



# Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

## Spring 2015 no 94

### Through The Chair

Spring is my favourite season. The bright greens of bud burst begin to add a splash of colour to the landscape but everything can still be seen in great detail; the remains of the mill wheel pits, the mill ponds and even the River Rivelin itself. The winter weather caused more tree damage this year than I ever remember. Fortunately the Sheffield City Council has been quick to unblock roads and footpaths with a little help from the RVCG task team. I do wonder if the warmer climate is allowing trees to grow faster and lankier making them more vulnerable to the strong winds particularly when laden with ice and snow.

As we enter the RVCG's 25<sup>th</sup> year, I am very proud to be leading a thriving voluntary organisation with more than 500 members, 9 committee members and an army of some 70 active members making the RVCG tick like clockwork. And thanks to the generosity of our members, we have the funds to supply the task team with the tools and safety equipment they need to work effectively on valley projects organised by Keith Kendall.

There are a number of activities planned this year for the Sheffield Environment Weeks and Ruskin In Sheffield that you can read all about in this newsletter. Please take some time out from your normal activities to support these special cultural and educational events. I would also like to see you at our Summer Tea Party in July where we celebrate the years activities and thank you for your continued support.

Graham Appleby  
RVCG Chairman

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### Membership Renewal

Thank you to all who have renewed their membership. It is still not too late if you have not already done so. Otherwise this will be your last newsletter. RVCG would like to keep you (and you want us don't you?)

### Donations

Many thanks this quarter to - Addison, Andrew, Davidson, Heathcote, Morton, Nutton, Peak, Hague, Lawrence, Redman, Woodhouse, Betts, Harrison, Robinson, Baines, Crellin, Dakin, Drinkwater, Henderson, Hill, Pawson, Saunders, Toseland, Albans, Fish, Goulding, Hill, King, Lee, Legg, Liddell, Bennett, Bradshaw, Byles, Cooper, Higbid, Lewis, Mason, McDermot, Morrell, Oakes, Owen, Palmer, Peter, Richards, Shail, Upchurch, Aizlewood, Beardmore, Best, Bruce, Clarke, Elliot, Foster, Higginbottom, Kettleborough, Paragreen, Rybinski, Shaw, Sorsby, Toplis, Wilde, Whitely, Wright, Edmonds, Emsley, Green, Hanson, Helliwell, Keen, Lampeter, Large, Neal, Rotchell, Woollen, Allen, Boddington, Grace, Habershon, Horsefield, Parker, Seaman, Slack, Wood, Birkett, Daines, Isherwood, Jackman, Mansell, Purdy, Sharpe, Thompson, Warrington, Cotton, Farrelly, Fletcher, Frith, Hetherington, Purslow, Walshaw, Ward and 'anon'.

If your name is not here it is because your membership arrived after this newsletter was sent for printing and delivery. Donations amount to £937 so far this year. We are very grateful for all your membership and donations. It helps RVCG to do its work.

Where would our valley be without you and the Task Group?

## **Task Team News**

### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

This morning saw fourteen of us down at the Rivelin Mill at Rails Road, a morning of mixed weather and a decent soaking before we started meant that the job in question was in doubt right up to us turning up.

The dipping platform was looking a bit worse for the wet winter we have had and fourteen pieces of the platform had just rotted and needed replacing. The platform had become like a skating rink so well done to David, Roger and Graham who managed to do the work without falling in. (Makes a change for us.)

The rest of us set about the willow tunnel which is in a really sorry state. The idea was to use 130 6ft garden canes to make a supporting frame for the side willows and to cut free the top of the tunnel which had become so entangled with some of the strong growth pulling the weaker and distorting the tunnel. The idea now is to let the willow grow as two separate walls for 6-12 months and then start again to make a tunnel but a little different to what we did before. Well done to all who helped with this and sticking with it through the rain. Once all this was done, Graham Roger and I went to the inlet to the dam which had become blocked with all the rubbish of winter and with a request from the council to help free it after the water level dropped. 30 minutes with a good long garden rake to get all the leaves and logs out and it was running free again, not as easy as it sounds as the access is difficult and you are waist deep in water to get to it.

Keith Kendall

### **Rivelin Story Walk 18<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014**

As part of "Off the Shelf" Festival in Sheffield, I organised a story walk for families to encourage them to look at their surroundings in a new way and use imagination to help them to write and tell stories.

The event was a resounding success and twenty seven children and twenty three adults attended the event. I had to split the

event into two walks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Luckily it was a beautiful sunny day-very warm for the time of year with the trees in full autumn colour.

We set off from Rivelin Park Café and walked as far as the Nether Cut mill pond, so that we didn't have to cross any roads. This walk takes about twenty minutes at a brisk pace but much longer when you are looking out for fairy hideouts and caves, goblin thrones and palaces, (Roscoe Wheel), giants' footprints and magical creatures. The children had a wonderful time and only two of them got wet when they slipped over on the stepping stones! The Rivelin Valley is ideal for firing children's imagination-full of mysterious ruins, gnarled trees, old allotments and of course the magical river itself.

The children were fascinated by the wildlife that we found on the walk. A bulbous garden spider abseiled down from a great high tree branch right in front of us and we watched in fascination as it climbed back up. When we reached Nether Cut mill pond, we were treated to a spiny Pale Tussock Moth caterpillar - a miniature dragon! After the excitement of the walk, we returned to the café where the children were treated to delicious chocolate cakes and the grown-ups relaxed with a coffee. The children spent all the evening writing their stories and they slept soundly after the fresh air, imagination and exercise. I would love to run this event again or something else that combines creative writing and the magical surroundings of the Rivelin Valley.

Anne Grange

### **The River Runs Through Me**

My roots are in Rivelin Valley. Walkley was my home to both sides of my family for several generations and from the age of three I grew up in Stannington. Mum and Dad were passionate ramblers and from my earliest days I was coaxed and carried down the hill, over the river and up the other side to visit grandparents in Crosspool. As soon as I was old enough to

disappear for the day, Rivelin became my playground and the river and its romantic landscape have been my principal point of reference for more than 60 years. You could argue that my career in conservation started here. My mum has a dog-eared cutting from the Sheffield Star dated 1962. I was 15 and pictured by the Rails Packhorse Bridge calling for the council to repair some substantial vandalism. 45 years later I was a trustee of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund. Who'd have thought it?

My earliest close encounters with the natural world were in the Rivelin Valley. From the Riggs where I found my first lapwing's nest to the dippers and kingfishers of the river itself. This was where I learned the basic laws of wildlife habitats and nature conservation. In those early years I didn't know the names of many of the plants and animals I was seeing but Rivelin is a wonderful outdoor classroom for anyone who wants to learn about the way a living landscape links together. I still have vivid memories of the carpets of bluebells in Coppice Wood at Whitsuntide when the Stannington Church choir walked down to see the patients in the children's hospital. Even then I recognised the complete contrast between that rich woodland and the bare ground beneath the big beech trees and the rank bog habitat beneath the alders that were colonising the mill dams.

Most importantly, I learned to love the fact that Rivelin is a landscape full of ghosts. The ruined mills, the man-made weirs and cobbled pathways all added to the fascinations for landscapes with a working history. I have spent most of my adult life in the Black Country, where the legacy of canals, clay pits and quarries offers much the same mixture of natural and built heritage.

This powerful sense of the past and the intimate intertwining of wild nature and industrial memory also captivated my father, Stuart and my grandfather, Ben Baines. Ben was a typical Sheffield "little mester" with a small three-man engineering business in a cobbled

courtyard close to Arundel St. That was his life from 9 to 5, but in the evenings and at weekends he was a watercolour painter. Throughout the 1930's he was part of a small artists' colony based at Rivelin Corn Mill, by the Rails and as a consequence my family has several evocative paintings of the Rivelin Valley and its ruined mills. Now, thanks to the *Ruskin in Sheffield* initiative, I have an opportunity to share those paintings with lots of other people who love Rivelin Valley. I hope they help to explain why this is such a very special living landscape. – and how it has shaped my life in conservation.

Chris Baines

*(Chris Baines is an independent environmentalist, a national vice president of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts and chairman of the Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership – another landscape with very strong links to John Ruskin. Chris's book *The Wild Side of Town* won the UK conservation book prize in 1987.)*

A lot of people in this area have had the same childhood experience as Chris, giving them a lifetime love of Rivelin.

We always want your stories for this newsletter. Were you a child, paddling in the river, having picnics and catching tiddlers? Perhaps you were at one of the local schools or a patient at King Edward's or Lodge Moor hospitals. Did you attend a local church or have memories of the Post Office/cafe at the junction of Rivelin Valley Road and Manchester Road where many families ended their walk up the valley? They did a very good toasted teacake! Please send your stories to M Sanderson.

**Please don't forget to renew your Membership of RVCG**

## **When Did You Last See a Red Squirrel in the Sheffield Area?**

Many of you will be familiar with the entertaining children's story of Squirrel Nutkin by Beatrix Potter and his romps through the woods with his friends, eating nuts. Unfortunately red squirrels seem to have abandoned us and have retreated to a small number of sites in the UK. Once they could be seen on Wyming Brook Drive and in the valley but the last one I saw was at High Bradfield in the late 1970's. A major cause of their scarcity is the grey squirrel, introduced as a novelty from America (where they are also eaten!) The problem is that the greys carry a pox virus that does not affect them but is fatal to the reds. Grey squirrels also damage trees by stripping bark.

Prince Charles is a patron of the "Red Squirrel Trust" and has ordered the "the humane and lawful control of control of grey squirrels" on some of his duchy land.

Lord Redesdale who has an estate in Northumberland where the greys are threatening the reds received a grant to design a new humane trap, approved of by DEFRA that can be fixed to tree trunks. It has a hazelnut screwed onto a pressure plate that activates the trap. Lord Redesdale has already exterminated over 23,000 grey squirrels on his estates and hopes that the same thing can happen on a national scale. Perhaps one day our children will delight in seeing Squirrel Nutkin again.

Thanks to the Sunday Times for allowing facts from an article of 19.10.14 for these to be reprinted.

### **Some Recent RVCG Events**

#### **15<sup>th</sup> January 2015 An Illustrated Talk on Sheffield Manor, David Templeman**

This was a talk on the history of Sheffield Manor, once a deer park for the Shrewsbury family and prison for Mary Queen of Scots on the orders of Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### **10<sup>th</sup> February The Woodhead Pass, Stephen Gay**

We heard about the difficult task of providing a rail route in Victorian times across the Pennines between Sheffield and Manchester though now closed because it did not have enough customers to make it pay.

#### **10<sup>th</sup> March Sheffield's Woodland Heritage, Melvyn Jones**

We are very lucky to have so much woodland in our city and this was a talk on how much value

our woodland was in times past from making cruck barns, timbered buildings, charcoal burning to basket making and coppicing to provide stakes.

## **RECORDER**

### **THANK YOU TO ALL WHO SEND IN THEIR RECORDS**

**Helen Albans- 1.1.15** – Kingfisher on Nether Cut Wheel, Glen Bridge and Hind Wheel. Grey Wagtail on Little London Wheel. Helen says she used our new guide book to check the place-names. Brilliant.

**G. Warrington S10, Crookes – 27.2.15** – 2 Blue Tits investigating an old overflow pipe hole. Has seen tits nesting and feeding young and watched them flying in and out of the pipe over several years, obviously a good nest site. Also saw and heard a skein of geese flying over Arran Road, from south to north west, in the first week of February but too dark to identify them (probably Pink-footed Geese).

**Graeme Hodgson – 14.2.15** – 4 Canada Geese skating on thin ice on Hind Wheel; 2 courting Dippers at Third Coppice and was happy to see the snowdrops.

**Gillian Drinkwater S10 – 11.30am on 9.2.15** – saw a skein of 22 geese (probably Pink-footed) high above Dransfield Close flying SW.

**Maureen Owen S10 – 5.3.15** – 9.15am – delighted to see a Great Spotted Woodpecker on fat balls.

**Graham Appleby S10 – 2.3.15** – Saw 18 Mallard (10 ducks and 8 drakes) on Rivelin Mill pond. These once ubiquitous birds are now in decline. Let us hope we get lots of ducklings.

**27.3.2015** - Really excited to report a weasel seen in my garden in the afternoon of Friday 27th March

I was in the middle of a telephone conversation and saw the weasel ... weaselling around on the lawn

I went into the conservatory to have a closer look and beckoned the family to witness it. I ran away to grab my camera but alas it had disappeared on my return. About 6 to 8" pale brown with a white throat.

**31.3.15** - I grabbed a load of kindling from my wood store under the carport and brought it inside. I lit a fire lighter in the log burner and surrounded it in kindling and left it to catch light

Returning a few minutes later, I saw a queen

bumble bee flying around the inside of the woodburner trying desperately to evade the flames I opened the door and encouraged it to leave with a waft of my hand and it flew out of site into the roof of the conservatory Today it appeared covered in cobwebs upside down apparently dead on the floor of the conservatory. But no. I removed the cobwebs and it showed signs of life Therefore I did my usual dying bee trick and watered down some honey roughly 50/50 and put it with the bee in a saucer The bee was almost paralysed but it's little proboscis was flicking backwards and forwards sucking up the honey liquid After about 10 mins the liquid had reduced considerably so it had drunk quite a bit and showed signs of recovery

So I put the saucer back on the log pile whence it came for it to return to it's natural habitat. Obviously I need to be careful in future not to include it in the kindling. Log piles are home for all sorts of insects so need to take more care in future  
**Sue Shaw** – at Walkley Bank -5.11.14 and 5.2.15 – 8 Long-tailed Tits, 10.11.14 – 2 Fieldfares, 17.11.14 – 3 Jays, 16.1.15 – Tawny Owl calling at 5pm; 14.11.14 – deer at waterworks; 10.1.15 – Heron at Nether Cut and Hind Wheel; 1.2.15 – Buzzard over valley.

**Bob and Margaret Townrow** S10 – 10.3.15 – Female Brambling on niger seed, 1 Redpoll; 11.3.15 – 3 Bullfinches, 4 Goldfinches and 2 Nuthatches all at the same time; 13.3.15 – frogs arrived in pond; 16.3.15 – 1 Redpoll.

**Roger Kite** S10 – Frog report – 1<sup>st</sup> frog arrived on 5.3.15 and 1<sup>st</sup> frogspawn on 8.3.15 and by the 13<sup>th</sup> there were 40 frogs and plenty of frogspawn. It is so important for people to have wildlife ponds in their gardens as due to modern day farm practice the traditional ponds have mostly disappeared.

**Joan Buckland** S10 – I have had a little Goldcrest visiting the fat balls for the last three months, and there were 2 on the 25.1.15 so maybe they are a pair. The female Sparrowhawk flies through now and again and on the 27.3.15 she actually sat on the perch of the sparrows' nest box and peered in. I hope she has not frightened

them off. Magpies and Rooks have been busy pruning my plum tree for nesting material. One Rook broke off a large stick then skilfully worked its beak along it until it reached the middle, and flew off perfectly balanced. I get a pair of Bullfinches regularly, no doubt because of the fruit trees and a pair of Greenfinch occasionally. I also have a Wren sneaking around the garden, plus the everyday Blackbirds, Sparrows, Dunnock, Robins, Great Tits and Blue Tits with the occasional Coal Tit and Goldfinch.

Joan Buckland  
3.4.15.

### **RVCG Donation**

Hi Graham

Please find £100 towards your much appreciated work. Humble Swain are a group of six men who sing in harmony (usually). They specialise in the South Yorkshire carols sometimes called the Sheffield carols. We perform in churches, pubs, folk clubs and the like. Any monies earned are given to charities, such as yourselves. We collect money from both performances and sales of our CD's. We are non-profit making and do it to keep the old carols alive and because we like it

Good luck

John Fowler

Many thanks John and Humble Swain. We will put the money to good use. I purchased one of your CD's and would thoroughly recommend it to help keep the original Xmas spirit.

Graham Appleby