



Friends of Ecclesall Woods

Newsletter October 2015.

www.friendsofecclesallwoods.org.uk



Ragweed

In the new edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary, words dropped include *acorn*, *beech*, *bluebell*, *dandelion*, *newt*, *pasture* and more nature words. I think this shows that the dictionary makers are out-of-date. There is so much emphasis now on introducing children to nature and play in nature and gardening and general out-of-doors activity. Do you think we should be worried?

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Our next event for all members of FEW is the Annual General Meeting. This is on Thursday 12 November, at 7.00 p.m., at The Woodland Discovery Centre.

Our speaker will be

PATRICK HARDING (as seen on TV)

THE OAK

Its history and ecology

So make sure this date is in your diary. The agenda, and minutes of the last meeting, are on page 6.

Meanwhile, the Footpath Group meets every Tuesday morning, and the Ecology Group is locating invasive plants throughout the Woods. Join them if you can.

Footpath Group.

Jane Beresford compiles a monthly report on the work done by the volunteers, and if you don't see this it's hard to believe how much gets done.

In the last 3 months, the group has concentrated on cleaning cross drains on the main footpaths, which helps keep the paths usable and attractive. There has been more fencing round Collier's Pond. Paths, particularly in Wood 3, have been improved with logs or stones in muddy areas. Fallen trees have been cleared. Paths have been lined with branches to discourage widening. There has been a major effort, 21 worker-mornings at least, to remove Himalayan Balsam along the Limb Brook, where it was riotously prevalent. And, of course, the ever-present litter-picking. A great tangle of wire was dumped at the top of the Donkey Field, and has been cut up and taken to the skip at the sawmill site. And at least 11 person-mornings have been spent picking up paper, plastic, bottles, tins, and dumped garden rubbish. Great admiration for the Footpath Group volunteers, and how they make the Woods more pleasurable for us all.

If you'd like to join the Footpath Group, they meet every Tuesday morning at 9.30 am, and work till about noon. Contact Jane Beresford, janeanden@gmail.com, or David and Judith Smith, dajusmith@live.co.uk. if Jane is away.

Ecology Group

The responsibility for the ecology group is shared by 3 people

Marilyn Small mhs1910@gmail.com

Sue Jackson Chris.jackson@zen.co.uk

Irene May Irenedeborahmay1949@gmail.com

This comes from Linda Evans, who is one of the surveyors for the Ecology Group.



Himalayan Balsam

Is it a pest?

I've just read "Where do Camels Belong", by Ken Thompson. It's subtitled "The Story and Science of Invasive Species". Ken Thompson was a lecturer in the Dept. of Animal and Plant Sciences at the University of Sheffield, and now writes on gardening and ecology. I've enjoyed his book "No Nettles Required", on promoting garden wildlife, and he comes across as talking sound sense backed up by evidence.

So, to Himalayan Balsam. It's claimed as a pest, which shades out native low-level plants, reduces biodiversity, and by producing more nectar attracts bumblebees and deters them from visiting other plants. There are efforts to remove it -- in fact, the Ecology group intended to remove it this year after surveys. There have been large studies of its effects, since it is obviously expensive to try to exterminate it. And these studies do NOT support the idea that it's a baddie to be jumped on. One Czech study shows negligible effects on biodiversity. Another, in our North-East, says that removal of Himalayan balsam can easily lead to the spread of other thugs -- goosegrass, bindweed, ground elder. And pollination? A German study found that native plants growing with the balsam got more visits from bumblebees than those in sites without balsam.

All this suggests that Himalayan Balsam does not need to be removed, and should simply be enjoyed. It does have pretty flowers, and it's enjoyable if you ever see the seedpod exploding.

This isn't to say that all invasive thugs are OK. Ken Thompson thoroughly dislikes Japanese knotweed, and thinks it's as bad as its reputation. We dislike it too.

New Ponds

The charity FrogLife was given a grant in 2013 to produce new ponds, to help frogs and toads and other pondlife. Frogs and toads generally have been having a poor time recently -- worldwide, practically all the species are endangered, and some have recently become extinct. Among the ponds constructed, there were 6 altogether in Ecclesall Woods and the surrounds: 1 in the Donkey Field, 2 just downstream from the Donkey Field, on the edge of the Bird Sanctuary, 1 in the Playing Field, and 2 in a field next to Wood3 and the Playing Field. I've been watching and photographing these ponds as they develop. This is the pond in the Donkey Field on 1 March 2014, just after it was dug. The expanse of mud and rough bare ground around the pond was very discouraging.



The next picture I took was in June this year. What a contrast!



All the bare ground is covered with luxuriant green. The flag irises were planted; the trees were there before; but what a fantastic recovery!



This picture was taken on 11 Aug 2015. Even more luxuriant. You can see waterlily leaves in the water, donated by some well-wisher. They don't look very healthy now, but they may take.

FEAST IN THE FOREST

The Woodland Discovery Centre have asked me to publicise this event, on Sunday 1st November, 10 AM to 4 PM. A celebration of autumn in the Woods.

**Woodland Discovery Centre
Abbey Lane
S7 2QZ**

Events will include:

**Cafe
Food Stalls
Woodland Crafts
Cooking on Fire
Children's Activities
Woodland Trails
Music
Conker Championship**

AGENDA for AGM.

Please note that the AGM this year will be held at 7.00 pm on Thursday 12 November 2015, in the Woodland Discovery Centre.

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of last AGM
3. Chairman's Report
4. Financial Report and Accounts
5. Membership Report
6. Footpath Report
7. Ecology Report
8. Archaeology Report
9. Any Other Business
10. Date of next AGM

THE MINUTES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2014 THURSDAY THE 23rd OCTOBER 7.30 PM, AT THE GRAVES WOODLAND DISCOVERY CENTRE.

1) Dr Toby Pillatt gave a talk on recent archaeological work in Ecclesall Woods, including survey work at the top of Wood 1, experimental work on producing white coal, and LIDAR images of the Woods. Lively questions followed.

2) **Apologies:** Joan Egan, Mr and Mrs G Hartland, Mr and Mrs M. Lewis, Paul and Irene May, Marilyn Small.

3) **Minutes of last AGM:** These were accepted as the correct record. John Baker proposed, John Fitzpatrick seconded.

4) **Chairman's report** We've had a year without a Chairman. I've been an acting Chairman, but many things haven't happened. Notably Newsletters. I did a last one in Jan, Monica did one in April, and there hasn't been one since then. But the Footpath Group and the Ecology Group, the active parts of FEW, have been active and productive and committed. You've just heard about archaeological activity. Co-ordination has gone on through committee meetings every 2 months. It's really obvious that the Chairman's role can be fairly limited, without affecting the group's activities. Which means there are lots of people who could be Chairman if they wanted; please will you all think about it?

Nonetheless, I have been persuaded by the committee to stand for Chairman again. If I'm associated with FEW at all, I just can't stop being bossy!

The other main activity during the year has been our part of the HLF grant. There are now 7 information boards dotted round the woods, as well as the original Q-pit board. They all have QR marks, which take someone with a Smartphone to our website where there is more information. Or you can look on the website anyhow, if you prefer. Last Sunday I went round taking pictures of all of the boards. Chatting to people, they all seemed interested and approved. We will also have revised leaflets on the Archaeology walk, soon available. I hoped they'd be ready for tonight. And, apart from admin. details at the end of the grant, that's our lot. No more grants in prospect.

5) **Financial report and accounts.**

Our Treasurer, John Fitzpatrick, reported on the accounts.

The accounts are distorted by the presence of a large unspent sum relating to the Heritage Lottery Fund grant, as they were last year. Ignoring this, we have a surplus of income over expenditure. This was not the case for some years, and our financial cushion of assets is being rebuilt.
(A page of the Accounts is available on request)

6) Membership report.

Lorna Baker reported that our membership is slightly down. We have 95 households paying a subscription, equating to about 160 people, and about a dozen complimentary members. Two new members have joined within the last three weeks.

7) Footpaths and Pond.

Our Tuesday morning volunteer team of eight have stayed constant throughout the year, working in snow, rain and wind.

Most of last winter was taken up with leaf blowing the paths, and we were able to send out two teams most weeks.

February, March and April were spent clearing muddy areas off paths. The worse areas being the lower parts of Woods 2 and 3.

An entrance to Wood 3, opposite the Hamlet was raised and improved at the request of the Tuesday morning walkers.

During summer, we installed 3 new and replaced 4 old sleeper drains in Wood 1 and also replaced a rotten footbridge below Parkhead.

On our way to and from these projects we
clear cross drains

improve path drainage

reinforce path edges with logs and branches and clear Cherry Laurel, Rhododendrons, and Himalayan Balsam as we find them.

The litter problem is increasing, especially along Whirlowdale Rd and the lay-byes on Abbey Lane. As a result we have litter picked these areas almost every week.

The charity Frog Life in conjunction with FEW decided on the location for 5 new ponds. Three were dug in and around the playing fields, one in the Donkey Field and another in the woods near the Donkey Field entrance, all paid for by Frog Life. All have been fenced and we will monitor them and if needed plant suitable species around the banks.

Colliers Pond water continues to be brown and murky. We have increased the wattle fencing, hopefully to deter dogs from destroying the plants along the banks. We have planted more irises and sedges at Colliers Pond and at the new pond in the Donkey Field.

More resurfacing of paths will be started soon, especially in Wood 3 and new sleeper cross drains are planned for the path leading down to Beauchief Gardens.

As always I would like to thank all our volunteers for turning up each week, whatever the weather, and a final big thank you to Ranger Tom Collier for all his help throughout the year

8) Ecology report.

At the Ecology Group meeting at the end of last year Monica Rorison stood down after 12/15? years of doing the job, and as she had done such a splendid job no one person felt they could completely take over, so myself, Marilyn Small and Irene May said we would take it on between us with Marilyn being the main contact for the group.

The subject for the group for 2013 had been for volunteers to survey their areas for flowering plant species through the growing season. 17 Members of the Ecology Group took part and plant species numbered 20 to 40 per area and when ferns and grasses were included it was over 40. The majority of the species flowered during the months May, June and July. Early flowerers were mainly trees: Alder, Hazel and Willow in February and March. Stinging Nettle flowered for the longest duration, usually 5 months. Long flowering times were also recorded for Bramble, Herb Robert, Herb Bennett, Red Campion and Broad-leaved Willow herb. Short time flowering species were Golden Saxifrage in March, Wood Anemone in April, Buttercup in June and Rosebay Willow Herb in July.

It was decided that the survey for 2014 would be for the group to get a general pattern of where the boggy/wet areas are in the woods. 14 people have taken part in the survey and up to 16th October 9

reports have been received, but others may have been received since as Marilyn is on holiday. A brief perusal of reports received showed that even though it was a dry summer most areas remained wet or damp and we shall compile a list of plants found within these areas. There will be a coffee meeting in December to discuss the results and get ideas for next year. More volunteers are always required as 3 members resigned from the group this year and any ideas for 2015 survey will be gratefully received.

I have continued surveying the Donkey Fields and a big change has been the addition of a pond by Frog Life. A largish area of overgrown brambles was removed to form the pond early in the year and once the hole had been dug it was left to fill up with water naturally. The surrounding area was very muddy at first and barren of vegetation. A fence has been erected round the front of the pond for health and safety reasons and to keep dogs out. It is hoped that frogs and newts will inhabit the pond in future years, but up till now I have seen no sign of any animal or plant life in the pond. Within a couple of months there were soon signs of vegetation and some plants I had not seen before in the area on both sides of the fence. A noticeboard has been erected in front of the pond. There was no sign of the orchid spotted last year.

In 2012 the Ecology group surveyed the distribution of bluebells within the woods and the results will have been discussed at a previous AGM, but this year Irene May has liaised with Matt Barlow, the GIS (mapping) officer, at Sheffield City Council, Meersbrook Park, and he has produced 2 excellent maps of the bluebell distribution in 1999 and 2012. These are being displayed at the Discovery Centre with notes about the findings, notably the decline in the number of bluebells since 1999.

9) Archaeology.

The year's archaeological activities were covered in Dr. Pillatt's talk.

10) AOB.

Various members discussed the question of getting more publicity. It was suggested that Radio Sheffield might want to talk about some of the new developments. We could also get publicity at the cafe in the Woodland Discovery Centre. It was agreed that we should ask for a separate portion of the noticeboard in the lobby of the Discovery Centre.

11) Date of next AGM.

22 October 2015. (Please note this has changed to 12 November)