

# THE REDLAKE

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## From the Editors

In these trying times, I have had some lovely stories that I hope you will find interesting and uplifting. There is an article that was printed in the Guardian some years passed, and it is of our lovely Redlake Valley, and it makes me feel proud and very lucky to live here. We have stories of thanks, and of things to come, and of activities that will continue, as long as there are bees. If you would like to submit a story for the next edition, you are most welcome. The next edition is the end of April, so any time before then is fine. Until then, Stay safe.

*Jeremy Jameson*

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More information and photos of some of these articles are available on the website at <http://www.chapel-lawn.co.uk>



Chapel Lawn in the winter sun.  
Picture by Ken Bowen

Dear Readers of The Redlake, I am writing to say hello and sing my praises of Hannah Willetts, your recently retired columnist of "Seasonal Gardening Notes". For years I have been too shy to write to her but upon learning she retired from writing her garden column I am sending this brief greeting from Lenox, Massachusetts. While none of you know me, I know more of you, your lovely village and the Redlake valley thanks to Hannah Willetts wonderful gardening book, *The Essence of the Garden*. I searched for more of Hannah's writings and I found her in The Redlake! What is more I found Chapel Lawn, Redlake Valley artists and now Shropshire and Chapel Lawn are on my "bucket list"! Hannah's writing is so beautiful, sensual, knowledgeable, humorous, sprinkled with historical knowledge that it has held pride of place on my "favorite garden books" bookcase. She resides among Miss Jekyll, Vita Sackville West, Mirabel Osler, Katherine Swift, Ronald Blythe, to name a few. I revisit my kindred gardening sister several times a year to enjoy her writing and presence as much as her gardening knowledge! She has given me many moments of happiness

in the contemplation of the garden and I am certain those who read her and love gardening would agree.

I will miss her gardening notes in the Redlake. I hope Hannah finds her days a new Spring. To quote Hannah, "Spring is a time of visible daily progress in the garden. One can smell the green growth; one can sense life stirring."

Kind greetings,

*Marianne Zimberg*

## ST MARY'S CHURCH

2020 the year of Covid 19 and possibly the only time St. Mary's has been closed through Easter and while other places of worship were slow to reopen our church came back to life with small friendly services, and by Harvest and Remembrance things were nearing normal.

The Carol service went ahead and Christmas day service with our Beryl was amazing.

These things can only happen with our wonderful P.C.C. team, and I would like to thank Karen and Mark for their great effort to keep us all alive, Barry, Alan & Eileen for services, Di, Pat, James, Andrew, George and Wayne and

anyone I've missed.

With Covid rising again, who knows what the future holds, but St. Mary's Chapel Lawn has proved with its congregation it can stand alone.

Services continue on the first & third Sunday of every month at 9.30am.

*Christine Oakley*



The font decorated for Christmas

## 'The shortest day'

What a spot to find yourself in on the shortest day of the year, high on the southern side of Hodre Hill overlooking the narrow valley of the River Redlake. Up here above the hamlet of Chapel Lawn is the ancient hanging oak wood called Bryneddin Wood. Near its top grows the solitary Bryneddin Pine - a Scots pine planted soon after the dawning of the 20th century - which stands out conspicuously when seen from the opposite hillside below the iron age hill fort of Caer Caradoc (1,321ft).

On clear winter afternoons the lowering sun casts the shadow of Caer Caradoc across the southern flank of Hodre Hill. And on the shortest day of the year the tip of this Caer Caradoc shadow just manages to touch the foot of the Bryneddin Pine. In that delightful informative arboriculturist's bible, *The Trees of Shropshire* (Airlife, 1986), Andrew Morton calls it an "inspired piece of planting" and points out that why this tree came to be there will probably remain a mystery.

We came up the slantwise "rack" (track used for access and hauling out the felled trees that villagers had the right to) that has reverted to a narrow path through the oaks and soon found our pine at the very eastern end of the wood. Here was a winter view to vie with the best in the Welsh Marches, of crumpled hills and the silent valley of the little Redlake in the last light of midwinter day.

Caer Caradoc (the shadow-caster) stood half a mile distant across the gloomy dale, its gently convex summit ringed by the prehistoric earthwork. A curl of silver smoke rose from a riverside cottage but we saw no other sign of human activity. As we peered down the valley, to the south-east, a small flock of rooks crossed towards Bucknell Hill, heading home after a short day's foraging in the turned red soil of some lonely field near Offa's Dyke.

Then we were feeling our way down in the velvet dark by the lane at Pentre Hodre and so down to Bryncalled. An orange light flickered in a cottage

window, a tawny owl called from the depths of Bull Wood across the river, then everything settled down for the longest night of the year.

Roger Redfern, *Country Diary*,  
Guardian, Saturday 1 January 2000  
Courtesy of Guardian News & Media Ltd

## WELCOME TO THE REDLAKE VALLEY

We welcome Mark Duffy and Janet Tudor to Brook House. We wish you many years of happiness in your new home.

## CYCLING THE REDLAKE VALLEY AND BEYOND

What better way to explore the tranquil lanes of the glorious Redlake Valley and beyond than on a bicycle – as long as you don't mind the hills!

I am a road cyclist rather than a mountain biker, although in addition to my road bike I do have an alternative with chunkier wheels to cope with the terrible winter pot-holed and gravelly road surfaces.

Of course, starting any bike ride in Obley means that whichever direction I go I have to start with a hill. Naturally, the one I try to avoid is the horrendously steep climb up past Pool House Hollow. A cycling website has named it the 'Obley Wall of Death.' With the steepest point a heart-bursting 35% its nickname is very apt. I have managed to crawl up twice, both times in September when I have a whole summer's fitness in my legs. Therefore, when I want to cycle to Clun I tend to take a much longer route.

Nevertheless, leaving Obley is not as difficult as the return. At this time of the year, when fitness levels are quite low, I tend to plan rides that avoid the steepest hills – Chapel Lawn and Bryncalled up to Pentre Hodre, Clun to Pen-y-cwm and Clunton to Clunton Coppice. That only leaves a couple of possibilities.

My favourite route for a short outing is to ride past Sandbank and drop down from Pentre Hodre towards Chapel Lawn, making good use of both brakes all the way down. I then coast along the flat valley floor through Chapel Lawn,

turning right at Pentre. Following the stream provides a very enjoyable climb through the steep-sided wooded valley up to Hobarris. Although the average gradient is only 4.5% it does reach 20% at one point and the surface can be very tricky. The landscape opens up towards Pen-y-wern and Black Hill comes into sight. Taking a right at the crossroads I make the gentle climb to Pen-y-cwm. Another right begins the circle of Black Hill. I sometimes stop at the parking space near Fiddlers Elbow and take in the views across the valley towards the hills of Wales. I've no idea how far I can see on a clear day but it's always impressive. Then I'm back on the bike and through the avenue of trees with more views to the right and the occasional deer to startle before dropping back down to Obley.

Looking ahead to this summer there is the hope of better times and the prospect of warm weather and longer rides. The choices are endless. I could head towards Bucknell, Brampton Bryan and Leintwardine for their flatter lanes, but it's to the west that I feel a calling. The hills, valleys and lanes beyond New Invention and Rock Hill are crying out to be explored. If anyone feels like joining me, let me know.

*Steve Packer*

## TALES FROM THE HIVE



The Winter of 2019/20 was quite mild. Not necessarily good for bees as they stay mobile, the Queen keeps laying a few eggs, and therefore the colony needs to keep them warm. Now warmth equals energy and energy equals food consumed. Out of our six hives, come Spring, we had lost one colony from starvation. Always the beekeepers fault- we should have fed them better or maybe merged them with a stronger



Colony. Cold weather is also a good time for killing Verroa. Nasty little beasts. The fertile female is sealed in with a developing bee larvae, mates again with her first male offspring and can then produce another brood- who all feed on the poor bee. Like the mosquito the verroa mite is a vector for introducing viral diseases. A good verroa is a dead verroa!

By February the remaining five Colonies were stirring and some hardy bees were even bringing in a little pollen, possibly Hazel or Broom. Pollen is fed to larvae so this indicated that the Queens were now laying. We gave the girls a feed of syrup to prevent starvation and to stimulate growth. Eggs laid now would be emerging in 21 days time in mid March and plenty of troops are needed to take advantage of the spring blossoms.

By the mid-March we could risk a quick inspection. Despite the wet start to the year the first honey supers were added. It was time to give the expanding nests room to grow. By April the rain had given way to sunshine and all colonies were growing well and more supers were being added. Unfortunately as the month progressed it got drier and drier and the blossoms stopped producing nectar. The bees began consuming their stores with a vengeance! The weather got even hotter as the lockdown progressed. Now empty supers were being removed. Perhaps due to the stress two colonies also suffered from CWDV- Chronic wing deform virus. This is vectored in by the verroa and then transmitted among the bees by mutual feeding and crowding. These colonies were taken out of production, given more space and fed up. One recovered well but it was too late for the second. All the frames were burn and the boxes sterilized. A call out from Bucknell School in May was very welcome and resulted in the collection of a fine Swarm. A call to Beguildy was less productive and despite going up in the world in the farmer's ewe box it was impossible to persuade an established colony to come from behind the farm house soffits. A split of one of our own colonies restored our numbers to 6. These ticked over during the rest of the Summer, each growing to a reasonable size and most replacing their Queens by superseding rather than attempting to

swarm. Other new Queens were introduced by merging splits. And then in late August the storms started. For once the culverts under the bridge at Lower Lye were clear and the '40 acre field' didn't flood. The hives remained safe and the meadow flower seeds we had sown were not washed away.

At the end of August we took off the meagre honey crop, the worst in years. Anything that the bees brought in after that they could keep. Also time for a major anti Verroa campaign. I hate those things with a vengeance! Then it was feeding up the wee beasties and settling them down for the winter, all snug with insulated roofs and winter overcoats. And with slabs of fondant on top in case they get hungry during this much colder winter. And, of course, this year will be a bumper crop, won't it.

*Steve Sherring*

### CELEBRATION OF THE REDLAKE VALLEY

What a relief it will be when people will be able to mix freely again. The time can't come soon enough when friends and family can meet up, visitors will be welcomed with open arms, and events can take place. Although we're not there yet, subject to restrictions being lifted sufficiently and people feeling confident enough to meet up, the Redlake Valley Community Benefit Society is planning a celebration of the Redlake Valley for the first week in October.

This is an event that will use pictures, words and music to showcase everything that's good about where we live. The emphasis will be very much on local. Bob James has agreed to head up a planning group and already James Middleton, Christine Oakley, Sarah and Simon Jameson and Patrick Cosgrove have volunteered to help. Rather than a one-off event on a single day, it will be spread over a number of days so that people can drop in whenever they like. There will be photographic displays, talks, music, and arts and craft.

Any funds raised will be shared between the Community Benefit Society and St. Mary's Church. Although the planning group members already have a long list of ideas, they really would like others to come

forward with their own suggestions and also offer to mount their own displays on, for example, family history, former residents of note, reminiscing and past events, farming, cookery, and so on (Sarah and Simon have volunteered to help with the design of displays if required). Although early days, do get in touch now to help with the planning.

Contact details are:

Bob James: T: 530395

E: [claudia@brymcambrie.plus.com](mailto:claudia@brymcambrie.plus.com)

James Middleton T: 530247S

E: [middleton3@xlninternet.co.uk](mailto:middleton3@xlninternet.co.uk)

Christine Oakley: 530585

E: [christineoakley1401@gmail.com](mailto:christineoakley1401@gmail.com)

Sarah Jameson T: 528546

E: [images@sarahjameson.co.uk](mailto:images@sarahjameson.co.uk)

Simon Jameson T: 528546

E: [simon@1066creations.co.uk](mailto:simon@1066creations.co.uk)

Patrick Cosgrove T: 530347

E: [pccosgrove@icloud.com](mailto:pccosgrove@icloud.com)

### POETS' CORNER

#### 'Bring on the farmers'

Everyone is worried  
When will we get our jab?  
We're all stuck in lockdown  
Life has become so drab

We should hand it to the farmers  
It would only take a week,  
They've had lots of practice  
Injecting all those sheep

I reckon they could do it  
They've got some decent kit,  
If they line up all the hurdles  
They'll do it in one hit

The ones who keep the cattle  
Well, they could use a crush,  
The dogs would sort the queue out  
There is no need to rush

They may even change the needle  
Every hour or so,  
And they could keep on going  
Through wind and rain or snow

And whilst we are together  
They could even check our teeth,  
And fire up the shearing handsets  
And give us a trim beneath!

## NOTES FROM STONY FIELD

Much has happened in the field since my last report.

New wetland was created at the bottom of the field in July when the underground drain was removed and the water diverted into a new channel feeding several shallow, open pools. The work took two contractors a whole week and I have to say, left this part of the field looking pretty trashed initially. However, within just a month we had dragonflies and damselflies patrolling the newly-open watercourse and vegetation quickly returned on the damp soils. The new water channel has since attracted aquatic plants such as Starwort, Water Crowfoot and Brooklime and the wild Watercress that grew in the old pool is happily spreading up channel.



In December, with the help of the Severn Tree Trust volunteers, the new wetland was planted with 120 damp-loving trees: Alder, Grey Willow, Downy Birch and Alder Buckthorn as part of the AONB-managed project, funded by the Woodland Trust and Environment Agency. The tree whips were planted as naturalistically as possible and we left areas around the shallow pools unplanted so these can continue to enjoy the warmth of the full sun in summer months, which should in turn attract plenty of aquatic life. Birds spotted hunting in the field so far include Heron, Kingfisher, Snipe and Kestrel.

A stretch of our field hedge was beautifully laid by Bob James (Chapel Lawn) in November. He also started a coppice rotation of Hazel trees on the lane side and built a fine rustic Chestnut pale fence. He did this work in aid of the Redlake Valley Community Benefit

Society. So, if you need a hedge laid or any coppicing work done, do contact Bob and I'm sure he'll be happy to help.

The winter months in the field this year are taken up with further mulching of trees in the top wood to help with weed control and water retention and adding more brash or 'trowse' (local dialect) to my deadwood hedge to keep it topped up.

One of our test ponds dug a year ago proved to have potential enough to be a candidate for the Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Pond Creation Scheme, and as a result will be enlarged and improved as part of this project in February. We will also build one or more hibernacula – underground refuges full of twigs, leaves and stones for frogs, toads and other creatures to overwinter. Despite the fact the pond looked pretty grotty through the summer with murky waters, it seemed to sustain and attract much life. I spent many a hot lunchtime sitting next to it last summer watching the gruesome mini dramas unfold and on one particularly sunny afternoon had the pleasure of a Southern Hawker dragonfly laying eggs on my boot. The pond is adjacent to the newly-rewetted site so should help provide some nice wildlife habitat once the trees start to grow and flourish.

I keep a website/blog on the story of the field. Do sign up if you wish - <https://sarahnewinvention.wixsite.com/we-bought-a-field>

*Sarah Jameson*

## A REDLAKE FAREWELL

Two local people have passed away in the past couple of weeks:

Ann Rogers who lived at Tan Vron until a couple of years ago.

Guy N Smith, author, pipe-smoker and shooting enthusiast of Black Hill: We send our condolences to Jean and their children.

## FARMING COLUMN

Ba ba black sheep

Have you any wool?

Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

The shearing shed is full

Wool is worthless, 200yrs ago tenants on the downland estates could pay their rent on the proceeds of the wool sales.

In recent years it has barely paid the cost of shearing. This year, because of Covid19 and crossbred New Zealand wool flooding the market it has not paid the cost of fuel for delivery to the grading depot. The wool board solution: Close 1/3 of the grading depots. How about the directors taking a pro rata cut in their large salaries instead?

Wool is natural, it is waterproof and provides good insulation (50 million sheep can't be wrong).

People pay for expensive woodchip to suppress weeds, wool will do just as good a job.

The sheep scanning season is in full swing, with some very good results considering the shortage of grass last year. The latest lockdown has removed one of the highlights of the year from the sheep farmer's calendar. Bragging rights in the pub on scanning percentages. One to one on the phone with no beer is not the same.

Wool is worthless, sheep are priceless. If it can manage to walk into the market it will make £100. What does a leg of lamb after processing cost?

In early December Facebook exploded! A UFO had landed on the Bryn Hill and aliens were tunnelling into the rings on the camp. It turned out the UFO was an Unidentified Fencing Object. (CAT loading shovel, belonging to a local contractor) and the aliens were a fencing gang putting a new fence up on the camp.

Trenches have been dug in 2 gardens either end of the village. (Is this to keep the aliens out?)

Last year the farmers across the valley acquired a new sheep dog called Bob, I found this very confusing, not knowing whether to get away, sit, come by, lie down or F\*\*\* off home.

In my last column I mentioned a local farmer that had lost a number of sheep. The police came out to investigate, but could not find the farmer- never mind the sheep. Still, like little Bo Peeps they came home eventually. The same farmer also mislaid his sheepdog. Modern technology came to the rescue and the dog was found pictured on Facebook.

*Bob James*

PS: We have cheap mulching wool available @£1 per fleece!