

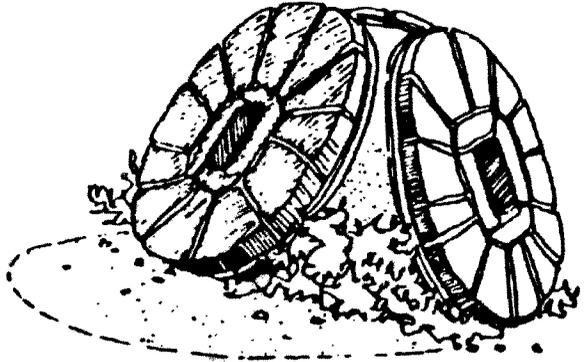
# DEAN VILLAGE NEWS

No. 115 Summer - Autumn 1996

## CLEAN!

There are some people who don't wait for a special clean-up day, but pick up litter whenever they walk along the riverside. (Will you too take a plastic bag to collect a few pieces, when you walk the dog for example?) As a result our section seemed pretty clear even before Sunday May 5, but there were some places which required a special effort, especially just below the old stone bridge. We had nearly given that up as hopelessly inaccessible when a young man arrived on the scene with chest-high waders. Two others on the bridge hauled the junk up with ropes. Well done and thankyou! That afternoon, looking downstream from the bridge there was nothing but clear water and the fresh greens of spring. Further upstream there is still a blot on the landscape, due to Gregor's activities at the back of Belford Mews. The Council is taking steps . . .

Even before the litter was removed from the river, the water quality, from the biological point of view, was excellent. The river is graded class 1 over most of its length, even through the city, and nowhere below class 2, for it supports a rich variety of invertebrates — insect larvae, fresh-water shrimps etc. — which are even more significant than the fish in proving that their environment is a healthy one. They are regularly sampled by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, which has incorporated the Forth River Purification Board. To be sure, incidents of pollution do occasionally occur, but the bottles



and cans, the fridges and trolleys do not prevent those wee beasties from absorbing food and oxygen.

The river was very different in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Dr Henry Meiklejohn, the first Medical Officer of Health for Edinburgh, described it as a sewer. The Lochrin Burn, draining a large industrial and residential area of West Edinburgh, was an open drain conveying a large amount of sewage into the Water of Leith at Coltbridge and down through the densely populated localities of the Dean Village, Stockbridge and Canonmills.

Legislation had been promoted in 1854 to improve matters but was ineffective. In 1864 an Act of Parliament provided for a sewer to be constructed from Roseburn to the sea, intercepting numerous drains and minor sewers which had previously discharged into the river. In 1889 the Water of Leith Sewerage and Purification Act resulted in a second sewer, from Balerno to the sea. Those two sewers still serve. You can see signs of them in the bed of the river (brick access points, man-made surfaces) or alongside it: the top of one sewer is the base of the path from the hotel footbridge to the wall of Donaldson's School. Another consequence of the 1889 Act was the closure in 1890 of the "Great Lade" which ran from the Dean weir just below the Village to Stockbridge, Silvermills and Canonmills, and of the mills which it had served. Dr Meiklejohn had

expressed strong disapproval of lades which ran through urban areas.

The men working the surviving mills had another problem: water which would otherwise flow from the Pentland Hills into the Water of Leith was being diverted for Edinburgh's water supply and then into the sewers, so that there was less to power their machinery. They persuaded Edinburgh Corporation to build compensation reservoirs — Harperrig, Threipmuir and Harlaw — from which water would be released in a dry season to ensure a reasonable flow.

The City Engineer controlled the use of water by the mills. It could be used freely for power to drive machinery, for this did not pollute the water, which was returned to the river; but only a limited amount was allowed for processes such as paper-making and tanning, whose noxious effluent had to be discharged into the sewers, the mill owners being charged according to the metered volume.

As a result of the 1889 Act the river was completely controlled by the City Engineer on behalf of the Corporation. Bailiffs (known as "bailies") were employed to walk the river within the City boundaries every day, checking on pollution, rubbish and fishing permits. For any day only four permits were issued for each of the three sections into which the river was divided within the City. So it was a privilege to get one.

The Leith Docks Commission had certain powers too, for debris carried down by the river could damage ships. They had a survey carried out every month or so; fallen trees were removed or cut up; some were felled.

The efficient control of the river by one authority continued until an Act of 1958 set up the Lothian River Purification Board, which concentrated on the much greater problems of the Esk and the Almond. From the seventies Lothian Regional Council was in charge of water and sewerage. The River Valleys Officer for the Wildlife Trust told us last October that he had to deal with fourteen different committees.

Now we have a unitary authority, but not the unity of control which existed under the City

Engineer before 1958.

Sources: Henry Meiklejohn: *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the City of Edinburgh*, 1865, quoted in DVNews 96.

Edinburgh City Council: *Main Drainage of the City of Edinburgh*, 1955.

Lawrence Walker: Personal communication.

## RECORDS

The National Monuments Record of Scotland has recently taken in the office plans of Sydney Mitchell & Wilson, which go back to 1883, when Mitchell set up in practice on his own. Unfortunately they do not include the plans for Well Court, but the DVA has a copy of the ground-floor plan which was printed in *The British Architect* (23 August 1889). No 2 is shown as a shop, but it was probably never used as such: no one remembers it as a shop and it was not built as in the plan. No 1, under the Hall, was the caretaker's flat. Have you noticed that it has two front doors? The first one led into the office where Findlay's tenants in Well Court and Dean Path Buildings paid their rents over the counter. It is now an spacious bathroom.

Moving right up to date, the Monuments Record has also taken in the office papers of Roland Wedgwood, the distinguished architect who occupied Well Court Hall from 1964 to 1996. They also made a photographic record of his office. The Hall has now been leased to Jonathan Speirs & Associates, lighting design consultants.

The National Monuments Record is open for public consultation at 16 Bernard Terrace, Newington (662 1456). Anyone can go and browse through the collection. Among other items of interest to us there are photographs of the unaltered interior of a stable in Belford Mews.

## TREES

There have been problems about the trees in the valley: they were too even in age and the non-native sycamores have proliferated. There has been some felling on Dean Bank, to give light for new plantings.

In 1985 the Association had put in a number of young trees on Dean Bank, with the Council's permission and the advice of an expert — oak, wild cherry, beech, hawthorn, birch, alder and guelder rose. For two or three years we checked them in early summer to make sure that they were not being choked by weeds. It is difficult to scramble up the slope to identify the ones we planted

high up, but you can see flourishing young cherry trees and oaks near the path.

Towards the end of 1993 the "Dirty Weekenders" (student volunteers) planted 200 trees, in cooperation with the Planning Department. Those are in green tubes, which are intended to protect the young trees from both rabbits and weeds, and also to provide a favourable micro-climate. Clearly there were some failures — allowance is made for that — and tubes have ended up in the river, but this spring revealed that at least three-quarters of the remaining tubes have living trees. Last winter the Recreation Department planted more trees, without tubes — a mixture of hardwoods such as ash and oak with some lower species, like hazel.

## LIGHTING

A complaint has been made that the lighting on Bell's Brae is inadequate as well as ugly. This has prompted the Secretary to raise again the possibility of complete replacement of the old lamps in the Village by ones more suitable for an Outstanding Conservation Area. This has been under discussion off and on since 1980. Although the Association paid £1000 towards Victorian-style lamps in Well Court, we could not hope to raise enough money to pay for new lamps throughout the Village; so we had to accept that better lighting would not be installed until the present ones were due for replacement. We were given hope that this might be in 1992-3, or 1993-4 . . .

## MELVIN HOUSE

Planning consent has been granted for a hotel at 3 Rothesay Terrace, with strict conditions about noise. Edinburgh Community Trust has had to withdraw from the project.

(See DVN 113, 114)

## IN THE FAMILY

Do you hesitate to speak to a neighbour about problems? e.g. "Please don't put out bread for the birds: there are rats about." "Please don't put your black bag out on the wrong day." "It's your turn to wash the stair." "Your window-box is going to fall on some one's head." So you say nothing; or you apply to the Department of Environmental Health or even the police. Can't we keep it "in the family"?

A resident has suggested that one person in each group of houses could be a channel of communication. Why not talk to your neighbours about this? You might then set up such a system — or find it unnecessary!

## SUNBURY

There will be an article on its history in the next D V News — about Moncur's Riding Academy, Fraser's stables and cab-hiring business, Belford Motor Company, the smithy, Whytock & Reid, Sloan's, Middleton & Townsend . . . . Can you contribute any documents, photographs or memories?

## A BID FOR MILLIONS

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust hope to hear in September that their application to the Millennium Commission has been successful. The list of projects to which they would give priority includes the completion and up-grading of the Walkway, upgrading of their Heritage Centre at Slateford, lighting of the Walkway and landscaping at St Bernard's Well. They do not seem to have adopted our recommendation that weirs, lades, and retaining walls be restored.

Among the reserved projects is an ambitious proposal drawn up by the architects Jim Johnston and Adam Zyw to restore and develop Lindsay's Mill, the lower part of which still exists below the three millstones. A reconstructed water-wheel would drive flour-milling machinery. A shop would sell bakery products and flour milled on the premises; there would be a café, an exhibition area and an audio-visual room, which would provide facilities for schools and community groups. The library and archive would be the repository for historical information and records.

The Committee of the DVA considers that the project is over-elaborate and unlikely to be viable unless it attracted many more visitors than we would want. We would, however, be glad to see a more modest plan to feature Lindsay's Mill and perhaps to carry out some restoration. What do you think?

## STILL MORE FLOWERS?

There are more hanging baskets than before and keen individuals have made a difference in Well Court, in Damside and at Dean Path Buildings. Mary McParland suggests that a group get together to plan still more for next year. She invites those interested to meet in her flat at 15/2 Bell's Brae at 8 p.m. on Wednesday August 21st. Phone 225 5330 or send her a note to let her know that you are interested and whether you will be there.

## THE DEAN VILLAGE ASSOCIATION Committee 1996-7

Chairman: Mrs Peggy Valentine,  
31/2 Belford Road (225 8942)  
Vice-Chairman: Ms Caroline Gerard,  
6 Belford Mews  
Secretary: Miss Dorothy Forrester,  
13 Belford Road (226 5843)  
Treasurer: Mrs Sylvia Bradley,  
22 Lynedoch Place (225 2639)  
and Ms Bridget Baines, 2 Dean Path  
Mrs W. Burrell, 23/15 Lynedoch Place  
Ms Isla Calder, 18 Well Court  
Mr John Bowie Dickson, 3/4 Dean Path  
Dr John Handley, 13 Sunbury Place  
Mrs Nan McLaren, 23/18 Lynedoch Place  
Miss Fiona Scott, 1 Well Court  
Mrs Helen Zyw, 17 Bell's Brae.

### Subscriptions

Life membership: £30 single, £45 double  
Annual subscription: £3 single, £4.50 double  
Concessions: £1.50 (pensioners, students,  
unemployed)

## DIARY

**Sunday 21st July, 2 to 5 pm.: Belgrave Crescent Gardens** will be open. Enter from the Crescent. Admission £1.00; children and senior citizens 50p.

**"Tales from Tbilisi"** — paintings by the Georgian artist **Levan Chogoshvili**, in the Zyw Gallery, Bell's Brae. Every day from **August 2nd to 31st, 11 to 5.**

**Wednesday August 7: Drive to Peebles for pensioners**, leaving the Village at 1.15 and returning at 7. Tea included. No charge. Book your place with Peggy Valentine, 31/2 Belford Road (225 8942).

**Tuesday September 24 at 7 p.m.: Visit to the**

**Scottish Office at Leith**, accompanied, we hope, by one of the architects. For security reasons, we must give a list of visitors and registration numbers of cars in advance. If you want to go, **tell Peggy Valentine by September 12**, saying whether you would like a lift or can offer lifts. Vehicles enter from the west end of Commercial Street.

**Tuesday October 15: "Urban Foxes" by Dr Gill Hartley.**

7.30 p.m. in the Seminar Room, Miller Row, by kind permission of RMJM.

**Tuesday November 12: "A French King at Holyrood" by Lord Mackenzie-Stuart of Dean.** During his exile a younger brother of the guillotined Louis XVI was glad to have sanctuary there from his creditors.

7.30 p.m. in the Seminar Room, Miller Row.

## STUART MATTHEW (1912 — 1996)

Stuart Matthew, who lived for many years in Lynedoch Place, was one of the founders of our Association in 1971. Having become an architect like his father John F. Matthew, who was in partnership with Sir Robert Lorimer, he designed the Cloister Chapel at Warriston Crematorium, housing at the Thistle Foundation, Loretto School Chapel, Linburn housing for the blind and works for the Thistle Chapel at St Giles'. His interest in this chapel led to research and the publication in 1988 of *The Knights and Chapel of the Thistle*. He was a musician who tutored and encouraged young musicians, whose success he was later to enjoy. He fought for people with disabilities, being particularly interested in finding a communication bridge between those with and those without disabilities, for example between profoundly deaf and hearing persons. Our sympathy goes out to his wife Joan, his constant companion and supporter for almost 60 years.