened by H.R.H. Prince Michael of Kent in 1986, and are administered by Radyr and Morganstown community council in conjunction with Cardiff County Council. Continuing maintenance is provided by volunteer wardens who keep the Woods free of litter and, on occasional Working Days, maintain the facilities of the area. The most recent additions to these are the **Millenium Path** beside the stream separating the Farm field from the woodland; and a boardwalk, constructed by BTCV, through the marsh. A monolith at the junction of these two new facilities commemorates **Bill Clarke**, the initial organiser and, till his recent death, the mainstay of the wardens.

**Wednesday 14th February 7.30 p.m.**  
**Tabernacle Church Schoolroom.**

An illustrated talk by **Tony Prater** (RSPB Wales) about what took place during the planning of the Cardiff Bay development, and how the new **Nature Reserve** on the Gwent levels, established as compensation for the loss of the mud flats in the Bay, is progressing.



Access to the Woods is easy. Radyr Station is only two minutes walk away. There are two entrances from the north, through Junction terrace and via Taff Terrace, where there is a small car park.

Footpath access is also available through Woodfield Avenue and, from the south, through Danescourt.

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

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

**MR KEN PATTERSON 12 MANOR COURT WHITCHURCH CARDIFF CF14 1BJ Tel: 029 - 20627077**