



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Summer 2015 no 95

Through The Chair

It's been quite an eventful year with our Summer programme and I can't believe it's all over so soon. We had a successful litter pick back in April followed by the Dawn Chorus walk supported by three highly experienced experts but was unfortunately cut short when the heavens opened. I was away for Roger Kites evening walk but I understand it was well attended and enjoyed by all. We have also had several Ruskin events brought to life by Ruth Nutter and her team with local lad made good and wildlife presenter, Chris Baines as ambassador. Chris revealed his local roots in the last newsletter and has volunteered to tell his story as a guest speaker for our November open meeting which I am really looking forward to if I can negotiate my way out of my wife's birthday plans! The Ruskin team also organised several events such as the Artists Colony-for-a-day supported by the RVCG which gave the public an opportunity to sketch and paint in memory of the artists colony that existed at Rivelin Mill in the 1920's and you can also read about the unveiling of the new plaque on Ruskin House on Bole Hill Road. The Ruskin team have also created 'The Ruskin Trail' linking various Ruskin locations and have a temporary Ruskin museum near to ASDA on South Road. Part of the trail includes some sophisticated way marker posts in the valley designed by Keith Kendall and Jonathon Paragreen and installed by the RVCG task team and we are looking for more sponsors. So lots going on and I hope you have joined us on at least one event!

Graham Appleby
RVCG Chairman

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Donations

Thanks to all of you who have renewed membership this year.

Also many thanks for the following donations from members that have arrived since the last newsletter – Birkett, Daines, Isherwood, Jackman, Mansell, Purdy, Thompson, Warrington, Brazil, Kershaw, Moorhouse, Willdig, Smith x2, Atter, Culmer, Flower, Humphries, Morton, Piermattei, Trickey, Beardshaw, France, Gladwell, Roe, Dean, Kitchen, Leathard, Lee, Tandy, Barrand, Duggan, Kershaw, Nockells, Robertson, Sharpe, White, Francis, Harston, Sharkey, Wileman, Woodhead, Dyson and Loasby.

Your donations are very welcome to the group. It helps us to do our work. As you know, we have a very active Task Group and donations that you send with membership are a great help to this voluntary work.

Since the last newsletter donations so far this year amount to over £1200.

If your name is not on this list, it is because your donation arrived after this newsletter was sent for printing and delivery.

We are also very grateful to all the people who work behind the scenes – those who organise the delivery round and the people who trek around the streets whatever the weather, posting them through your letterboxes.

Task Team News.

Task Day Sunday 28th June 2015

The first five of our new way marker posts and a new Ruskin information board at Rails Road, have now been installed. Many thanks to the Task Team members for a good morning's work. We hope to have all 21 sites marked as soon as possible to complement the new 'Walking the Rivelin' Book.

Each post costs the RVCG £200 and we are looking for sponsors who can have their details engraved on a plaque which has a QR code for mobile phone users to access more information and which can include a link to your company. Perhaps sponsor one in memory of a relative or just make a contribution towards the cost. - please contact Keith Kendall (rvcg@supanet.com) for more information.

Keith Kendall

If you would like to join the merry band of Task Team members please contact Keith Kendall. He will be very pleased to hear from you.

Ragwort

This rather nasty smelling but attractive looking yellow flowering plant is everywhere. It thrives in waste sites and fields. If it was hard to grow, we might be cultivating it in our gardens.

Some creatures like it. Over 117 insect species and bees use it as a nectar source including the declining cinnabar moth.

It is of most concern to people who keep cattle and horses, though they avoid it because it has a bitter taste. If dried in hay it becomes tasteless and can cause stomach troubles for horses. Landowners have a responsibility to prevent it spreading onto grazing land

The Ragwort Control Act of 2003 gives a code of practice and although impossible to eradicate, precautions must be taken.

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Valleyside Garden Centre Manchester
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Our Moorland Heritage

Some people who have never visited Sheffield think that it is a dirty, industrial place "up north". We know better and they might be surprised at the amount of moorland quite close to us. Three quarters of the world's heather moorland is in Britain and we have our own bit on Den Bank and around the Hagg Lane allotments area. Is this the nearest bit of moorland to our city centre?

Some time ago the council waged war on the bracken that threatened to obliterate the bilberries and heather on the Den Bank area. Bought blueberries do not compare with the flavour of bilberries and who would be without the scent and colour of heather?

Families would go out en-masse and sometimes have a picnic. It takes a long time to collect enough to make a pie or jam. Do you have any bilberrying (or blackberrying) stories? Please send to M Sanderson (see contact list for phone number). Also we would love to have any other Rivelin reminiscences for this newsletter. Did you play in the river or work in the valley? Perhaps someone could give us the lowdown on being a Task Team member or you might have valley stories such as collecting eggs from the Gosney family at Moor View Farm.

We need your stories.

M Sanderson

Here is something that might start you off. My Auntie Saved My Life

I was five years old and out for a walk on Wyming Brook Drive with my sister and Auntie Alice. Auntie A had brought a treat – some boiled sweets. These were on ration in wartime so it was a lovely surprise. I started choking when one got stuck down my throat. They said that I turned blue. I returned to consciousness being held upside down by my legs and my sister bashing me on my back, the boiled sweet landing on the ground. After that, boiled sweets were banned.

Please note –

There are better ways of dealing with this emergency now – e.g. the Heimlich procedure. First Aid books or a course will explain.

M Sanderson

An Unusual Visitor to Redmires in WW1

Admiral Karl Doenitz (1891 – 1980) became a sea cadet as a youth and by 1913 was an acting sub lieutenant in the German navy. He served first on a cruiser in the Mediterranean but in 1916 requested a transfer to the Submarine Forces where he became a Watch Officer. By 1918 he was a commander of a U-Boat in the Mediterranean. The boat was sunk by the British and he was imprisoned on Malta. In 1918, he was moved to the camp at Redmires here in Sheffield.

Perhaps it was thought that such a notorious prisoner was safe in this remote spot.

This was the place where the York and Lancs Regiment trained in WW1 but by 1917-19 it housed German prisoners of war. Its retaining wall can still be seen. In WW2 this camp held Italian prisoners of war.

While at Redmires, Doenitz started to behave strangely. Later, writing in a memoir he said he feigned mental illness in the hopes getting released because he wanted to avoid being prosecuted as a war criminal. He was transferred to Wynthenshaw Hospital where he remained until being repatriated. It was commented upon in the press that German prisoners of war were treated far better than British prisoners of war in Germany who were returning home emaciated.

After his release, Doenitz returned to his naval career, built up the German Navy and became a Vice Admiral during WW2. In 1940, he was praised for being responsible for sinking more than three million tons of allied shipping. He remained an indefatigable Nazi supporter.

At the end of the war, he announced the death of Hitler over German radio saying that he died "a hero's death after having led an unmistakably straight and steady life" and also announced himself as Hitler's successor. This part of his career did not last for long. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in the Nuremberg trials.

During WW2, two of his sons were killed, one when his U-Boat was sunk in the

Atlantic and the other when his boat was sunk by a French destroyer.

While at Redmires, did Karl Doenitz ever reflect on the fact that what a beautiful part of the world he had been sent to?

He spent the end of his life, unrepentant and in quiet retirement.

M Sanderson

Information taken from the Sheffield Star 27th April 2010 and a German account of Doenitz's life.

Oil Seed Rape

Recently, if you have looked across the Rivelin Valley from its south side, you will have seen bright yellow fields in the Loxely Valley. Farmers are fast converting to this crop. This is oil seed rape, an ever growing, popular crop with farmers though it can cause an allergic response in hay fever sufferers. Canada is the largest producer and it raises £388 per ton.

It is a brassica, the same family as turnips and has been cultivated for over 4,000 years, first used as lamp oil and later as a lubricant in steam engines. It started off as a bitter crop but this has now been bred out of it. Farmers also use it in rotation so helping to deter pests and to improve following crops.

After the Chernobyl disaster it was found to have three times the capacity to take up radioactivity than other crops.

Used oils are collected from businesses and are processed into biodiesel for motors. Bees love the nectar and is used in blended honey.

The cold pressed rapeseed oils are said to have only half the saturated fat found in butter and olive oil.

The oil seed rape market is said to be worth more than £6.4m and sales are increasing.

M Sanderson

Dead Trees in the Valley?

From time to time, the Press reports on various tree diseases. Do you know of any of the following in the valley?

Ash dieback fungus has been found in a few parts of the country but this is not a common tree in the Rivelin area. There are some saplings growing over the wall opposite Valleyside Garden Centre though it is said that northern ash trees are less likely to catch this disease.

An oak tree pathogen has been found to also infect the larch tree in the south of England, Wales and Scotland but it has not so far infected the oak.

The oak processionary moth has been found in London and weakens trees, leaving them open to other diseases. If you see a tree that looks as if it is ailing (but not dying of old age) please tell us.

Here is a poem to finish this newsletter.

A verse taken from "Inversnaid"
by Gerald Manley Hopkins 1844 - 1889

"What would life be, once bereft
Of wet and wilderness? Let them be left.
Oh let them be left, wilderness and wet.
Long live the wilderness yet."

Thank goodness RVCG is looking after our own bit of wilderness.

Please contribute to this newsletter by sending your own reminiscences to M Sanderson. We like your stories in this newsletter.

Also don't forget Joan Buckland wants your reports of wildlife observation whether in the valley or your garden.

THE RECORDER - SUMMER 2015

Phew – what a hot week we have had, including the hottest temperature ever recorded in Sheffield, 32.6°C on the 1st July, following by amazing displays of lightning and heavy downpours - real summer weather at last. My water butts are now full again but the slugs and snails are very active. You can't have it all ways! The wet weather has come at just the right moment for my tadpoles, many of which are becoming froglets. They are a bit later than last year, probably due to the cool start of British summer time.

My garden has been very colourful this year. Blossom trees and roses have been beautiful. The cotoneaster was buzzing with bees. I have never seen so many, they were impossible to count. I was very pleased to note that there were a lot more honey bees than in the last few years. Buff Tip, Red Tip, Tree and Honey bees were the most numerous. All the bees are after the nectar from flowers and in the process pollinate them, but sometimes they become 'robber bees' and 'steal' the nectar without pollinating. This may be in particular flowers where the nectar is hard to get at. I have many Aquilegia in my garden and I saw bees sucking nectar from outside the flowers. On closer examination I noticed small holes at the base of the flowers. One bee may have made the hole but all the species were taking advantage of it. Another quirk of nature is connected to bees but where the plant does the tricking. Certain species of orchid – Bee, Early Spider and Fly, emit a chemical that smells like the pheromone produced by female solitary bees to attract a mate. The flowers also really do look like bees and the males are tricked into trying to mate with the flower thus picking up the pollen and transferring it to the next flower it visits. I had the opportunity to test this out as the Water Works inadvertently mowed some orchids (they say there are still some in flower and it will not happen again). I put three orchids in water on the kitchen windowsill and the very next day a Tree Bumblebee was trying to mate with them. They are now setting seeds so maybe I will be able to grow some next year. I have a photograph as proof. The wonders of nature never cease to amaze me. Let us hope the government do not relax the ban on neonicotinoids which has been detrimental to bees, and that we continue to hear the drone of the bees every summer.

It has also been a very good year for Buttercups – the fields opposite the Water Works were beautiful. Even on a dull day they make the fields look sunny. Unfortunately there are not so many pastures with flowers. The whole country must have been ablaze with colour before pesticides and fertilisers were used. Some insects are doing well in the warmer climate and creeping northwards. I had an Alder beetle, *Agelastica alni*, on my Alkanet and a small longhorn beetle, *Grammoptera ruficornis* on Hawthorn flowers. I also found it down the valley (where there are plenty of Alder trees) on Roger's evening walk on the 12th May. The other place I have seen them is Old Moor RSPB reserve where they are extremely numerous.

Last week I noticed a cat jumping in and out of a patch of long grass in my garden. I went to investigate in case it was a juvenile bird. When I got there a field mouse ran out of the grass, which I immediately caught. For my pains (literally) - it grabbed me by the thumb - I managed to put it in a hole in the stone wall. The cat was left wondering where its prey had gone! Luckily the mouse did not pierce the skin as my tetanus jabs are not up-to-date. For the last month I kept wondering who was riding a bicycle up and down all day and ringing their bell, until I realised it was actually one of the Blackbirds. Starlings are brilliant mimics but I did not know that Blackbirds were capable of this. I identified the Blackbird with my binoculars whilst it was actually singing, and Roger has heard it also. It is a very realistic bicycle bell and most certainly is top bird in my opinion. I have only seen five Swifts overhead regularly but the members of Hagg Lang Allotments have seen about 30, and a Buzzard and a pair of Bullfinch. They also have seen a Mullein caterpillar (which looks very striking with yellow and black markings). Gillian Drinkwater saw one on a Mullein plant (which is the caterpillar's main food plant). A Hedgehog was rescued from Stephen Hill Road by a lady who actually stopped her car and put the Hedgehog in Clough Wood. Well done that lady!

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO SEND IN THEIR RECORDS

Mary Brazil S6 – 4.5.15 – Top fields at Stannington – a number of Skylarks singing and dropping and she also saw Peewits.

Doreen Best S10 – 28.4.15 – Saw three Snake's Head Fritillary flowers in Carver Fields. Doreen took a photograph. (I have these in my garden but do not know how they got in Carver Fields).

5.5.15 – in the early morning three Roe Deer south side of Old Coppice Road, and first duckling on Wolf Dam.

Mavis Roadhouse – 7.5.15 – Heard Cuckoo bottom of Wyming Brook and lone Peewit.

Shirley Foster S10 – 11.5.15 – Shirley went to use compost from old heap but when she lifted the black plastic off out jumped 6 frogs. She comments 'their home now, so no more compost for a bit!'. 14.5.15 – heard Cuckoo at upper Redmires Reservoir.

Sheila Emsley – 6.4.15 – Peregrine Falcon spotted at bottom of Hollins Lane near the weir by the stone bridge. Sheila has been watching the Peregrines on St. George's Church so recognised the bright yellow hooked beak. Well spotted.

Sarah Reaney S6 – 17.6.15 – Saw female Grey Wagtail near café, and saw a pair a few days earlier near the chair sculpture.

Sue Shaw 28.6.15 – Saw the flash of the Kingfisher along the river next to the children's play area in the valley.

Mark Sharkey – 5.5.15 – Saw 2 deer (Roe probably) in the fields between Rivelin Valley Road and Long Lane.

Joan Daines – 24.5.15 – Saw 3 Dippers, a Tree Creeper and Grey Wagtail in the valley.

Joan Buckland S10 – 25.5.15 - Red Kite flying north down valley.

Joan Buckland 7.7.15

For a Plaque on Ruskin House, Walkley, to celebrate the foundation of St George's Museum, 27 June 2015

In 2010, shortly after I became Master of the Guild of St George, I happened to meet a young woman who worked in the museum world. She had grown up in Sheffield in the 1980s and 90s and become interested in art as a result of visiting the Ruskin Gallery, then in Norfolk Street. I was fascinated and asked her how as a child she had discovered the Gallery. 'My parents used to take me,' she said. 'And what sort of people were your parents?' I asked. 'They were foundry workers,' she replied. I confess I had expected her to say they were teachers or artists or professionals of some kind, and I thought rather ill of myself for that automatic reaction. She was, after all, telling me something I should have expected, for Ruskin had created the Collection – St George's Museum, as it originally was – not for those who already know about art, but for the working people of Sheffield, above all metalworkers.

Ruskin created the Museum in this very house, now known as Ruskin House, in 1875. He had founded the Guild of St George four years before in despair at the condition of England, blighted (as he saw it) by industrial capitalism. He was appalled by the operations of the market that had made the nation theoretically wealthy and left most of its people in poverty, oppressed by mechanical labour and living for the most part in inhuman conditions, often without access to clean water and fresh air. He was equally appalled by the impact of industry on nature itself – the pollution of air and water and the violation of natural beauty. Ruskin wanted to restore a flourishing rural economy in which working people lived in a healthy relationship with the world around them.

But the Guild was also concerned with art and craftsmanship. Ruskin believed that beauty in design was only possible if the craftsman was acquainted with natural beauty. Great art and fine craftsmanship derived from appreciation of the world God made for us. The collection in St George's Museum was a teaching collection, designed above all to teach the workman by example and, in so doing, to satisfy his need for fresh air and green fields, beauty and justice, all of which he saw as related to one another. *'The mountain home of the museum,'* he wrote – meaning the hills of the Rivelin valley (he was fond of such exaggerations) – *'was originally chosen, not to keep the collection out of the smoke, but expressly to beguile the artisan out of it.'*

In 1875 he paid a visit to his friend, Henry Swan, who had recently moved from London to this house. In the late 1850s and early '60s Ruskin had taught drawing at the Working Men's College in London. The College had been founded by philanthropists like himself to provide free education for men who through poverty had missed out on education. Swan was a journeyman engraver who had turned up in Ruskin's class and the two men became friends. Ruskin not only liked Swan but admired him too, and it was in his house that the setting for his Museum first came to him. He had been thinking about it for some time and had drawn up plans to build it in rural Worcestershire, where the Guild has land, but he had begun to consider that an industrial city – particularly the rural edge of an industrial city – would be more appropriate. The setting here, with the Rivelin valley visible from the windows and smoky Sheffield far down the hill behind it, seemed to him almost ideal, especially when he realised that Swan and his wife Emily would be willing to run it for him. Sheffield was right too. The hills around the city reminded him of Florence and even – rather extraordinarily – of the Alps, and he had long been an admirer of Sheffield craftsmanship. The little mesters making cutlery in their workshops were the public he most valued.

So the Collection was set up here, and metalworkers made their journey up the Bellhag Road to see it in large numbers, their names recorded in the Visitors' Book. Among the most frequent visitors, to give a notable example, was a young knife grinder named Benjamin Creswick. Swan soon discovered that Creswick wanted to be a sculptor and recognised real talent in his work. He recommended him to Ruskin, who commissioned a bust from him, and then recommended him to friends in Birmingham. Creswick soon moved to Birmingham, where he became famous as a sculptor of public monuments and got involved in the

Arts and Crafts Movement in London and elsewhere. He founded a small dynasty of artists, one of whom, his great-granddaughter Annie Creswick-Dawson, is with us here today.

What we have sought to do with the project called *Ruskin-in-Sheffield* is show that that same Sheffield spirit which Ruskin called forth in 1875 is alive in Sheffield today. I think we have succeeded in doing that. That we have done so is a huge tribute to the project producer, Ruth Nutter, but it is also due to the people of Sheffield who are still ready and willing to campaign for beauty and justice.

I would like to express the Guild's thanks to several people:

- to Ruth Nutter for the wonderful work she had done under the banner of *Ruskin-in-Sheffield*, and to those who have worked with her
- to John and Joy Smith, landlords of Ruskin House, for their willingness to accept this plaque and, indeed, their enthusiasm for it
- to John O'Brien, building manager of Ruskin House, for his constant willingness to help and his interest in the project
- to Richard Watts, who worked for many years on planning the public spaces of central Sheffield, for designing and carving this beautiful stone, very much in the traditions of craftsmanship which Ruskin taught
- to Marcus Waithe, who set up the website *Ruskin at Walkley*, for providing the words on the plaque and contributing his skills as a scholar and lecturer to *Ruskin-in-Sheffield*
- to the tenants of Ruskin House for their tolerance and understanding, and especially to Jonathan Rawling for his ongoing support of the *Ruskin-in-Sheffield* project
- to everyone in the Walkley community who has supported *Ruskin-in-Sheffield* from the outset
- and since what we are celebrating is something that lives on after its founder's death, to John Ruskin, who created St George's Museum, bought this building to house it and lives on in the values of this city and its people.

For a Memorial on the Grave of Henry Swan, Walkley Cemetery, 27 June 2015

There's a fresco in Siena called *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*. It's by the fourteenth-century artist Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Ruskin admired it a great deal. A crucial section of the picture shows how good government is associated with a healthy, productive interchange between city and countryside, and the picture at that point focuses on the place where the city ends and the country begins. I am reminded of the picture by this place: when you come here, you feel you have reached the limit of the city and you look out across the trees and the fields. I think it was precisely that feeling that Ruskin had when he looked from Swan's house to the hills beyond, now of course covered with buildings.

Appropriately enough, this is where Henry Swan is buried. It's a pity he is not here with his wife, Emily Swan, because as Dr Mark Frost has shown us, she was very much his co-curator at St George's Museum, but she died long after him and in another place. The Swans had four children, one of whom is buried here with his father – Laurence Swan, who died sadly young.

Swan was a bit of an eccentric – some people thought him a crank – but he was warm, humorous, loyal, original and careless of the opinions of others. When he met Ruskin at the Working Men's College he was a journeyman engraver. In that role, he had worked for Isaac Pitman, the inventor of shorthand. He was interested in spelling reform and new systems of musical notation. He was also a skilled illuminator. He was, by contrast, keen on innovations – on photography, for instance – and he was one of the first people to own a bicycle. Unlike Ruskin, he was a Quaker, a pacifist and a vegetarian.

For many years the site of this grave was unknown. It was only recently discovered by the Revd. Ron Frost, Mark Frost's father. Mark had been studying the working-class men and women who worked for Ruskin and the Guild, and his father, a retired clergyman who lives in Sheffield, decided to help. The gravestone he found was broken in two, the ground had subsided and the lettering on the stone had been effaced beyond recall. We in the Guild decided that the grave should be restored, the soil built up again and a memorial placed over the stone to record Swan's presence there, with tribute duly paid to one of the Guild's earliest and best employees.

In some sense this recovery and restoration of Swan's memorial and the plaque set on the wall of Ruskin House are symbols embedded in the programme we call *Ruskin-in-Sheffield*. They signify that though Ruskin and Swan were forgotten or disappeared for periods of time, they are present among us here in Sheffield: present in the good work they did and present in the continuing life that drew that work out of them. The social and economic climate of their time was harsh, and they stood against it. They spoke out or acted for the needs and dignity of common people, who have a right to claim beauty and justice as human needs. As the life of our time grows harsher, as I believe it is doing, they continue to stand for those values as these stones do for them.

On behalf of the Guild of St George and *Ruskin-in-Sheffield*, I would like to thank the following:

- the Revd. Melanie Fitzgerald, Irving Smith and Hugh Waterhouse for their support, help and enthusiasm, and the work they did to secure permission for the new gravestone
- Ruth Nutter of Ruskin in Sheffield for leading this effort and my colleagues in the Guild for supporting her
- Richard Watts, again, for designing and carving a beautiful stone, a model of fine craftsmanship
- Ron Frost, for discovering the stone, and his son Mark for writing the text that is carved upon it, as well as lecturing for the *Ruskin-in-Sheffield* project
- Mick Searcy, for restoring the grave and mounting the new stone
- everyone in the Walkley community who has supported *Ruskin-in-Sheffield* from the outset
- Henry and Emily Swan for living and working among us. Let us remember them with honour and gratitude.

Clive Wilmer
Master of the Guild of St George

