



Newsletter

Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Winter 2019 no 109

Through The Chair

Welcome to our Winter newsletter. In October the RVCG were successful in a £20k Heritage Lottery Fund bid to help improve various aspects of the Rivelin Valley. A summary of our current plans can be read in the enclosed article but if you have any further suggestions then I will be pleased to hear from you. We are bound by strict regulation and require the permission of the Sheffield City Council who are the land owners. The RVCG Task team will have a really interesting and important function over the next couple of years fulfilling the project objectives.

Thank you again to Irene Harrison in her choice of speakers for our recent Open Meetings which have been very well attended. See the programme for up and coming events. One important item in the RVCG calendar is our 28th AGM where the work of the RVCG is celebrated and the committee is reselected for the next 12 months. As previously mentioned, there may be opportunities for new committee members. If you are interested or know someone who may be interested, then please contact me. The RVCG has been blessed with a stable committee for many years who have brought an eclectic mix of knowledge and skills which continue to make the RVCG successful.

Graham Appleby
RVCG Chairman

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Task Team

The British winter brings us defoliated trees and a blanket of leaves covering the ground. However dead leaves and twigs tend to accumulate at the sluices which control the force of water into the goits of our remaining mill dams. It's amazing how effective a few leaves and twigs are at slowing the force of water and without human intervention, the dams would dry out.

Therefore, in November we set about our annual event, with rakes and spades, of cleaning the sluices and removing larger debris that would have washed down in the winter rains. Sometimes it is necessary to lift the sluice gate to let the power of the water free up the blockage and there is some heart-warming gratification in seeing the water suddenly burst through and swell the goit with water that would eventually make its way to the mill pond that would gently begin to fill. Winter is also a good time to inspect the structures of the dams, river banks and footpaths that are usually hidden by foliage in summer to help us plan future task days.

Graham Appleby

Wood Lane Countryside Centre

RVCG usually take part in the annual Xmas event held here, but this year, the house is having a makeover.

Joan Buckland and I have made things with children earning a little cash for RVCG and enjoying a walk around to see all the other events and stalls – a good start to Christmas. Their homity pies, taken from a recipe from the wonderful Cranks shop in London, unfortunately now closed, was very popular.

This building has quite a history. It was originally owned along with other land around the area by the Duke of Norfolk, when it was considered that there was a need for a local residence. Later it was used by a variety of tenants.

The Georgian house was constructed in 1805 and was classically symmetrical, but later enlarged and included a barn for the Duke's farming activities.

There was also a pit for the now illegal cock fighting.

Then a succession of tenants and owners occupied the building. Professor and Mrs Statham were known for their garden parties in the 1920's.

The Countryside Management Service now has the building and it has various uses.

When I was a teacher, my class spent an enjoyable time there and the least academic children showed great proficiency with practical skills such as cleaning the pond and feeding the chickens. Back at school they happily wrote about their activities that day and some even wanted to work there when they grew up.

M Sanderson

This year is the 200th Anniversary of John Ruskin. Please keep an eye out for the many events that will be taking place.

<http://www.ruskininsheffield.com/>

Donations

Thank you for your donations this year that already amount to £152. It will be put to good use.

News Stories

We are always pleased to hear from you in this newsletter. Many of you have lived in the area for many years and have interesting stories to tell. It does not matter how long or short.

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Ebenezer Elliot

Rivelin Valley was a place that was loved by the poet Ebenezer Elliot. (1781 – 1849), known as the 'Corn Law Rhymer' who was world famous for his lead in the fight to repeal the corn laws which caused hardship and starvation to the poor.

One of his favourite haunts was Blackbrook Stream that runs from the Hallamshire Golf Course to Rivelin. This can be reached via a public footpath which starts just below Rivelin Lodge on Lodge Lane, after walking on the path for about ten minutes, the brook can be heard tinkling below, it is a bit of a scramble to get down there where you will find a stone with ELLIOT carved on it although over the years the letters have eroded somewhat. The view of the valley, where two form seats have recently been placed is simply breathtaking and it is no wonder that Ebenezer went there for inspiration for his poetry. Two of his many poems of the area are entitled "Farewell to Rivelin" and "Tree of Rivelin".

There is a bronze statue dedicated to Ebenezer in Weston Park. The granite rock upon which he is seated reflects a favourite rock in the valley where he used to sit. Another recent tribute was

in 2009 when an artwork called "Harvest" depicting giant wheat ears blowing in the wind was erected on a Rotherham Traffic Island in celebration of his famous "Corn Law Rhymes".



The famous rock at the foot of Blackbrook stream bearing the name 'Elliott'

Redmires Racecourse

Around 1870, a company was formed, the "Sheffield Racing Company" which decided to erect a racecourse on the south side of the valley on land at Lodgemoor opposite the Three Merry Lads, after the closure of the one at Broomhill. A grandstand was built surrounded by a high wall and stabling for the horses was provided on a farm aptly named "Racecourse Farm" (now demolished) on Soughley Lane. The first meeting was held in 1875 and lasted for about three days. Thousands of people came to the races, many on foot, but those who could afford it would come by horse drawn wagonettes. Unfortunately, the horses had to make the journey up to Redmires from Sheffield and obviously when they arrived at the course, they were not in a good state to compete. The location made the course very unpopular with the public, the owners and trainers and the venture was abandoned after only two seasons. It is said that the cost of building this ill-fated project was £15,000. Apparently ten years prior to the racecourse being erected the London

and North Western Railway abandoned a scheme promoted by them to construct a railway from Buxton to Sheffield.

The Route suggested was up the Rivelin Valley and would have passed within a short distance of the course. I imagine the Sheffield Racing Company believed that there was some probability of this project being resuscitated, which would have greatly enhanced the value of the property and made access to the grounds easier. After the failure of the racecourse the area was used as a World War1 training ground for the Artillery and the Hallamshire Rifles which meant good business for the two local public houses, The Three Merry Lads and the Sportsman.

The next use of the racecourse was as a prisoner of war camp where hundreds of prisoners were interned in wooden huts during the last war.

Today the racecourse has been turned into a camp for Travellers, the Council having laid down concrete bases and toilet facilities.

Thank you to **Mary Richards** for the two articles above.

Recent Events
Open Meeting Ian Rotherham
Professor of Environmental
Geography at Hallam University
Shadow Woods
13th November 2018

Ian is a busy person. Apart from giving lectures he writes newspaper columns on wildlife and nature, holds workshops and is a prolific author. He likes to walk our surrounding moorland – a good start for anyone.

In the past our area suffered from smog and pollution and there are still parts of the city that are grimy, but our woodlands and moors still survive despite the industrial legacy of our area.

We learned that land use around our city still retains ancient trees despite many going for items such as pit props and fires.

Ted Hancock
The Construction of Totley Tunnel
9th January 2019

The 3.5-mile tunnel was built between 1888 and 1893 between Totley on the outskirts of Sheffield and Grindleford for the new Hope Valley rail line. Work started at each end and the contractor foreman, Thomas Oliver, bet that the tunnels would meet each other within 5". The result was 4.5" and so he won his bet.

The navvies were local men or itinerants who travelled around as railways grew and many were Irish. Some brought their families and some married local girls and remained living here. Gelignite was used to break up the rock and then the rubble had to be brought to the surface.

Smallpox arrived in 1885 and accidents caused problems but the tunnel lives on today.

A Celebrity Once Lived in Crosspool!

You might have heard Michel Palin recently on Saturday Live, Radio 4. He spoke of taking bike rides around the area and it was obvious he was talking about the Rivelin/Crosspool area because he talked of the beautiful countryside and enjoyed walking on the hilly slopes down to the river.

Once I had to deliver a newsletter in the Watt Lane area and the resident told me that this was where he lived as a schoolboy. Michael would be seen running for the bus in Crosspool on his way to Birkdale School.

M

Sanderson

Possible New Forest

The Government has plans for a new

forest of 120 miles between Hull and Liverpool which will be planted with 50 million trees over the next 25 years. The first trees have been planted in the hills above Bolton. Trees as well as being beautiful absorb CO2 and help to reduce carbon emissions but it is thought by some the natural way of increasing trees is by their seeds rather than by humans planting saplings. Also, trees that are planted are more likely to dry out as they are not as well connected to the soil as fallen seeds. Oliver Rackham, the great woodland expert believed self-sown seeds by birds and mammals are best.

M Sanderson

**The RVCG would like to thank
Valleyside Garden Centre for
their continued support**

THE RECORDER – Winter 2018/19

The Recorder

I hope you are all getting back to your normal routine after the excesses of Christmas. It has been a mild winter so far with only a few days of frost. My snowdrops are in flower and the daffodils have buds. Roses, calendula, feverfew, lavatera, wild strawberries and broom are still in flower. I still have not cut back the dead plants in my garden. I leave them as long as possible so that little creatures have somewhere to overwinter, but now new shoots are appearing I had better get a move on.

It has been a hard winter in northern Scandinavia and the Redwings and Fieldfares have made their way to our area. During December I had up to twelve Thrushes, mainly Redwings, in the garden and seven Blackbirds which were probably from Scandinavia. Look out for Waxwings as they have been spotted in Stannington Road recently. I hope there are some berries left for them as my Rowan and Holly berries have now been depleted. There is an interesting fact about Fieldfares that I have recently learned. In north-central Europe and Scandinavia where the birds spend the rest of the year, they are sociable and nest in colonies, sometimes of many hundreds of nests within sight of one another. I have seen big flocks of Fieldfares feeding in the same field, much as Rooks do. When a predator comes into the area it must think it is on to a good thing, but the Fieldfares have a secret weapon, which, as far as is known, is not used by any other thrush or British bird. Once a predator is spotted the Fieldfares create a hullabaloo that would frighten most other birds away. If this does not work the predator is in for a nasty surprise. The Fieldfare launches itself into the air and dives towards the intruder making a strange squealing

sound and sends a carefully aimed stream of faeces onto the feathers of the predator. Other birds continue to bombard the predator until it flies away. The faeces contain Uric acid which can harm the waterproofing of the intruder and cause it serious problems. It makes you wonder how they evolved to do that.

I have many Sparrows in my garden, and I have been watching them thoroughly enjoying themselves having dust baths on a bare patch of earth at the top of the garden. Two Coal Tits regularly visit the garden and they have been busy caching sunflower seeds in the trunks of the plum and apple trees. I store my cooking apples in the garage and noticed some had been nibbled and the tell-tale tiny faeces of a mouse. Using our live trap, we caught two fat Field Mice which are now in the wall up the garden, hopefully quite cosy.

Before Christmas I went into the loft to get the trimmings and entered a Halloween set. The Daddy Long Leg Spiders, *Pholcus phalangoides*, had taken over and messy webs were on every rafter. Not a sight for the faint-hearted! You may have heard the foxes being very vocal lately calling for a mate. They are regularly in my garden and now there are two coming together.

As I am writing this article my husband shouted to look out of the front window and there were three Buzzards circling over Den Bank. They are now becoming a regular sight over the valley.

On 27th December as I was waving my visitors goodbye, I noticed a Circumzenithal Arc directly above us. This is an upside-down part of a rainbow and only occurs when the sun's altitude is below 32deg. I saw this above my house last June, so it is worth keeping your eyes open as this phenomenon does not happen very often. Now is also the time to spot

Dogbows (Mock Suns) which can look mostly red and yellow, on either side of the sun. We probably have some cold weather to come in the next two months so make the most of the mild weather. Let me know of anything interesting or unusual you have spotted and what you have had in your garden this winter.

Thank you to the following for sending in your records:-

Keith Kendall S10 – 4.9.18 – Kingfisher on Frank Wheel; Dipper and Heron near Packhorse Bridge.

Roger Kite S10 – 5.9.18 – Dipper on Frank Wheel; 1.1.19 – Dipper at Frank Wheel; Heron on Wolf Wheel.

Neil Porter S6- 28.8.18 – Wall Butterfly; 21.10.18 – Small Copper; 6.11.18 – Drake Mandarin on Wolf Pond and Kingfisher flying upstream; 4 Buzzards circling over Tofts Lane on 8.11.18.

Vivien Falshaw S10 – 2.11.18 – 2 Buzzards circling over Den Bank and Manchester Road.

JimC S6 – 22.12.18 – sent in two lovely pictures of a Heron on Plonk Wheel.

Joan Buckland S10 – Seen in my garden this winter – Blackbirds, Redwings, Fieldfares, Bullfinch, Sparrows, Coal Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Great Tits, Blue Tits, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Magpies, Jackdaws, Collared Doves, Robin, Jay, 1 Male Greenfinch, 1 Song Thrush, Feral and Wood Pigeons, 1 Crow, Male Tawny Owl calling. 5.1.19 Dipper on river at Rivelin Corn Mill.

Joan Buckland
10.1.19

Thank you to Joan and Paul Buckland for identifying the two items from the previous newsletter.

The mystery plant turned out to be a Thorn Apple, *Datura stramonium*, which was in cultivation by 1597 and first recorded in the wild in 1777, another alien that is becoming more common, and is poisonous. It has various common names including Spiny Apple and Jimsonweed



And the mystery insect turned out to be a Tipulidae; a type of crane fly.



Having cut back the foliage in my garden in the Autumn, I came across a blackbird's nest and noticed quite a quantity of plastic and nylon had been used in its' construction. A worrying sign of the times.....!



Graham Appleby



Dennis J Smith 1947 - 2018

Dennis J Smith may not sound familiar to many people, but his sudden recent passing is a significant loss to society and probably only really appreciated by those who knew him. The contents of his house were a gold mine of collections of little mesters tools, historical research information and important sketches and paintings. Sadly, he appears to have had no living relatives, left no will and lived in a council house in Fox Hill

After Dennis's passing efforts were made to rescue his unique collections. This included 18th century cutlery and locally made rural Stannington/Rivelin pocket knives. It is hoped that this collection has been saved and will form part of the Ken Hawley collection at Kelham Island - perhaps apt since Ken was a close friend. Unfortunately, his other material such as his paintings drawings and documents were, as we understand, sold to a house clearance with the bulk being dumped. He was very interested in local artists particularly William Lowe. Some interesting material was rescued from the bins outside his house such as taped interviews, photographs and diaries.

Local historian, Michael Dyson, was researching the history of the Rivelin cutlery trade and had befriended Dennis who had provided a vital source of useful information and pictures. The only saving grace is that Mike had had the opportunity to copy some of the information and pictures that Dennis had generously agreed to. But now, all the originals may be lost forever.

Dennis Smith made some valuable contributions to various historical institutions and societies. For example, he provided articles for the two books by Melvyn Jones, *Aspects of Sheffield 1 & 2*. One article was 'The Button Making Industry in Sheffield' and a second 'John Spencer's Baltic Trade in Sheffield Wares'. Dennis is described in the list of contributors in those books as follows:

'Dennis Smith was born in Sheffield in 1947, spending much of his life in the Walkley area (He was born at an old cutlers' farmhouse at Arnold Street). Educated at Morley Street County and Myers Grove Comprehensive Schools, he worked variously as cutlery worker, food mixer and cemetery worker. A childhood exploring the ruined mills of the Rivelin Valley was partially responsible for his interest in industrial history. Other influences were his father's reminiscences of Sheffield trades and working conditions. He is possibly remembered by local librarians as the schoolboy who left grubby finger marks on *The Oxford History of Technology*! Dennis has published booklets on aspects of life in the Bradfield and Cawthorne areas of South Yorkshire. His articles have also appeared in the *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, and *Sheffield University's Lore and Language Journal*. His other interests included English, art, walking and early music. He also enjoyed wide travel in the British Isles and part of Greece. He retains fond memories of meetings with local people who had worked in the older local industries and spends considerable time attempting to recover details of life from documentary sources.'

The Stannington Local History Group have a document in their collection 'The Cutlery Industry in the Stannington Area' D.J. Smith 1977. He first published it in 1976 with 400 copies and the Stannington Local History Group thought it would be a good idea to reprint it in 2015 with just a few amendments. This book broke new ground and was soon regarded by many historians as a seminal work, a result of many years of meticulous research

A close friend of Dennis Smith was the renowned ecologist Martin Spray who wrote the following eulogy about Dennis:

"It was suggested to me that I was Dennis's best friend. I hope not: I would not wish that on anybody.

Dennis died a few days ago (Aug 2018-ed.) He was about my age - just a few months younger, so I suppose I knew him for nearly 70 years. He and I were children in the same unadopted backwater road in Walkley and spent an interesting part of our childhoods exploring our territory together. Then I moved home and this interrupted our friendship. I went from grammar school to university; he went to complete the senior class and then to look for a job.

A few years later, I met his mother by chance and agreed to call and see him. This I did - and we picked up our friendship where we had left it, as though there had been no interruption. Later, I had moved from Sheffield and our contact was largely by letter. He was a guest at my wedding, and he was generous with gifts for my daughters. To me, he was generous with gifts of books, CD's, and occasional knives, letter-openers, small ivory engravings, and so on. I was a little less generous with presents to him.

But it was copies of his own writings that were - and are - more important to me. We collaborated on a research project and wrote one of its papers together. Over the years, Dennis found and sent me copies of articles and archive notes and topics he guessed (accurately) I would be interested. I similarly sent him things I found in case they were of interest. I could offer things from the university library and the internet. He offered me things found by ferreting in local archives.

Much of Dennis's writing, mostly on aspects of local history, I assume, was about places he knew well. His local knowledge seemed to me to be impressive, and his sense of wider history was sound. I'm not sure how 'academic' his work was, but he was a valued contributor to Sheffield University's Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language. He made several contributions to its journal, as he did for the Hunter Archaeological Society. I see his contributions as on par with several academics I can think of. I see writing and publishing as vital parts of his life. However, I have no list of just what contributions these are.

I have his letters from 1971 to 2017, and they do mention topics from time to time, but they must be less hit than miss. Mostly, he told me about places he had been to (including his foreign trips), items he had bought, and thoughts on 'topics for the day' (but without detail).

I dip into these letters occasionally; and I as often as not come out disappointed. They are small windows through which I see small - frustratingly small - pieces of his life. He, as it were, gives little away. I see virtually nothing of his friends, or of his family. I see almost nothing of deeper feelings and emotions that people, places, things, or ideas may have generated. They were probably absent of few. I find this a little frightening.

When I heard, at Christmas 2017, that Dennis was ill, I had just received a copy of an old photograph that I wanted to send him. Which I did, with a short note. I had no reply, but I hope he received it and was pleased to see it after so many years. We were about eight; we were each side of my Welsh Border Collie, outside my home - about a hundred yards from his. We each had a hand on the dog. It represents for me, a happy, simple, start to life. I hope he also saw something happy it."

Martin Spray, Forest of Dean, August 13, 2018.

Martin and Dennis co-wrote a seminal piece of work which includes historical information about the Rivelin valley. It was entitled "The Rise and Fall of Holly in the Sheffield Area". Reproduced on the following Sheffield History website -

<https://www.sheffieldhistory.co.uk/forums/topic/9011-the-rise-and-fall-of-holly-in-the-sheffield-region/>

The RVCG would like to thank Michael Dyson for the information and Melvyn Jones and Martin Spray for their articles.

Graham Appleby

Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Partnership

To the North West of Sheffield are a number of reservoirs. Langsett, Midhope and Underbank to the North, moving South there are Broomhead and Moorhall Reservoirs, then there's Dam Flask, Agden, Dale Dyke and Strines reservoirs with Rivelin Dams and Redmires Reservoirs in the South. In the 1950's, a bus company decided to set up tours around what they called the 'Sheffield Lakeland'. This term has been adopted for this project to help improve the landscape and public access to the surrounding areas.



All this information can be found at:
<https://www.wildsheffield.com/discover/your-community/sheffield-lakeland-landscape-partnership/sheffield-lakeland-landscape-partnership/>

In October 2018, the National Heritage Lottery Fund agreed to provide funding of £2.6m rising to £3.4m with matched funding from a number of core partners. Yorkshire Water, Sheffield City Council, Bradfield Parish Council, Stocksbridge Town Council, Natural England, the Environment Agency, South Yorkshire Archaeology Service, Sheffield United Community Foundation and representatives of landowners and local access groups. The project will be managed by the Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust until its conclusion in 2022.

Sheffield Lakeland is much loved but valued by different people for different reasons. Some "values" are well understood – its aesthetic beauty, its farming and forestry and its recreational opportunities for example. Others are highly valued by special interest groups, such as its internationally protected wildlife, industrial heritage and distinctive culture. However, some aspects of Sheffield Lakeland's ecosystem services are only just starting to be understood – such as the landscape's capacity to offer flood protection through natural flood management, the benefits access to the landscape offers for our mental and physical well-being and the landscape's capacity to mitigate or help us adapt to climate change.

Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Partnership will build a shared understanding of the multiple ways in which the landscape is valuable and will take action to record, manage and protect these for the future.

We believe that:

By working in partnership and at a landscape scale we are better able to address the challenges and conflicts that arise between the different values placed on the landscape.

By acting together now, we will realise our vision of "a more natural and resilient Sheffield Lakeland landscape for everyone to value, enjoy, understand and feel part of".

A small proportion of Sheffield Lakeland encompasses the Rivelin Valley and the RVCG submitted a successful bid amounting to £20k. The project plan includes plans for the Task Team to upgrade the footpaths either side of the Rivelin Park



Footpath to Roscoe Mill

There are also plans to provide an information board at the Rivelin Park Café which was originally Spooners Wheel; one of the earliest mills in the Valley with the playground being the original mill pond.



Rivelin Park playground that was Spooners Wheel Dam

There are also plans to upgrade our notice boards, provide essential tools and safety gear for the Task Team, and to support various public events including a planned Heritage Open Day in September. The hub of our bid was to provide a wildlife pond at Rivelin Corn Mill. We wanted to address a number of issues here. The sluice gate is broken. The goit passing under the A57 by the old Post Office is severely silted as is the small pond feeding Rivelin Mill pond.



Plan of Rivelin Corn Mill Pond and Goit

However following detailed discussions with SCC it has been decided that this task is not appropriate for this project due to the extensive use of contractors. Therefore, we are currently finding alternative tasks to utilise the money originally earmarked for this part of the project which may include further footpath repairs and new publications.

Graham Appleby

Endcliffe Park Memorial

On Feb 22nd 1944, a damaged WW2 bomber returning from a mission in Europe was forced to ditch in Endcliffe park killing 10 American aircrew. Eye witnesses say the pilot purposely flew the plane into trees thus avoiding the public who were scattered around the park. A memorial has been maintained ever since by an eye witness, Tony Foulds, who was 8 years old at the time. To commemorate 75 years, the BBC will be broadcasting live from the park from around 6am to 9.15am on the morning of the 22nd February. However, there is no need to arrive at this time. People are encouraged to arrive at the park from around 7.15am. A memorial service will take place from around 8am with the flypast set to follow at 8.45am.



The aircrew of Mi Amigo B-17 Flying Fortress