
COLWALL VILLAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

January 2008

Geopark Way Trail Update

Conrad Shail

The Geopark Way is back on track after suffering some delays following the great flood of 20 July 2007. We all saw the pictures on our televisions of the devastation left in the wake of the flood and the damage the sheer volume of water caused. Parts of the Way were literally washed away leaving new routes to be planned. On a more positive note the washing away of large amounts of soil has exposed outcrops of rock not seen for hundreds, if not thousands of years.

The opening date is now planned for August 2008. There will be a week of celebrations starting in Bridgnorth on the 23rd and making their way down to Gloucester on the 30th, with villages and towns taking turn to hold events to mark the opening of their section of the Way. It has been suggested that Colwall should host the celebrations on Thursday 28 August, for the opening of the section between Cradley and Ledbury with its unique position at the foot of the granite Malvern Hills pushing their way up against the rippling limestone landscape of Coddington and Wellington Heath. A provisional agenda has been drawn up with the celebrations starting at 10:30 with events staged by the local community and refreshments. We are still to decide exactly where the celebrations will be staged and what or who will be involved. Early suggestions have included the Ale House and a guided walk around the Church by an expert pointing out the interesting stones used in its construction.

The route for the way through our village has now been decided. It will mainly follow footpaths, along the edge of the hills from the Wyche Cutting and then down to Evendine Lane, Colwall Green, Brockbury Hall, St. James' Church, and up to Oyster Hill. An electronic copy of the map is available by emailing geopark@rock.com quoting 'Geopark way map'.

The Village Society will help plan the events and will call on its members for support. Anyone interested in helping please contact Conrad Shail [REDACTED] or email geopark@rock.com. Please come forward with your ideas, as we would like to make this a day to remember. It is important we involve other societies, churches, official bodies and clubs from the village and surrounding areas and we would like to hear from those of you who would like to involve your club etc. in the celebrations.

Next meeting –

Monday 21 January

at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall

We are pleased to welcome Mr Alastair Ramsay, Headmaster of the Downs School, as our guest speaker.

The Downs School has existed on its current site since 1900. It has, in its time, been a unique school, developing from a strictly Quaker school and going through various changes to its current cross cultural approach. Mr Ramsay's talk will cover aspects such as Quakerism, the growth and decline of boarding, and the development of boarding from the outdoor dormitories and fixed routines of yesteryear, to the more homely atmosphere of today. In many respects The Downs was at the very forefront of the education of prep. school children in this country, and things we take for granted today such as co-education, hobbies for children and even science teaching were introduced very early on at The Downs and in some cases were pioneering.

Illustrated with a number of outstanding photographs from the school's extensive collection, Mr Ramsay's talk will provide a fascinating insight into one of Colwall's best-kept secrets.

All welcome. Admission for members is free, guests £2. Refreshments afterwards.

For the record – Colwall railway bridge

In December 2007 a new traffic management system was introduced on the railway bridge. The traffic lights were moved to each end of the approach, a chicane was constructed on the bridge to route vehicles in a single lane supported by the internal beams of the bridge, and a 2 metre height barrier was installed. The bridge was re-opened to traffic up to 3 tonnes on 7th December 2007.

Orchard survey in Colwall *Chris Sennett*

If you look at an aerial view of Colwall parish you soon notice that there are a number of traditional orchards. The trees are laid out in a regular grid, but much more widely spaced than modern commercial orchards – in the old days trees were grown as standards on non-dwarfing stocks. Any traditional orchard will have been around for the best part of a century and is likely to have considerable conservation interest.

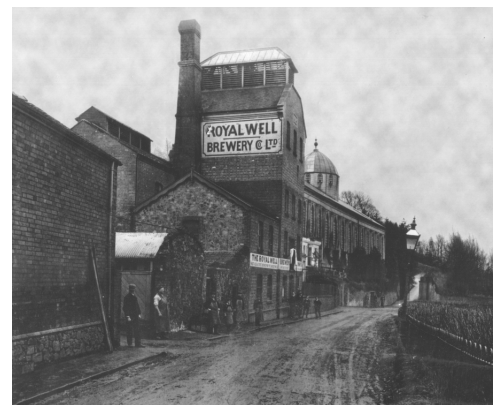
The most obvious sign is mistletoe, but the trees often have insect populations which are peculiar to old orchards, as well as particular lichens and other flora. Partly as an indicator, but also because it is an endangered species, a group of us are surveying the orchards for the noble

chafer beetle, a project supported by the Malvern Hills AONB and the People's Trust for Endangered Species. The noble chafer is an iridescent green beetle, spending most of its life as a grub eating decayed wood. The adult form is only around for a few weeks in summer, so the presence of the chafer is identified by the droppings the grubs leave, called *frass*, which are quite distinctive. Those of us on the survey have each been given a small phial of beetle poo to check in case we find anything promising – I have to say, no luck so far, but lots of possible holes in trunks.

If you would like to get involved, please contact Helen Stace, [REDACTED].

The Royal Malvern Spa Concert Hall

In the 1880s, Mr William H Ryland, a former Mayor of Bewdley, owned the Royal Well spring and 5 acres down to the road below. He was approached by wealthy entrepreneurs who asked him to build a Well Room for the public to take the waters. Instead of a simple well room, Mr Ryland decided to build an enormous concert hall, pump room, art gallery and pleasure gardens on the site. In 1882 he put in hand this major complex costing £40,000, an enormous sum in those days. Much secrecy surrounded the operation and many local people were under the impression that a convent or a monastery was being built. No-one in Great Malvern knew the purpose of the colossal structure until it was completed and Mr Ryland proudly announced that he was about to open the Royal Malvern Spa.



Dome of the Hall can be seen on the right

The building was designed by a London architect and built in Corinthian style using Bath stone and Malvern Hills granite. It measured 150 by 60 ft and 76 ft from floor to top of dome. The Concert Hall seated 2,000 people. It was opened in May 1883 'by Jenny Lind, in the greatest grandeur, before a gathering of all the Worcestershire and Herefordshire elite'¹. The complex became a huge success attracting thousands of visitors with a multiplicity of events including an All Night Ball. The grandeur was an obvious threat and clearly alarmed those on the other side of the Hill. They immediately drew up plans for an even larger and prestigious Assembly Hall and Winter Gardens in Grange Road. These were completed in 1885 and opened at another glittering ceremony. The Winter Gardens were an overnight success and doomed the Royal Malvern Spa to gradual failure. In 1895 the Royal Malvern Spa was closed down with Mr Ryland losing all his investment in the project.

The floor of the Royal Well Hall was designed with the bright idea of laying timber planks every 6 inches or so in the brickwork and nailing stained and varnished boards to these planks. Cuprinol had not been invented then and the result was catastrophic. The building was shored up with immense baulks of timber inside and this helped for a time, but the building was unsafe for its original use. It was demolished shortly before the outbreak of World War 2. All that remains are parts of the two entrance main gateposts.

Sources: Colwall Village Society Topic Booklet 'The Commercial Complex – now Residential – on the West Malvern Road' by T B V Marsh (available in Colwall Library); Image from Deb Turnbull;

¹ *Worcestershire Archaeology & Local History Newsletter, 1979 No 26*