

Newsletter

NOVEMBER 2019



Revealing Our Heritage

Who Do You Think They Are?

(Answer on back page)



Bringing Some Rewilding to Colwall by Andy Ball

Recently I was fortunate enough to visit the Knepp, a 3500 acre farm estate in West Sussex, to see their rewilding project, which is hailed as an exemplar of how we can change our land management practices to benefit flora and fauna. The key questions for me were what were the lessons to be learnt and how could I possibly adapt those for my far more modest garden in Colwall...?

The story of the Knepp is well-recorded in the book '*Wilding*' written by one of the co-owners - Isabella Tree, along with her partner Charlie Burrell. The pair, faced with the difficulties of the changing economics of farming and battling with the inherent problems of poor clay soil abandoned their conventional dairy and arable operation at the turn of this century, sold their farming equipment, removed many of the fences and gates, and just let nature run its' course. More detail can be found at <https://knepp.co.uk/>.

They have diversified their business to include several different income streams. These include rewilding educational safaris, up-market camping ('glamping'), commercial and residential property lettings, food production from their free-roaming 're-wilded' livestock – deer, cattle and pigs, together with income from traditional farm subsidies.

The day that I spent there was a mixture of talks, a land-rover safari through part of the estate, and a walk round their campsite. Along with my partner and friends the other attendees included farmers, other landowners and several employees from a northern wildlife trust.

First impressions are hard to ignore. I was initially struck by the plethora of wildflowers in the boundaries of their visitor car park, the noise of the birdsong and the professionalism of the business. The land-rover safari was excellent, the terrain very unfamiliar. Where there would have once been well-defined field boundaries the hedges had grown up and burgeoned out. Scrubland predominated with a patchwork of glades interspersed with young oak trees, brambles, blackthorn, dog rose and willow. The grass was surprisingly short, grazed tightly by groups of red and fallow deer, English longhorn cattle, Exmoor ponies and Tamworth pigs.

The book '*Wilding*' describes the transition, over time, of a very controlled, neat landscape to a very unconventional, untidy one. Not for everyone, so if you like order and tidiness the Knepp might seem to be a mess. What's not in dispute is the transition in terms of the rise in abundance and diversity of species with birds, insects, wildflowers and tree cover all dramatically increasing. The Knepp recently featured on BBC's *Springwatch* television programme with a feature on their nesting and (unfortunately) unsuccessfully breeding storks.

So, back home in Colwall I reflected on what I had seen and wondered what might be usefully applied to our already lovely village environment. Perhaps the key conclusion would be on the subject of tidiness. There's a move afoot, championed by the Knepp and by other mainstream influences such as the BBC *Gardener's World* television programme and the Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Flower Show for us to adopt a more relaxed approach to the management of our land and gardens - to be less strict and tidy, and to let nature gain the upper hand more often.

Around Colwall you will see individuals leaving their roadside verges uncut for longer periods, in doing so allowing wildflowers and other grassland plants to develop into valuable and attractive linear meadows. This is being supported and formalised by the *Verging On Wild* campaign whose advocates are trying to influence and modify Herefordshire Council's highways verge management regime.

A similar approach can be adopted within the bounds of your garden. After our Knepp visit we have left two small areas of our front and back lawn's totally uncut as wild refuges and I was very pleased to recently spot a vole scampering from one of these areas across the adjoining mown grass. In a similar way we have not cut our front lawn for several weeks since the start of June and more by accident than design we have been amazed at the informal temporary meadow that has developed to include hawkbit, buttercup, dandelion, red and white clover, selfheal, yarrow and oxeye daisy. The bumblebees and butterflies love it, and at night we have been surprised by the number of moths that we never realised could be around. At some stage we'll do another cut and the more traditional lawn will return...

Finally I've concluded that hedges were a key part of the Knepp success story. In Colwall I'd say that the hedgerow adjoining the footpath by the sewage works is a good comparison with what I saw in West Sussex with a fabulous mix of species, rather unkempt in stature, but obviously full of life. In our garden we've restored our boundaries to include new plantings of both field maple and hornbeam hedges and we'll manage these for the benefit of birds and other wildlife especially with regard to the timing and type of hedge cutting regime.

Okay, so most of us don't own a 3500 acre estate, but I found the Knepp an intriguing and mentally stimulating place which raised questions about my previous thoughts and practices about gardens and the wider countryside. There are lessons to be learnt and with a more relaxed approach to looking after my garden I've found that I've saved both time and money and that in doing so I believe that I've also benefited flora and fauna which has to be a good result all round.



Dear Members,

Over the last few months the Society's committee has been considering the best way forward for the Society in the light of the dwindling number of people serving on the committee.

Since its inception in 1998, the Society has had two basic aims, viz:

- (a) to protect and improve the village environment and amenity, and
- (b) to research and record village history.

In pursuit of these aims the Society has:

- carried out a Hedgerow Survey in 1998.
- 'given birth' to the Village Litter Pick,
- prepared the Village Design Statement, endorsed by Herefordshire Council in April 2001.
- researched the Golf Course, the Racecourse, buildings on West Malvern Road and W. James the builder,
- published 'Colwall through the Millennia' to celebrate the Millennium.
- published a map of the old buildings and watercourses in the parish,
- published three monographs on the history of the village, entitled *Bygone Colwall*, *Discover Colwall* and *Colwall Folk*.
- maintained and added to an Archive of historical documents and photographs relating to the Village, held in the Millennium Room.
- erected a number of plaques around the village in celebration and memory of some well-known people who lived here for some of their life.
- organised 78 public talks (to the end of April 2020), open to members (and for a nominal fee to other interested people), on subjects related to the Parish
- published a nominally quarterly Newsletter.
- published and maintained a web site (www.cvs.colwall.info), which includes all past Newsletters and is fully searchable.
- exhibited at and taken part in various Village Fun Days, Horticultural Shows and Ale House Festivals.

Over 21 years the composition of the committee has inevitably changed (although our original Chairman is still serving on the committee!) People have kindly joined the committee and helped to organise many of our activities and then have needed to leave for many necessary reasons. As a result the number of active people serving on the committee has gradually shrunk and now numbers only 6; (of whom 2 have served for over 20 years and another 2 for over 10), the present Chairman is also Acting Secretary.

The committee therefore, faced the question as to whether it is viable for the Society to continue, given that fewer people are available to carry out the necessary work needed to keep it going.

One other important factor in the mix is that, mainly as a result of the financial success of the three monographs mentioned above, the Society currently has a bank balance of about £10,000.

After careful consideration, the committee has decided to recommend to members at the next AGM in April 2020 that:

- (i) for the next year (i.e. 2020/21) membership of the Society will be free. This will do away with the need to keep membership records and publish membership cards.
- (ii) expenses for postage, printing, room hire, fees for lecturers etc., will be met from the Society's current cash balances.
- (iii) the Newsletter will continue to be published, nominally on a quarterly basis, but in future may only be available on-line.
- (iv) the Society will plan to organise at least two public meetings each year on subjects of local interest

In terms of personnel, I will be standing down as Chairman from next April but I am very pleased to say that Liz Hill has agreed to put herself forward for this position at the AGM in April 2020. I shall be offering to stay on as Treasurer and Susan

Bond has agreed to stay on as Archive co-ordinator. After 11 heroic years publishing the Newsletter Derek Rees has decided to retire from the committee but I am delighted to say that Andy Ball has very kindly agreed to take over the role full time from next April. Margaret Matthews has also agreed to stay on to continue to give us wise counsel from all her many years running our finances and membership records.

However, we still badly need a new Secretary and we would be very pleased if someone would come forward to take on this role. No experience is necessary and existing committee members would happily explain what is needed. The role is mainly an administrative one and would include the production of Agendas and Minutes of committee meetings (3 or 4 per year) and AGMs, booking the Village Hall etc.

Also additional new committee members, with new and different ideas and experience, would be **extremely** welcome.

Please contact me at any time ([REDACTED]), or any other member of the committee, to discuss joining us. We can then explain what is involved.

From next April therefore, the Society will be a leaner organisation, possibly seeking to do fewer things, but the core aims outlined above will, we believe, remain intact.

I wanted to write to you at this juncture so that you are aware of the changes that are coming, which I hope you will be pleased to endorse at our AGM next April 2020.

This is your Society. Let us know what topics you would like talks on or what other sort of events you would like the Society to run.

With kind regards,

John Atkin.

Message from Liz Hill :-

'We ran a very successful exhibition of maps in October and we are very grateful for the loan of an original version of the 1842 map from Bridget Evans and of a copy of an 1806 Bright Estate map from David Hodgson. We have added information about where you can view and buy maps containing Colwall information on our website under the "Links Page". <http://www.cvs.colwall.info/Links.html>'

Future Talks

25th November 2019

(Additional Date for your Diary)

Another Film from Catcher Media entitled "Carousel"

27th January 2020:

David Whitehead

'The Historic Parks & Gardens of East Herefordshire and the Malverns'

27th April 2020 [AGM]:

Dr. John Harcup OBE

'Jenny Lind – Colwall Days and Before'

Answer to 'Who Do You Think They Are?'

The elusive 'Aunt Alice' (on the right) and her niece Evelyn. [Photo courtesy of Mrs Ann Robinson]

(Alice Pedlingham was the wife of Tom Pedlingham who erected the clock tower by the Library in her memory)

Finally ...

My thanks to our contributors.

Articles on Colwall related subjects (however tenuous!) are always welcome.

If you are prepared to receive your newsletters by electronic means, please register with the email address below.

Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are CONTRIBUTIONS!

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or hardcopy c/o Colwall Library