



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Autumn 2009 no 72 Through The Chair

Communing with Nature

Those of you who read the Sheffield Telegraph will know that Keith and I had the privilege of attending their Awards Night at Whirlow Hall the other evening. We were there to receive the Winner's Trophy in the Community Section on behalf of the Group which had been nominated by Mrs Rita Whiteley. We were delighted to be able to take Rita and Edward along with us to witness the event which was hosted by Paul Hudson. Paul gave the guests a short anecdotal talk on Climate Change before announcing the various Category Winners. He read out the citation for RVCG and it was great to see our achievements recognised in this way.

We are the largest Community Voluntary Group in the city and the impact all your efforts have made is actually appreciated by the wider world. That folk can still enjoy getting back to nature along our valley – walking the dog, studying the natural and industrial history or simply recharging the batteries within the peace and tranquillity of Sheffield's best bit of countryside is down to your efforts. Well done – whatever your contribution, you are to be congratulated for your contribution to the well-being of the local community.

Roger and Out
(soon to be down and out!)

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Donations

Many thanks again for your donations to Machin, Goulding Jackson Hoyland Kershaw Russell, Szabo Gwynn-Jones and Harston. We have had over £600 in donations this year and we are very grateful for its help to continue our work in the valley. Also thanks to everyone who has helped our group this year from the Task Group volunteers to those involved in printing, organising, sorting into areas and delivering our newsletter. Also thanks to those involved in catering, organising events and open meetings, technical help, planning matters, publicity and to all our members.

A New Local History Book

As a follow up to his book "A Look at life in Bradfield Dale and the Stannington Area", Joe Castle has produced a booklet, "The Early Years of Stannington Top House", being the story of the Crown and Glove public house, known on both sides of the valley and where RVCG finished up after a recent walk. In the booklet Joe reveals how it got its name, the only one in the country. The booklet costs £2 and a proportion of the proceeds going to charity. Copies of the book are available by order only from the Crown and Glove or from Joe Castle on 0114 2301032

River Channel Flood Management Work

You might have notice the disappearance of trees at Malin Bridge which has changed the landscape. The Environment Agency has sent the following information. "The initial work involves the removal of trees from the river channel and mill race at the junction of the rivers Loxley and Rivelin. This has been carefully timed to avoid the bird nesting season and the trout spawning season which begins in October." "Trees growing in river channels can lead

to serious problems during flood or high water events when branches and trunks can end up causing blockages in the channel and under bridges.”

This programme will help to reduce the flood risk to large parts of Sheffield and before long we hope to see the site looking attractive again.

Close Encounters October 2009

One night last week, I heard loud banging noises coming from near the back door. I looked out of the window and could see nothing. Next morning, I found the containers of bird food that I kept there had been moved down four steps and were on the lawn. They had very secure lids. The one with fat balls had been opened and the empty packet was a long way down the garden. I bought some more fat balls, put them back in the container and placed a very heavy boulder on top. The next night I heard the same noises and opened the door and a very well fed badger was within inches of me and we stayed looking at each other for what seemed a long time until I shooed him/her away. The boulder had been moved down four steps and the fat ball container was open on the lawn. The badger seemed to be returning for the box of birdseed. This serves as a reminder that the South Yorkshire Badger Group says that feeding badgers is not a very good idea. Firstly, they are not getting food that is natural for them and secondly, it leads to increased fertility bringing problems in urban areas. I wondered if the tameness of the badger was because of this.

Margaret Sanderson

Did Waltheof Have a Hall Here?

Yes, he did because the Domesday Book (1086) says so. The hall was somewhere in Hallamshire but it omits to say exactly whereabouts and this anonymous writer has caused problems for historians ever since.

Waltheof was an Anglo-Saxon earl who had the misfortune to be around at the time of William the Conqueror. Our most well known local historian, David Hey is certain that the hall was on the naturally defensive site at the confluence of the Don and Sheaf later to become the site of Sheffield Castle

and the present market. Burnt timbers of the period were found there during an excavation. Two more historians, Hunter and J D Leader thought so too. S O Addy thought it was in Rivelin, near to Stannington but the Rev. Odom and Walter Hall were convinced that it stood at Hallam Head near the present golf course which was also a possible site of the long gone village of Hallam.

One thing is certain that in this dim and shadowy time without a great deal of written history, the old boundaries of Hallamshire (which are not quite the same as the present constituency) would contain the heavily wooded, good hunting and hawking country essential for an aristocratic lifestyle.

Waltheof's hall was likely to be similar to the one described in the Anglo-Saxon poem, Beowulf. It would have been richly decorated to show off wealth, a place of hospitality and revelry, convenient for meetings and sometimes acting as a courthouse. In times of trouble the hall would be filled with soldiers, their bedding lying on the floor and weapons stacked around the walls, a good place to plot against your enemies. It was also built of wood, convenient for William when he was in his 'burning and razing to the ground' mood.

Waltheof was unfortunate in that he wavered in his commitment to William. At first, they were friends and he managed to keep his lands when other Saxon lords lost them and their lives. He even spent time in France with William and married his niece, Judith.

Waltheof along with invading Danes became involved in a plot against William but they were later reconciled perhaps indicating that Waltheof was a charismatic figure but later he joined a conspiracy to divide the country between himself and the Earl of Norfolk. He confessed this to the Archbishop of Canterbury and was given a penance but this was not enough. William worked on the same principle as invading Romans. If you weren't for him, you were against him. Waltheof was arrested and taken to Winchester where he was beheaded in 1076 and buried at crossroads.

Later, on intercession from his wife he was re-interred at Crowland Abbey where he was venerated probably because of his generosity to the church. This information on Waltheof's downfall comes from Odam's 'Historic Personages of Sheffield', but he gives no sources. Countess Judith inherited his land.

The question of Waltheof's hall still remains. Walter Hall thinks that the site on the Don and Sheaf would have been Swein's of the Manor of Sheffield. His preferred site above the Rivelin in what he believed to be the ancient village of Hallam comes from the Latin of the Domesday Book –

"Ibidem habituit comes Wallef aulum".

(In the same place the companion Wallef had a hall.)

But there is no archaeological evidence for this but there is a loose link with the local name 'Burnt Stones' which perhaps refers to William's devastating quelling and laying waste to the rebellious north. If you live around the area and digging your garden, look out for the remains of a burned Anglo-Saxon hall and let's reclaim Waltheof's hall for Rivelin. Just make sure that any burnt timbers are not the remains of Bonfire Night. But maybe you would want to keep it a secret. Having an archaeological site in your back garden could become an onerous duty.

Margaret Sanderson

Some Recent Events

2nd October Group Barbecue

Once more this was in Ken's spacious garden and he managed to mow the lawns in readiness despite the constant rain. As usual the day was fine. In all the years of RVCG barbecues it has only rained heavily once. Thanks to everyone for contributing and especially to Ken for lending us this haven in the middle of Crosspool and Glenda for the usual catering – not a burnt sausage in sight!

8th September Graham Appleby in Kenya

This was the second part of Graham's trip and we started with a magnificent balloon ride which makes us all want to go there to do it for ourselves especially as it involved

a champagne breakfast. Accompanied by jungle noises, we looked down on scenes of giraffes, lions, elephants, zebras and more, all with wonderful sunrise scenes.

The Kenyan people look happy, colourful and friendly and coping with visitors must bring a welcome livelihood.

Where are you going to next Graham?

13th October 101 Natural History Enquiries

Paul Robinson, a curator from Sheffield Museum returned to give a talk on his work. Last time we heard about alien invaders but there's a lot more to Paul's job than that. He seems to be permanently on the phone answering Sheffielders' wildlife queries.

In between phone calls he manages to research, teach, cope with school visits and keep the natural history collection in good order. He also seems to be a skilled taxidermist and prehistoric monster model maker. (If you ever make one, lentils are very good scales). We also learned that the museum is doing well since its revamp. A popular attraction is that you can find out what the weather was like on the day you were born or any other date you fancy. Weston Park has a long history of weather recording. When you see Paul Hudson on Look North, think about the help he has received. He's already been on the phone to the museum to check the day's records. Many strange creatures have found their way into Sheffield requiring an anxious phone call. Freshwater jellyfish were found in the canal basin. They probably came from the Amazon via someone's aquarium. An urgent phone call said, "A lobster's walking up Ecclesall Road past our school." It turned out to be our rare native crayfish. Where had it come from? A hoopoe (a rare sighting in England) was found in Bradfield and someone e-mailed a photo of a small fat snake with big eyes and a spiky tail. It turned out to be an elephant hawk moth. Paul also copes with such questions such as where to find rare butterflies in foreign places.

It is evident from this talk that the museum is the centre of a lot of learning and information and contains many priceless and historic natural history collections. We

had a good glimpse of behind the scenes work but it is also a good hands on experience for children, well worth a visit and with an excellent café to collapse in when you have finished.

Some Wadsley and Loxley Commoner Events

Monday 16th November

Manor Lodge – a talk by Peter Machin
7.30pm at Wadsley Church Hall, Worrall Rd

Saturday 28th November

A Wadsley and Loxley Commoners/ Ranger Service

Bird Box Making – meet at the grassy area above the steps just up from Rural Lane Car Park at 1.30-3pm. Look for the Ranger Van.

Monday 14th December

The Origins of Christmas Carols – History and Singing led by Malcolm Nunn 7.30pm at Wadsley Church Hall Worrall Rd
Contact for the above events - phone 2335331

Please don't forget our own programme of events at Stephen Hill and enjoy Glenda's cakes and coffee. Bring a friend. Next ones include Susan and Alan Parker, Birding in South Yorkshire – 10th November and our own local Carol Evening led by Malcolm Nunn 8th December, both at 7.30pm. See your events programme for more.

This is your last newsletter before Christmas. As you know, our Chairman, Roger is retiring next year and we are just becoming aware of the many jobs that he does and some of these we are looking to spread around a bit. A lot of you do practical jobs for us but we will soon be asking for more help.

Watch This Space

A Happy Christmas and New Year to all our members.

THE RECORDER

By Joan Buckland – RVCG Recorder

Summer has been a bit of a washout but autumn has so far been dry with a

fair amount of sun. This led to flurry of late sightings of coloured butterflies, mainly Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Painted Lady. That until then had not been very plentiful. Those of you who had cut back their Buddleia hard in the spring should have witnessed this late spectacle. Throughout the summer there were plenty of small and large Cabbage White, Gatekeeper (Hedge Brown), Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood butterflies.

Caterpillars are not the Gardeners favourite things but that dowdy looking creature, on closer inspection, can be weird and wonderful. I was closing the garage door and noticed a dark blob, which I picked off. This turned out to be a knobbly, stick-like looper caterpillar, which on identification I was amazed to find would, hopefully, metamorphose into the beautiful yellow Brimstone Moth. I had seen a large yellow moth flitting about earlier in the year. The moral is, do not squash every caterpillar you see as they could turn into something beautiful.

If you want moths in your garden, grow plants that have adapted their flowers to release their perfume at dusk. They usually have light solid colours that stand out in the evening. Some flowers to consider are Evening Primrose, Honeysuckle, Lilac, Petunia, Phlox, Buddleia, Nicotiana, Ivy and Campion. I take no responsibility for caterpillar damage and your friendly neighbourhood bats will eat a lot of the moths anyway!!

Still, talking about caterpillars, has anyone seen any Cinnabar Moth caterpillars? I always have a few Ragwort plants in my garden as this is the only food plant of this moth, but I

have not seen them or the caterpillars for a couple of years now. Please let me know if you have spotted any. It is important that we keep as full a record of plants, animals and insects as possible to show how diverse our area is. Certain plants and creatures have specific requirements and if these are lost they disappear.

If you think there are more spiders, Daddy Longlegs etc than usual, you are correct. Last year's wet weather has produced a bonanza of insects, which is good news for birds and bats. We are thinking of holding a photographic competition next year so now is the time to get that fantastic spider picture with the dew on its web or one of the fabulous sunsets we get over the valley.

RECORDS

Derek Hastings July / August 09 – two Greenfinch on nut feeder in garden – first sighting for two years. Also Gatekeeper butterfly on oregano (which is a good plant to attract insects)

Margaret Sanderson September 09 – Peacock, Ringlet, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Hawthorne Shield Bug, Nuthatch, Jay, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Greenfinch, Chaffinch and bullfinch.

Margaret and I went for a walk on the sledging field on 7th August. It was a warm sunny morning after a wet night. There was a lot of colour from the flowers and plenty of Meadow Brown butterflies mainly feeding on the pink bramble flowers. There were three stems of Marsh Orchid with healthy looking seeds. Other plants noted were:
Milkwort, various docks, Great Willow

herb, Broad-leaved Willow herb, Tutsan – St Johns Wort, Common Marsh Bedstraw, Brooklime – Veronica Beccabunga (lovely name), Foxglove, Hogweed, Ragwort, Self Heal, Hawksbit, Yarrow, Knapweed, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Bistort, Tormentil, Yellow Rattle, Sheep's Sorrell, Common Sorrell, Harebells, White Clover, White Deadnettle and Stitchwort. If anyone can add to the list, please let me know.

Margaret Sanderson has also compiled an excellent table with data of frogs spawning in her garden pond over a ten-year period. This type of recording is very important and gives experts information on climatic conditions. The art of phenology (noting and studying of times of recurring natural phenomena) is fascinating and useful. If many people did this, we could build up a picture of what is changing in this respect.

Frogspawn Data

M Sanderson Den Bank Close

YEAR	1st FROGSPAWN	1st TADPOLE	No of days hatching
2000	March 10	March 25	15
2001	March 31	April 22	22
2002	March 25	April 6	12
2003	March 9	March 25	16
2004	March 7	April 2	26
2005	March 16	Heavy frost killed spawn	
2006	March 16	April 15	30
2007	March 6	March 29	23
2008	March 1 March 25	Heavy frost killed all spawn April 14	20
2009	March 12	Heavy frost killed all spawn	

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