# FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER
32
MAY 1999


## *Editor's Forum*

by Ken Patterson

A warm welcome to the Thirtysecond Friends' Newsletter!

Following my brief introduction to our history I am grateful to **Chris James** for fuller information given in his article.

I also appreciate the response to my request for contributions by **Mr David Clark**, as well as our usual contributors.

**Mr Hugh Harrison** has taken over from Mrs Pauline Linck in reporting on the RSPB Phoenix Group. Pauline has done stirling work and will continue with other activities including her role on our committee.

As part of the International Year of the Older Person 1999, I hope to report in our next issue on the "**Global Walk**" which takes place on **October 2nd**. It is intergenerational – please let me know if you are interested. Meanwhile, take care and continue to enjoy our Country Park.



## From the Membership Secretary

NOEL GALE

### *MEMBERSHIP*

Membership renewals for the current year are flowing in. It is to be hoped we can top last year's record Family Membership of 237.

For those members whose minds it may have slipped or who have mislaid their renewal forms, I have arranged for another slip to be delivered with this quarter's Newsletter. Thank you for your continued support, and a warm welcome to those new members who have recently joined us.

### *NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION*

Not before time I would like to thank those 12 members who take time to deliver our Newsletter each quarter, particularly those without transport who have to rely on shank's pony.

Although the majority of our members are located in the north of Cardiff, our membership covers the whole of Cardiff and outlying districts - Radyr, Creigiau, Pentyrch, Gwaelod-y-Garth, Tongwynlais, St Nicholas, etc. We also have members in Barry, Pontypridd, Bridgend, Aberystwyth, and as far afield as London.

I hope you all find the Newsletter interesting. Any suggestions and snippets of news for inclusion will always be most welcome by our editor Mr Ken Patterson.

Please note my new postcode.


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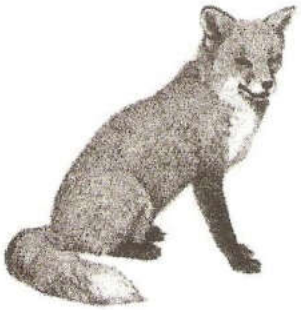

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# Reserve News

by
**Mike Wiley**
Countryside Warden

After a very wet winter and some late snow, now at the end of April while I write this article it's a glorious spring morning. Most of the summer migrants are here now - **Chiffchaff**, **Blackcap**, **Willow Warbler** and **Whitethroat** are all singing. The **SandMartins** made an early appearance at the beginning of April when they were seen to be excavating holes in the Sandmartin Cliff. Now they seem to have moved on, showing only sporadically in the last couple of weeks. Perhaps this year they won't nest. As I've mentioned before, they're not renowned for site fidelity — we'll see. Already families of **Mallard** and **Moorhen** are to be seen on the canal and ponds, and young **Robins** are busily feeding from their parents.



We have a family of **Foxes** on the Reserve. One morning I watched the vixen and three cubs playing in the meadow. Recently one of the Forest Farm volunteers reported to me an incident across the river where a man was seen to send two Lurchers after a young fox cub. These dogs are generally greyhound/sheepdog crossed and are very efficient at what they do. The cub would have been torn apart. To some this is sport. I went across the river but saw nothing.

In the June 1998 issue of the Newsletter I told you of my concern about the large number of fish in the canal, predating on dragonfly larvae. I said I would keep you informed. Last January the Fisheries Department of the Environment Agency took a sample number of **Roach** for analysis to ensure they were healthy. Although some had blackspot (a parasite showing up as black spots on their scales) they all gained their health certificate, and one day in February the canal was electronically fished and 500 roach were removed to stock a large lake near Hereford where they would be allowed to breed. The operation, headed by Keith Jenkins of the Environment Agency, was carried out in a very professional manner to ensure that no harm came to any of the fish.

The Friends have recently agreed to fund the upgrading of the feeder track as part of the ongoing **"access for all"** programme. This well used track forms part of the circular walk around the Reserve and has deteriorated badly. This summer the YMP main sewer is also being upgraded with some major works being carried out by Hyder; this involves excavating under the River Taff, so expect some diversions near the farm.

While at home recently working in the garden I happened to look up just in time to see a Red Kite sailing over. A magnificent sight! But before you rush for your binoculars and start scanning the skies - I live in the Brecon Beacons National Park. However, they are expanding their territory, so you never know.

## IMPROVEMENTS to the COUNTRY PARK

by E.O.E.Edwards

***PATHWAY UPGRADING***

During the winter the path alongside the Feeder from the gate by the Canal Towpath towards the Hides became very wet and muddy. The Friends have agreed to fund a project to upgrade this section of path to a standard fit for wheelchairs and walkers who do not wear wellingtons!

This has been made possible by a very generous unsolicited gift from the Joseph Strong Frazer Trust.

***SIGNS***

Five signs have now been erected at the entrances to the Reserve. There is a Map of the Reserve in the middle with a bilingual text on either side; each one is numbered so it is possible to find your location on the map.

The signs were designed by the Friends and Sport & Leisure; the artwork was done by the Environment Dept at County Hall.

The total cost was £2480, of which the Friends paid £500; an Environmental Grant from County Hallcoveredthe rest. Sport & Leisure covered the cost of the erection.

We are extremely grateful to all those who helped to bring this long sought after improvement, helping to define the boundaries of the Reserve within the Country Park.

## THE FRIENDS 1989-1999

by Chris James

Following a Watch meeting at Forest Farm almost exactly 10 years ago, **Chris Powell** (then Parks Conservation Officer for the City Council) and I were discussing the impact on the Reserve of the transfer of BT's transport depot from Western Avenue to fields once part of Forest Farm. The plan to develop the site was complete, and the prospect of the loss of the fields with their ancient hedges and Scots pine, with its breeding Kestrels, was depressing to us both. The prevailing national climate at the time did not seem to be in our favour. How could similar schemes threatening the Reserve be prevented?




If you visit the **Longwood** end of the **Drive** you will see the steps are now completed. Not quite John Buchan's "49 Steps", but at times it felt like it.

This month will be an active one for the Group, checking **nest boxes** at Forest Farm and Roath Park and recording their contents.

Also there will be a **Knotweed** cutting session. Fortunately the knotweed has now been almost eradicated.

We have completed our second wildsquare survey of the Reserve, this time recording first Swallows sighted, Peacock butterflies and Toad spawn - no luck with the latter.

It was clear that action was required. We exchanged many ideas including one of mine to set up a Friends group. Neither of us had experience of setting up a Friends group, nor did we have much time to devote to the idea. Chris, however, found time and energy to canvass support and to organise a meeting of interested people at Forest Farm in December 1989. The group, composed of wardens, voluntary wardens and workers from The Farm, met several times and arranged a launch meeting for **The Friends** on **14th March 1990** in Bethel Chapel vestry. At the end of the launch a steering group had been elected, and **39 individuals/families** had signed up for membership.

The Friends were now established; regular meetings including talks and walks followed, setting the pattern of meetings that exists today. The first **Newsletter** was produced in March/April of that year by **Ken Patterson**, who still edits it — now up to issue no. 32. This first Newsletter outlined the main objectives:

> "To contribute in whatever way possible to protecting and developing, in a suburban setting, this area of countryside as a valued amenity and a nature reserve for the observation and study of flora and fauna in their natural habitat. We trust our purpose will enhance the enjoyment and quality of life for an increasing number of members of the public."

Have we met these objectives? Undoubtedly yes! Under the leadership of **Denis Davies** and **Ted Edwards** the Friends have provided serious and informed opposition to the development of the Whitchurch Hospital Meadows since 1990. The opposition still continues.



Significant fund raising has supported the financing of schemes to improve reserve access and to improve viewing of the wildlife. Practical support, ideas and cash have been given to expedite the completion of projects in a timescale that would not have been possible with only council support.

This support has enabled **Mike Wiley** (Countryside Warden) to achieve improvements to access and observation hides in an environmentally sensitive way. Habitat diversity has been increased by the construction of two new wet areas, each with observation hides funded partly with Council money, Environment Agency support, and money raised by the Friends.

Reserve access has been improved, paths resurfaced, ramps and wheelchair passes installed and stiles replaced by gates. Early fears of motorcyclists and cyclists abusing the improved access have proved unfounded. Also vandalism to the hides has been less than anticipated. Support for these schemes illustrates the boldness and courage demonstrated by the Friends and Mike Wiley. Less foresight would not have resulted in the Reserve which we now enjoy. It is now accessible to more people and the hides allow us to see the wide range of animals and plants that populate the area.

The contribution of the Friends extends beyond campaigning and fundraising to providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and information between the public and the Leisure and Amenities Department of our County Council. The record of achievement of the warden supported by the Friends is proof that such partnerships can produce a synergy that benefits us all.

Long may the Friends flourish into the next millenium, upholding their objectives of protection and development of the Reserve for the observation and study of plants and animals in their natural habitat.

## PENTYRCH IRONWORKS

by David Clark

An interesting source of local historical research is the Cash Book of the former Pentyrch Ironworks from **August 1789** to **May 1793**. The book comprises 132 folios and was deposited at the Glamorgan Record Office in 1955 under reference D/DXn3. I have a photostat copy which can be borrowed if required.

The book was entered in the name of **Thomas Vaughan**, the manager of the works and a brother of Joseph Vaughan, agent of the **Melingriffith Tinplate** Works, which then existed in Whitchurch.

The Works were situated on the west bank of the River Taff near **Taffswell**, over which was later built the railway viaduct. The foundry near the present Ynys House was the last building to be cleared.

The first entries for Aug 7th 1789 were of the payments for coal from Coed-y-Bedw Colliery to Evan Hopkins, Wm Miller, Lewis Thomas, Charles Evans and Wm Lewis - totalling £18-13-11/2. Other payments of a few shillings each were made to Wm Gimblett, Thos Russell, James Jarret and John Adams.

On July 2nd 1790 payment of 140 guineas (£147) was received from William Lewis Esq of Greenmeadow. On the same date 6/8d was received from Jas Israel of the mill at Gyllinnis. Also on the 2nd July 1790 payment was made of £6-6-0 to Willm Coslett & Henry Roberts on account of raising mine (iron ore) at Rudry. Sinking a pit for 6 fathoms at 7/6d a fathom was paid to Rowland Howell of Coed-y-Bedw Colliery on 13th Aug 1790.

A number of local collieries, farms, businesses and individuals are mentioned which give a fascinating insight into the activity of some of our forebears in very different times. It is interesting to learn that in the 1600's "Edmund Mathews of Radure co. Glamorgan ... Did make and cast at a furnace at Pentert co. Glamorgan ... About 150 tons of iron ordnance", and he was in trouble with the authorities.

There is a good account of the Pentyrch Works in a chapter of "Historic Melingriffith" by Edgar L Chappell, published in 1940.

David Clark 171 Heathwood Road Cardiff

## MORE RESERVE NEWS

by E.O.E.Edwards

**HEALTH MEADOWS** The Public Inquiry was during the week of 15 February and lasted 4 days. Under discussion was the amended first Plan; it would transfer about 6 acres to the Reserve.

I gave verbal evidence in support of the written evidence objecting to the proposal. The MP and Councillors Salmon and Pearson and the Whitchurch Action Group gave evidence. Health were represented by a battery of experts, and the Council by Chris Powell Conservation Officer and a Senior Planner from the City Planning Dept.

The Inspector will report to the Welsh Office any time now.

**NEST BOXES** Last year the number of boxes unused was 31, and seven went missing.

Consequently the estimated number of chicks was 432, compared to over 500 in previous years.

This increase in unused boxes is puzzling, and a careful watch will be kept this year to see if the trend is continued.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

by E.O.Edwards

The Annual General Meeting was held on the 14 April; it was encouraging to see approximately 50 people staying on after the illustrated talk on the Canal.

Safety on the cycleway/pathway between Radyr Weir and the M4 bridge was a cause of concern. Cyclists do not have means of warning people that they are coming, some at a very fast speed; this can pose a danger to walkers. It is fast becoming a no-go area during the summer months; the possibility of a separate path for walkers must be explored. This will be brought to the attention of the Highway Dept at City Hall.

The condition of the canal wall was raised. It was recognised that the damage was caused by dogs going into the canal and tearing the banks away as they scramble out. Repair of one spot only means the dogs move to another spot, and the same thing happens again. The general opinion was that the whole wall should be rebuilt from Middle Lock down to the south entrance at Melingriffith to cure this problem and at the same time stop the leakage problem near the southern end.

The meeting was informed that at a meeting between Mr Mike Clark, Assistant Director of Sports and Leisure, Mss C. Webb, Park Development Officer, Mss B. Shephard, Senior Community ranger and the Friends committee on 25th Sept 1998 assurances had been given that a Management and Restoration Plan was being prepared and would be ready by March/April, This would help in obtaining National Lottery money for the development of the Country Park and highlight the work required to safeguard the future of the canal. This assurance was well received and was a fitting end to a very successful evening.

A brooch in the shape of a Kangaroo with precious stones in its tummy and a red ruby for the eye was found on the floor after the meeting. I have it.

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

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