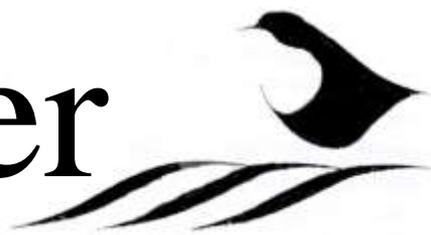




Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Autumn 2007 no 64

Through the Chair

Recreation in Rivelin

No, I'm not talking about rebuilding Rivelin Mill Pond even though it is one of my favourite subjects – I'm thinking about genuine recreation – the recovery of people's spiritual health and well-being by taking a stroll or picnic in Rivelin Valley. We do not realise today just what this magical spot meant to Sheffield Folk in years gone by. I have just been booked to give my slide lecture on "Rivelin Valley – the Cause of Conservation" for the 70th time. Out of a selection of 12 different topics this is the subject dearest to the heart of every community group in Sheffield. From Beighton to Bradfield and Greenhill to Grenoside and even further afield like Bakewell, Penistone or Royston, it's amazing how many people recollect family expeditions to Rivelin. They love to see slides of places they remember having happy times between the hardship of earning a living in one of the most smoke-polluted atmospheres in the Country. They are grateful to see a Community Group like RVCG still, not just promoting the Valley's landscape and wildlife, but actually ensuring its maintenance by getting stuck in. That's well over 2000 individuals who think you are great and regularly give us a vote of confidence. Take it from me – RVCG is appreciated.

Roger and Out

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Donations

The total amount of donations sent with membership this year now totals £537. Also thanks this quarter for donation from Maas. All these donations are put to good use in our work in the valley.

Planning

Like me, you may have heard about government plans for future housing development in Yorkshire. It seems likely that even more houses will have to be built than either the Council or the Regional Authority had previously planned for. The Government will soon pronounce on the number of dwellings which have to be built in Yorkshire up to 2021, and it seems likely that the figures on which Sheffield has based its proposals in the recently published draft Development Framework will be substantially increased. Planning at the regional level may seem very remote but it will have a profound effect on the nature and shape of Sheffield for years to come. The Councils in Yorkshire will have no choice but to allocate land for the dwellings that the government dictates must be provided. For the Rivelin Valley, this could mean even more pressure to release green belt land. Unfortunately, you will have no say in the decisions of the government on this matter. I will keep our members informed as further information becomes available. At the local level, there are a number of planning issues to report. Following further correspondence with the Council's Head of Planning, I don't feel we can take matters at Model Farm and at Oaks Farm (both on Tofts Lane, Stannington) any further. I have been informed by the Head of Planning that 79 dwellings and 29 apartments on the Loxley College site. The main reasons are the

adverse effect on the Green Belt and the environment of the Loxley Valley. R.V.C.G. had previously opposed this application. An objection has been lodged on behalf of R.V.C.G. to an application for two semi-detached dwellings west of Nichol Road/Bole Hill Road. It was considered that this development would extend the built-up area into the Valley and set a precedent for further incremental encroachment elsewhere.

Hearings before a government-appointed Inspector are to take place into the unauthorised dwelling at Redmires Road, Wyming Brook. R.V.C.G. has previously opposed this development and has confirmed this opposition in correspondence with the Inspectorate.

The former Post Office and café at the junction of Manchester Road and Rivelin Valley Road has been sold. We will watch with interest any proposals for the site and buildings, and will comment, as appropriate, on any planning application which may be submitted.

We are also watching the situation in respect to the excavations along Hagg Lane and the work being undertaken at the old King Edward's site on Rivelin Valley Rd.

Derek Hastings.

Visit to Old Moor 23rd Sept

A group of RVCG members visited this wetland reserve near Wombwell in the Dearne valley on a fine Sunday and we all enjoyed our tour of the hides, some of us very pleased to be near knowledgeable people who could tell us what we were seeing. There is a huge variety of wetland birds to be seen here, though we did start off by viewing a multitude of greenfinches crammed onto their feeders. This was only the beginning because as we progressed around the reserve many more delights were to be seen. This reserve was formed from the subsidence caused by coal mining, helped by the removal of soil that was used to regenerate colliery waste tips and all this very well landscaped to encourage a variety of wildlife. Around 40 different birds were seen including grebe, coot, tufted duck, lapwings, golden plover, teal, dunlin, goosander, sandpiper, gadwall, heron, little

egret and mute swan. It was good to see this site being used by young people who were busy watching birds (feathered kind) and adding them to their lists.

Just to add to a good day out there is a very good café and shop, open all year round except Christmas day and Boxing Day. Also there is good disability access.

Contact for RSPB Old Moor Reserve
Tel: 01226 751593

M Sanderson

A Visitor in Rivelin

In April 1876, a gentleman arrived at the Walkley end of Bole Hill Road and entered a small cottage that backed onto Bell Hagg Road to attend a meeting. He was well aware of the views over Rivelin Valley and the moors beyond because later when writing of Sheffield, he said, "Yorkshire is within easy reach of beautiful natural scenery." He was an influential person of his time – art critic, Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, a meticulous draughtsman and collector of art and beautiful objects. He was John Ruskin who moved in the Pre-Raphaelite circles of artists such as Millais and Burne-Jones. He was visiting the cottage that he had bought for the purpose of housing a museum for the education of men working in the traditional trades of Sheffield. As usual for the time, he only mentions 'men' though the report of the meeting says that six women were present. The building is still there but now much enlarged and turned into flats.

Ruskin was keen to found a museum here so that he could house some of his artefacts and works of art. This was just to be part of his greater vision of social reform born out of a hatred of industrialisation where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. He established the Guild of Saint George to further his work and one of its aims was to bring works of art to the people, hence the museum. The reasons for choosing Sheffield for the museum were explained in a statement of 1882 – "I acknowledge Ironwork as an art always useful to man", also "that Sheffield is in Yorkshire, its inhabitants old English and capable therefore of the Honesty and Piety by which old England lived." So here

he hoped was a hardworking population ready to grasp the education in the arts that Ruskin was ready to give. He wanted equality amongst people with works of art being in communal ownership instead of being housed by a few rich. Everyone should have access to as many books and pictures as they could look at or read. His ideas went further than works of art and included farming. Cattle and sheep should be on public lands and vast open spaces should be used for culture and gardens. Even the birds were to be in common ownership so nobody could shoot them. With this in mind he also bought a farm in Totley to be used for allotments. Both these schemes were unsuccessful. The Sheffield Daily Telegraph commented that the people Ruskin had done so much for, "refused to climb the painful slopes (of Walkley)" to see "costly treasures cribbed, cabined and confined." The Totley experiment failed because of poor land and men falling out with each other. The museum's lack of space led to it being moved to Meersbrook Park in 1890, provided by Sheffield Corporation. Later it was moved out of Sheffield to Reading University away from those for whom it was set up in the first place. Fortunately, it is now back with us, firstly in the old Hay's building on Norfolk Street and now in the Millennium Gallery.

There you can see a delightful mixture of precious minerals, wonderful casts of carvings taken from Italian churches, medieval hand illustrated books and paintings and drawings, including some by Turner. The enlarged cottage on Bole Hill Road is called Ruskin House and the views of Rivelin are still there.

Thanks to the Curator of the Ruskin Museum, John Ruskin An Illustrated Guide James S Deardon The Brantwood Trust 1981 and Art and Society in Sheffield 1876 Robert Hewison, Guild of St George Lecture 1979.

M Sanderson

Open Meeting 11th September

The Work of the South Yorkshire Badger Group

Monica Ward, the chairperson of the group came to keep us up to date on badger activities. As before, the threat to badgers is still with us, through digging and snaring by those who take delight in the cruelty afforded by the "sport" of badger baiting. Badgers live in social groups and rely on their sense of smell that is 600 times more powerful than ours. Their large nose and long claws enable them to dig. Recently it has been discovered that a sow will mate outside the family group, so introducing new genes. Cubs are born between February and April and remain underground until weaning in May. They stay with mother for one year. Badger setts can sometimes become a nuisance such as when alongside railways or under walls that can collapse. Badger Groups will assist with relocation of setts when this happens. Threats to badgers can also come from slug pellets and rat poison. Vets who work with badger groups will give the antidote of vitamin K in peanut butter and syrup sandwiches, then their dung is monitored as it changes from the bright blue of the poison back to brown. The threat of snaring has been found on shooting estates around Sheffield and causes terrible distress to foxes and pets as well as badgers. TB in cattle is not a problem in South Yorkshire. Ten years of culling where TB is prevalent has not worked as other badgers move into culled areas and 80% of TB is spread cattle to cattle. In some urban areas, badgers setts are increasing in size. People are finding badgers attractive to watch and are feeding them. Sows will only produce young if they are fat and so breeding rates will increase. This can lead to great damage being caused in gardens (RVCG often hears reports of this). The badger group recommends that they should not be fed artificially but if they are, food should be gradually reduced so that they become used to searching for their natural food. It is illegal for anyone to harm badgers or their setts under the 1992 Act. If you see any suspicious activity around a badger sett contact the **SY Badger Group Help**

Line on 07778 660065 or if no one is available dial 999. Never approach the people involved – they are often dangerous, but take a description of persons, dogs, vehicles and equipment.

M Sanderson

Digging in Rivelin

No – not badgers this time but human activity of an interesting kind. The archaeology department of the University of Sheffield was at work at Holme Head Wheel for ten days in June. Their plans were to find traces of workshops up to the 1st World War era. This work provided training for around eleven undergraduates. The students exposed early 20thc concrete flooring, grinding troughs and remains of a hearth. Knives were finished on this site and damaged knife blades that had been discarded have been found. Bob Johnston, the archaeologist is to get specialist advice on cutlery. Earlier structures are still there beneath the concrete flooring and excavations are hoped to continue next year. A report on the dig will be published so watch this space. Also, working with the ranger service, there are plans to provide on site interpretation.

Thanks to Bob Johnston for information.

M Sanderson

While on the subject of Rivelin's past don't forget Keith Kendall's book 'Walking the Rivelin'. Copies are available from him (see contact list) £5 including postage and packing.

Task Team

There are no reports this time as they all escaped on holiday. The chain gang is now recaptured and by the time you read this will be back at work under Keith's whip.

Wadsley and Loxley Commoners

Here is some information on their future events. All events at Wadsley Church Hall
Saturday 3 November 07

Barn Dance with the Rhythm Chaps and pea and pie supper. 7.30 – 11.00 Phone 2335331 or 2343385 to book.

Monday 19 November 07

Peter Machan Lords and Ladies of Hallamshire.

7.30

Monday 10 December 07

Ray Battye Gannister Mining on the Common

7.30

Monday 21 January 08

Paul Hobson Wildlife Photography 7.30

Monday 18 Feb 08

Geraldine Hughes My Work and Life as a Potter 7.30 Work on sale.

Monday 17 March 08

Malcolm Nunn Historical Slides 7.30

Monday 21 April 08

Bob Horton Magical Sheffield

For more details ring Alan 2348425

Don't forget to look at your winter programme and join us in our Open Meetings. You are welcome to bring someone with you – they do not have to be members.

Do you have any interesting stories concerning Rivelin? Please contact Margaret S (see contacts list). We would love to see some in this newsletter.



Finally, after years of pressure from the RVCG, Thursday 17th May saw the grand opening of the new Rivelin Mill Dam. The day was attended by Council dignitaries and rangers, the RVCG committee and some of its members, also members of the public and a class of children from Lydgate Middle School to test out the new pond dipping platform. The Council had made a wonderful job of installing the new dam, its surrounding paths and landscaping. The RVCG had contributed by building the pond retaining wall and installing the pond dipping platform. The RVCG has further plans to add picnic benches and an interpretation board. The group has already installed a new gate at the Rivelin Post Office end of the dam and have installed bird boxes on surrounding trees.



After just a few weeks the pond was already teeming in aquatic creatures and Keith Kendall, the RVCG task team organiser, can be seen here discussing the children's wiggly squirmy catch.

I watched the new series of 'The Nature of Britain' with Alan Titchmarsh and it highlighted the crucial links between animals, insects and farming practices. By allowing the insects to thrive the animals and birds also thrived. It's a case of striking the right balance. On the BBC 'Science and Nature' website there is a 'Breathing Spaces' week at the end of October inviting people to get involved in building wildlife habitats. The RVCG task team have always included the creation of wildlife habitats in all its projects such as creating log piles when coppicing the woodland, the installation of bird boxes and the restoration of the ponds. If you look after the micro-organisms, the insects, birds and animals will look after themselves!

The great Badger debate continues with the announcement today that the governments scientific advisor has recommended a badger cull in some of the most TB ridden areas of Britain. I have only just read recently that a similar cull in Southern Ireland proved to be very expensive and the results showed that limited culls were relatively ineffective as individuals fled and increased TB counts in adjacent areas.

We have had numerous reports of badger activity with one lady asking about how to stop badgers digging up the garden. I raised the question at the recent SY Badger group meeting and was told to remove the source of food or provide a suitable fence although badgers can dig. Many lawns have the leather jacket (daddy longlegs) in excess due to the mild winters and these can be reduced with suitable treatment. Badgers also eat a lot of worms but we wouldn't want to get rid of those so a suitable fence or electric fence is probably the best solution.

The Ranger Events book is now out and if you fancy getting your hands mucky, there are three local events:

Sun 25th Nov – Tree felling and coppicing Clough Fields 10:30am –3:00pm followed by tree planting.

Sun 16th Dec – Xmas at Rivelin for festive

activities and stalls. Rivelin Park Café
10:30 – 3:00pm
Sat 19th Jan – Hagg Wood management
Long Lane Parking Bay 10:30 – 3pm
Contact West Ranger Team 01142686196

Reports

I have received emails thanking the RVCG on its success at Rivelin Mill. One all the way from an ex Rivelinite in Australia (thanks Tony) and Carol Lofthouse went on to say that she had seen a few ducklings racing around the pond and also a couple of wagtails on the nature trail back in April. Claudia Hall also reported grey wagtail at Swallow Wheel 11 May.

Aug – Margaret Sanderson walking along Wymingbrook Drive spotted Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia Nemorum*). Margaret Sanderson also reported Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium Prateuse*) on Hagg Lane, Skull Cap (*Scutellaria Galericulata*) at Hind Wheel and a badger on Den Bank. Joan Buckland reported seeing 18 house martins around Den Bank Close.

Joan Buckland is a new recruit to the RVCG committee and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience of local wildlife.

Maureen Owen, David and Anne Mason reported actually seeing a goldfish in Rivelin mill Pond 7 August. As much as I thought this might be a wind up, it was also confirmed by Ken Shail who is one of our most senior and respected members of the RVCG and at 80 something is still a regular active member of the task team. There, don't you all feel ashamed of yourselves now?

Sep – members reported the following sightings in their gardens:

Flocks of long tailed tits by several members – which is quite normal this time of year and often these flocks contain different members of the tit family.

Margaret Sanderson reported Coal Tits, Green Finch and Chaffinch.

Margaret Owen - Greater Spotted Woodpecker

Keith Kendall - Sparrow Hawk and Jay

Graham Appleby Group Recorder