

WHERE PEACE COMES DROPPING SLOW

Most people in Burton will know about the pits in the village. Formerly the site of gravel extraction, long since abandoned, the pits are now filled with water, and until recently the 70-acre area, only a few miles as the black-hooded crow flies to Lincoln Cathedral, served as a nature reserve under the auspices of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust with a lease from Lord Monson. Today, though, the gates are locked and barred, the lakes and the woodland being maintained by a private fishing syndicate.



There is, however, one man whom villagers may see at the pits, who travels the two-and-a-half miles every day from his house off Burton Road in his Reliant Robin, affectionately referred to as “The

Pig”. This is the voluntary warden and bailiff, who looks after the pathways, clears away the nettles and the brambles, stocks the lakes, and generally keeps the place shipshape, noting the abundant wildlife to be seen all around in this little oasis where peace really does come dropping slow. His name is Roger Ingamells.

Mr. Ingamells, now in his 59th year, first went to the pits as a child some 50 years ago to fish during the days when the pits were still in operation. Years later, after working at the Lincoln belt-making firm of Dawsons, he took early retirement at the age of 50, being told that he was too old for another post within the company. He regarded this early release as a full-time opportunity to follow his great interest in wildlife, having for 25 years acted as a part-time and unpaid bailiff and warden at Burton pits, working in co-operation with Peter Russon and the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust



In 1996 he started to work full-time at the pits, still in a voluntary and unpaid capacity, and now reckons that he has put in some 50,000 - 60,000 hours, spending every day, Sundays included, at the pits. In summer he sometimes arrives at the pits as early as 6 a.m., staying on until 8 o'clock in the evening, having sandwiches in the summer, and using a small stove to heat up soup during the winter months. For the past 16 years he has never had a holiday, understandably much preferring to spend his days in this little oasis in Burton. “I’m not married”, he explains. “I’m married to nature”.

He never gets bored, saying that there is always something to see. “You mustn’t go chasing after wildlife,” he explains. “You must sit quietly in the same place and let the wildlife come to you”. In this way there is an abundance of wildlife to be seen at the pits: sand martins, oysters catchers, kingfishers (the female has a bottom yellow beak; the male has black beaks), woodpeckers, and a variety of resident owls, including Barn owls, Tawny owls and Little owls.

This year a pair of Kingfishers have raised two broods and the barn owls nesting in a box high up in a tree raised three youngsters. 16 species of Dragonflies breed in the lakes and many can be seen in our gardens throughout the summer months. There is a wealth of butterflies including the white hairstreak, the pits being one of the few areas in Lincolnshire supporting this rare species. The whole area is therefore a refuge for all types of wildlife.

Much of the warden’s work involves clearance - taking out tons of clay from the pits, usually in winter, and clearing the surrounding areas of brambles and keeping the paths clear. He reckons, for instance, that he has removed 3,000 sycamore trees. When these trees are removed, the flowers, especially foxgloves which can lie dormant in the soil for a hundred years, reassert themselves, looking beautiful in the Spring - “a real picture”.

Over the years he has seen many changes, the latest being the formation of a new lake that is now taking place, complete with an island in the middle, which is being funded by Chris Moyses a member of the 40 strong fishing syndicate. Chris has taken on the lease from Lord Monson and has spent many thousands of pounds in clearing and restoring the water features. This new lake, says Mr. Ingamells, will bring back a considerable amount of wildlife to an area which has been badly neglected over the past few years.

Over the years the pits have not been without their problems. The relationship between the conservationists, represented by the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, and the fishermen has not always been an easy one, despite the conflict being greatly exaggerated. “The conservationists think that we fishermen are dreadful people - we’ve got horns on our heads”, Mr. Ingamells explains, arguing that the fishermen have done far more to preserve and improve the pits over the years than the Trust.

“In any working party there would have been 13 members from the fishing syndicate, but only two from the Trust”, he explains. “The Trust would always say that they couldn’t get enough people to help”. Last year, however, the Trust decided, following an increase in the annual rent, to give up the lease, departing from the pits and leaving it to the fishermen.

Before the iron gates were introduced, the pits were a dumping ground for burnt-out cars and fly-tipping. There were also thefts from parked cars, as well as equipment. Over the years, Mr. Ingamells has lost two chainsaws and a brushcutter, and has had his Robin Reliant broken into, even having his lunch taken on one occasion. The small hut has also been broken into several times.

The ever increasing traffic along Fen Lane, involving cars and vans speeding along the very narrow road in what has become a rat-run, has brought problems for the wildlife, especially for creatures crossing the road and not making it to the other side. Among the recent fatal casualties has been a family of badgers that had been resident in the reserve for many years.

There is also the danger of the resident mink, Mr Ingamells saying that, "Nothing is safe from them, except what flies". Even though vigorous efforts are made to shoot and trap the mink, they have nevertheless wiped out all the water voles which bred along the banks of the local waterways. "Ratty" and his friend "Badger" from the Wind in the Willows, sadly will not be taking tea with toad and mole. "Never touch a mink", the warden warns. "They are vicious creatures and have a row of deadly teeth". Rabbits can also cause havoc with their rapacious appetite for food. "People want to see what damage they do, and the geese are just as bad. Three geese eat as much as a sheep". Roger is non to keen on another visitor to the lakes - the cormorant. Over recent years the cormorants have colonized waterways and are now a serious menace to inland fishing lakes and trout farms .

Pesticides and fertilizers have also caused problems. In the past there were otters, but today none can be seen, having been killed by chemicals washing into the water and poisoning the eels on which they fed. Nevertheless, there are many kinds of fish in the drains and in the lakes, including roach, perch, tench, and carp and even the occasional terrapin, a relic of the ninja turtle craze. Above the waters there are moorhens, cootes, and a great array of ducks and wading birds.



Despite all the problems and the constant day-long battle to keep nature reasonably restrained and tidy, Mr. Ingamells is confident about the future. As long as he keeps fit and healthy and can travel to the pits each day, he will continue looking after the 70 acres. He will also grow his runner beans and other

vegetables in his little hideaway surrounded by trees, taking care of the families of owls that nest in boxes in the nearby trees, and ensuring that there are enough fish from his small breeding pool to stock the lakes.

To walk around the area with Mr. Ingamells is to enter another world: a place of tranquillity and calm where, in the words of Mr. Yeates, peace "comes dropping slow". In a troubled world that rushes by not so very far away, demented in its haste and sparing no time to stop and stare, Burton pits is an oasis that reminds us of the gratitude and thanks we owe to Mr. Ingamells for his loving and unpaid care over so many years. Long may we see that little Reliant Robin making its way from Lincoln to this enchanted place.

John Copeland



Port Wine jelly

A quick and easy dessert, guaranteed to produce an interesting reaction from new guests at a dinner party. Serve with caution.

- 1 pint (575mls) good quality port
- 1 sachet (11 grms) gelatine
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2-3 ins cinnamon stick

Dissolve the sugar in about a quarter of the port, add the cinnamon stick, stir in the gelatine and leave to infuse for about half an hour. Check that the gelatine has all dissolved, if not warm gently again. Add the rest of the port, strain through a fine strainer into a mould, then place in the refrigerator until required.

A variation is to line a basin with halved black grapes soaked in the mixture (skin side outwards) then turning into a dish. A little extra gelatine may be required to ensure a set.

Margaret Sexton

Burton Estate Club



With the 'summer' now behind us we turn to autumn entertainments at Burton Club. On Wednesday 13th October we turn to Italy for our inspiration, with an Italian Evening to include food, wine and culture. If you love the Italian way of life why not join us. And if you have never tried Italian food and wine, now is your chance!

As a variation on the traditional theme, on Sunday 17th October why not join friends and neighbours for a Harvest Tea, rather than the usual Harvest Supper.



Moving back to continental Europe, Thursday 18th November sees our traditional Beaujolais evening. Try the new season's wine, but if you are not that brave there will be plenty more to tempt your palate.

Membership of Burton Club costs just £10 for the year. Details from the Secretary on 01522 525502.