



# Friends of Dibbinsdale

Supporting Brotherton Park & Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve

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[www.dibbinsdale.co.uk](http://www.dibbinsdale.co.uk)

## Letter from Dibbinsdale

### Spring '14

"Letter from Dibbinsdale" is a newsletter for the people who use the reserve and those who seek to support its conservation and management.

Mellow Yellow  
Spring is blooming in lovely shades of yellow. Can you name 5 flowering plants shown here?  
Answers on back page



Carpets of Anemones in Marfords Wood

### Love Wirral Award

Dean Patten, a local resident living nearby in Heatherdene and one of the team masterminding the archaeology project that took place last summer, applied for a £500 grant to improve the St Patrick's Well area of the reserve from the Council's Love Wirral Scheme. The scheme objective is to encourage local people and groups to improve their local areas. Dean applied and via a vote of Wirral residents his scheme was deemed worthy and successful.  
(continued inside)



### Tree Planting

February saw the last of the winter seasons tree planting. It was a very rewarding occasion for one retired ranger. The young trees had been propagated and tended by the last ranger and volunteers who saw the opportunity realised for their plant charges to find a home in the park. The young trees had been taken as cuttings in most part from a few years ago. Last year they were potted on into large 12 inch pots (Asda's donated cut flower tubs) They found homes in several places around Woodslee. Cherry trees were planted alongside Spital road, willows at the back of the main car park and elderberries adjacent to Woodslee School. Most of the trees have a high conservation or aesthetic value. (taste good or look good) Let's hope they continue to give enjoyment to all.



A



B



C



D



E

## Love Wirral Award (continued)

A clean up of the well area is to take place and an interpretative notice board will be designed and erected to tell visitors about the historic significance of the site.

St Patrick's Well is not truly a well at all. The red sandstone escarpment here produces impermeable rocks that stop water soaking into the ground. The result is that water accumulates at the surface in what could be ungenerously described as a smelly puddle. The naming of the feature after St Patrick alludes to the journey of the saint who sailed across the Irish Sea in the post Roman period to somewhere in the northwest as part of a missionary quest to make us Christian. Don't you love legends!

Dean's notice board will perhaps be more diplomatic with the real story. As a modern day wishing well it has a lot to recommend it, but I need to inform possible donors that wishes are only granted with pound coins given to the Ranger!

### Message from Alan

Another spring has arrived in Dibbinsdale and we are all looking forward to a good summer. Unfortunately, we suffered a burglary at the ranger's office early in March and lost a number of valuable tools. The thieves broke in through the back door and cut locks in the store rooms. Although this setback affected us all, I was reminded how good people can be by the help of volunteers in making the building safe and tidying up after the break in (thank you Mike). I was also heartened by the quick response from our Friends Group with the immediate offer to pay for a quality alarm system to be fitted to the building. On a happier note, I, along with nine other rangers have been training as a Forest Schools Practitioners over the past year and we have been delivering Forest Schools sessions at parks and open spaces around Wirral. This has taken me away from the reserve on a number of occasions. However, I am now able to deliver these sessions to our local schools from Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale LNR. These sessions will give me the opportunity to use the outdoor classroom that we have been working on over the last ten months. It will also bring a new group to the community that uses and enjoys the walled garden.

Over the past year I have been involved with helping to put together a new updated management plan for the reserve which will be completed in April this year. This document will be available for your consideration and comment at The Rangers Office, Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale LNR; throughout May. Thanks again to everyone who helps in any way to make Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale the friendly welcoming place that it is. Long may we all enjoy it.

Regards Alan Smail  
Ranger, Brotherton Park and  
Dibbinsdale LNR

## Mystery of the Massacred Toads

It sounds like the title of a gruesome murder mystery, but unfortunately this is true and took place at Woodslee Pond at the end of March. At the end of a volunteers work session the existence piles of dead frogs and toads were drawn to Alan's attention.

"Are the Ranger's doing a cull of amphibians on the pond?" answer "No, and what do you mean?"

On closer inspection, piled up on the edge of the pond and fishing platforms, could be seen 100s of dismembered frogs and toads. It looked strangely like the doings of a horrible gang of lads, except that there were so many corpses and bits clearly eaten. Very weird! Alan called in the man from the Environment Agency in the days that followed to shed light on the 'crime'.

His verdict was that it was possible that a family of otters may have come snacking in the night and selectively eaten the best bits. (Toads are known to not be to every animals taste) Thereby leaving the dismembered untasty bits. Where is one of those expensive infrared wildlife cameras when you want one! No tracks, no skats ( poo) left behind. American Mink are known to act in a similar way to foxes in a chicken coop (i.e. killing everything they come across and then stashing the bodies in a larder for later digestion.) This seemed possible. The impact they have on the wildlife as a whole is very serious. Herons would only take ones or twos. Rats would only eat the bodies once killed. So otter or mink? The mystery remains, but poor old frogs and toads.



### Planning Application Decision Awaited

Early in the year a planning application was made by the occupants of 17 Pineridge Close for the construction of dwellings on private land overlooking the river and thereby the reserve in the Spital Dam area. The details of the development are posted on the Council's Planning Department website. The members of the Friends were emailed with view to what response they wished to make (i.e. no objection, some objection or total objection)

Upon the strength of feeling of those who replied, an objection to the development was made on the grounds that it would constitute a visual intrusion and impact on the wildlife of the shared river valley. The Environment Agency have lodged their objection to the development with the council, as have Bromborough Society and residents in the area.

The written up report including the planning decision will be available from Mrs Parker of the department at the end of April. We await the council's decision.

## New Bodgers Shed

Construction of the new bodgers shed is coming along a pace. What is a bodger shed, you may ask? I suppose it is a conservationist way of saying a 'craft area'. The old shed, which was inside of the walled garden, just through the visitors centre, fell down over the winter. (more accurately- threatened to fall down!) It was used as a wood crafts undercover area. Some of the recycled timber used to be stored here. The old one was a bit gloomy and cluttered, so the new one has every prospects for being an improved show case and resource for developing wood craft skills- i.e. bodgering. The bodger was a woodland worker in olden times that would live in a hut in the woods. He (she?) would cut wood to make charcoal, make hurdles, gates and rustic furniture. With a pole lathe he would turn wooden spindles for chairs that might later be finished off by a chair maker in a town .Hence his work was 'bodged'- later associated with something done roughly or badly. This will hopefully not be the case with future craftwork here.

Interestingly the design of the structure has a touch of 'grand design' in it. (as of Channel.4 TV programme fans) Alan wishes to create a recycled materials element in its making. The frame is made of treated wood but he hopes to tile the roof with plastic estate agent house boards and used wattle and daub type straw bales for walls. Should look good as well as perform a valuable role in integrating estate management in the reserve with materials recycled for future use back in the park. Volunteers have been supporting Alan in its construction and The Friends have contributed to the cost of materials.

Winter works ....spring and summer promise  
Winter conservation work done with future habitat benefits



## Bromborough Woods 'Dead Hedge'

Some valuable coppice work was done in late spring to help bring life back into the woods. The cut hazel will allow light to the woodland floor, improve the success of the bluebells here and the sticks bordering the path will help form a barrier to lessen trampling



## Bodens Hey 'haircut'

One side of Bodens Hey Meadow received a sympathetic haircut. The perimeter growth of encroaching brambles was lessened to allow the edge of the meadow to blossom with more flowers this summer. The retention of brambles will still enable cover and food for wildlife but biodiversity is enhanced

## Walled Garden improvements

The new year saw the repair of the lintel going into the walled garden. This was undertaken by council contractors and involved removing a decaying wooden lintel over the gateway into the garden that held up bricks across the top. The collapse of the lintel and bricks above it were a potential health and safety hazard. The new lintel and brickwork now serve to set up improvements to the bodger shed now being undertaken. It is quite interesting to reflect that the gateway itself was created in the early 1980's when the first rangers cut through the perimeter wall to make an entrance that was then part of what became a tree nursery.

Eastham Centre's Incredible Edible Project continues into 2014 based on a grant obtained earlier. Materials have been bought to make and repair new raised beds, provide water barrels and taps for irrigation, plastic for a polytunnel, and wood to repair the boot room wall and fit out a new shelves and staging for the potting shed. The garden begins to burst with new plantings, seedlings and the promise of a fruit full season. A lot of work has been done over the winter to prepare the garden. The apple trees have been pruned, bird protected beds made for some fruit and vegetables, the herb garden renovated and a new bird feeder garden created near the Volunteer Base. Things are looking up with energy and enthusiasm from staff, volunteers and clients of Eastham Day Care Centre. Particular thanks go to Bill Hughes and John Hudson for their continued involvement in the garden after their retirement from Social Services



## One for the Calendar

Under the guidance and experience of Alan, the Ranger, and the volunteers, work has been undertaken in the winter months to create a new walled garden, with "That feeling of years gone by". The walls and gate have been repaired and opened up. Separate flower and vegetable sections have been given their space in the garden. Special features have been introduced (well worth a visit). To blend in with the new and old a brand new, eco-friendly Bodger shed has been constructed with materials used to blend in with the garden.

To celebrate the new garden, and other projects that volunteers have achieved, we are holding a charity night on Friday August 15th, 7.30pm with a production of Mary Queen of Scots, "No **time for tears**".

The performance will take place in the garden with the actors in full Tudor costume. Tickets approx £5.

**Further details to follow in plenty of time for this enjoyable social evening.**

Clive James, Friends Committee Member and volunteer

**Get well soon.** All people associated with Dibbinsdale would like to wish Steve Skinner, the Friends Secretary, a speedy recovery from his appendix operation. Look forward to seeing you back in the park.

Answers to Mellow yellow flower quiz: **a.** primrose  
**b.** marsh marigold **c.** celandine **d.** coltsfoot **e.** willow catkin

## Events at Dibbinsdale in May.

**History Walk**  
Tuesday 6th May,  
10am - 12.30pm Cost: **FREE**

A guided walk around Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve looking at the recent heritage and history of the reserve and how the valley was formed. There are some hills on site and sturdy footwear is recommended. The walk will cover no more than two miles.

**A Tale of Two Parks**  
Tuesday 13th May,  
10am - 2pm Cost: **FREE**

Join the Wirral Rangers walk around Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve and Eastham Country Park stopping at Eastham for lunch. There are food outlets at Eastham or you could bring a packed lunch. This walk will be no more than five miles and some of the walk will be on open roads. Dogs must be kept under control at all times.

**Bats in Brotherton Park**  
Tuesday 20th May, 8.45pm - 10.45pm Cost: **FREE**

A walk around Dibbinsdale Local Nature reserve looking and listening for the bats that live in and around the valley. There are some hills on site and sturdy footwear is recommended. The walk will cover no more than two miles. Children are welcome but must be well supervised.

**Booking Essential**

**Contact:**  
0151 334 9851  
Email  
[alansmail@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:alansmail@wirral.gov.uk)

**Meet at: The Rangers Office, Dibbinsdale, CH62 2BJ**

**Nearest station: Spital**