
COLWALL VILLAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

July 2004

Orchids in Colwall

The September newsletter had a little piece about orchids in Colwall in the 1950s when 12 different species were mentioned as growing here. As a result of this, two people got in touch with me to say they have orchids in their gardens: with the ones I have seen myself, we have a grand total of four: the common spotted, marsh and green-winged orchids and the broad-leaved helleborine (not a hellebore, a helleborine – also an orchid).

That leaves the violet helleborine, the pyramid, early purple, butterfly, scented, frog and bird's nest orchids and the common twayblade to find. Some of these could be in flower now and the twayblade in particular is quite widespread and distinctive with its single pair of leaves. Please keep your eye out for them – it would be wonderful to get all 12 back again.

Why are orchids interesting?

For a start there are a lot of different types. The orchid family contains about 30,000 species, indicating what biologists would call a radiation – a rapid evolution of a group of plants, each exploiting different aspects of the environment. Quite why the orchids have this variability is not known, but all of them are characterised by the same flower plan – three sepals, often coloured, more or less alike and looking like petals, and three proper petals, one of which is very different from the others and forms a lip. This is extremely variable, in some species imitating insects, but the many different shapes of the flowers have always fascinated people and given rise to common names such as man orchid, bee orchid, frog orchid, ladies tresses, bird's nest orchid and dozens more.

But apart from the flower form, orchids often have an exotic way of life. There are some forms specialised for living on trees and some specialised for living on decaying plant matter, using a fungus as an aid. And did you know that vanilla pods are the seed pods of an orchid?

Chris Sennett

More litter

We are glad to report enthusiastic support for our efforts in the Village Spring Clean, but black spots remain beyond the powers of the Society or of individual members. The little dingle by the railway bridge near Barton Court has long been a dumping ground for old kitchen appliances, items of furniture and discarded motor parts. The location is further blighted by graffiti, now several years old, on the bridge itself.

This hidden site is potentially an attractive dell, its damp shade offering shelter for plants and birds. Any ideas?

On the other hand we are delighted to report that the bushes on the railway embankment by the Ballard Reserve that some weeks ago bore garbage of every kind have now been cleared. We are very grateful to the unknown persons who have restored this pleasant and accessible area and to the Colwall residents who, on their own initiative, regularly clear up rubbish and help to preserve the agreeable character of our village.

Are you troubled by Weeds?

Stephen Ballard thought he had the answer, according to this account in 'The Hereford and Gloucester Canal' by David Bick, 1979.

Whilst walking from Malvern to Worcester through a field of wheat stubble the concept dawned on him of destroying weeds by forcing a flame onto the ground by a fan driven from the axle of a two-wheeled machine, the flame being generated from coal or other fuel. 'May be drawn by a stubborn horse' noted Ballard, 'and the more stubborn he is the nearer he should be hooked to the fire.'

Member Margy Brace is anxious to try to pinpoint exactly where *Edward Elgar's parents stayed on a holiday in Colwall*. Apparently the idea for Caractacus came to his mother Anne on this visit. If you have any information please phone her on [REDACTED].

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Frontline Colwall

With D Day much in the news recently, it's worth recalling that people in Colwall and the area around were well aware that militarily 'something was up'. Councillor Roy Stockton recalls the sound of munitions trains being shunted in the disused railway tunnel under the hills. This was the first tunnel driven from Malvern (the present one was built in the 1920s to overcome the problem of flooding) and the square brick chimney used to ventilate it can still be seen. Roy lived then on Shelsey Drive and the noise of the operations down below could easily be heard at night-time.

About the same time, US troops were quartered in Nissen huts in Eastnor Park. Roy remembers them leaving in armoured vehicles, presumably for Normandy. They stopped at his grandmother's cottage to buy some eggs and, as a parting gift, threw what Roy thought was a football over the hedge. It turned out to be a medicine ball, used for strenuous training in gyms. Roy could never make use of it because, lad as he was then, it was too heavy to lift.

Malvern, of course, was home to the radar research establishment. It had been moved from Swanage to Malvern College, and there scientists developed a range of mobile radar stations. Some scientists landed in France in the afternoon of D Day, in some cases to oversee British radar and in others to analyse captured German versions. Among the experiments being carried out on the Malvern Hills was "anti-jamming" research. One of the jamming ploys was the dropping of strips of silver paper near radar installations, and local children collected piles of this attractive material.

Towards the end of the war, prisoners of war were to be seen in the fields helping local farmers. These were Italians whose camp was in Ledbury on the site of the present John Masefield School. They were very distinctive because on the backs of their greatcoats was always a large coloured circle. At least one of them liked the locality so much he stayed and married a local girl.

Future development

The Unitary Development Plan: Revised Deposit Draft (UDP) is the catchy title of an important large document produced by Herefordshire Council setting out its proposals for development and future

land use for the whole of Herefordshire until 2011. There were more than 3000 objections to the first draft; some changes were made and the latest version has now been issued. A copy is held in Colwall Library.

The UDP has chapters dealing with employment, retail, natural and historic heritage, tourism, minerals and waste. But the one which perhaps has the most obvious impact concerns Housing, where the Council gives its proposals for nearly 7000 new dwellings in Herefordshire – two thirds in Hereford and the market towns, and the rest in rural areas, mostly in 48 'main villages' which include Colwall. Colwall is specifically affected in two ways. First, an area of land on Brockhill Road known as 'Covent Garden', currently a recreation area of the Downs School, is 'allocated' for 20 dwellings (planning jargon, meaning that an application for future development is anticipated). Secondly, Herefordshire Council proposes to extend the settlement boundary, which currently runs along Old Church Road, to go instead around all the properties in Old Church Road east of 'Burleigh', and around all the properties in Mathon Road and Redland Drive, just one field away from the Parish boundary. The significance of a settlement boundary is that new development or re-development is, in principle, allowed within it; special 'exception' policies may also allow development on adjacent land. Extending the settlement boundary thus allows more 'windfall sites' to become available – planning jargon for housing sites which are not specifically 'allocated'. The Council estimates that about 30 new dwellings could potentially come about in this way.

What happens next? The 'Revised Deposit Draft' will be the basis for a public enquiry in early 2005 when an independent Planning Inspector will consider all outstanding objections. These include objections to the 'Covent Garden' allocation from members of the public and the Herefordshire Branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) (which has objected to all the allocations on green field sites in the main villages) and objections to the change in the settlement boundary from members of the public and Colwall Parish Council. All these people will be busy in the autumn preparing evidence for the Inspector.

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