

Backwell Environment Trust

Bulletin 28 - Spring 2014

www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A very warm welcome to our latest spring bulletin

The BET volunteers have been working hard over the autumn and winter months scything our ever-expanding wild flower meadows, reducing the numbers of the non-native turkey oaks in the woodlands as well as opening up the area around some of BET's archaeological features. The Cabin restoration project is also now very well advanced and is on target for completion later this year.

To help you find your way around our action-packed bulletin the contents are listed below:

BET Membership

Activity Mornings

Woodland Report

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Nest Box Survey

Cabin Update

It's Membership Renewal Time!

Well, it's that time of year again when we hope you will consider renewing your BET membership for another 12 months, so with your Bulletin you should receive a 2014/15 membership renewal form. We try to make renewal as easy as possible for you, so if there is no change in your circumstances please write '**No Change**' across the form. But please remember to confirm your gift aid status.

If you want to pay by electronic transfer then please identify the payment with your name and again write 'Gift Aid Yes' or 'Gift Aid No' in the message space.

You can hand deliver your form to any of four addresses on the form or post it to Anne-Marie Smith who is our membership secretary (1 Manor Court, West Town, Backwell, BS48 3BS).



Membership Renewal



The membership year runs from April 1st to March 31st and renewals for 2014/15 are now due. We really hope you will complete and return the enclosed form.

The size of our membership is a very important factor when applying for grants etc, so although we seem to be very well established, we do still need to demonstrate a wide base of support across the community.

Gift Aid is also a very important source of income for us so, if possible, please tick the relevant box and don't forget to sign the form.

If you have joined or rejoined since November 2013 then please ignore this notice as your membership will go to March 31st 2015. Thank you for your continued support



Volunteer Activity Mornings - on EVERY MONDAY and the FOURTH SATURDAY of every month starting at 10 am on both days and continuing for about 2 hours or as long as your energy lasts.

The tasks will change as the year progresses and can vary according to your strength and interests. Please wear stout footwear and suitable old clothes.

We always break at about 11am for large amounts of chat, tea and biscuits.

Meet at the lower entrance to Jubilee Stone Wood outside No17 Church Town just before 10am, or telephone in advance to find out where we shall be working (01275 463315).



Woodland Report

As usual, the trusty BET volunteers have been incredibly busy managing BET's two nature reserves - I really don't know what we'd do without them! The autumn season was taken up with scything our wildflower meadows and although we started at the end of August, we didn't actually finish until January! This just goes to show the large area of wildflower meadows that we have restored since BET was formed some nine years ago. The winter season has been taken up with coppicing and scrub reduction mainly surrounding BET's fabulous archaeological features and our ponds.

Turkey Oak Reduction

Turkey Oaks are an introduced tree species with only very limited value to our native wildlife. BET has therefore decided to remove as many Turkey Oaks as possible from our reserves to give other native tree species a better chance of survival. The BET volunteers started this process of reduction last year and have continued on through this winter season.

FACT FILE : Turkey Oak

Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*) is a deciduous broadleaf tree native to south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor. It was introduced to the UK both as an ornamental tree and in the hope that it could be used for building ships for the Navy in the 18th century. It can be told apart from native oaks by its 'hairy' acorn cups, which look like they are covered in a dense coating of moss.

Value to Wildlife?

The Turkey oak is nowhere near as valuable to native wildlife as English and sessile oaks, although the catkins do provide a source of pollen for bees and other insects and the acorns are eaten by birds and small mammals (although they are said to be less palatable than native oak acorns). One major disadvantage of the Turkey oak is that it is host to the gall wasp, *Andricus quercuscalicis*, whose larvae damage the acorns of native British oaks. In 1998, the Ministry of Defence ordered the felling of all Turkey Oaks on its UK bases and the Avon Wildlife Trust has a similar policy of removal from their nature reserves.



Leaf

The leaves (which are arranged alternately) are distinctive and different from those of the native oaks (sessile or pedunculate). Whereas the leaf of the latter is quite broad, the leaf of the turkey oak is 'narrow' and more 'angular'. The top surface of the leaves is a dark, rich green but the lower surface is paler. A leaf stalk or petiole is clearly visible.



Buds, Bark and Stem

The trunk is often long and straight with branches that are somewhat more slender than those seen on English Oaks. One of the tree's distinctive features is the bark, which has orange coloured fissures near to the base of the trunk.



Flowers and Fruits

The male flowers hang in catkins and the female ones form acorns that sit in cups or cupules. In the Turkey oak, this cupule is covered with a 'forest' of tiny outgrowths so that the cup is scarcely visible.

Opening up the Archaeological Sites

BET has some fascinating archaeological features but most of them were a bit hidden in the woodland. So to make some of these ancient features stand out more, we have been coppicing trees and removing scrub around the lead mines (or are they tumuli?) as well as the Warrener's Cottage, both in Jubilee Stone Wood. This thinning out has made both sites much more visible and should therefore help visitors better appreciate the woodland archaeology.



The Old Oak Tree



To my mind, the best tree in either Jubilee Stone or Badgers Wood is an ancient oak right next to the Fern Way. Professional estimates of its age range from 350 to 600 years old so it is definitely a tree worth saving. Unfortunately over the years other, more vigorous trees, have shaded it out somewhat putting it under unnecessary stress. So in March, BET sought professional help to fell a large Turkey Oak and a Sycamore to open up the tree canopy once more. The extra light that can now reach the ancient oak should hopefully benefit this fabulous old tree.

Volunteer Mornings

As you probably know, BET runs regular volunteer task mornings on every Monday and the fourth Saturday of each month. The Monday group typically has around 10 to 15 volunteers, whilst the Saturday group averages around 5 volunteers per session. It is only with so many volunteers helping out with BET's many woodland tasks that we've been able to achieve the results we have - so a **BIG BET** thank you to you all.

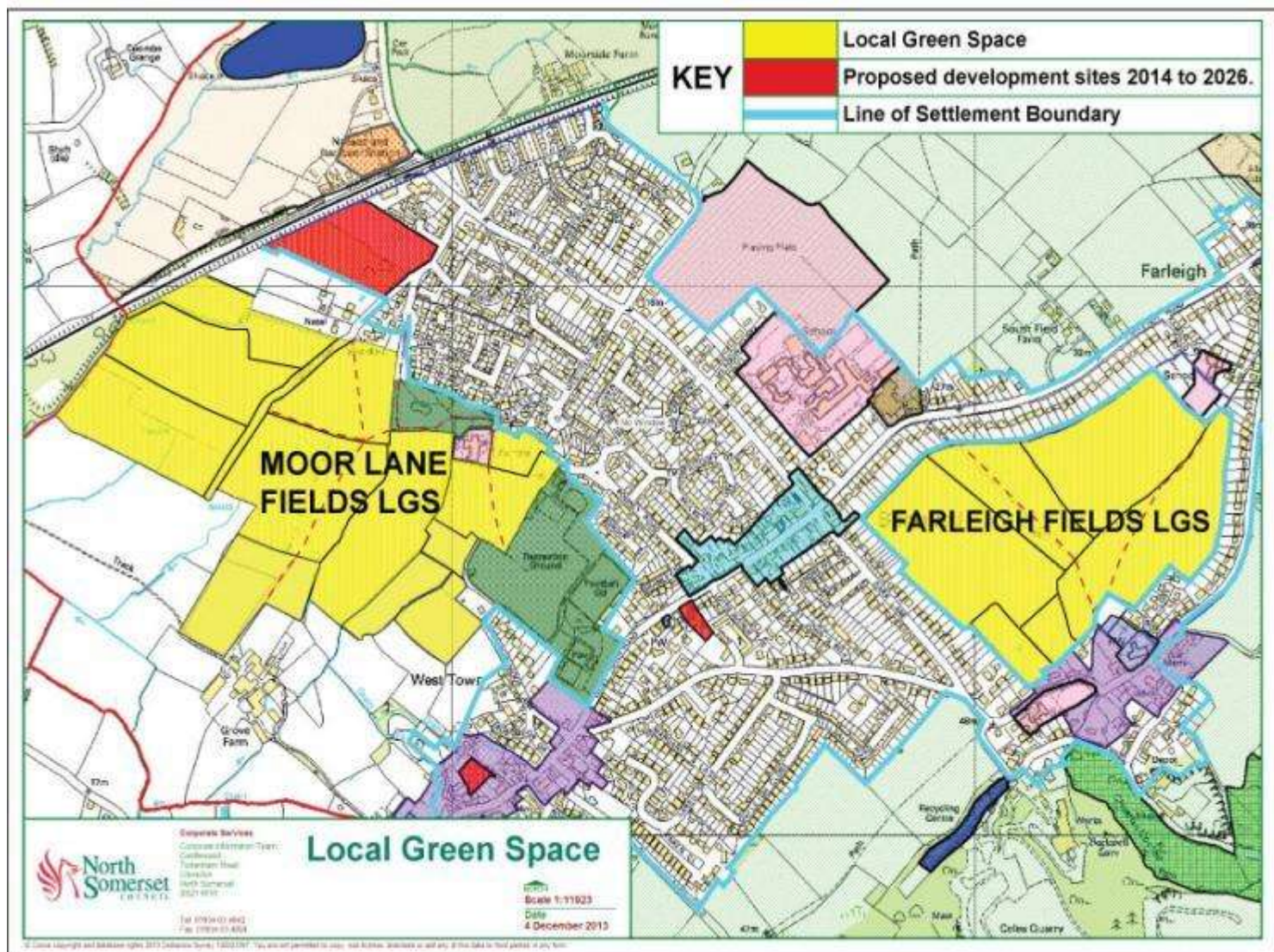
Jan Chambers



Local Green Spaces

Local Green Spaces. Parish Council accepts BRA/ BET Proposal but.....

Members may recall that in collaboration with Backwell Residents Association (BRA) and after consultation with its members, BET proposed that within the Neighbourhood Plan, Backwell designate the whole of Farleigh Fields and an area adjacent to Moor lane as Local Green Spaces. These areas are shown roughly in the indicative map on the next page.



This proposal has now been accepted by the Parish Council on the basis of the extensive evidence collected and assembled by the two organisations culminating in a submission made in January 2013 and updated in January 2014.

As would be expected BET concentrated on the criterion of 'Richness of Wildlife and biodiversity'. This was achieved by on the ground surveys and by assembling all the available information pertaining to the two areas. It soon became clear that even though all of this land is given over to agricultural use it is still exceptionally rich in terms of its natural history.

I am grateful to the following BET members and supporters for information, encouragement and guidance in the documentation of BET's evidence: Dot Baker, Gill Brown, Ian Chambers, Philip Chapman, Councillor Michelle Gibbons-Price, Jenny Greenslade, Michael Marks, Carrie and Keith Riches, Dr Terry Smith, Bruce Stewart, Andrew Town, Val and Geoff Wells, and Geoff White. I apologise in advance to anyone I may have inadvertently missed.

Unfortunately it seems that North Somerset Council believes the Localism Act means that they will decide what is best for us, and they may oppose the Parish Council's proposal for Local Green Spaces. It will be up to an Independent Examiner to decide.

It is my personal view that Backwell has done everything possible to meet the letter and spirit of both National and Local Guidance. I hope members will strongly support the Parish Council in its bid for decent Local Green Spaces for Backwell especially when it comes to the referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan.

I hold a hard copy of each of the complete 2013 and 2014 BRA/BET submissions which are available to members as hard copy on a lending library basis or electronically, although the file is very big and needs to be transmitted in 3 or 4 sections. Perhaps more practically the BET part of the submissions dealing with wildlife and biodiversity is much smaller and is also available on the same basis.

Bill Charnock

A Little about Lead - without the boring bits!

When the Romans landed at Richborough, Kent in AD43, they were heading towards the mineral-rich lands of the West Country - Cornwall with its tin, and Exmoor its iron, but the real target was probably Charterhouse on Mendip in Somerset. It was well known that deposits of lead and silver could be easily obtained there from the mineral 'galena' in the carboniferous limestone, which lay close to the surface, and silver especially was always good for Rome's monetary economy!

Even BET's Jubilee Stone Wood had small seams of lead and iron ores running down the hillside,



which undoubtedly were also exploited by Romans from the 20 acre industrial 'small town' at Gatcombe, Flax Bourton. Excavations there in 1954 and 1977 found traces of both lead and iron processing, also pewter, a mix of tin and lead which was popular for tablewares.

Other Roman lead items found locally include a lead-lined stone coffin discovered in 1884 close to the substantial Roman Villa at Wemberham, Yatton, whilst another burial discovered in 1951 on Clevedon Court West Lawn, had a lead disc close to its jaw. In the 1960s at Henley Wood (by Cadbury-Congresbury hillfort), a Roman/post-Roman cemetery of 90 graves was uncovered, and remains of 4 temples. Casting fragments of shaped lead waste were also nearby, possibly used as roof flashing. The site has now been quarried away.

One of the best places to see remains of lead mining not only from the Roman period, but also Medieval, and Cornish mining

from the 19th century is at Charterhouse (pictured opposite). The area was described by a boy from Sidcott School, Churchill, who went on a school trip there in 1884. '...a more solitary position could scarcely be found. Poor communication with any town, except by cart, then several miles must be traversed before one is reached...a decidedly out of the way place to live in'.

It was very different when the Romans took over the area, initially under military supervision of the Second Legion on behalf of Emperor Claudius, as mines were an Imperial Monopoly. By AD49 it was a huge industrial site full of workshops, processing plants and other buildings - a hive of activity. It bore no resemblance to the usual Roman town of well-laid out streets, but was more like a Wild West one, full of soldiers, slaves, criminals, the usual entrepreneurs and camp followers.

The reason why so much time and effort was put in to obtaining the lead, was that it was not only easy to process as it melted at relatively low temperatures, but there were many uses for it, such as on buildings as flashing for roofs, waste pipes, gutters and cisterns. It was good for waterproofing baths, made into coffins, plugs, rivets, weights - and most importantly - used to sweeten wine!

After the lead was smelted, it was moulded into oblong 'pigs', varying in weight from 100-223 lbs, and Roman carts were designed to carry 4 of them at a time. They were either transported north to the River Avon, and Sea Mills, or east over Salisbury Plain to Southampton, then shipped to Italy. Mendip pigs have been found in France, and Mendip lead was used at Pompeii. Silver was

extracted from the lead by 'cupellation', heating the alloy in open hearths at temperatures in excess of 1100 degrees, and when the lead oxidised, it was scooped off the surface as scum, leaving only the silver. Large quantities were needed for silver coinage, and when added to gold or copper, made gold coins. When lead was added to copper, however, it was excellent for making counterfeit coins!



Small scale mining must have continued over the centuries, because by 1612, legends told of fantastic wealth obtained from Mendip lead mines, although work involved to obtain it was extremely hazardous. No explosives were used, but charcoal fires were lit along the rock face, and when hot, water was thrown against it to fracture and break it up. A dangerous job indeed, which is why a mining law stated that even if a man died in a very deep tunnel, his body would still be brought out and given a Christian burial. It was not surprising, therefore, that by 1670 the industry declined, as mines had to be dug deeper and deeper to find the lead, and were often flooded. As Mendip lead was also inferior to Derbyshire lead, all the hard work involved (and loss of life) was just not worth it.



The Reverend John Skinner of Camerton first discovered the Roman site at Charterhouse in 1819, when helping Richard Colt Hoare plot the Ordnance Survey Maps. He found a field 'thickly strewn' with Roman pottery, roofing tiles, animal bones, and hearths and charcoal from industrial smelting. The farmer complained to him that all the building foundations just beneath the surface played havoc with his plough! Another farmer found 3 lead pigs

(total weight 500 lbs) in 1822, but Skinner took so long to see them that they were sent to a plumber in Cheddar who melted them down. However it is thanks to Skinner that we have his plans of features from his small excavations, along with notes and sketches of the miners and their families.

At that time the gigantic heaps of waste ore from earlier mining operations were being re-smelted, as newer processes could extract more lead, and from 27 miners in 1846, it grew to 300/400 by 1853. Before any re-smelting was done, special hammers were given to the miners' wives and children, who beat and ground it up into smaller pieces. Then it was washed in buddles (troughs) to separate the waste from the rich ore, which sank - another job for the children who helped tread it down with their feet, unless there was a central paddle to stir it up, or a shovel was used instead.

In 1861 a Cornish Mining Company took over and invested in new processing plants. All of the lead produced was then sent in granule form to the Shot Tower in Redcliffe Street, Bristol, but the industry never flourished, and closed down by 1905, with nearby St Cuthbert's Lead Works (pictured) at Priddy closing by 1908.



Finally it must be mentioned that working with lead is very dangerous, due to toxic by-products of arsenic and cadmium, so mortality rates amongst all the workers must have been very high. An



excavation on the Roman Town Field in 1960-67 was halted as cattle began to die from eating the black disturbed soil around the grass roots. This is why only sheep graze there now, because they nibble safely at the blades of grass, not pull out the roots. Even the Time Team Big Roman Dig in 2005 had to close down early, due to the contaminated soil, despite the fact that we (members of CHERT - Charterhouse Environs

Research Team) wore protective white suits, masks and gloves.

Charterhouse is a fascinating place for countryside walks, with not only remains of Roman, Medieval and 19th century lead mining, but there are also faint traces of the Roman industrial 'town', military fort and so-called 'amphitheatre' high on the hillside. It is a place that nearly 2,000 years earlier had hummed with activity (to say nothing of pollution by noxious fumes), but today it is green and peaceful, and, because of the lead, we will probably never know the full story of what life was like there all those many years ago

Jenny Greenslade



Metal Detecting Musings

When the BET trustees first gave me the OK to detect in the Trust's woods, I wasn't sure what



to expect. Now I know. I am certain to find the ends of shotgun cartridges ("Shotties" in the detecting world), 0.303 cartridge cases left over from the late altercation with Mr Hitler, iron nails by the score and sundry bits of any other old iron. Interestingly, deep buried rusty iron gives a very good indication of a silver coin at 3 inch depth - a problem with most detectors, apparently. So if nowt appears after digging 6 inches - its iron! However, I try to dig it, it could be another cast iron pot or summat else of

interest. But not very often, usually it's a chunk of unidentifiable iron bar.

Coins come up frequently, especially near the Jubilee Stone. Victorian, early 20th century, and modern decimal, which do not wear well in the ground. The latest find was a very nice 1914 shilling. Until 1920 silver coins were just that, silver. From 1921 the silver content was reduced to 0.5%.

Near the Warrener's Cottage, out popped (well not exactly popped, it was about 6 inches down) a Bristol & South Wales One Penny Token, dated 1811. Due to a shortage of copper (the Navy was copper bottoming its ships at the time), local associations and industries produced tokens in place of small change in the early 19th century, like this one for use in specific areas.



I've also had a George III ha'penny, in poor condition, with only "GIUS " (From Georgius) readable. But the indistinct bust of him is facing right, which helps identify it.

Oh, and a French 10 centime of 1988 came out too!

A gold engagement ring, sans stone, was found in the cleared area near the viewpoint, London Assay mark 1977, 19 carat. Ian has this, to sell for the funds!

A very large safety pin was an unusual find with traces of gilding, possibly a scarf pin.

Other oddities include a time fuse from a WW2 3.7inch AA shell, a bag of oil paint tubes and a hair dryer!

If anyone lives in an old house, I would love to search your garden. A local house has produced a Norwegian 1 ore coin of 1934, to the owner's mystification.

Keith Matthews - CPO RN, Very much retired!



Nest Box Survey 2013/14

Last year, the nest box survey was done during that bitterly cold weather in January, so this year it was suggested that we started in November when, hopefully, the weather would be less hostile and it would also give us a bit more opportunity to repair, replace or refurbish any boxes needing attention.

So in November, Bill, Brian, Derek and Carrie went out into Badgers Wood to clear and check all the boxes. We found 8 nests, but we also had 5 dormouse nests (2 in one box) and 1 wasp nest which had completely sealed the entrance hole! As usual, an owl box had been used by squirrels. In Jubilee Stone Wood, the number of nests was 9, plus 4 dormouse nests, 3 of which were on



top of bird nests, and 1 squirrel nest (owl box). The frequency of dormouse nests in the bird boxes means that we have to seriously consider taking along a licensed dormouse handler when the boxes are done next year. The numbers of bird nests are the same as last year, though this year there were quite a number with corpses which we had not found before - possibly due to the cold spring and shortage of food.

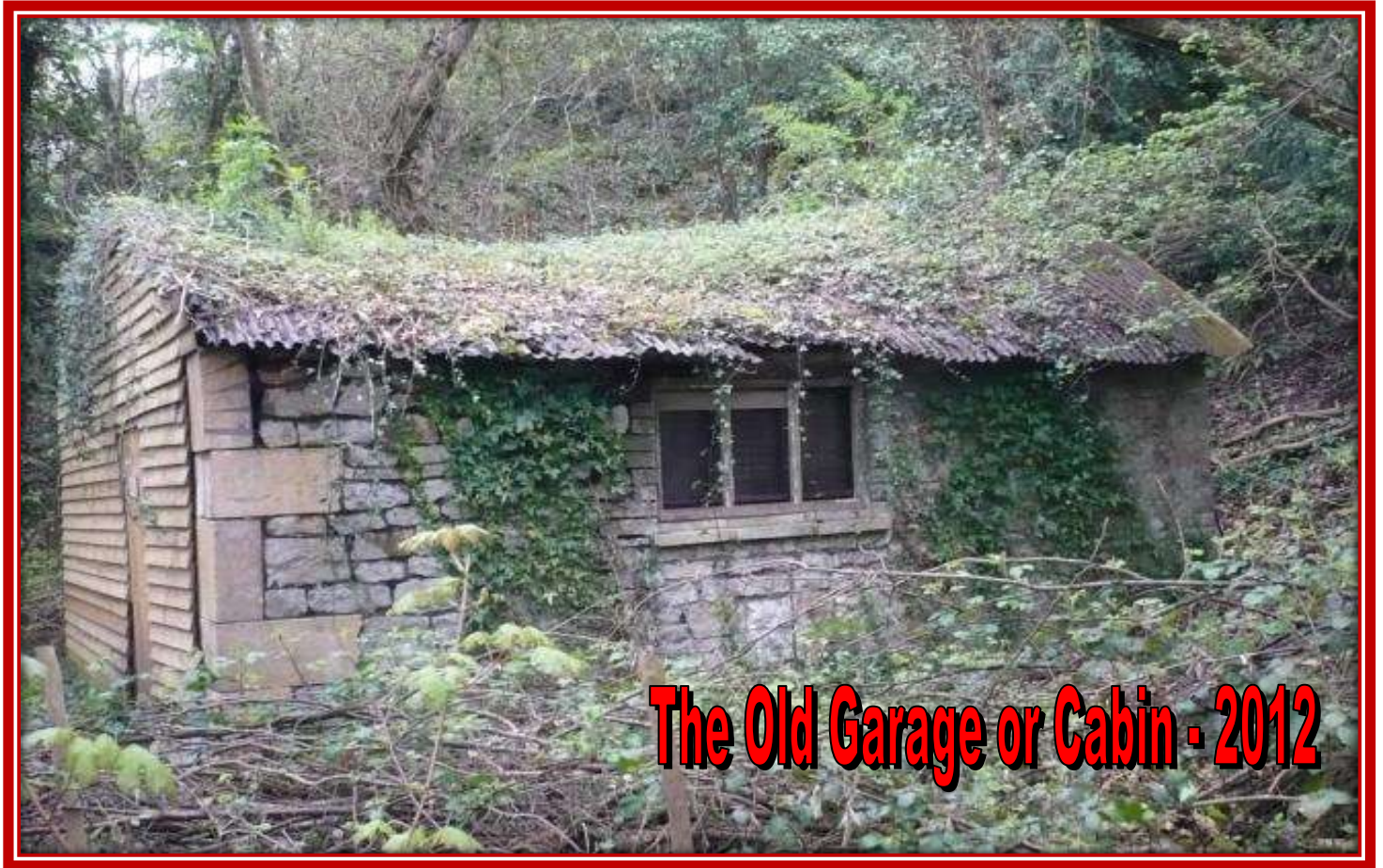
Thanks to Bill for the tremendous amount of refurbishment on boxes this year, putting in drain holes and replacing lids and hinges. Another 3 boxes have been put up in JSW and 4

in BW in areas where there were no boxes. Let's hope the birds have kinder weather this year!

Carrie Riches

Cabin Update

It was way back in 2012 that the BET trustees made the decision to save the old garage in Badgers Wood. The structure at that time, had deteriorated to such an extent that the roof was



in imminent danger of collapse, and it became clear that if we didn't do something rather quickly, the building might not be around for that much longer. Naturally, as with any large project aiming to restore an old building, there are always many surprises in store and the garage has been no exception. Since the project started, many hundreds of hours have been put into its restoration and BET is incredibly lucky to have such a talented and hard working group of volunteers to push this tricky project forward.

Jan



In BET's last bulletin I was pleased to report that the new wooden roof beams had been put up to support the roof, and this was quickly followed by some additional blockwork and stonework to lock the new beams into position. Galvanised steel bars have also been fitted to prevent the new roof acting as an aerofoil in strong winds and taking off, the drilling into the natural stone of the south wall was particularly hard.

Fixing the new roof sheets started at the north end - and it started very gingerly!



The first row of three sheets was placed in position and adjusted for the correct overlap, a suitable overhang for the north wall and an even overhang over the side walls. Once this had been done the positions of the sheets were marked, then taken down and placed inside the Cabin; this was November and daylight was in short supply!

On the next visit, the first row of sheets were actually screwed down and the successive rows followed. Eventually, a working procedure was developed which resulted in a row of three sheets being fitted in about an hour.



By Christmas, all the sheets were fitted and the fire, complete with a new flue, was burning.

Since the New Year, a storage area has been built inside the cabin and new windows have been fitted. The windows were generously provided free of charge by **Brorn Windows of Congresbury** and when they were ready, they were collected and stored in the Cabin until we had the time to fit them. However, two days after collecting them, Brorn called to say they had two professional fitters available for a day, so we now have both brand new and perfectly fitted windows.



So, what still needs to be completed?

Well there's still a bit of masonry and pointing at the top of the south wall, the ship-lap cladding needs to go back on to cover the north wall, the new outer door needs to be completed and some internal surfaces need to be painted. Finally, there will need to be a good tidy up both inside and outside the Cabin and then maybe a new gate with stone pillars and a dry stone wall?

Gerry Wilcox

