



Newsletter

Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Summer 2020 no 115

Through The Chair

Welcome to the RVCG Summer newsletter and apologies for its delay. It seems inconceivable that being retired and in Covid lockdown that it would be difficult for me to find the time to publish this newsletter, but indeed that was the case. I must also apologise to the contributors of the newsletter whose articles may appear a little out of date. I'm already on with the next newsletter and your contributions and comment are welcome.

Covid lockdown brought some pleasant surprises as wildlife began to creep back into quiet urbanised areas that would have normally been bustling with pedestrians and motorists and we would love to hear of your own experiences.

The RVCG is itself in lockdown in that all our events are cancelled until further notice although the committee still have an internet meeting once a month. I have taken a stroll down the Rivelin nature trail a couple of times this summer and it is looking in fine fettle although I have noted a few areas for improvement for future task days.

The RVCG will be celebrating 30 years next year and we are looking at options for various sculptures in a number of locations along the nature trail. If you have any ideas, suggestions or the artistic skills to make a physical contribution, then please get in touch.

As you know, I have given notice to stand down as Chair but I will be around to oversee our 30th celebrations and will remain in post until replaced or until I am forced to step down. Stay safe!

Graham Appleby
RVCG Chairman

Contacts

Chairman	Graham Appleby	01142660203
Task Force Coordinator	Keith Kendall	01142307144
Newsletter	M Sanderson	01142306790
Treasurer	Christine Roe	01142665473
Group Recorder	Joan Buckland	01142305829
Speaker Organiser	Irene Harrison	01142335780
Membership	Graham Roe	01142665473

Mail to : rvcg@supanet.com
Web: www.rivelinvalley.org.uk

An ode to the lockdown

This virus has got us all locked in our houses,

With no one to talk to 'cept four walls and our spouses.

We've run out of jigsaws and games like monopoly.

Now we're all bored and cannot think properly

How to keep active in our minds and our bodies

Praying that we really know what our dear God is

Up to – surely a plan and no awful surprise

When we've just done our one piece of exercise.

We're told it'll be Christmas before we're set free

March to December sounds like nine months to me

Lucky then – all these NHS beds have been stored

'Cos we'll be needing a great big Maternity Ward

Roger Kite

The Paddling pool and other diversions

In the 1950's, if we woke up to a lovely sunny summer's day, for a special treat my mum would take my brother and myself on a trip to the Rivelin Valley Paddling Pool.

Out would come her large green bag which she packed with sandwiches, towels, sun lotion (usually pink calamine lotion), beach ball and swimming costumes. Mine was of the ruched design and my brothers was a pair of woollen trunks, which when wet dropped to his knees! Then full of excitement off we would trek down the back lane and through the donkey wood, so called because in the past donkeys were kept there, and on towards the paddling pool. When it came into sight, to us we could have been in Barbados, it was a vision of bright turquoise paint, sparkling waters and big blue skies, it was the nearest thing we would get to a day at the seaside. I remember the pool was always crowded with children splashing around in the water and racing from end to end over the three bridges.

When it got to late afternoon my mum would take us to an allotment garden just above the pool where the lady gardener sold cups of Dandelion and Burdock or Tizer for 3d a cup. This gave us some energy to make the journey, all up hill, back home.

The Paddling Pool was opened in 1951 by Sheffield City Council to celebrate the Festival of Britain. At around the same time a playground and café were constructed on the site of Spooners wheel which dated from the 18th century, the buildings were pulled down and the reservoir filled in to accommodate this.

Sadly, the Paddling Pool eventually closed down; one of the reasons being that there were worries about pollution as the filtration system was very basic and did not meet EU health and safety standards. However, in 2013 the Paddling Pool was completely revamped and it now has water play equipment including jets, sprinklers, bucket drops and water tables. It is open

from late May until September and seems to be well used.

The Paddling Pool was not the first public water attraction in the Rivelin Valley. In 1909 an open-air swimming pool was opened up by Sheffield Corporation by converting New Dam, (built in 1850 to provide a supplementary water supply for Spooner Wheel), into a swimming facility, but you may have had to swim alongside the fish! It was initially for men and boys but women were also known to have used it. Apparently swimming costumes could be hired from an attendant for one penny. It closed in the 1930's because the changing rooms, which were housed in a large wooden hut, burned down. 19,098 swimmers were recorded as using the pool in 1910. Wild swimming is becoming very popular again today, so who knows what you might see in the Rivelin Valley.

Another proper treat, further up the valley, was a trip to the swing boats at "Swingley". We used to catch the number 54 bus to Rivelin Dams and alight at the terminus by the side of the Norfolk Arms Public House. Just a short walk further up the road, what is now a lay-by, once held a small hut selling mugs of "builders tea" pop, crisps and ice cream. The owner also operated wonderful large swing boats by pulling what looked like bell-ringers ropes, on the field behind. The ride was 3d for 15 minutes – what a bargain! These sadly disappeared in the 1960's and a house is now built on that spot.

Mary Richards

Thank you

Members have donated £262 so far this year. Thank you for your very generous contributions.

We would also like to thank Axelby, Mansell, Radley and Niepokojczycka for donating their reservation fees for the pea and pie supper totalling £32 following the cancellation of this year's AGM.

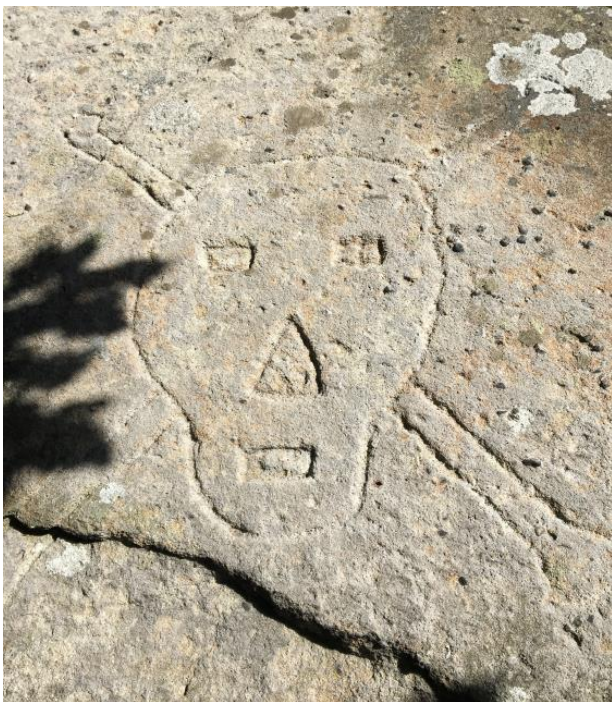
Lion rock

Just below Carver Fields you can find this carving of a lion on the side of a large rock.



We know it was there in the 1960s but not when it was carved or by whom. If you know anything about its history then please do let us know.

Nearby but more hidden away is skull rock.



If you've not seen them, take a look!

From the archives

This is a rather sorry story from the November 1993 newsletter.

'Two men who live locally have been fined a total of £1250 for badger baiting in Whirlow Park. The offence took place at 10am on a Wednesday morning and was reported by a walker. The badgers were wanted for fighting with people betting on which would live the longest.'

Note – badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and they first saw legal protection in the 1970s. They are protected primarily because of the long history of cruelty against them, rather than because they are scarce or endangered. They've been in the UK for at least half a million years. More information can be found here.

<https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/badgers>

And finally

If you have any memories of Rivelin Valley please let us know. It could be something about King Edward's Hospital or the adventures of your childhood!

M

Sanderson

Vacancies

The RVCG is a highly respected organisation with a keen following and strives to improve the environment of the Rivelin Valley for its wildlife and visitors. We are also entering into other areas such as the recording of its history, collecting historic material, paintings, sketches and documents and making these available for the interest and education of the public. We also require help with media, advertising and publishing. If you would like to offer some help with any of our projects or functions, however small, then please get in touch. We also have vacancies for the roles of Chairman, Secretary and Task Team organisation. Again, if you are interested in any of these roles then please get in touch.

Graham Appleby

THE RECORDER – Summer 2020

The Recorder

Well, we are past the Summer solstice but it looks more like winter outside, with the wind, the rain and mist and cool temperature. I am almost tempted to put the heating on. Last week we had record high temperatures and I was in the shade to keep cool. May was the sunniest and driest since 1929, but that seems a long time ago, and June has been wetter than average. I hope you made the most of it and enjoyed the delights of Spring. I went to Jackeys wood just to see and smell the bluebells, the most evocative sign of the season. Did anyone watch the lightning on the night of 13th June? I had an excellent view from the bedroom window, looking over the moors towards Glossop. I counted 65 flashes in 30 minutes. Though spectacular for me, not so for the people of Salford which suffered storm damage, as did a house in Millhouses. The natural world is frightening and destructive at its worst, but amazingly beautiful and relaxing at its best.

Before today, when everything is hiding from the weather, my garden has been a hive of activity. The plants have liked the weather this year and everything looks more lush than usual. Rather like a desert blooming after heavy rain. The berry bushes are loaded with fruit. The raspberries are two weeks earlier than last year, no doubt due to the hot May. The ground under the Bramley apple tree is covered with tiny apples, partly the June drop but also the wind and rain have knocked a lot off. Hopefully there will be some left for us. There has been the constant buzzing of bees and hover flies, with more Honeybees than last year, and we have a Buff-tailed Bumble Bee's nest in a stone wall. Half of my back lawn is covered in Catsear, *Hypochaeris radicata* (a native plant),

which looks lovely in the sunshine and attracts many insects. Now the wet weather is back there are plenty of snails, especially the pretty Brown-lipped and White-lipped Banded Snails. There are also many frogs of different sizes in the garden and I have to be careful where I tread as it gets dusk. There is no shortage of food for them.

Our moth trapping has been more successful with the hotter weather, and last weekend we had 21 moths (9 different species) with wonderful names such as Heart and Dart, Angle Shades, Willow Beauty, Spruce Carpet, Clouded Silver, Buff-tip, Swallow-tailed, Brimstone and the beautiful Elephant Hawk Moth.



iPhlogofora Meticulosa - Angle Shades Moth

Our Noctule bat should not go hungry. We took part in a 24 hour Bioblitz in our garden for the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust last week. It was a lovely day and we got nearly 50 species. We also counted the different plants in the garden which came to 127, not including the various grasses and sedges.

Melanie Wall saw something very interesting down the valley. She saw a Heron catch and eventually eat what she thought was an eel. The 'eel' had wrapped itself round the beak of the Heron to try and avoid being eaten. The Heron dropped the 'eel' which was attached to a stone, then quickly picked the 'eel' back up and

ate it. As we do not have eels in the Rivelin I think it must have been a Brook Lamprey. They are river bottom feeders and attach themselves to stones with sucker-like mouths and could easily be mistaken for eels.

The lockdown is being relaxed and three months of fresher, cleaner air, less background noise and a heightened awareness of the sounds of nature are coming to a close. I shall actually miss it. Already the hum of the city is back and some people are behaving recklessly. I have noticed hedges being cut, which is a bit early. Birds could still be nesting until August so please check for nests. The peace and quiet is just a memory, probably never to be repeated, although we are not out of the woods yet. I hope you were able to appreciate your gardens and the nearby countryside more. Watching the blackbird bathing in the bird bath with juvenile sparrows sitting round the edge having a shower gave me a lot of pleasure. Listening to birdsong in the evening as it was getting dark and trying to catch sight of the bat was very calming.

I am looking forward to hearing your lockdown nature stories. How did the birds fare in your garden? Let me know what butterflies you get.

Thank you for sending in your sightings:-

Sandra Barnett S6 - 2.4.20 - Roe Deer crossing near S bend at 12.30pm

Eileen Coombs S10 - 29.4.20 - Counted 81 Toads squashed on the road at Redmires. What happened here?

Mark Bateman S6 - 24th and 29th April - pleased to report 2 Hedgehogs in his garden. Maybe there will be young around. Mark has also seen a roosting Tawny Owl and a Hare.

Susan Thackeray S25 - 19.5.20 - Lucky to have 3 Hedgehogs nightly in garden from 21st March. Also has Blue Tits nesting for the first time and 2 pairs of Robins nesting. A Mistle

Thrush occasionally visits. (Let me know if the nests were successful).

Sue Shaw S6 - 1st Swift seen 4.5.20; June, Havelock - 6 Mandarin ducklings + 1 female, 4 coot chicks + 2 adult, female Mallard + 6 young, 2 Moorhen chicks + 2 adults; Heron; 6 goslings at Redmires; 10.6.20 - 19 Starlings lined up on roof ridge of house opposite (can anyone beat this?).

Roger Kite S10 - In garden - Green Shield Bug on Hazel and a Sloe Bug. Many Hoverflies and Bees. 2 Blackbirds fledged from a nest right beside the back door, but a neighbour's cat (not ours) destroyed his Robin's nest.

Bob Townrow S10 - Saw first Swift over Carsick Grove on 6.5.20. 8.5.20 - pair of Goldfinches on Niger seed and a pair of Coal Tits nesting nearby.

Vivian Falshaw S10 - 8.4.20 - Heard Woodpeckers at Hallam Craggs. Saw 2 Buzzards over A57.

Melanie Wall S6 - Melanie spotted 2 Dipper nests and a Grey Wagtail nest down the valley and on the 9.5.20 saw that 4 Dipper chicks had fledged. I hope the craze for wild swimming does not disturb our Dippers.

Christine Roe S10 - Has lots of Goldfinches, Sparrows and Blackbirds in garden, with a flock of Long-tailed Tits passing through.

Carolyn Warrington S10 - Bullfinch visiting her apple tree in late April, no doubt looking for a tasty bud.

Neil Porter S6 - 23.5.20 Green Hairstreak; Heard up to 3 Tawny Owls frequently calling night and day (probably non-breeding males); 24.6.20 - first ever Tree Bumblebees in garden.

Joan Buckland S10 - Regularly hear a pair of Tawny Owls calling; 29.6.20 - pair of Bullfinches plus 1 juvenile on feeders. Male Greenfinch also on feeder, first time seen for a while.

Joan Buckland 29.6.20

Task Team News

Although the RVCG Task Team has had to endure a long period of inactivity due to Covid-19, we did spring into action for just one day on 14th June following a rather serious graffiti attack. We began to receive reports after the last weekend of May when most benches, mill-markers, metal railings, the toilet block and the grade II listed Mousehole Bridge were daubed in spray apparently by NPK (Norfolk Park Klan?) known to the authorities.



ii Holme Head Wheel interpretation board

Keith Kendall created an appeal on Facebook and the Just Giving website and managed to raise over £1000.



iii Keith Kendall and Antony Davenport repainting a door down at Mousehole Forge

He then asked me to organise a task day to which 15 volunteers and even a passer-by committed to a mass clean up. Keith had purchased graffiti cleaner, gloves and masks, buckets, and various cleaning materials and we split the volunteers into teams of four and asked them to observe social distancing etc.



iiivThe grade II listed Mousehole Forge Bridge

The result was that most of the graffiti was removed except for stonework and brick walls. Despite lots of elbow grease, the 400-year-old Mousehole Forge Bridge remains blighted with paint stain



iv vRivelin Park toilet block

With the remaining money we are planning to engage professional contractors to try and clean up the remaining graffiti. Thank you to all the public who donated, the RVCG Task Team members who volunteered and particularly thank you to Keith Kendall for making it all happen.

Graham Appleby

Upper Cut Wheel 1749 - 1930

Just to the upper side of Glen Bridge, known locally as the 'S Bend', lie the remains of Upper Cut Wheel. First recorded in 1749 and used for cutlery grinding, it was working right up to around 1930. It was involved in a rattening case in 1874 (where employees sabotaged machinery as part of an industrial dispute).



Upper Cut Wheel – KK Collection

The millpond was once used as a boating lake but is now vastly reduced and its overflow still ferries water into Nether Cut. The upper area is level with the road and the foundations of the old swing boats can still be seen. This was recently the scene of an RVCG Task Day when the access from the road was resurfaced.



The Remains of Upper Cut Mill - GA photo

Way below the road level and dominated by the bridge are several interesting structures such as the ground floor fixings of up to 8 trows that once employed around 13 men and a small

fireplace and chimney. The old wheel pit forms the background structure behind a magical waterfall that gushes down from the millpond and goit above and away under the bridge to Nether Cut Wheel.



Upper Cut Wheel Pit – GA photo

Prof. Mark Bateman is a Professor in Paleoenvironments (*old environments*) and Deputy Head of the Geography Department at Sheffield University. He is also an RVCG member and a volunteer newsletter deliverer over at Stannington. He invited me to join him and some of his students on a walk along the Valley back in November 2019. On visiting Upper Cut Wheel, Mark was interested in why the millpond was much smaller than it used to be, which I had understood to have been caused by a landslide. When Mark returned home, he did some investigation and sent me his findings.

Dear Graham,

Hope this email finds you well. After our visit I was very intrigued by the area around Upper Cut wheel where the boating lake used to be. You can see the level platform for the swing boats, where the wheel was situated but no sign of the mill race or boating lake. At our visit you mentioned that the area had slumped but it was hard to tell because of the trees.

There is now a new technique using airborne radar (LiDAR) which looks through any vegetation and maps the land surface to within 25 cm. Luckily someone (I assume the Environment Agency after the floods) has flown the Rivelin valley as large parts of the country is not covered. I have made a couple of slides which might interest you combining this data with the

geological map and also with the old Ordnance Survey map of 1920. The former shows the area where the lake was, has slumped as it is made of loose sediment and boulders. It also shows that the Rivelin Glen and Millstone Edge quarries were exploiting where the Chatsworth Sandstone outcropped briefly in the valley sides (explains why not other quarries in the valley). The old map shows the slumping has infilled where the lake was mapped. Looking at other old maps the slumping is not shown on the 1930s maps but was on the 1950s maps. You might conjecture that vegetation clearance and allotments associated with Digging for Britain might have led to instability and the slump or of course bombs in the 1940's!

Hope this is of interest

Best wishes

Mark

Rivelin Valley between Hind Wheel and Upper Cut Wheel

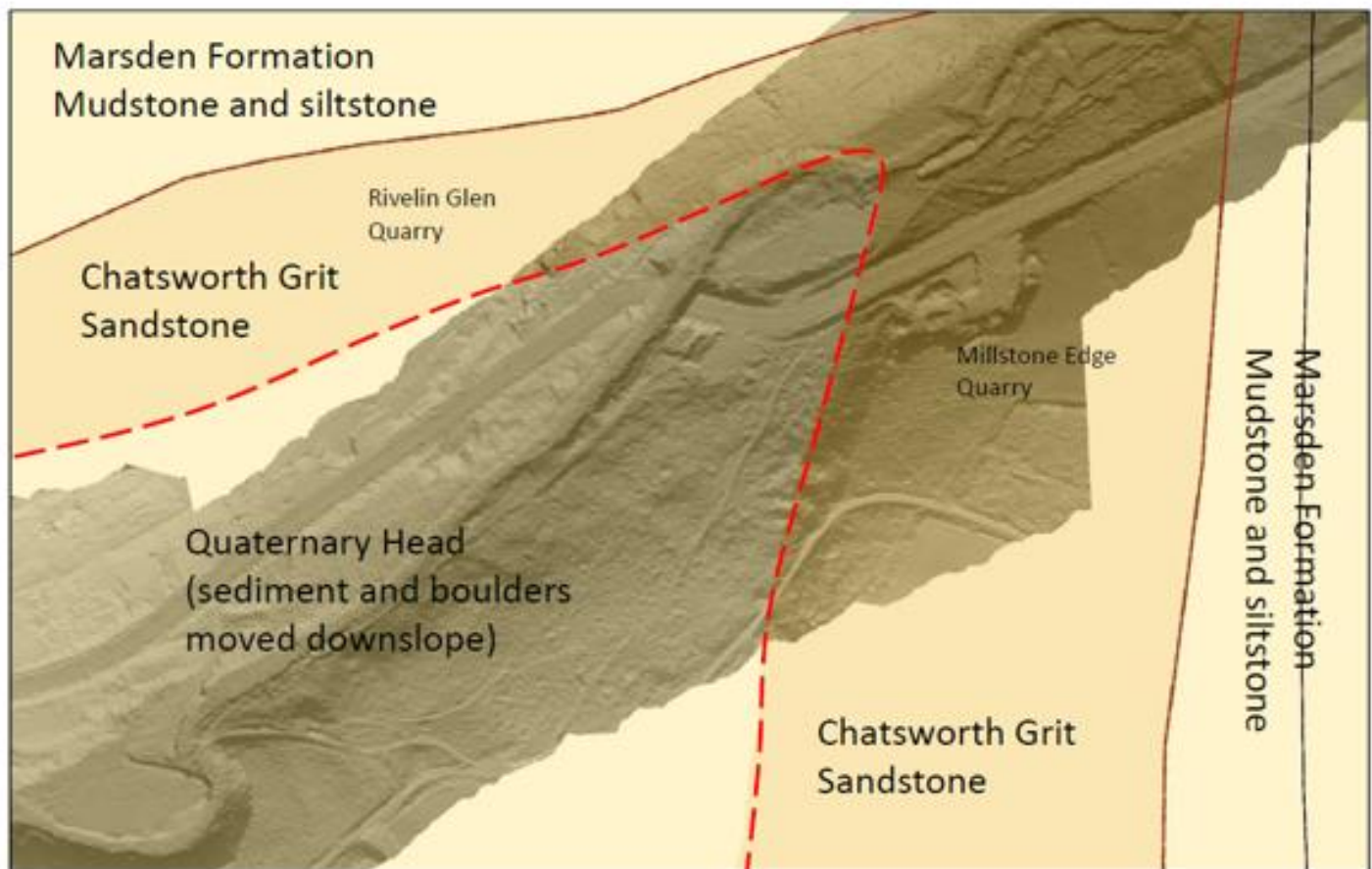


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Grey is Lidar at 25cm resolution showing land surface under the trees. This is overlain by map from 1920's showing the boating lake. Maps from 1950s don't show this lake so it is assumed slumping occurred after 1930's but before 1950's.

Rivelin Valley between Hind Wheel and Upper Cut Wheel



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"Geological Map Data BGS @ UKRI 2020"

Grey is Lidar at 25cm resolution showing land surface under the trees. This is overlain by the geology map for the area showing around Upper Cut Wheel unconsolidated sediments moved downslope covering the former boating lake. Also note both Rivelin Glen and Millstone Edge quarries are in the massively bedded Chatsworth Grit Sandstone

Thank you to Prof. Mark Bateman for the above article - Graham Appleby

I recently came across an article on the BBC Wildlife website that I thought might be of interest to you. There is a list of 17 invasive species affecting the UK some of which we can see today here in Rivelin Valley and some of those I had no idea were actually classed as 'invasive'.

<https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/facts-about-uk-invasive-species/>

Graham Appleby

Update on the 'Protecting Sheffield from Flooding' programme

In July 2020 it was announced that Sheffield had been awarded an additional £16 million of central government funding for the city's flood defence programme.

<https://sheffieldnewsroom.co.uk/news/additional-16million-to-protect-sheffield-from-flooding/>

The extra funding has been awarded for the Upper Don Valley Phase 2 scheme that will protect the Neepsend and Kelham districts of the city, together with a significant contribution to natural flood management (NFM) measures in the uplands above the city.

The £9 million Upper Don Valley Phase 1 project, which covers the Lower Loxley area from Malin Bridge Park and Ride to the confluence on the Loxley with the Don near Owlerton. This will be conventional flood defence walls and is due to start by September (subject to permissions) with completion by autumn 2021. The damage at Hillsborough weir has been assessed by structural engineers – possible repairs will be looked at as part of the Loxley flood defences. Specific sites for the NFM measures are still to be identified.

From a meeting of the Sheffield Waterways Strategy Group that I attended in March, I can also report that:

Preliminary investigations have started to look at putting in flood defences between Kelham Island and the Neepsend/Loxley confluence. A flood storage area on agricultural land near Wharncliffe Side is also under consideration.

A feasibility study, including preliminary survey work, is continuing on flood defences on the Sheaf and Porter. It may be necessary to consider a lower standard of flood protection than desirable in the first instance, depending on the funding available.

Work on defences on the Blackburn Brook is also still at the feasibility stage.

The new SCC Natural Flood Management (NFM) officer is working with the Environment Agency and Sheffield and

Rotherham Wildlife Trust looking at opportunities for NFM measures, particularly in the Upper Don catchment. Some NFM work has already started under the Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Partnership project, including tree planting near Underbank on a farm owned by Yorkshire Water (you may have seen this reported on Look North and elsewhere). SCC has commissioned work on predicting the possible effectiveness of NFM measures in the area, in order to help target different areas of catchment for funding.

SCC has had talks with Yorkshire Water regarding the use of reservoirs in flood risk management. Environment Agency is also having talks with Yorkshire Water and Ofwat. There are understandable difficulties in balancing drought and flood risk management, but it is hoped that solutions can be found.

Use of reservoirs in flood risk management

Last year, Holly Lynch, the Labour MP for Halifax (whose constituency includes Calderdale (which has experienced devastating floods), was instrumental in bringing forward the Reservoirs (Flood Risk) Bill, which intended to require Water Companies to manage reservoirs for flood risk management. However, due to the calling of the December general election, the Bill failed to complete its passage through Parliament before the end of the session, and so made no further progress. I contacted Holly earlier this year to find out whether she was going to put forward the bill again, and was told that she was planning to table an amendment to the new Environment Bill. This has now been done – it includes the wording "The Secretary of State must make regulations to grant the Environment Agency additional powers to require water companies and other connected agencies to manage reservoirs to mitigate flood risk." We know that some discussions have already taken place in this area about using the reservoirs in the Don catchment for flood risk management (see my notes above), but it would be more straightforward if this was a legal requirement.

Information about the Environment Bill and proposed amendments can be found at <https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-21/environment.html>. I'm not exactly sure of the procedures, but according to the website "This Bill was being considered by a Public Bill Committee but due to current circumstances the sittings of the Committee have been suspended until further notice. The Committee is now scheduled to report by Tuesday 29 September 2020."

In April 2020, Holly Lynch received a letter from George Eustice, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, responding to a number of areas she raised with him after the recent Calderdale floods. Below is an extract from his reply – the complete letter can be seen on Holly's blog at <https://www.hollylynch.org.uk/news/2020/04/02/floods-minister-responds-to-demands-for-calderdale/>. He isn't convinced that this legislation is needed, but sounds like he is willing to listen to the arguments.

"Using Reservoirs for Flood Attenuation"

We also discussed your intention to propose an amendment to the Environment Bill relating to the use of water company reservoirs for flood attenuation, which you have now done. As you are aware, this is a complex matter with trials already underway. For example, I am aware that Yorkshire Water is re-starting its trials in the Calderdale area, following the recovery of the reservoirs after the dry summer of 2018. The Environment Agency already has an arrangement in place that will allow Gorpley Reservoir to be drawn down to two metres from the top, which would provide additional flood protection to the town of Todmorden.

This matter was discussed in the Adjournment debate on 9th March, so you will already be aware that any use of water company assets to assist with flood risk management must of course be very carefully considered. The potential to use assets in this way will be site specific and must be balance against the company's primary responsibility for the water supply. I am not currently convinced of a need to put requirements for water companies to use their reservoirs in this way into primary legislation, but we will of course discuss this further during the committee stage of the Environment Bill, although that Bill is not intended for new food management legislation. I also understand that Rebecca Pow MP has offered to meet you and Matt Western to explore this matter further."

A Heritage Strategy for Sheffield: Consultation on the Draft

In a previous RVCG Newsletter, I mentioned the consultation on the draft of the new Heritage Strategy for Sheffield. Like so many other things, work to complete it was paused because of the pandemic. JuHS is now aiming to finalise it and publish before the end of this year. This means there is still time to comment on the draft, if you wish.

Please email them at: sheffheritage20@gmail.com In particular, they're interested to know what implications you think the post-pandemic environment has for the Heritage Strategy and its Action Plan. Yes, there are huge uncertainties ahead; how could these affect attitudes to heritage? Are there, on the other hand, opportunities? Do let them have your views. The draft strategy can be seen at:

<https://www.joinedupheritagesheffield.org.uk/news/draft-heritage-strategy-for-sheffield-update/>

Heritage Open Days 2020

The annual Heritage Open Days festival went ahead as planned this year, between 11-20 September, unfortunately the RVCG committee had decided that it would not be possible to hold an event this time, due to social-distancing constraints but hopefully we will participate next year. This year, for the first time, the festival included online digital events as well as the traditional onsite visits. To find out more visit <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/> or contact the Sheffield coordinator team at hods@sheffielddcivictrust.org.uk

Olivia Blake maiden speech

Some of you may have heard that Olivia Blake, the new MP for Sheffield Hallam mentioned Rivelin in her maiden speech in the House of Commons on the 15th January 2020. Here is an extract:

"My constituency stretches right from the heart of Sheffield city centre, deep into the Peak district. It showcases some of the most magnificent countryside in the UK, including the many reservoirs surrounding Bradfield and Redmires, and the ancient Ecclesall Woods. The area also has a proud industrial heritage. Walking through Forge Dam or Rivelin Valley, you can see the overgrown cranks and grindstones that once drove our economy. Fulwood ward was home to Thomas Boulsover, the inventor of the famous Sheffield plate steel. It is a privilege to represent somewhere that played such an historic role as one of the engines of British industry."

Sue Shaw, 28th June 2020

Wildlife-related activities

The **Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust** website has some wildlife-related activities for adults and children that can be done while we are under the Covid-19 restrictions, including indoor and outdoor activities. These can be found at:

<https://www.wildsheffield.com/getinvolved/nature-adventures/>

Snow gates in wall next to Mousehole/Racker Way bridge

At the beginning of June, the old wooden gates in the wall on Rivelin Valley Road next to Mousehole/Racker Way bridge were removed and the gap infilled with stone



The Old Snow Gates being replaced on Rivelin Valley Road near to Mousehole Bridge

There were two sets of gates on this stretch of wall, which were used when snow was being cleared from the road, so it could be shoved directly into the river. They hadn't been used for over 30 years – it's good that it's no longer permitted to sweep anything from the road into the river!

Sue Shaw, 28th June 2020

Slag tipped in the river!

Some of you may have seen the old metallic slag on the riverbank and forming an island just below Grogam weir, which is mentioned in 'Walking the Rivelin'. We assume it was waste material from the nearby Mousehole Forge. Last week, when looking for young mandarin ducks in the river, I saw another area of tipped slag forming part of the riverbank



The Waste Material from the Smelting of Iron is called Slag and found on the riverbank around Mousehole Forge

this time just upstream of Mousehole /Racker Way bridge. I also found some lumps of slag protruding from the path near there – one of which I found by falling over it when quickly trying to avoid a jogger coming up behind me!

Sue Shaw, 28th June 2020

Swifts

Amazing Swifts



I expect like me many of you look forward to the return of the swifts each year and enjoy watching them swoop about overhead. I recently came across a couple of websites about swifts, which have prompted this article.

The first is called 'Swift Mapper', a web-based mapping system and mobile app, set up by RSPB and partners:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/swiftmapper/>

Each year, swifts fly from Africa to the UK to breed. They pair for life and meet up at the same nest site in the UK each spring – usually in gaps under roof tiles and in the eaves of buildings. However, in just 20 years, more than half of our swifts have vanished and it is thought that the loss of nest sites in the roofs of buildings is at least partly responsible. By using Swift Mapper to record sightings of screaming swift parties and swift nest sites, you can help to build a picture of where swift nest sites need to be protected and where it would be best to provide new nest sites. It is also interesting to look at the site and see where the local hotspots are – there have been plenty of records in Walkley and Hillsborough, but not so many in Crosspool, Lodge Moor or Stannington, so perhaps you could help with that?

Another RSPB website (<https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation--sustainability/help-swifts/amazing-swift-facts.pdf>) has some amazing facts about swifts. I've picked out some of them ...

As a group, swifts are the fastest of all birds in level flight (the peregrine is the fastest of all birds, but only in a steep dive called a stoop). The top speed recorded in a recent scientific study was 111.6km/h (69.3mph). The wings are long and narrow, and superbly adapted for fast flight, but don't allow slow flight or a great deal of manoeuvrability. They probably hunt at about 25 miles an hour and drink by gliding over smooth water and taking sips.

'Our' swifts are only 'British' birds for a quarter of their lives (three months per year) – the rest of the time they are 'African'.

A swift, weighs about the same as a Cadbury's Crème Egg (or any other 40g chocolate bar). For its size, the swift has an exceptionally long life-span – averaging about 5.5 years. One bird in Oxford was estimated to be at least 18 years old. It's reckoned that this bird flew, in its lifetime, about 4 million miles, the same as flying to the moon and back 8 times!

They almost never land – except at their nest sites – doing everything on the wing, including sleeping, mating and collecting nest material. They seem to bathe by flying relatively slowly through falling rain. No other bird is known to mate on the wing (apart from some other swift species). Once they launch themselves off on their very first ever flight, that's it, they don't return to the nest and are no longer cared for by the parents.

The swift probably eats more species of animals (small insects and spiders) than any other British bird. Over 312 have been recorded. Each bolus (ball of food) brought to the babies contains 300–1000 individual insects and spiders. Swifts can't feed in wet weather in the UK, so fly around storms to find dry areas – the only UK birds to do this. On the wintering grounds in Africa it's different – there are more insects in the air on rainy days, so the swifts will head for rain.

They have a clever adaptation. Food can be scarce in bad weather – the chicks can go cold and torpid and survive for days without food, then regain weight rapidly once supplies resume. Most baby birds can't do this and would simply die within hours.

Sue Shaw, 28th June 2020