
COLWALL VILLAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

July 2005

Looking around ... Flower fields

In the 1842 tithe map of Colwall, there are over 40 fields with meadow in their name. This implies that they are, or were, fields cut for hay, and in those times without selective weed killers they would have been full of flowers. Hay fields really are a pleasure to see. A field full of meadow buttercups is like a sea of gold, while later on sorrel flowers spread a red mist over the grass. Ox-eye daisies, cuckoo flower, bugle, meadow sweet – there are dozens of common flowers which all together in a field make the effect of an impressionist painting.

In Colwall now, the meadow flowers are not common. Grass is cut earlier for silage and old meadows have been ploughed and re-seeded: pasture fields today are very productive, and make the fields that surround us a beautiful uniform green.

These changes in farming have resulted in the decline of meadow flowers. Where can you find ragged robin, betony, agrimony or harebells, which should all be common in Colwall? They now exist only in little groups which you have to search out. With the decline of old meadows (90% loss in the last 50 years) these meadow flowers are going too.

There are odd fields around Colwall which do contain a good selection of wild flowers, most famously Colwall Green, which has a wonderful display of devil's bit scabious in late summer, but there are others. I was interested to walk over two fields on Evendine Lane offered for auction recently: one contained well over a hundred common spotted orchids as well as cowslips, pignut, St John's wort and tormentil, while the next field had hardly any flowers in it, I don't know why. But these special fields are precious and becoming rarer: they really do need looking after. **Chris Sennett**

Photo display

The selection of old and recent photographs – 'Colwall Now and Then' by Graham Cowan at the Fun Day caused a lot of interest. There will be a chance to see some more at the Wyche and Colwall Horticultural Show on Saturday 13 August, 2 – 5 pm.

Cleaning up

The Society's annual village Spring Clean raised 27 bags of litter, including part of a cooker retrieved from a tangle of brambles by an intrepid collector who braved the raw weather to scramble bare-foot through a stream. It was encouraging that the amount of litter from the more rural locations was less than previously. It appears that some residents make a practice of clearing litter at intervals throughout the year. We are grateful to them and to all who braved the cold in March to join us.

The Station and Railway

In May the Society approached Central Trains about the accumulation of litter on the platform at the station. We are pleased to report a helpful response and our observations are that the station is now much cleaner. We have expressed our thanks to the company.

At the same time we asked Network Rail to remove the graffiti on Cummins bridge and to try to reduce the amount of litter on the tracks. We hope action will soon be taken.

Michael Martin

Nothing found

A watching brief by archaeologists on the development behind Bank Chambers found nothing of interest. A disused well was uncovered and made safe.

Why Jenny Lind chose Colwall

Although we are all aware of the attractions of the Malvern Hills, it may well have puzzled some people why one of the world's most famous singers, 'the Swedish Nightingale', Jenny Lind, should have chosen to retire with her husband to Wynds Point, Upper Colwall. Apparently the singer had a daughter, also Jenny, who married a Herefordshire farmer. The parents, of course, visited her – and fell in love with the area.

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At our next meeting on Monday 26 September Keith Duddy will be showing us something of his restoration of Park Farm, and has written this foretaste of its interesting past and present.

Park Farm

The history of Park Farm is coloured by a plethora of varied local events of interest, from its heyday in the late Middle Ages as a Bishops Palace and hunting lodge to its modern day role as a family home undergoing extensive restorative work to return it to its former glory.

Although only remnants of the original house are evident, there are enough clues to suggest that this church property was subject to radical changes through the ages. The period whilst in service as the Bishops Palace is arguably the most prolific period in the history of the house, characterised by great feasts, hunting excursions and large entourages. The Domesday account of 1085 provides the first recorded reference to the existence of Park Farm in Colwall, then referred to as the Bishops Manor. The surrounding countryside proved to be a rich hunting ground. It is not surprising that Park Farm soon became a popular place for successive hunting Bishops.

Park Farm's fortune was intrinsically linked to the history of the region; at times of power and plentiful resources, the site was large and flourishing, enjoying mutual highs and lows through centuries of extensive social change and upheaval. The wealth and favour bestowed upon the Bishopric depended greatly upon the period, in particular the stance towards religion favoured by the Royal in power. Over the centuries, the Bishops tenure over the manor of Colwall became reduced, culminating in 1647, during the Civil War, when the Bishopric of Hereford were ordered by Parliament to sell the farm for a sum of £336.19s.4d. From this point, the farm changed hands several times before being purchased by the eminent Ballard family in 1910.

The house now consists of three parallel gables. The largest gable forming the north block is the oldest, dating back to the early 1500's whilst the two smaller gables are from a later period dating back to approximately 1660. The current construction is a two-storey timber frame and brick noggin with a tiled

roof. The framing consists of narrowly placed uprights and diagonal bracing in the northeast gable, typically Elizabethan through its design and use of building materials.

In what appears to be an unbelievable oversight on the part of the authorities, Park Farm was in 1970 overlooked as a site of historical interest, condemned to a future of dereliction. It was not until recently that it was recognised as a significant historic building and granted Grade II* listing.

Four years ago the house was bought by the Duddy family. Keith owns i2i Television – a company that produces mainly factual programming for a variety of broadcasters. In the past four years the out-buildings have been extensively developed to provide accommodation for the growing business which operates from the 6,500 sq ft Victorian barn. In October 2004, work began on restoring the house. A long period of consultation followed with English Heritage and Herefordshire Council until plans were approved to start work.

The major task has been the derelict northern-most wing which was in a state of near collapse. New green oak from Gloucestershire was used to replace rotten timbers and the building physically lifted nearly 9 inches on one side to bring it back level. With the structural work now complete work is beginning on restoration of the interior. Once the northern wing is finished the rest of the house will be gutted and rooms restored to original dimensions and (in some cases) uses. It is anticipated that work will be complete by the end of 2006.

The opportunity to take a building apart and put it back together has resulted in us uncovering some surprising information about the building's development.
