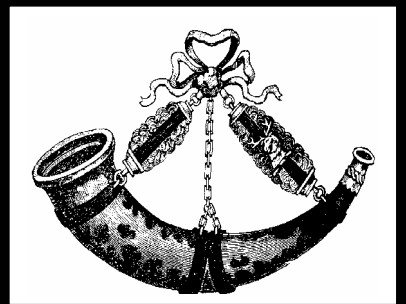


Letter from Dibbinsdale



Spring'09

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

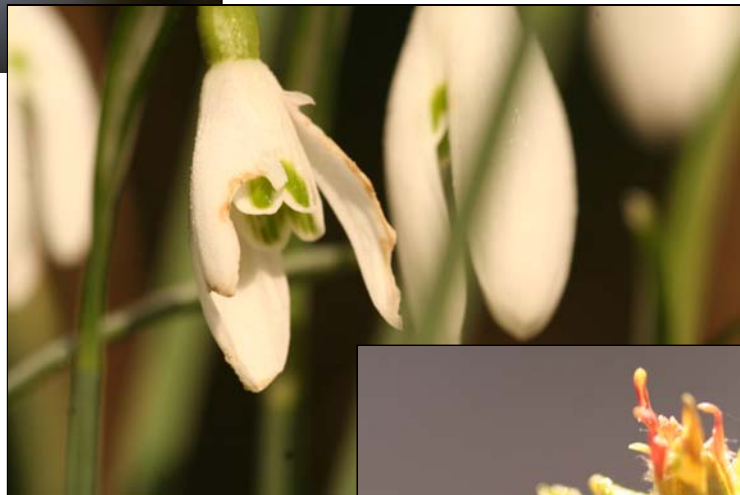
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Spring is here...its official

And what wonderful time for the woods. New growth and new life emerges day by day. The air is warming up and the sun might actually come out !

Kingfishers are checking out places to nest along the river bank, summer migrants like skylarks are returning to the meadow and the frogs and toads have set their spawn. The cherries, anemones and bluebells are flowering their heads off.



The snowdrops produced a wonderful show on the river banks in February this year.

(middle)

The bird cherry (top) and emerging leaves (bottom) produce one of the most beautiful shows in woods

Green Flag Reapplication

The process of trying to improve Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve's infrastructure through the Green Flag 'audit' continues. Last year the reserve narrowly failed the Green Flag inspection by a panel of judges in May.

The reserve has been reentered for another appraisal this year. The management plan has been improved and a number of site improvements have been put in place. Some are only small improvements like better information boards, signing and benches. Others are administrative, like the addition of a conservation management plan to the overall management of the site plan. Others are improvements to safety, like the building of a safety fence on the viewpoint overlooking the valley. (Near Point 2 on the trail) Yet more relate to better access, like the creation of a new all weather path network between the car park and Woodslee Pond.

The criteria used for judging the quality of the open space in the Green Flag Award can be seen 'online'. If you would like to find out more about the process and the council's commitment to Green Flag, please ask at the Rangers Office, or see the council's website (www.wirral.gov.uk)



Boards and benches

With the help of The Community Service and other volunteers the reserve has had the addition of some new interpretative boards and simple benches (donation of Wirral Footpath Society) at key places in the reserve. These have been sited to link up with the Heritage Trail that was created last year. If you would like a copy of the trail, please contact Pete the ranger, or go online to www.dibbinsdale.co.uk where you will find a copy posted there.

Ducks at Dibby



There was a pair of Mandarin Ducks spotted in Woodslee pond on Monday 23 March by a local dog walker. Mandarin ducks are not often seen here at the pond. The Mandarin duck was seen in the valley the week before. Here is some information I have found about the ducks that you might find interesting.

Mandarin Ducks, which are referred to by the Chinese as *Yuan-yang* are frequently featured in Oriental art and are regarded as a symbol of conjugal affection and fidelity. A Chinese proverb for loving couples uses the Mandarin Duck as a metaphor: "*Two mandarin ducks playing in water*" The Mandarin Duck symbol is also used in Chinese weddings, because in traditional Chinese lore they symbolize wedded bliss and fidelity. Specimens frequently escape from collections, and in the 20th century a feral population numbering about 1,000 pairs was established in Great Britain.

Although this is of great conservational significance, the birds are not protected in the UK since the species is not native there. In the wild, Mandarin Ducks breed in densely wooded areas near shallow lakes, marshes or ponds. They nest in cavities in trees close to water. Shortly after the ducklings hatch, their mother flies to the ground and coaxes the ducklings to leap from the nest. Mandarins feed by dabbling or walking on land.

They mainly eat plants and seeds, especially beechmast. They feed mainly near dawn or dusk, perching in trees or on the ground during the day. Mandarins may form small flocks in winter, but rarely associate with other ducks.

Oliver Evetts

Springwatch and Breathing Spaces Grant

The National Lottery who runs the environmental grant scheme called Breathing Spaces have contacted The Friends with regards to supplementary funding. The Friends were successful with their application to Breathing Spaces a year ago so they have been asked whether they want to apply for a new round of funding called 'PHASE 4'. The application was sent off in February and we will hear about whether we are successful in April.

Perhaps more interestingly, the National Lottery have an association with Springwatch, the BBC's wildlife programme. In the 'tick boxes' for the application, there was one that asked whether The Friends wished to be including in any future TV programming of Springwatch. We said yes! If we are on the telly, we will have to think up an event for them to film. Good eh?!

My name is down to talk to Kate Humble!

Tree planting

Bebington Scouts undertook a tree planting task close to the Rangers Office in early March. The area around Woodslee Cottages has a number of ornamental trees already growing there. The Monkey Puzzle Tree, The Coastal Redwood and the Holm Oaks are just a few that have been happy growing here for over 100 years. The introduction of different varieties of non native trees has been going on for many years now. The Dawn Redwood, The Giant Sequoia and Serbian Pines are a few new 'faces'.

This planting season (winter) has seen the latest of our arboretum trees. Douglas Firs, Cypresses, Hemlocks and European Larches have all been 'dotted about' the site. They have been clustered in small tree groups so they can stand a better chance of survival.

The trees, planted in 'pockets', need to fight off competition from the surrounding vegetation in order to grow away successfully. To achieve this, each tree has a plastic blanket around it over which a thick layer of woodchip has been spread.

The sight of some of these new arrivals in 10 years time will be an exciting prospect. As other trees become available, it is hoped that this collection will be added to in future years.



Woodslee Pond make over

In a much more dramatic and high environmental impact way, trees close to Woodslee Pond have been pruned and coppiced. The idea here is to create a screen of low level vegetation that will provide food and cover for wildlife.

The cutting back has changed the look of the area close to the end of the pond nearest the walled garden. It will allow more light and moisture to the ground. The tree stumps that remain will regrow and produce vigorous new growth as the season progresses. This has been done in a similar way in the area known as Sunlight Dell. Here hollies were given a 'severe haircut' over three years ago and now the regrowth is quite impressive. Dense thickets of holly and laurel provide cover for a range of creatures. A young fox has been seen over the winter exploring the undergrowth with perhaps the prospect of setting up home.

Close to the pond itself, the willows that overhang the bank of the northern end have also been cut back. Willows are the fastest growing trees in the reserve. Branches of over 6 feet in length will come from the cut 'stools'. The cut willow branches have been made into 'stakes' that have been driven into the wet ground around the pond edge. These will sprout from such cuttings and form new trees. There will be a protective willow screen around the waters edge. The new tree roots will also stabilize the bank edge.

The increased light in the area has meant that a lot of young trees and bushes have been able to be planted in the understorey. Attractive guelder roses, wild roses and elderberries and been planted to improve diversity. Daffodils, periwinkles, ivies and other ground cover plants have been used to add a bit of colour. The growing conditions under the yew trees here are very difficult, so a lot of new compost has been added.

A lot of this work has been done with the services of Heswall Day Centre, Eastham Conservation Trust and the Community Service. (See photo of lads & new gate below) Many thanks all for your efforts.



Extracts from Memories of Woodslee

The quest for local history information about Woodslee House continues. Some interesting new developments have popped up with this in mind.

*Patricia Brook has sent in to Bromborough Society her **Memories of Woodslee**. Some extracts are enclosed below. Thanks to Susan Nicholson for passing these on.*

“The drive leading up to the house was flanked with rhododendron bushes. It was unlit so could be quite eerie on a dark night. A right hand curve of the drive brought you up to the house”.

“A small door on the left hand side of the house led to a small hall and a panelled stair case (according to my mother, it had 52 steps in all) It was lit through a large stained glass window. These stairs were the access to two flats. One of the flats was the first home of my parents, Philip and Hilda (Nee Bell) Holmes, and the other by Mr and Mrs Hale and their baby son Michael.”



1928 Hilda (nee Bell) & Phyllis Holmes

Steps leading to small putting green, Woodslee House

“On the ground floor a door gave access to the cellars. These housed some kind of boiler which needed to be stoked. Maybe this was for hot water, as all the flats were lit by gas and heated by coal fires. The entrance to this part of the house had a wood and glass front door with an overhead decoration of leaded lights. It led to a vestibule with a mosaic tiled floor, beyond which was a T-shaped hall. On the left of the hall was a small bathroom which contained a bath, wash basin and toilet. The taps were brass and the toilet seat was square shaped and made of wood.”

“To the right was a entertaining room. This, as did all the rooms, sported a large basket fire grate, with a white marble surround and hearth. A chimney sweep was often called as the large chimneys were a favourite nesting place for pigeons. A long corridor ran along the length of the house separating the front from the back. This was dominated by a large Adam fire place”.



“To the left was a short passage with a tiled floor and small single rooms on either side. I think this may have been the servants quarters in more affluent times. The last door on the right led to a very large and bright kitchen, situated at the back of the house. This looked out onto the gardens. It had lots of cupboards and draws in dark wood and a large sink with wooden draining boards. To the left of the fire place was a “walk in” room. This had a thick metal door with heavy locks and a large handle. Inside the floor was concrete and shelves that ran from floor to ceiling. It was referred to as the ‘The Butlers Pantry.’ I think it had been used for the family valuables. Away from the servants quarters the corridor continued to the other end of the house and at the end of which were three large bedrooms. One bedroom at the front and two at the back. One of which was mine. The room had a fire place with a wooden surround and a tiled hearth.”

“I recall the names of some of the residents. There was Mr Dick Moss and his wife Edith and their daughters Mary, Lilly and Nellie. There was also Mrs Parry, Mrs Barr and daughter Ethel and the Wainwright family. Altogether Woodslee sported a pleasant small community. It had a football and cricket teams. There was also tennis, depending on the season and enthusiasm. These activities took place on a field behind Mr Atkin’s Lodge House and adjacent to Woodslee School.”

“With the onset of World War Two, Woodslee House was requisitioned by the government of the day, and was subsequently occupied by the armed forces of several countries. We moved to Allport Road. My mother, hoping to return in more peaceful times, optimistically retained the front door key. Unfortunately the house was demolished in the late 1950s. I wonder what became of the Butlers Pantry?”

Patricia Brook October 8th 2008

News in Brief

Cross Country and ‘Orienteering’.

This spring and last summer a number of cross country races have been held in the reserve. These have been organised by Janet Young, a teacher from Wirral Grammar School for girls. As part of a network with local primary schools and Wirral Grammar and Bebington High School who are a Sports Colleges, Janet has been encouraging sporting and recreational activity in the park. Woodslee Primary, Poulton Primary, Church Drive, Port Sunlight and Grove Street, New Ferry have all been involved in cross country races.

Other uses of the reserve for physical activities with young children have also been explored. A tree hunt was undertaken on Spital Fields for example, along with a Teddy Bears Picnic with younger children. Simple orienteering or wayfaring is something that will be developed in the coming year. There are some thoughts on the idea of creating a GPS trail, using satellite tracking devices and maps of the reserve.



Woodslee House.

Still on the Woodslee House theme, Peter had a visit from Warner Williams, a gentleman who at one time worked for the council’s groundsmen based here at Dibbinsdale. Warner told a wonderful tale of a long term task he was involved in which was filling in the cellars of Woodslee House. When the house was demolished, the cellars beneath the ground were left intact. They posed a safety problem because there was access into them. The solution was to fill them in. Brick archways (vaulting) supported the house and through these archways tons of rubble was tipped to fill in the hole formed by the cellars. Not all of the cellars were accessible to the tippers, so Warner thinks there is still a ‘void’ of cellar unfilled underground. Anyone got a cave detector (geophysics)? Anyone got any photos of this being done. Warner mentioned a work colleague of his called Carl Huxley who lived in Palatine Road who was keen on taking photographs. Does anyone know anything about him?