

Porter Valley News



The newsletter of Friends of the Porter Valley - Registered Charity No. 1069865

Issue 100

January 2021

In our 100th newsletter we are pleased to announce that the Forge Dam Project is well on its way!



In the last newsletter we asked members to “watch this space” and sure enough developments are coming thick and fast. Ann's November Members Update announced wonderful news of a £100,000 anonymous

donation and we have since been in detailed discussions with Sheffield City Council about the best way to move the project forward. This generosity changes the dynamic of our fundraising as, in addition to Section 106 monies, we now have available 88% of the revised estimate for the project. Three-quarters of this money is now in the Fund and the rest is due in early April. We now do not believe we need to go through the process of obtaining money from the Lottery Fund.

Now in mid-January Sheffield Council has released a public Cabinet paper about the project on its Facebook which some of you will have seen. Cabinet has approved the proposals, including the acceptance of a donation from FoPV of funds to start the process. The plan specifies recreating an open body of water of varying depths with a re-profiled island and banks adding to wildlife habitat; the installation of a barrier to direct the brook over the spillway to prevent any future silting up; the removal of sediment to a site (currently proposed as Beighton) to serve as cover material for a closed landfill site (which will mean that it will not have to be bio-remediated as it will not be treated as waste).

Everyone's best endeavours are now focussed on raising the shortfall in funding and at the same time try to bring the project to fruition by March 2022 with a start in the Autumn of 2021.

David Young and Ann le Sage

Thank You! to our friends in other organisations for all their support these past months: Forge Dam Cafe team has been wonderful in the run up to Christmas (including donations from the Café tree collection). Various Council staff have helped enormously with conservation work advice, and support for Bingham improvements and Forge Dam restoration aspirations. I sang their praises to Parks Department's new Director Ruth Bell when we met on site in December. The Council faces severe financial difficulty in 2021. Thanks all of you who wrote in response to my 15 September mid-quarter News update. And thanks too to those who sent photos of the valley. There evidently was some joy during this long year.

Ann le Sage

Inside this issue:

Festival of Britain Woodlands	2
Knitters	2
Ducks in the valley	3
Christmas achievements	3
Leather Wheel Goit	4
Editorial changes	4
Contact details	4
Membership details	4
Committee members	4
Activities	4

Keith Civil planting seedlings destined for Festival of Britain Woodlands around 1951.



Reflections on Festival of Britain Woodlands

Vanessa Roberts reflects on her family connections with Festival Woodlands: The Porter Valley has been part of my family's history since my great grandparents bought a new house on Brooklands Crescent in 1926. In 1949 my father, Keith Civil, emerged from his schoolboy years of the second World War and, followed by two years conscription service in the RAF, to start work in his first job as a gardener for Sheffield Corporation based at Forge Dam. He was a book loving intelligent visionary and I remember him buying me the book "Silent Spring" by Rachel Carson in about 1967. This book was an ecological warning message. In fact, it is recognized as one of the most influential books of the 20th century, exposing the destruction of wildlife through the widespread use of pesticides. I knew my Dad planted some of the trees around Carr Bridge and I realize that he was part of the post war vision of Sheffield having taken part in the creation of the Festival of Britain Woodlands. In the photo he can be seen planting out seedlings in Sheffield Corporation's glasshouses, no

doubt destined for the Festival Woodlands. Sadly, my Dad died in 1990 but I felt that I would like to donate a sum of money to buy tools to help in the restoration of Festival Woodlands. I know my Dad would be smiling his own reserved smile knowing that his groundwork in the Festival Woodlands is being carried on with tools bought in his memory.

A note from the FoPV conservation volunteers:

We are grateful for Vanessa's donation of tools to help us restore Festival of Britain Woodlands. We have struggled with obtaining tools during the last year owing to restrictions on using tools formerly loaned to us by the Council Rangers because of the risks of transmitting the virus through tool sharing. Volunteers have been using their own tools which are now wearing out. We have now generated so much brash that we need to dispose of much of it in some way. Although we can make wildlife refuges with some of it there is just too much for that purpose. Luckily, Danny from Sheffield Lakeland Partnership has kindly offered to bring along their tractor and chipper during January for a day. Chipping should help us to control the increasingly large brash mounds. We will continue to clear the Festival Woodland until the spring when birds will be nesting. By then views down to Forge Dam should be well established. Our volunteers have worked very hard on this and other projects over the last year and should be congratulated on their efforts.

Dave Clegg, Conservation Volunteer Organiser

Dear knitters,

Sorry that we've been unable to meet up but it's been good to keep in touch over the last few weeks. Thanks to those who've contributed stockings as our sales have been brilliant. We've only been able to use three outlets: Le Crunch at Bents Green, Nature's Way at Fulwood and Forge Dam Café. We didn't ask supermarkets for Christmas novelty chocs as this involved unnecessary social contact so we have bought cheap *Freddos* which sit nicely in the stockings. In 2019 we made £160 at the fair and £272 selling stockings. In 2020 we made an astonishing £534 just selling stockings. We were selling till Christmas Day!

I think it's all down to restrictions on treats for so long... we've managed to put a smile on people's faces. Additionally, Linda Sibley, sold Father Christmas, bauble knits and lavender bags to her WhatsApp group and at her street's Christmas lights switch-on. She was pleased to raise £72 for Bingham Park Community Group which FoPV also supports. We have a stock of upmarket knits ready for Christmas fair 2021. I'm sure they will go down a treat. Thanks to those of you who enjoyed knitting those. Unless circumstances alter considerably FoPV won't be able to hold the Easter Duck Race but that doesn't prevent us selling our knitted ducks for more smiles!

Thanks to all of you, whether or not you've been able to pick up those needles, Particularly Sue, locked down in Leicestershire, knitting fingerless mittens and Rowena who donated stockings made by her WI group.

Ann Greenwood and Caroline Egglestone

Ducks in the Valley

We are indeed fortunate to have a sequence of dams in the valley which have survived from the intense industrial usage of the river years ago. All these remaining dams provide a perfect environment for water birds, by far the most common being, of course, the Mallard. Flocks of 30 or more can be seen throughout the year on Forge Dam, Wiremill, Shepherd Wheel Dam and Ibbotson, down to Nether Spurgear and Holme Dams in Endcliffe Park. Numbers vary on a daily basis, but Mallards can be guaranteed perhaps by the daily supply of food from the passing public and especially from very young children. Birds are often seen in flight and it is likely that they move up and down the valley between the various Dams dependant on their urges to choose partners and mate. The chicks so produced are a delight for the public and food for the heron.

Two years ago visitors to Wiremill were surprised to see two larger ducks which were identified as male and female Black East Indian Ducks. These are in fact an ornamental breed of domestic duck thought to have originated in the USA and are almost certainly escapees from someone's private collection. The male has now left the dam. Other visitors, and perhaps the most exotic looking are the Mandarin Ducks. The male is an amazing sight with elaborate and ornate plumage with distinctive long orange feathers on the side of the face and orange "sails" on the back. The female is less dramatic but still lovely. This difference between the sexes is quite common in many, but not all, species! Large flocks are seen on the valley but disappear at times to other dams or to breed in trees and we see their chicks later. Recently another exciting flock of some 14 Goosander were seen on Wiremill. This is a diving duck and again has marked differences between the sexes, the male once more being the more colourful. Another recent sighting was of a solitary Teal on Forge Dam.

We are so lucky to have this habitat at hand enabling us to see both common and less common species. Nothing can be guaranteed as they fly in and leave as and when they like. Well worth checking the dams on a regular basis.

Chris Nicholson

Christmas achievements to report

The December 2020 calendar picture shows what our annual Christmas Fair should look like, but of course that could not be repeated for real...it would have been impossible to manage crowd distancing. For the same reason the pop-up sales tables we originally envisaged could not be run. However, amazingly, our substitute distanced Christmas wreath making turned out to be a winner all round: lots of new contacts, new members, some brilliant products, and a real earner for the Forge Dam Restoration Fund just as a real Fair would have been. Our Treasurer is still totting up the figures! A big thank you to our Web manager Mike Halliwell for setting up the wreaths and wreath kit sales on the FoPV shop in addition to the usual Walking Booklet, Christmas cards and Calendars.

A huge thankyou to the tiny team that devised the process, designed publicity, collected and assembled raw materials, made up the orders, arranged with buyers to pick their purchases up from front gardens, and very importantly liaised with our two Cafes, Bents Green Le Crunch and Broomhill Post office who were to sell for us. All in all we sold out of cards before December started, made 68 wreaths and 52 wreath kits, sold nearly all the calendars and saw lots of Walking Booklets head for Christmas stockings!



At a normal Fair we would have made perhaps 15 wreaths and helped families make another 50 to 60 or so. Great team effort by John and Jenny Gittins our wreath, ring and kit makers in chief; Caroline Egglestone and Cheryl McCormick the Nether Green and Bents Green focus for wreaths, and links to the crucial sales outlets, Hilary White for marshalling us at the start and supporting throughout; Ann Clegg for fielding buyers up at Lodge Moor, and Alison Beck who made extra wreaths when the going got tough. I think all our fingers have recovered now! We found making wreaths at our own pace indoors in the warm quite an interesting alternative to struggling with foliage outdoors in the cold at crowded tables!

Lots of lessons learned for next year. We don't want to lose the community event but distanced making and selling were enjoyable too. We could start a bit earlier, organise makers in teams, and offer "Christmas wreaths" workshops. Anyone like to join in next time?

Ann le Sage



Secretary:
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Annual Membership:

Single: £10
Family: £15
Concession: £5

Membership forms
available from
David Young
(tel. 2307909)
or on our website

Cancellation

In case you were in any doubt, there will be no talk in February due to COVID-19.

It's also very unlikely that we will be able to run our annual duck race this Easter.

The Committee:

Ann le Sage
Chair
David Young
Treasurer
Glynis Jones
Secretary / newsletter
Dave Clegg
Conservation work days
Les Greenwood
Catering
Mike Halliwell
Website / membership
Glyn Mansell
Bingham Park
Maggie Marsh
Shepherd Wheel open days
Chris Nicholson
Walks
Flora Owen
Talks

Leather Wheel Goit gets a Makeover

The Leather Wheel was first recorded in 1754 as a cutlery grinding shop, but it changed its name at least four times during its history with the name Leather Wheel appearing in 1803. A 1902 OS map describes it as the Nether Mill works (disused), although its last official name was the rather splendid Whiteley Woods Bottom Wheel and shops. It finally closed in 1891.

If there was no information post to pinpoint the spot, it would be easy to walk past the site without realising, as nothing now remains. The mill was demolished in 1907, and the dam was filled in in 1957. Curiously, the goit was left intact, although the entrance was modified with the introduction of a new entrance 2 metres lower down, making a dog leg, and the aperture made smaller, presumably to restrict the flow of water. The stone slab used to secure the sluice mechanism is still in place where the entrance originally was. At the eastern outflow end a substantial stone sill creates the perfect sump for the foulest smelling silt imaginable.

The picture shows the original outflow from the dam which is now under the path and sadly hidden from view, as it is a beautiful stone arched tunnel, lined with shallow stone steps, almost as clean as when it was first built. The goit itself is finely built throughout its length with dressed stone walls and substantial capstones, although some of these are missing. Restriction to the flow has encouraged the build-up of leaf litter and other debris and the edges were totally obscured by ivy, brambles, nettles and self-sets which had rooted in the goit and the wall.



The Leather Wheel goit has been blocked and neglected for many years. It's unfortunate that during a past reconstruction of the footpath the original sluice opening was blocked off and a much smaller feed created. The first job was to try to remove pebbles and silt from under the path to get some flow of water; this is an ongoing task, but it is a shame that there is unlikely ever to be a strong flow.

The next task was to create a channel along the full length of the goit. At the top end by Armchair Bridge the debris is sand and pebbles, but it quickly turns to muddy silt. Over the years, rocks and bricks, perhaps the remains of industrial buildings, have found their way into the goit and further impeded the flow. It would be too ambitious without mechanical assistance to clear the goit fully, but a clear, meandering flow will be enough to bring the goit back to life. Work to clear brash and self-sets has made the full length of the goit more visible from the footpath and we hope, increased walkers' appreciation of this largely overlooked part of our industrial heritage. We have been working on the goit for

several weeks attempting to reverse the encroachment of mother nature. David has done most of the heavy work, hacking at the compacted bed to make a deeper channel and placing strategic stones in the main river to divert more water through the goit. He has also cleared substantial amounts of silt and stone from the channel, such that water is now flowing freely. The grey wagtail (pictured) certainly appreciated the efforts and felt secure enough to forage close to where David was working.



John Gittins and David Manley (thanks to John Garth for historical detail and picture)

Changes on the editorial front

After 15½ years, our newsletter editor, Ann Granville is stepping down. This means that Ann has edited 62 of the 100 newsletters we've produced so far! I know this because we took on the production of the newsletter together in October 2005 from Ros Hancock (a very hard act to follow) with newsletter no. 39. We all, and especially I, want to say a big thank you to Ann for the sterling work she has done over the years, (not least the unenviable task of getting our contributors to submit their copy on time!). The good news is that Les and Ann Greenwood have agreed to pick up the baton from here, so I look forward to the next 15½ years in good company ;)

Glynis Jones