FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 45 SEPTEMBER 2002

Editor's Forum **Ken Patterson**

Welcome, new and established Friends, to our Autumn edition of your Newsletter. We have a pleasing number of contributions which again takes us to eight pages.

What is encouraging too are the contributions of ***Mr Les Gibbon*** *and a previous contributor,* ***Mr Eric Tucker****. We also have an 'anon' which should create some controversy, and possibly a few hackles raised.*

Please let us have your views on this, and any other matter which interests you.

There is also a contribution from ***Mr Duncan Hockridge****, the new* ***Speakers' Secretary****.*

Would you please note my new address & tel. no.

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Good quality Raglan sleeve

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PAULINE LINCK **029-2061 7012**

Membership

Noel Gale Membership Secretary

At the time of going to press our membership totals **225**.

This is well on the way to last year's figure of 234.

There are a few members still to renew. With those, and some new members, I hope to achieve my target of 250.

Thank you all for your continuing support, and a warm welcome to our new members.

Farewell and Welcome

Paul Kent, who worked on the Reserve for many years with Warden Mike Wiley, has left to work with BTCV. We wish him well.

A warm welcome to **Paul Davies**, the new Countryside Ranger.

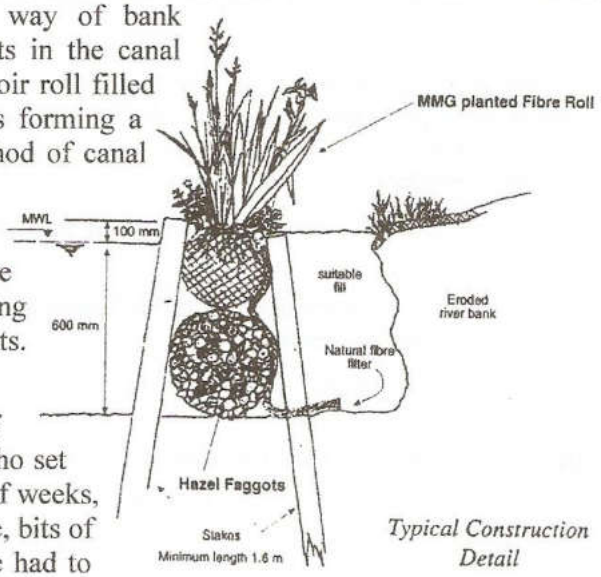
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Reserve News

by Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

In the last Newsletter I wrote that this summer would see us resurfacing a length of the towpath and rebuilding sections of the canal wall. Well, there's been a change of plan! Dennis Davies, your secretary, has been hard at it negotiating with the **Prince of Wales Trust** to try and obtain a grant from the **Landfill Tax Credit Scheme** in order to finance partially the above projects. If it comes off, a contractor will be doing the resurfacing work, leaving us to do the Canal bank.

Instead of the usual rebuilding of the canal bank walls, Chris Powell, the Parks Conservation Officer, has come up with a more environmentally friendly way of bank revetment. This entails placing bundles of hazel faggots in the canal against the banks, and securing on top of the faggots a coir roll filled with soil and pre-planted with marginal vegetation, thus forming a natural edge to the canal. This is a tried and tested method of canal bank revetment, and we hope to use it here on a trial basis.

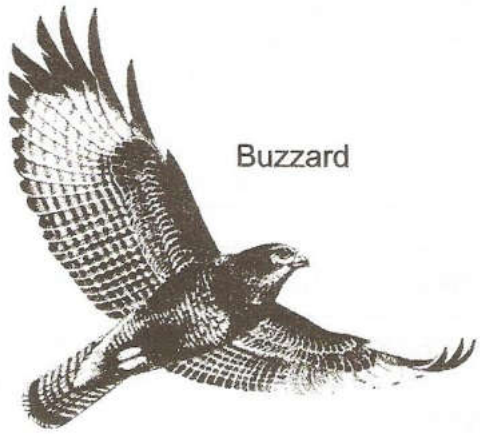


Typical Construction Detail

Unfortunately we've had a setback, as the Parks Department offices have just been destroyed in a fire; the original plans for the work have gone up in smoke, along with large numbers of important and historical documents. Fortunately I kept copies of the plans at Forest Farm.

Also at Forest Farm, we recently had a group of travellers in lorries and caravans appear out of the blue who set up camp next to the river. They moved on after a couple of weeks, but have left behind literally tons of rubbish – garden waste, bits of vehicles, building debris – you name it, we had it. We've had to call in a JCB, tractor and trailer to clear it all away. After four days work they're still hard at it.

On a more cheerful note, while working on the Reserve one day I was fortunate enough to witness something I had often heard and read about, but until now had never seen. On coming out of the woodland I heard the mewing calls of Buzzards; looking up, I was just in time to see two Buzzards come together and lock talons. They stayed together this way, swirling and dropping to just above treetop level, where they released one another and sailed on their separate ways. This behaviour is thought to be a part of the pair bonding ritual.


Buzzard

Only a few days after this I was lucky enough to have another unusual sighting. High up on the open tops of the Brecon Beacons near my home, I heard the unmistakeable cry of a Peregrine. Searching around I drew a blank. The sky was empty. Then the call was repeated. Across a small valley facing me I could see movement in the tall bracken.

Through my binoculars I watched two Peregrines locked together, but this time not in a friendly way but in combat. These birds were tumbling headlong through the bracken, rolling down the hillside, screaming as they rolled over and over. One rose up, and was quickly pursued through the air by the second. The valley seemed alive with their cries as they seared across the sky and out of sight over a hill.

(continued on next page)

A few minutes later only one Peregrine returned, gliding back down the valley, obviously the victor. I think that what I had witnessed had two possible explanations. It was either a territorial dispute, with one bird defending its patch against an intruder, or it was a parent driving away one of its offspring, which is the normal way of ensuring areas aren't overpopulated.



Peregrine

Meanwhile, back on the Reserve, the ever-encroaching vegetation alongside the footpaths has a formidable adversary in the form of Howard Davies, one of our voluntary wardens; he's fighting the good fight. Well done, Howard!

SET ASIDE

by E.O.Edwards

The heading refers to the land that farmers have had to take out of production in order to comply with the policy to prevent over-production, and so create food mountains.

Some farmers have used this land to provide food for birds during the Winter. The land has been cultivated and sown with crops suitable for birds, but the crops are not harvested; they are allowed to ripen and fall to the ground, or stay on the stalk, all ready for the birds to feed on over the Winter.

The wardens and Friends of the Reserve are very supportive of this scheme, and have identified about five acres of land adjacent to the allotments; these would lend themselves to this scheme.

A feasibility study was carried out, and it was found that with an initial grant from CCW, the costs could be funded by the Friends. Contractors would be employed to prepare the land, and volunteers could do the sowing while the birds do the harvesting.

The beauty of this scheme is that it does not tie up the land; if any other scheme comes up, then we move out. The scheme fits in with the ethos of a Country Park. During the Winter it will provide an added attraction, with suitable viewing stands and maybe a Hide.

Unfortunately we have not had permission yet to go ahead, but we remain hopeful that one day the merits of this scheme will be recognised by our Councillors. Then the Country Park will begin to come alive.

RSPB WILDLIFE EXPLORERS



We have had a very good Summer at Forest Farm, Radyr Woods and Cosmeston Park. We also have a very full **Autumn Programme** planned, which includes …

A Video evening **Quiz** **Guest speakers** **Craftwork**

Halloween party **Painting** **Puzzles**

If any children, aged 7-12. are interested in joining, please telephone …

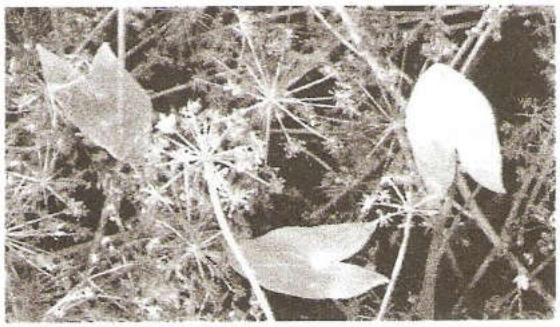
Sue Walters (Registered leader) 2075 1760

THE CANAL

by E.O.EDWARDS

Having had a look, and theorised about the Iron Bridge, we progressed north to Sunnybank Cottages, and found out quite a bit about them.

Before moving on, as you come abreast of the wall in front of the former cottages, look at the water; you will see leaves poking out, and they are the same shape as an Arrow Head. This gives the plant its name, and this is one of the very few places where it can be seen in South Wales.

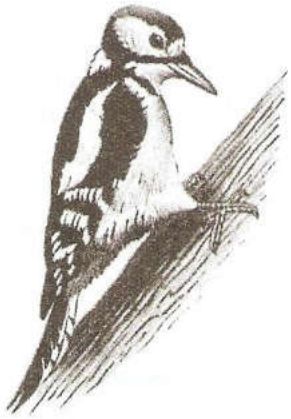


Sagittaria Sagittifolia
Growing in the Canal

Ten years ago, I remember that this plant was near Forest Lock; over the years it has moved down to its present position - how or why I don't know. Does it grow seed which drifts with the current, or what? Answers please!

Walk along the length of the wall; where the canal broadens out look at the bottom of the canal; there you might be able to see the **Fresh Water Sponge** - another rarity.

Further on you come to the new **Oak Gate**, purchased by the 'Friends', and opposite this the 22-metre section of canal wall that is due to be repaired this summer using the British Waterways system of hazel bundles and coir. At the moment our plan is on hold, because the headquarters of the Parks and Highways was burnt down last week; they were handling the contracting side of the plan.



Great Spotted Woodpecker

Further on, past the meadow with its commemoration **Oak Tree** planted by the 'Watch Group', you come to a wet wooded area on your left where the **Greater Spotted Woodpecker** nested this year. This is called **Sheeps Bane Wood** - an odd name, don't you think? No doubt there is a good scientific reason behind it, but the one I prefer is about when *Dai Me-me* had spent a morning trying to drive his sheep out of the swamp, got very wet, stomped into the house, and growled at his wife,"That damn wood is the bane of my life. I'll cut it down one day." Quick as a flash his wife *Jane Full-pelt*, in true Welsh fashion said, "Sheeps Bane Wood - what a lovely name! Put a fence around it, *Me-me*, and you'll have no more trouble." That's how it happened, didn't it?

Further up you come to the first lock; this is called **Forest Lock No. 43**. The **Lock House** was on the far side, and there was a stone arched bridge where the wooden bridge is today.

On the towpath side there were stables, and I should imagine a place for a sit-down and a pot of tea, or whatever they drank in those days.

I'm told that at one time a Sea Captain and his family lived in this house, and that he, on his travels, collected dried Butterflies and had them on display in glass cases around the walls. Was it his son that had the first motorbike in the area?

Do ask around, and write in if you have any bits of information that will breathe a little life back into this lovely place.

(photograph on next page)



Forest Lock House Glamorganshire Canal

NOTE FROM SPEAKERS SECRETARY

At the last AGM I volunteered to arrange some talks for our 2003/2004 programme. Although the dates are still far away, I thought members would like to have this advance notice of what has been organised. Further details will be included on the 2003/2004 membership card.

Wed 12th Nov 2003.	**Illustrated talk on the National Wetlands Centre of Wales, Llanelli.**
Wed 11th Feb 2004	**Illustrated talk on the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Project.**
Wed 14th April 2004	**Illustrated talk on the local history of Cowbridge.**

It has been suggested that members may welcome the opportunity of meeting up for a coach/boat trip to visit **Flat Holm Island**. Having it on a Saturday will enable members to bring members of their families. The coach will run from Whitchurch car park. Times will be dependent on tides, but to have the best chance of good weather, the trip will probably be run in early July 2003. The likely costs will be £9 per seat for the bus; the Council charges £13 per adult (no concessions) and £7 per child (under 17 years) to visit the island.

To gauge the response to this trip, or if you have any queries, would you please contact me either by telephone on **Cardiff 2062 6111** or drop me a line at **5 Clos Cromwell, Rhiwbina, CF14 6QN** within the next month. If it is then felt that the suggestion meets with your approval, further details will be included in the next Newsletter / membership card.

DUNCAN HOCKRIDGE

PASSAGE BOAT or FLY BOAT

E.O.Edwards

In his article on "How boats pass on the Canal" Harry Linck made reference to a Passage Boat. This triggered a memory I had of once researching the history of these boats. Apparently at their time they were the fastest mode of transport inland, running to a tight schedule and having priority over all other traffic. On the bow of the boats was carried a glittering scythe-blade as a proud symbol of their superior importance; it would sever the towline of any boat that did not drop her line quickly enough to let them through.

Harry lent me a book, "Hornblower and the Atropos" by C.S.Forrester; in this book Hornblower is making a trip on a Passage Boat from Gloucester to London along the Thames and Severn Canal, and I am assured that the account is factually correct, so I will quote from it. I must confess I enjoyed the rest of the book as well - thank you, Harry.

The boat, "Queen Charlotte", was about 70 feet long and 5 feet wide, with a draught of less than a foot. There were two tow lines attached to timber heads at bow and stern. One boatman rode as postillion on the rear horse, controlling the lead horse with shouts and the cracking of his whip; the other boatman sat at the tiller in the stern.

The boatmen had the trick of lifting the bows, by a sudden acceleration, on to the crest of the bow wave raised by the passage of the boat. It was this trick that made the fantastic speed possible - nine miles per hour, with a change of horses every half hour. The going was far smoother than the stage coach; it was nearly as fast and decidedly cheaper, at a penny a mile even in the First Class.

The two score of farmers' wives and wenches who sat aft in the Second Class with their chickens, ducks, eggs, and butter were all of them travelling as much as twenty miles to market, in the confident expectation of returning the same day. Assuredly this canal traffic was a miracle of modernity. Thank you, C.S.Forrester. So you see, the "Pony Express" was nothing new!

MOGGIES - PETS OR PESTS

Anon (Name & address supplied)

I pose this controversial question to our readers. To some of us cats are indeed lovable pets, but I venture to say that our friends in the wild think of them as pests with a capital 'P'. Despite consuming 500,000 tonnes of cat food, worth more than £750m, it would appear that our 7.7 million cats (plus goodness knows how many feral ones) are still hungry. In the 1990's an investigation for the Hawk Board carried out by Dr. Nick Fox, an environmental consultant, estimated that, "in a year 75 million birds and some 130 million mammals are killed by Britain's cats; simply reducing predation by cats during the sensitive breeding months of April—July could reduce wildlife deaths by 100 million a year."

It seems to me that however much a cat is fed, it will still go out, stalk and kill a young Thrush or Robin it may encounter on its travels. They are 24-hour predators. The danger they pose to ground-nesting birds has been highlighted by Chris Knight, a farmer and wildlife film-maker - "many people turn their cats out at night, so what dothey do? Hunt, of course."

I have my own personal experience of this. We have had Blue Tits nesting in our garden for the past five years, but as sure as night follows day - the 'black moggie' from 'up the road' is soon seen prowling under and around the nest box; regrettably, on two occasions it has been successful in disrupting the Tits to the extent that the eggs - and on two occasions the young - have been deserted. I am sure the cat had made a killing.



I have no problem in people having a cat for a pet; in fact, in the past we have had cats in our home, but I really think that all cat owners should be forced to make their pets wear a collar and, what is more important, a loud bell which may help in announcing to our friends in the wild impending danger from 'the enemy' !

YOUTHFUL MEMORIES

by **Les Gibbon** (10 Heol Pentwyn, Whitchurch)

I was born in October 1933 at No. 7, New Houses, Melingriffith. The houses were condemned about this time, and we all moved out in 1935, along with Sunny Bank.

I don't remember living there, but my mother told me stories about the houses. They were 'two up and two down', rents were four shillings and a ha'penny, and the fronts were called the Bailey; this made Melingriffith a bit unique, as it had three Baileys. She liked the summer days; people passing, especially cricketers on a Saturday afternoon, would stop and have a chat. Not long after my parents moved there we had a nasty fire; my mother had been ironing, and forgot the iron. It was the cricketers who ran from the Sports Field and helped put it out; some received money, as they had ruined their 'whites'!

She didn't like the nights there as my father worked nights a lot in the works; so my auntie, Lorna Pudge, came to live with us for company. She hated the 'black pats', as she called them, who came out as soon as it got dusk, and covered the walls and ceiling. She also told me of a huge spider that came out most evenings along the picture rail; she, or my Dad, could not kill it, but the day I was born it never came again! Who am I?

She also told me that the women fetched the water from the well more than the men, as they would hitch their skirts up; the men would get their trousers wet unless they wore wellies, as the water gushed out at that time. It was always really cold, even on the hottest days. She told me it was a job getting to sleep, as you could hear the mice running around in the attic. One night they could hear 'clink, clink, clink'. Dad lit the lamp, and there was a mouse running around a mug with a spoon in it.

Dad was head boy of the 'cold rolls' at fourteen; he then became foreman, and after the death of Mr Ivor Mercy he was made foreman of the Tinplate works until it closed in 1957. By the way, the well is still there. I've tried several times to get it cleaned out and re-built, but to no avail - a lone voice; perhaps if we all got together, something could be done. It's well worth saving, as it's from the 18th century, believed to have been built by the Harfords, along with Sunny Bank and New Houses.

Finally, a famous sportsman, Jack Peterson, Heavy Weight champ of Wales who was friendly with my Dad would often break his run and pop in for a few minutes and juggle me about on his knees as you do with toddlers.

Les Gibbon is a familiar figure in the Nature Reserve. He can be seen on most days, pushing his cycle along the towpath or sitting on the bench near the Lock, trying to read his newspaper, but spending more time chatting to passers by. There is nothing that Les doesn't know about the Canal and its history. He has an interesting collection of old photographs. He is a Voluntary Warden of the Reserve, and has a special interest in the fish found in the Canal and Feeder. In his youth Les was a well-known local amateur boxer.

Dennis Davies

Sunny Bank Cottages Photographs

by **Eric Tucker** (11 Manor Rise, Whitchurch)

Further to my letter in the March 2002 Issue, and the continuing interest in the Sunny Bank cottages ...

Members wishing to possess photographs of the cottages and other locations along the Canal can obtain copies from the Museum of Wales archives situated on **Nantgarw Industrial Estate**, the old colliery site. The exact location is just past the Cinema, on the opposite side of the road. Parking is available in front of the building. It is possible just to call in, but it would be advisable to phone first, to ensure that the person to see is available -

Mr Peter Bennett Telephone **029 2057 3562**

RSPB CARDIFF & DISTRICT LOCAL GROUP **from Sue Walters**

INDOOR MEETINGS

(Please note change of venue)

Lecture Theatre 4 (ground floor)
Cyncoed Campus of **UWIC**
Cyncoed Road Cardiff

Friday 18th October	Gardening for wildlife.
	Do your bit for conservation, helped by **Tony Hamblin.**
Friday 15th November	"Memories of Morocco"
	Gordon Lansbury makes a welcome return.
Friday 7th December	The wildlife of Northern France.
	A 'local' area abroad shown to us by **Roy Croucher.**

FORTHCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Sunday 27th October	**The Gower.**
	Coastal estuaries and beaches.
Sunday 24th November	**Parc Slip, Parc Pond and Kenfig.**
	Wildfowl and Waders locally.
Sunday 8th December	WWT **Slimbridge.**
	Swans and Geese galore.

A non-refundable deposit of £10 will secure a seat on the coach.
If you would like to book a place, please contact Field Secretary

Joy Lyman Tel. no. **2077 0031**

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

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

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