

Porter Valley News



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

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Forge Dam

After the Shepherd Wheel, this is the next big project. The Forge Dam area has been looking very run down for some time now. Apart from a few improvements to the playground and flood repairs to the bridge and banks in 2009, there has been little investment. Benches and seats need repair; trees need renewal; the dam is hugely silted and needs a long term solution. Alan and May have been negotiating with Council Officers about the state of their buildings as well as running a petition at their Forge Café about the whole area.



Meanwhile the Friends of the Porter Valley Committee went on site to walk the patch with Councillors and Council Officers in the autumn. All agreed that something needed to be done. We now expect to see work start in 2010 on a master plan for the Forge Dam in the context of the whole valley. We have given the officers a copy of our original 2003 Vision Statement for the Porter Valley parks to contribute to the thinking which is still largely relevant even after six years. See this on our website or contact me on 07790250087 or e-mail ann@lesage.org.uk.

A crucial question is "what should Forge Dam look like?" Many people have said they want to see a clear stretch of water again, not filthy mud and drying banks, but the river dropping debris as it runs right through the dam makes this difficult (and no, the silt trap maintenance system does not seem to have been a robust solution). One serious option is to involve the Wildlife Trust and invest in a Nature Reserve here, in other words to keep the river flowing and manage the silting to form an attractive wetland. We know that woodcock and snipe occasionally take cover here. So comments please to help the thinking!

As part of our 2010 voluntary work programme we intend to work with Parks' officers to repair the benches at the Forge Café and elsewhere above the dam. Anyone ready to help on this one? We have just put in a bid for a Community Chest grant from the South West Assembly to buy materials.

Ann le Sage

Footsoldier reports that he is limbering up for a repairs walk with representatives of the Friends, and of the Council Officers, in January. As he writes conditions could hardly be more physically testing for us locals with more ice on the paths than on the dams. Even before the snows the valley sides were running with springs – some of which had not been seen in decades. Provided that the snow and ice has cleared by the day we walk, we shall be able to record a winter scene ready for remedial work.

Footsoldier comments that the repair that deserves a 'big tick' is the Wire Mill dam leak; it had made a mess of a favourite Easy Going path for rather too long – but puddle clay is not exactly a modern medium in which to work! As of early January – an excellent job.

The project that takes the eye is, of course, the Shepherd Wheel dam. For sure the process of tearing back the centuries isn't a pretty sight but when mankind wants to restore and enhance, the weeds (including sycamores) must first be cleared. What a superb start by the recorders and the fund-raisers – and the guy that drove the digger!

The need that cries out for urgent attention now that the 'Muddy Path' has been sorted, is the spring which emerges from the base of the wall near the steps from Oakbrook Road into Endcliffe Park top. Too many people have moaned for it to be ignored.



Progress of the Shepherd Wheel Project

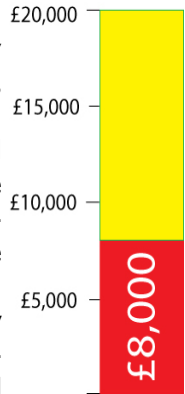
After all the activity in the Autumn a quiet period ensued but things are going on in the background prior to work recommencing in January 2010.

The removal of silt was successful, though somewhat messy, and what remains in the millpond was needed for the final landscaping etc. However what with the exceedingly wet summer and November and the nature of the silt material, the remaining silt seems to be unlikely to dry out for landscaping purposes. The City Council are looking at alternatives, which may involve the main contractor for the dam repairs who has now been appointed, with a view to commence work in January.

The detailed design of the educational shelter and access ramp is under discussion with English Heritage and the various designers and contractor. Negotiations have successfully taken place with the Hangingwater Allotments group to "borrow" some land near the mill, to improve access for disabled people.

The volunteer photographing, recording and storing of removable items within the mill building has been completed. An Interpretation Workshop has been held to determine how the site will be described, illustrated and demonstrated for public and educational visits. A tender brief will soon be sent out to suitable specialist firms to continue with the remaining archaeological recording, monitoring and interpretation design.

On the fundraising front, FoPV have now raised another £8000 towards our new £20000 target, making £28000 altogether, plus a further £2000 from the Town Trust. Recently we were informed that Viridor will award the project £45000 from the Landfill Communities Fund.



David Young



Shepherd Wheel Inventory

In preparation for the restoration of Shepherd Wheel, I and two other volunteers, Walter and Eileen Fox, under the guidance of a volunteer professional archaeologist Ben Graves, and with the help and guidance of Park Ranger Tom Newman, undertook a project to catalogue and remove all 'moveable' items from the building.

The work began at the beginning of October, fortunately in bright weather, as there is of course no lighting at the Wheel. Over a period of four weeks, working two days a week, everything that could be lifted, carried or rolled was removed, listed and described in an inventory. The work was tiring, cold and very dirty, so we were grateful for the protective clothing provided by Tom. During the work we were visited by a robin, so we were not surprised when clearing some coiled drive belts from a shelf near the window to find a nest carefully built in the centre of one!

This first stage produced an inventory with over 500 entries, which covered approaching 1,000 individual items. None of the volunteers are industrial archaeologists or historians, so the descriptions may not always be correct, but we tried to be accurate rather than over-imaginative! In November, (and several degrees colder!), we returned to the Wheel and carried out a second recording project, this time listing, measuring and photographing all the objects which could not be removed. This second inventory in particular will be used for information in the process of awarding contracts for the restoration work.

Among the industrial items, we also found two hibernating Herald moths. We reported these to the Council's ecologists, who were apparently very excited, and have added the sighting to their database. (We aren't sure whether this was an unusual sighting or whether ecologists are particularly exciteable!)

We all enjoyed the hands-on nature of the project, but we all came away with a feeling of great respect for the grinders who worked there in such conditions.



Herald Moth

Peter Bayliss