

# Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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### A Poem for Spring

Spring starts on the 20<sup>th</sup> March. Let's celebrate the advent of the most poetic season with a poem which isn't "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud," Wordsworth's pleasant yet extremely overplayed ode to daffodils.

#### A Light Exists in Spring

by Emily Dickinson

A Light exists in Spring  
Not present on the Year  
At any other period –  
When March is scarcely here

A Colour stands abroad  
On Solitary Fields  
That Science cannot overtake  
But Human Nature feels...

### Lambing Season

Just a reminder that we are now coming up to the lambing season, in fact new lambs can already be seen in many of the fields as we start to venture out more into the countryside. Please note if you are a dog owner it is your responsibility to ensure that when walking your dog on a public path through farmland to keep all dogs on leads. Loose dogs can cause distress to sheep and during this time of year that can cause the loss of the sheep's life and the life of their lambs, both young and unborn.

The loss of livestock is a great financial cost and has an emotionally impact to farmers who spend many hours' worth of time, effort and money to raise them. A sheep which is pregnant with two lambs for example has a potentially worth of £1000 towards their livelihood. Also bear in mind that prosecutions for criminal damage could potentially be sought against any dog owner / walker causing loss of life to livestock by not having their dog under proper control.

The farmer does have a right under law to shoot any dog running uncontrolled on his farmland that is a threat to their livestock - providing various criteria are met. This however is an absolute last resort and farmers do not want to do this!

Please be considerate during this time, and this way everyone can enjoy our beautiful rural areas.

**Glenda B**

## Take a Note

As we approach our new season for Spring Vale Rambling Class, our 127th, I thought that I would take a leaf from our friend Alan Rogerson who I know keeps a little notebook with jottings about the rambles he has been on. If this is the year that I start my "journal" what would it look like, what would I be looking to include and what do I need in order to do this?

In other words what is the purpose of such a book?

Answer: There are many reasons

How many times have you tried to remember details of a particular walk and debated with another friendly walker which way you went!

When trying to recall how many miles you have walked this year can you honestly remember without writing it down and be accurate. Miles or steps they all count!

When trying to exchange details of something you saw or heard and when others don't believe whether that can be true or not, you can argue more strongly if you have noted it down and perhaps win your argument!

And then there is the joy of just doing it for yourself and not for any one particular reason but just for the relaxed calmness it can give you.

Journals can be any size large or small. They can be any colour, lined or plain, soft or hard backed. You can get them very cheaply from the supermarket. You can just use a pencil or a pen as you don't need colour and in terms of how good they will look, it doesn't matter because nobody else need see them. They are your secret and for your eyes only. 📖📖📖 📱📱

So, let's all take a page from Alan's notebook. Get yourself prepared. Get your book and pen ready and look around you on a walk. Jot down little notes of what you have seen, who you chatted to. What the weather was like, where you went and how did you feel on the walk. No two walks are ever the same.



**Glenda B**

## The Forest of Rossendale

In late Middle Ages, the Rossendale valley was part of the Royal **Forest of Rossendale**. The original medieval meaning of 'forest' was like a 'preserve', for example land that is legally kept for specific purposes such as royal hunting. So 'forests' were areas large enough to support species such as wolves and deer for game hunting and they encompassed other habitats such as heaths, open grassland and farmland.

The area was not extensively wooded but consisted of many pockets of woods and large areas of rough open countryside. The initial settlements would have been in "booths" or farmsteads and encroachment into the forest would have developed them into small hamlets.

The whole area of Rossendale was governed by a constable nominated by the principal landowners who held the position of "The Greave of The Forrest". After 1515 the role of constable became a quasi-hereditary position held by the Whitacker family at Broadclough Hall, near to Bacup, the only ancient hall in the district.

You may have read recently that thousands of new trees are to be planted at sites across Rossendale to create new woods — described as 'Rossendale Forest'. They are not trying to re-establish the area as a massive forest such as the New Forest or Sherwood Forest, but to introduce many small pockets of woodland across the whole of the Valley.

The work comes as many ash trees in Rossendale like many places across the UK are being lost to a fungus which causes 'dieback'. But there is hope that the practical work to plant young trees and that the growth in natural immunity within trees will gradually counterbalance this loss over the next 50 years. Peat bogs are also to be supported in this project, which is linked to addressing climate change, carbon emissions and creating new green spaces. Schools, river and nature groups are joining the Rossendale Forest project with the borough council. Groups of volunteers have planted over 1,200 trees near Loveclough in Rossendale and the Spodden Valley is also due to be planted.

When out walking within the area look out for these new wooded area.

**Michael C**

## **Death's Chainsaw will not Harm me**

I am tall, freestanding, contain a unique biological system and have lived a long time.

I am in touch with nature, but I am misunderstood.

I am big and tough but like you have my limits.

I can be injured or killed by diseases and insects.

My branches break and my trunk can split or my roots may no longer grip the soil.

I can twist, turn, bend or break, just like you.

Just like you I can be weak and fail,

But I have learnt how to look after myself very effectively by building walls to deal with infection.

I have an inbuilt biological defence system and can repair myself just like you.

I am very adaptable and respond rapidly to the forces of nature and things that can destroy me.

However, I can't respond to mankind.

At the slightest sign of infection, you want to cut us down for fear of litigation.

Why do you so easily hurt and destroy us instead of trying to protect and heal us.

Why do you not see the signs earlier, so we can enjoy our latter years in peace?

We are more endangered than you think!

Why do you try to suffocate me by spreading tarmac over my roots, denying me water and nutrients?

Why do you cause me damage by creating wounds on my bark with your mowers and strimmers?

Why did you pollard us and stop us making sugar and starch to nourish ourselves so we could grow big and strong?

You have caused us physical stress and subjected us to pollution.

You are killing hundreds of us but we have not intentionally injured or killed any of you.

If we have become dangerous it is because of the way you have treated us.

You have failed in your responsibility towards us.

When we get in the way of your planning schemes you simply cut us down and sacrifice us in the name of progress.

You do not consider how we can live together.

We are not inanimate objects we are living, breathing things.

We have rights too and in future we want our rights enforced.



**Barbara S on behalf of trees everywhere, because Trees Need Tender Loving Care!**

## The Kingfisher

The common kingfisher symbolises **luck** because they can find hidden treasure on riverbeds. They also represent **wisdom** through their ability to dive deep into the water with *conviction and determination* in search of food even though there is no guarantee that they will come back up again with any prize at all.

In Polynesian culture they believe that the bird has command on seas and waters. The kingfisher stands for *peace and prosperity*. It is connected with Jupiter which is also a symbol for peace and prosperity. It is a symbol of fertility and harvest. The Greek name for kingfisher is halcyon, leading to the term halcyon days. We use this term to refer to fondly remembered times in our past. In China, kingfishers are symbols for faithfulness and happy marriages.

A kingfisher on a totem pole represents speed, agility, luck, and patience. Legend tells that the Kingfisher waited a long time to transform into its perfect figure. It provides you with strength to step up to the next level, and face challenges head on.

When (r)ambling alongside a river look out for the azure blue, the brightly coloured plumage of orange underparts, turquoise blue wings, electric blue back and rump of a flying kingfishers arrowy dash across slow moving water. The white feathers around the kingfisher's neck symbolise a necklace made of shells.

Nowadays, Kingfishers can be found on logos for airlines and beer, and a bird festival among others. I wish you luck, wisdom, conviction and determination, peace and prosperity, fertile ground, a good harvest, and halcyon days of special memories. When out walking have speed, agility, luck, and patience.



Jean G

## Food for Thought

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council are currently displaying their development plan covering the next 10 years in various locations around the borough. Some of the areas that are designated were protected green belt land in the previous development plan and are now proposed for development - causing concern and protest in some of the areas.

Greenfields are certainly spiritually uplifting, especially if they have public rights of way running through them. There are, however, some issues that need addressing. Even though farmland is certainly picturesque, it doesn't unfortunately tell the whole story. A recent report showed a disastrous decline in farmland birds caused by modern farming methods. Hedges have been removed to make fields bigger, enabling large machines to operate and increase food productions. Ponds have also been filled in to increase the area under production.

Of course, most of these farmers, both local and nationally, will be quite happy to forget about food production when the local authorities turn up with their cheque books to purchase the land.



So, the existence of green fields doesn't necessarily mean that they are good for wildlife. They can be quite sterile in wildlife terms. Developments can on the other hand, if done correctly, be beneficial to wildlife. Certain features will benefit wildlife and biodiversity, can be incorporated into each development plan. Shrubs and hedges are often now features of such development, as are ponds and wetlands sites. So ironically commercial development can be better for wildlife than sterile green fields.

Certainly, food for thought!

Tony C

## Our Changing Countryside

Many walkers will notice the changes to our countryside that are brought about by the seasons. The carpet of winter snow leaving a platform of silence as you walk through the woods, the heady smell of bluebells and wild garlic that late spring brings to a walk and the assault on our eyes and ears that a deep covering of crunchy, autumn red and orange leaves offer as you kick your way down an autumn path.

What may be less obvious are the negative changes that have taken place but don't despair. There is a good ending to this sad tale.

The RSPB has been telling us that over the last 40 years our bird numbers have fallen by 54%. The summer skylark, our summer songbird, numbers have crashed by 60% with sparrow and corn bunting numbers dropping by a massive 90%.

Thankfully, there has been a group of people out there who have recognised this and done something about it. They are the friendly farmers. Tapping into the grants available from the Natural England's Countryside Stewardship Scheme, they have been encouraged to support a conservational commitment to diversity in the countryside.

The difference that you would see in a normally pure arable field would be tussocky, grass margins around the edges of the field providing hiding places for insects and ground nesting birds. These are sometimes planted with wild flowers giving pollen and nectar for insects which provide food for the birds. Beetle banks established in the middle of fields give nesting sites for skylarks together with the plentiful supply of food - beetles, spiders and insects.



Skylark

But these individual farmers don't always stop there! They sometimes sow particular small areas with seed mixes - oats, spring barley and quinoa that do not get harvested but are left through the winter so that the birds have a stop gap to keep them going through hard winters. Quite often you might notice a "cover crop" at this time which protects the soil from winter erosion, offers protection for brown hares from the keen eyes of a bird of prey.

But how do we know this works?

On a recent walk and survey in the Gloucestershire area, it was noted that skylark numbers had increased from 15 pairs to 44 pairs. On a 2 hour walk, 28 different types of birds were noted - yellow hammers, linnets, chaffinches, skylarks, blackbirds, buzzards, heron, mallard, moorhens, sparrow hawk among them. All of this and at no commercial detriment to the farmer.

So what would these differences look like to the walker? The difference to wildflower mixes would mean that we would see wild blooms in spring and summer with insects feeding on the pollen, the birds feeding on the insects. The field margins would remain untouched from ploughing and look as though the farmer has missed a bit! But these areas give food to young bird chicks, shelter for small mammals, and flowers for butterflies. Winter stubble gives shelter for small animals. As well as providing an impromptu path, "Hedgerow lanes" provide shelter for animals with no herbicides or fertilisers. "Pollen patch" areas provide clover, trefoil or vetch for insects, butterflies, moths and bumblebees. Ponds and ditches mean no livestock in that area but plenty of perfect landscape for dragonflies, aquatic insects, frogs and newts. Beetle banks can be identified by their raised mounds in the middle of a field that are often planted with a dense grass cover. The predatory spiders and insects feeding on the pest insects then become a meal for any passing birds.

So next time you are out walking just look hard around you as the landscape may just be trying to hide the changes that have taken place since you were last here!!

**Eleanor**