

Living the Levels

The quarterly newsletter for the
Living Levels Landscape Partnership



Spring 2021

Loving your Levels
a legacy in the making

Beer and Bees

Poems and Prose

Tourist Toolkit

Events coming up (check the website!)



Meet the Gwent Levels Brewer
April 8th



Making of the Medieval Levels
April 14th



The Secret Life of Pylons
April 22nd



Wild Watch Training 2021
April 28th



City Nature Challenge 2021
April 30th - May 3rd



'Wild Wales' live poetry
April 30th



'Tours, drives and walks' mini talks
May 14th



Writing the Landscape: Poetry
May 15th



Mega Tides of the Severn Estuary
May 20th



Little Flanders beyond Wales
May 26th



Wales Garden BioBlitz
May 29th

LAST CHANCE FOR YOUR LEGACY VIEWS!

Well not quite but we really need your views so don't be shy! Programme Manager Alison Offord brings us up to date on shaping our plans for the future.

A huge thank you to everyone who's completed our Legacy survey – it's still open so please encourage anyone who cares about the Living Levels to take part. We're close to 100 responses which is great to see but please keep them coming - you can access it [here](#).

The results will be published in a future edition but I don't want to influence anybody who is yet to respond so I'll park that for now.

Meanwhile I thought I would fill you in on where we are with wider legacy planning. Each of the 24 projects will have a legacy plan setting out what the long-lasting benefits are and how they will be secured. Usually this will be through out partners' main activities, dedicated management and maintenance plans or plans for third parties to take over project work. In some cases, the legacy will be dependent on securing extra resources – usually for funding or people.

We are also discussing at Board level what a renewed vision and partnership for the Levels will look like, how the work will be resourced and funded and priorities for funding.

As plans progress we will update you but you are always welcome to share any thoughts with me @ Alison.boyes@rspb.org.uk

Alison Offord Living Levels Programme Manager



WAXING LYRICAL ABOUT THE LEVELS

In November we teamed up with award-winning poet Ben Ray to bring you the Living Levels Poetry Competition.

The theme was the Gwent Levels and the prize included Ben Ray performing winning entries live during his online 'Sound Levels Live!' event 'Poetic Wales'.

Here's Ben's musings...

Lodged deep in the confines of quarantine far away from the Gwent Levels as I am, it has been a real joy to read and judge the entries for the Living Levels' Poetry Competition and to travel back to this special area through the page. From Chepstow to Cardiff via Newport, I felt I've taken a literary walk across this wonderful space via the poetry submitted!

As hard as it was to choose just one, the winner Stephen Cogbill's captivating 'Moon-Crazed Work' stood out: it's slow, meandering tour along the water's edge, taking in 'salt-claimed' trees and the 'patience-hardened gaze of stock-still fishermen', demanded confidently to be heard.

However, this poem is closely followed by two runners-up: Val Ormrod's 'Windmill Reen' evocatively captured past adventures and stories embedded in the communities of the Levels, whilst Mike Rees' 'Connections I' painted a vivid, clear snapshot of daily life in the area and the interaction between locals and nature surrounding them.

In these difficult times, poetry can help us to connect with a landscape which we cannot always be with physically - a quality all of these poems hold in abundance.

Stephen Cogbill's winning entry plus Val's and Mike's can be enjoyed throughout this edition of 'Living the Levels'.

WE WANT YOUR POEMS on the theme of wildlife for Ben's next 'Sound Levels Live!' performance on April 30th: [Wild Wales](#)'.

Send your poems to info@livinglevels.org.uk and Ben will perform them live!

MOON CRAZED WORK

(a November Coast Walk of 25 miles requiring
a dawn start and after-dark finish)

1/

Grey mists
roll back
As I peer
Offshore
At the silt-fast ship

Ribcage of oak
Hull planks
Now voids of
dim daylight

Grounded there
awaiting
the lifting tide

that never came

2/ The large
Time toppled
Tree
Salt-claimed
Lodged against the
concrete certitude
of the
Sea wall
Catches the first
brightness
of the day

Beneath it
I tread
the duvet
of seaweed
and flotsam
the Tree's bed
before a high
Spring tide
calls it
Falteringly
to its next
Voyage.

3/ Past
the rootless
sea-sick
Tree

past
the jealous
still-rooted
Ship

At
Passage Wharf
I stop

to watch
and hear
the fickle tide

First lapping
Then surging
around
the Pill.

4/ Mor Hafren
sets about
its
Moon-crazed
work

Scouring
the flats

Carrying
in its flow
beneath the
patience-hardened
Gaze of
stock-still
fishermen
an invisible burden

The Fish
once daylight fails
my only
Fellow-travellers.

Stephen Cogbill 3/12/2020

ARE YOU UP FOR THE CHALLENGE?

This year Living Levels is part of an epic, global citizen science project to collect information about our local wildlife. Gavin Jones reveals a tale of two cities and one very special landscape taking on the rest of the world...

In 2021, cities across the UK are collaborating with over 200 cities across the world to record as much wildlife as possible to help track how nature is bouncing back this spring, as part of the [City Nature Challenge](#) – and we need you!

Since 2018, cities from all four continents have taken part, with over 822,000 wildlife records submitted across the globe over four days in 2020. The Challenge originated in the US where cities are huge, so to punch above our weight, the Gwent Levels have joined forces with partners from the cities of Newport and Cardiff to create a kind of, well, South-East Wales city massive!

We'll be delivering events, activities and signposting resources leading up to the international 'Challenge' weekend on April 30th – May 3rd, featuring online and self-led activities to help you safely record as much wildlife as possible from your windows, gardens and during daily outdoor exercise, using the [iNaturalist app](#).

[City Nature Challenge](#) is organised on a global scale by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and the California Academy of Sciences.

Details on how you can get involved and for our events, activities and resources will be available from April 16th via [GNAH Cardiff](#).



MEMORIES OF GWENT LEVELS ORCHARDS?

Our [Heritage Orchard project](#) continues to graft away, literally, as the spring blossoms approach. Orchard Officer Beccy Williams now gets to the core of how you can get involved by sharing your apple anecdotes!

The Heritage Orchard project has been busy DNA testing to discover what varieties are in our old orchards, taking scion wood from these trees to graft new ones plus planting new trees in established orchards and creating new ones! With the help of volunteers, we have also been clearing and restoring some of the old orchards.

However we now want your help in a different way!

Do you have any stories, newspaper articles or photographs of what orchards meant to you and life on the Levels?

For example, did you know that in 1878 an award winning nursery called Fair Oaks, founded by John Basham, won RHS awards for cultivating new varieties of trees that went out to orchards far and wide?



So have you got a "Gabalva" in your garden? A "St. Cecilia" up your street? A "Monmouth Green" in your meadow or maybe a "LLanarth Early" lurking at the back of your lawn?

Perhaps you have pictures of your Taid a Nain making cider or picking fruit, your Mamgu's recipe for levels apple cake? Or maybe your cousin has a "Cummy Norman" ..?!?

We want to gather your memories of these fantastic features and share them with others, to celebrate our unique orchards and what they have meant to you.

Email info@livinglevels.org.uk etc or post to Beccy Williams (Orchard Officer), Gwent Wildlife Trust, Seddon House Dingestow Monmouth NP25 4DY.



Photo by Beccy Williams

THE (FUTURE) WALES COAST PATH

“The land on which we stand is as fluid as the tides. What happens next is up to all of us”

Local artist Alison Neighbour updates us on continuing her journeys along The (Future) Wales Coast Path this year in Magor and Newport.

My work seeks to raise awareness of the impermanence of the land many of us take for granted, and to open up a conversation about flooding, sea level rise, and adaptation. Whilst along the Levels sea level rise might seem like something that won't affect us in the short term, it's important to start a conversation about it now so we can make preparations for future generations to inhabit (or abandon) the places that we know and love.

My work will begin at a lighthouse, sited on the high water line of the possible future Welsh coast. The lighthouse serves as a navigational aid and a provocation to think about the “what next”.

I will also be leading guided walks and conversations that take us on a journey from the current shoreline to the future one, and there will be more information on how to join in once dates are confirmed.

If you'd like to find out more about Alison's project, please have a look [here](#).



FULL STREAM AHEAD FOR DITCH WORKS!

Our Living Levels' very own 'Ditch Doctor' Kate Rodgers digs the dirt on a successful season of drainage works

As project officer, I'm just starting to un-cross all my fingers and toes after the weather held long enough over winter to enable ditch restoration works to be completed before the start of the bird breeding season.

The long-wet winter of 2019 had huge impacts for the habitat restoration programme, with 22 of the 24 ditch projects put on hold. However, the supreme efforts of local contractors have managed what others thought not possible... to get back on track! Together we have worked through the back log whilst adding 46 new project contracts. Not even Covid-19 could de-rail us and the project is now running at 87% completion.

My thanks go to the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Integrated Workforce Team and the Internal Drainage District (IDD) Team who have worked with us in helping restore two areas of neglected ditches on the Wentlooge side, improving biodiversity, water movement and flood storage capacity.

Another output of the project is to assess the use and re-instatement of traditional 'grips', traditional ways of moving water from fields into the surrounding field ditches via a system of ridge and furrow (shallow trenches). We have been trialling re-instatement to great success, with water moving from fields into ditches instead of pooling, meaning the land is drier to farm.

If you would like some advice and guidance on how to manage/restore your ditches or interested in knowing more about grips please get in touch!

Big thanks to: Matt Shervington (MJL Design), Ian Crouch (Countree Care), Dan & Alex Price (Great Porton Agri), Geoff Rowland (Hale Bros), Des Williams (Williams Contracting), Les Pritchard, Dan Maggs (DCM Fencing and Groundworks), Andrew Prosser, Jamie Williams (Williams Agri), Ross Price (R&R Groundworks), Neil Phillips (NR Phillips Agri)





SENSE OF PLACE TOOLKIT & AMBASSADOR TRAINING

How do we ensure that our future visitors continue to discover the rich heritage of the Levels? Visitor Destination Manager Elinor Meloy spoils us with our Ambassador initiative...

As a legacy for the programme and to help Gwent Levels businesses, communities and visitor destinations prosper post-lockdown and Covid, we will be working with stakeholders to develop a toolkit of top tips, hints and reveals, to attract more people to the area and to local business.

The toolkit will:

- Develop everyone's understanding of the wonders of the Gwent Levels
- Provide a coordinated welcome to visitors to the Levels
- Provide an opportunity for businesses and organisations to promote the Gwent Levels

The toolkit will be a long-term resource for customers, visitors and communities that brings together everything that has been developed, produced and installed as part of the Living Levels Landscape partnership, which you may have been part of and contributed to.

These range from recreation to sculpture, wildlife to archaeology and simply making the Gwent Levels a better place for everyone to live, visit and immerse themselves in.

Once the toolkit has been developed we will be hosting training sessions (online or in person depending on Covid-19 restrictions) for ambassadors to become familiar with the toolkit and how to glean the most from it.

If you'd like to find out more please get in touch with Elinor elinor.meloy@rspb.org.uk

SPRING CLEANING THE HOUSE

It's time for sprucing up the home in readiness for warmer times but imagine spring cleaning a 17th Century Gwent Levels mansion with an enormous 'garden'? The National Trust's Rosie Toy blows away the cobwebs on preparations.

Although Tredegar House is still closed to the public, our team have been busy looking after the property so it's ready to welcome back our visitors. In the formal gardens and parkland, we've been working hard to prepare the grounds for spring.

This has included tree work in the park and ensuring the flower beds and herbaceous borders are ready for the spring and summer months. We've also been working closely with Natural Resources Wales and Living Levels to create new signage for the parkland, which will help visitors make the most of their time outdoors, as well as sharing some of its history.

Despite the cold snaps in February which saw the lake freeze on several occasions, late winter and early spring blooms have been appearing week by week. We can't wait to share our outdoor spaces with our supporters again!

Meanwhile, we've been completing our annual spring clean in the house and ensuring collection items are protected from pests and damp. We've also been sharing some of our history with the South Wales Argus, who are publishing monthly nostalgia articles about Tredegar House in its heyday.

We're keeping our fingers crossed that we will be able to reopen soon and look forward to welcoming everyone back when we can.

Please check our website
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/tredegar-house



HELP US FIND BUMBLEBEES ON THE LEVELS

Bumblebee Conservation Trust's Clare Flynn unveils a hive of activity for you to get involved with this summer as part of our 'Pollinating the Levels' project!

The Gwent Levels provide a unique and diverse habitat for a range of bumblebee species, including one of the UK's most threatened bees, the shrill carder bee, (*Bombus sylvarum*). We are so lucky to have many committed volunteers who have recorded bumblebees or undertaken monitoring transects on the Levels over recent years.

This summer we are providing a programme of support and training for both new and existing volunteers. We will be offering beginner and refresher training in Bumblebee ID, progressing to discovering more about trickier species, developing field skills and setting up Beewalk monitoring transects.

Topics will include 'Beginners and Refresher training' and 'Introduction to the ginger carders'. There will be opportunities for a monthly catch up to discuss identification difficulties and share photos, tea and cake, even if online!



We will also be holding regular field days (Covid restrictions, allowing) for volunteers to practise their skills in the field. We hope to give participants the confidence to become established bumblebee recorders, ultimately providing the data we need to protect and conserve our local bumble populations into the future.

If you'd like more information on joining us this summer, whether as a beginner or more experienced recorder, please contact Clare (clare.flynn@bumblebeeconservation.org) or Elinor (Elinor.Meloy@rspb.org.uk).





Giant hogweed
Heracleum mantegazzianum

HABITAT

Along streams, rivers, on waste land and rough pastures.

KEY ID FEATURES

- Aptly named 'giant', this member of the cow-parsley family has flowering stems 2-3 m high with flowers up to

combined with UV radiation causes recurring skin burns that can be severe.

DO'S & DON'TS:

- **DON'T** touch - hazardous! Always wear protective gear - see Welsh Government's 'Giant hogweed: controlling it on



American mink
Neovison vison

HABITAT

Aquatic habitats, including coastal, but mainly rivers and lakes.

KEY ID FEATURES

- Body length 30-50cm with glossy dark brown/black fur, and white patches on chin and throat. Tail is

DO'S AND DON'TS

- **DON'T** break the law - If you catch/trap a mink you cannot release it back into the wild, it's illegal under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.
- **DO** - Mink control should only be undertaken by professionals and as part of mink control projects.



Red-eared, yellow-bellied & Cumberland terrapins
Trachemys scripta elegans

HABITAT

A wide range of still to slow flowing freshwater habitats.

DO'S & DON'TS

- **DON'T** breed, sell or exchange. If you have a pet terrapin it can live out its natural life with you.

HELP DEFEND THE LEVELS FROM ALIEN INVASION!

Don't panic but we do want you to be our eyes on the ground with the launch of our new 'Gwent Levels Invasive Non Native Species (INNS)' pocket guide. Natural Heritage Officer Kate Rodgers dons her Alien Hunter hat to investigate further...

INNS are relatively scarce on the Gwent Levels landscape, but because of its interconnected drainage system, very important for wildlife, they are considered a significant threat. The key to protecting the Gwent Levels is preventing INNS from establishing and controlling or managing those that are already established.

Awareness and understanding of this issue is low and recording limited, so this guide hopes to change that! It will help you identify some of the INNS already found on the Gwent Levels and possible new-comers which we should be on high alert for.

The guide also gives some simple 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' that will help prevent the spread of INNS.

The 'Gwent Levels INNS Guide' should give people the confidence to identify non-native species and lead to better recording and management of INNS on the Gwent Levels - protecting this precious landscape.

Be quick - grab your copy today! There is a little give-away competition running too - the first 50 people to request a copy will receive a Boot Buddy! Boot Buddies are convenient, small and portable that clean all types of muddy footwear.

Hard copies in English and Welsh are available from Kate Rodgers kate.rodgers@rspb.org.uk or call 07780 227981. Also on our website as a [download](#).

SEP'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY!

Almost everyone has had a 'lockdown birthday' this last 12 months and the same goes for the Severn Estuary Partnership (SEP). Katie Harvard-Smith unpacks the bunting and reveals the party plans!

The Severn Estuary Partnership (SEP) is an independent, estuary-wide, non-statutory initiative led by local authorities and statutory agencies. Since its inception in 1995, SEP has been promoting partnership working for the future of the estuary by working with all those involved in its management, from planners to port authorities, fisherman to farmers and many more and are looking forward to continuing this work into the future.

SEP marked its 25th year anniversary in 2020.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions, we were unable to celebrate with our partners and stakeholders last year. However, this summer, as part of our belated celebrations we are launching our new website, 2021 Forum, celebratory short film and our Severn Tidings magazine, looking back at our achievements over the last quarter century.



Hopefully, our planned celebrations will help launch SEP into a further successful 25 years! The 2021 Severn Estuary Forum is being held as a series of three online events, between May 25th – 27th, from 10am to 1pm, and will be the 14th in its series.

Join us for a lively and informative day of presentations and talks, allowing for a unique opportunity to learn from others, share ideas, and boost partnership working. The event will be focused around three key themes: Climate Change, Adaptation and the Community; Planning Governance and Flood Risk; and Severn Estuary: A Changing Landscape. Register for your place [here!](#)



Severn Estuary Forum

25th, 26th & 27th May, 2021

We hope to see you online.

REBECCA'S CHOICE

Founding member of our 'Writing the Levels' group Heidi Gallacher, is a published author and the following extract is from her novel

In this scene from 1892 the main character Rebecca is trying to help her sick friend, Morgan, by taking him for a walk along the sea wall. Morgan is a doctor and has just returned from working in Hamburg where cholera is rife.

The sea wall at Wentlooge is somewhere that I visit when I need to be alone, perchance to think about something that is bothering me, or perchance to escape from the wishes and desires of my husband once in a while.

My parents used to bring me here as a child. It is a place where I feel free – as free as the curlews that circle high above the marshes, or the untamed, long grasses that border the wall that runs alongside the sea.

As Morgan and I alight outside the Six Bells tavern, the sea breeze threatens to whip my words away. I speak to the carriage boy to make arrangements for later. Whilst the boy leads the horses to water, I take Morgan's arm and we cross the lane, walking in the direction of the church. I find the little path that runs past the church and up to the sea wall, but it is too narrow for us to walk side by side. I tell Morgan to walk ahead of me. He is already calmer; I notice the loosening of his stride, his interest in his surroundings. On either side of the path, fields of emerald green stretch away from us. I can see cows and sheep in the distance; gentle animal noises waft towards us on the warm air. There are brambles on either side of the path. I stop and call Morgan when I see sprigs of ripe blackberries dangling. 'Look at these! Do you like blackberries? Here, try one.' I pick the fruit and eat one or two of the sweet, delicious berries.

The thin man takes the fruit from my hand and eats a couple of the blackberries. He turns to the laden bush and picks some more, then he crams them into his mouth. Purple juices run down either side of his lips, but he does not notice. It is as if he has unleashed his hunger, finally, at last. I let him eat.

After a long time he swallows and then retrieves a handkerchief to wipe his mouth; the cloth is soon stained violet from the fruit. He smiles. After, we carry on our way until the path rises a little and widens out as it reaches the sea.

We turn and walk along the sea wall in the direction of Cardiff. I laugh as the wind pushes against us. 'It will be easier when we walk back.'

Morgan sighs, a long whisper taken by the breeze, I feel that he needs to express, or even expel something that is buried deep within him, troubling him. I walk beside him. I know I must be patient.

I look out to the sea, over the Môr Hafren, my gaze resting on the edge where it meets the sky. I can just discern the tiny grey outlines of the two islands in the distance: Flat Holm and Steep Holm. Nearer to me, I notice the mudflats below the sea wall spreading out from the biscuit-coloured rocks, the brown mud soft yet cracked, for the tide is far, far away.

I turn to Morgan. His eyes are unfocused; he is not looking at the sea. It is as if he is looking beyond it, beyond the flat islands on the horizon. We amble onwards.

Half an hour later, we turn and walk back. It is easier now, the warm wind on our backs pushing us forwards. Ahead of us in the middle of the farmland, the square tower of St. Peter's Church stands blunt, its dark grey stone like a shadow against the azure of the sky.

'It's so beautiful here,' Morgan says.

Copyright Heidi Gallacher 2019



A SECRET ST MICHAEL

Nestled between two main thoroughfares on the Caldicot Level is a hidden gem benefitting from some hard working volunteers; Pete Strong reveals all...

The parish of Llanfihangel Rogiet was unique amongst those on the Caldicot Levels in that it was the only one that did not stretch down to the banks of the River Severn. Having been carved out of the larger parish of Rogiet in the early Middle Ages, it eventually lost its separate identity in the 19th century, when it was reabsorbed into its larger neighbour. It now forms a hamlet squeezed between the M4 to the north and the railway line to the south. The parish church, the church of St Michael and All Angels, which is accessed on foot through a farmyard, fell into disuse in the 1960s.

In 2010, after it was leased to the Friends of Friendless Churches, Caldicot and District Local History Society were given keys and permission to make use of the building. Since then we have used it for a series of events including harp concerts, folk music, sea shanties, Christmas events and talks.

We have also created a permanent exhibition, "Llanfihangel Rogiet, a Parish and its People". Although we have no responsibility for the churchyard, we do what we can to look after it. It had become terribly overgrown, with large patches covered in nettles so thick that nothing else could grow. A lot of effort has gone into cutting these back and into tidying up neglected graves.

Subject to Covid-19 restrictions, the church is open to visitors. Contact Pete Strong, Secretary of [Caldicot Local History Society](#) on strong@btinternet.com or 01291 425638.

BELLS AND BELL RINGING – A SOUND OF THE LEVELS

The Gwent Levels are blessed with many churches but what of the beautiful bells they house?

Volunteer Brian Neale, a ringer from the [Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers](#), braves the belfry to tell us all.

Church bells have brought sound to the Gwent Levels for many centuries. Monmouthshire has been fortunate in having a significant number of churches that have a rich history of examples, some of which date back to pre-reformation times.

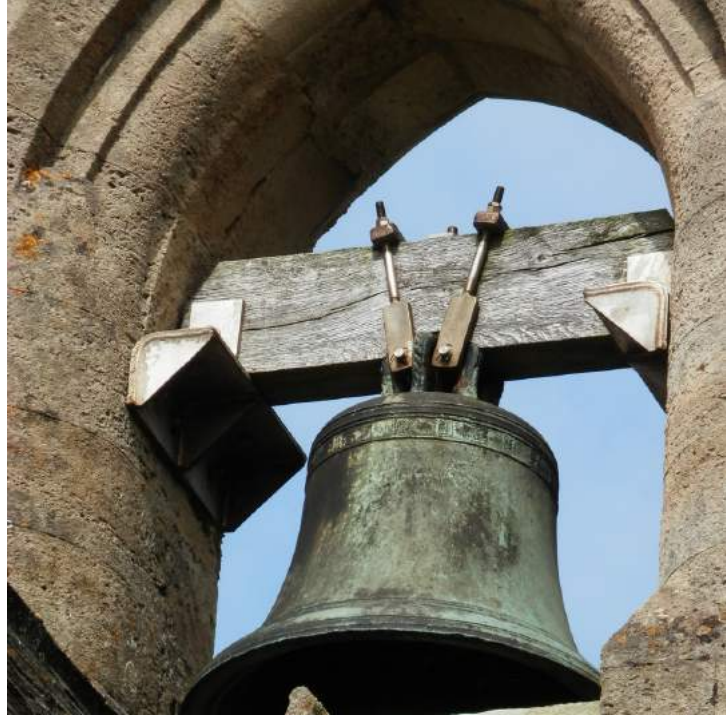
Among them is the Medieval bell at Undy on the Caldicot Level. This is thought to date from between 1350 and 1380 and have been cast in Bristol. It is in full view from outside the church in its turret above the roof, so would be easy to see on a post-lockdown walk.

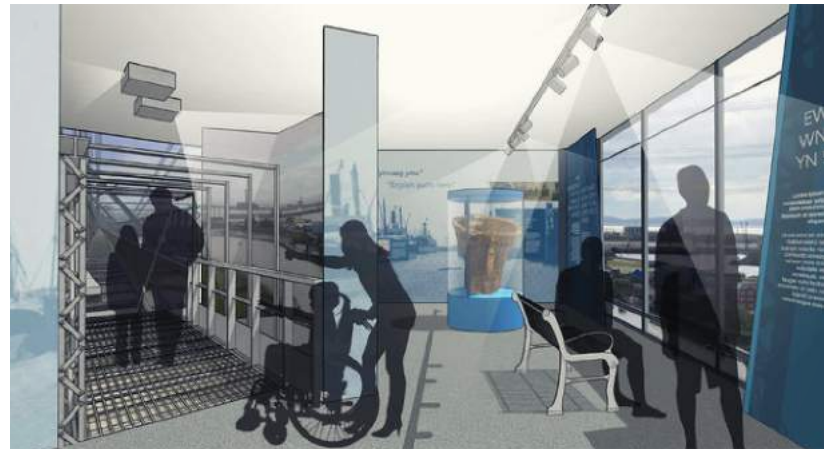
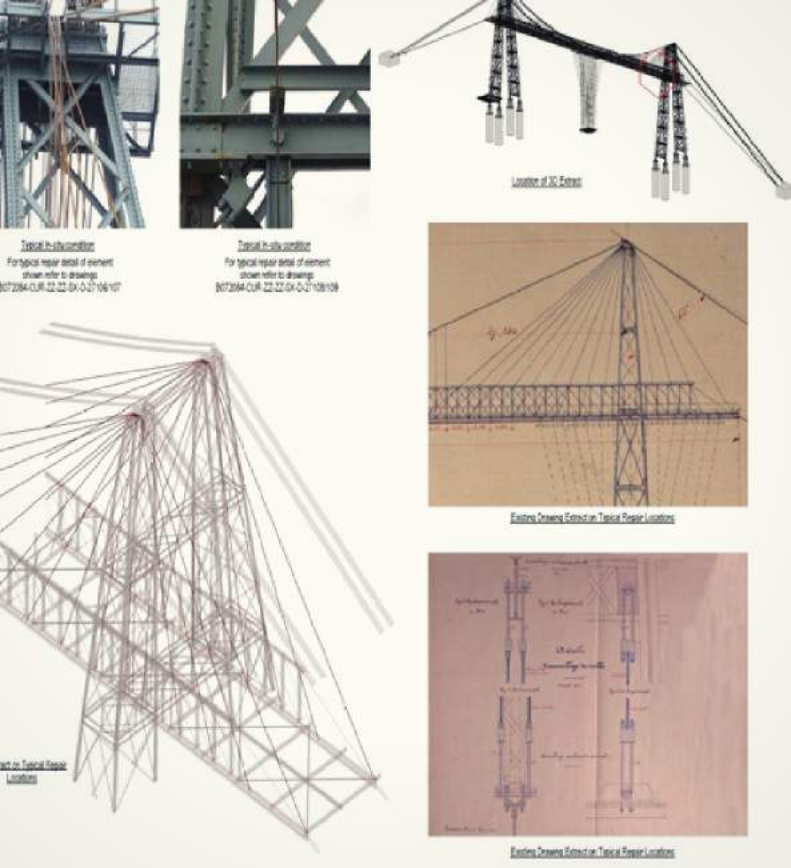
Two further such ancient bells are incorporated into a ring of six at nearby Redwick. Here, one ringer is required for each so that they can 'ring the changes'. This produces familiar varied patterns of tuneful sound as the bells are rung in different sequences, some known as methods.

The eighteenth century saw an increase in the installation of new rings of bells. Examples on the Wentlooge Level include at Peterstone (now a private residence) in 1726 from bellfounders Evans of Chepstow, St Brides in 1734 from Rudhall of Gloucester and at Marshfield in 1767 from founders Thomas Bayley of Bridgwater (middle right).

A feature of many bells is the casting of inscriptions which can include information about local people at that time, such as 'JAMES EVANS VICAR' at Marshfield.

When restrictions allow (and if you have a set of binoculars), see if you can safely spot the writing on Undy's bell (top right)– 'VIRGINI MARIE LAUDES'- Praise to the Virgin Mary.





UNDER THE BRIDGE

Standing astride and linking the Wentlooge and Caldicot Levels is Newport's iconic Transporter Bridge, recently awarded Lottery funding. Project Officer Emma Newrick takes us through the next steps – all 270 of them...

The Newport Transporter Bridge is more than a landmark dominating our city's skyline. It is the world's most complete, surviving transporter bridge.

Following a £8.75 million grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund the bridge will undergo extensive restoration including work to the main boom, eastern approach viaduct, suspension cables and restoring lost architectural features of the gondola.

A new three-storey visitor centre will be built with a café, shop, community space and a dedicated gallery will bring the history of the bridge to life, featuring the stories of those who built, designed and used the bridge.

There will also be more car parking spaces for visitors and an exciting activities programme including theatrical performances, family trails, art workshops and mindfulness sessions.

In partnership with Living Levels, Natural Resources Wales and the Wales Coastal Path, visitors will discover more about the wider natural environment and improvements will be made to the immediate landscape with outdoor seating and viewing platforms.

The site will remain closed until Spring 2023 but there will be plenty of opportunities to get involved through joining the residents panel, sharing memories and photographs, becoming a volunteer or a Friend of the Newport Transporter Bridge.

For a behind the scenes look at the work on site, interviews and the history subscribe to the Bridge's [YouTube channel](#) or follow on social media.

FLY-TIPPING ACTION WALES AC LO TIPILO CAMRU

BLUE BELLS FROM BLACK SPOTS!

The Fly-Tipping Action Wales team give us a quick update from the [Black Spots to Bright Spots](#) project...

An important goal of the Black Spots to Bright Spots project is to transform areas prone to fly-tipping through environmental interventions.

The project has had successes to date with work at Duffryn where a range of partners came together to clear a commonly fly-tipped area. Also, signs were erected, and wild-flowers planted to transform the appearance of the area and make it less prone to litter and fly-tipping. We're excited to see how the area looks as we move into Spring this year and we plan to visit soon to assess whether fly-tipping has reduced.

Taking forward additional transformations has been hampered somewhat with the coronavirus pandemic, so the team has been working on a new approach. Find out about our 'Win a Community Garden' competition in this issue - see page 23.

In other news, there is currently an opportunity to feed into Welsh Government's prevention plan that aims to make Wales litter and fly-tipping free. We encourage you to visit the link below to find out more and to submit your ideas and feedback.

English - [Litter and fly-tipping prevention plan for Wales](#)

Welsh - [Cynllun atal sbwriel a thipio anghyfreithlon i Gymru](#)





CAN YOU DIG IT?

DigVentures are returning to the Gwent Levels and promise a host of exciting volunteer opportunities – virtual, socially distanced and in-person – this Spring/Summer 2021. Dr Josh Hogue sifts through the treasures and shows us what's in store...

MAPPING STORIES FROM THE LEVELS

We're seeking individuals who would be interested in mapping the voices of the Gwent Levels for our project 'Mapping Stories from the Levels'. Participants will be given full access to oral histories recorded as part of the Living Levels project, digging into the transcripts and listening in to locate some great stories that we can include on our online map.

Volunteers will help create audio snippets from the oral histories, linking these to locations using our interactive Living Levels GIS map. Anyone can get involved from the comfort of your own home, although you will need access to the internet and a laptop or computer. We'll kick off in April 2021 and provide all the online training, support, and guidance you need.

HERITAGE ON THE HORIZONS

Our project 'Heritage on the Horizons' will give people the opportunity to get out-and-about and learn more about the archaeology and history which we can see from the various walking and cycling routes across the region.



Participants will explore walking routes, helping to identify, describe and photograph the buildings, monuments, and sites of interest which you can see from each route.

Key information will be added to the Living Levels online GIS mapping tool, and we'll create an interactive map full of things to see and stories about the past, so future rambblers can learn all about heritage across the Levels.

We're looking for volunteers who would be able to join us online and on the trails from May 2021.

BACK IN THE FIELD

Finally, we're really hoping to be back in the field during June/July 2021 for some archaeological explorations.

Our aim is to explore some fantastic sites to find out about the past of the region, and we hope you can join us! The details are still being finalised whilst we wait for news on the current lockdown, but we hope to be looking at a medieval moated site associated with Tintern Abbey, as well as exploring the Flemish origins of villages on the Gwent Levels.

Each project has plenty of opportunities for those who want to learn a new skill and help us create a fantastic resource, so if you are able to get involved, or just want to know more about any or all of the projects – just get in touch!

You can register your interest on the [DigVentures website](#).

SEWAGE IN SPLOTTLANDS

Proving that if you dig too deep you may uncover a stink, Research volunteer Marion Sweeney unearths some unsavoury sanitary practices on the Levels

Sir Charles Morgan, 1st Baron Tredegar

Today we dispose of our waste water with little thought, but back in the 1800s, the water and sewerage systems were still rudimentary, and struggling to cope with the speed at which Cardiff was growing.

In 1860 there was a threat to the water supply for Pengam Farm in Roath, when the Water Works Company made a proposal to divert water from Roath brook for the flushing of local sewers. Lord Tredegar raised an objection insisting: 'You must supply Pengam Farm with water for the cattle.' The proposed solution was that the pipe supplying the farm could also be used to send water back to flush the sewers, this meant that fresh water and sewage would use the same pipe at different times, with obvious health implications.

Although by 1871 the British Medical Association was warning against complacency regarding the threat of cholera, raw sewage was nevertheless being used to fertilise crops. The main sewer supplying Roath was tapped into at SploTTlands, and a pump installed for irrigation purposes. The sewage remained untreated but for a grating to hold back larger items: the resultant liquid sprayed onto the vegetable crops at a rate of 300-400 gallons per minute.

Whether anyone became ill because from this practice is not known. A cholera outbreak in 1848-49 killed 380 people in Cardiff alone.

At the time the causative agent of cholera had not been fully established, but it was widely accepted that its spread was facilitated by insanitary conditions.

Windmill Reen

The's a big baba, the locals laughed as we pushed the old coach pram up the road to Redwick canoe balanced atop and tied with string.

At Windmill Reen we tugged and struggled till the craft rattled onto the grassy bank and slid with a rush into the water.

Only one seat but me and Johnnie squeezed onto the boat, one standing, and pushed off, took turns with the oar to glide us downstream.

Redshanks and curlews paraded the banks, water voles skittered into their burrows and a dragonfly dazzled in bright flashes.

We larked and lurched, dodging driftwood and debris, only occasionally tumbling in to swim with the river eels.

As the sun sank low we made for the bank weary and wet and replete with fresh air, eager for Mother's seed cake and crumpets.

Scrambling through mud to heave the boat ashore we patted our big baba and laid it tenderly to rest amongst the tall reeds.

Val Ormrod



WIN A COMMUNITY GARDEN UP TO £1000!

Does your local area suffer from fly-tipping or littering issues? Do you know of an outdoor community space on the Gwent Levels that could be brightened up?

Areas that are visually appealing not only increase the quality of our local environment but send out the message that anti-social behaviours such as fly-tipping are not tolerated.

We have up to £1000 available to support the transformation of an outdoor community space in need of a bit of love into somewhere attractive and wildlife friendly. Work will need to be complete by 24th December 2021.

The money available can only be used for funding goods and materials, up to the value of £1000, which we will purchase on your behalf. For example, you may decide that you need planters, peat-free compost and some wildlife friendly flowers.

Please use [this form](#) to tell us what you would like to do and how much you expect it to cost.

You should submit your application on or before 16th May 2021.

A panel made up of the Living Levels Team and Fly-tipping Action Wales will judge the submissions and help make the winning entry a reality. Good luck!

Meet the Brewer!
7pm, 8th April



Photo by Sasha Hill

PROMOTING THE LEVELS ONE BOTTLE AT A TIME...

Brewer Toby Jones raises a glass to a 'hoppy' partnership highlighting the special terminology relating to the unique landscape and management practices of the Gwent Levels...

Anglo-Oregon Brewing Company (AOBC) is a small craft brewery located in Newport on the edge of the Gwent Levels just down the road from Coleg Gwent's Nash campus. We have been brewing strong ales, stouts and porters since 2015.

We began a collaborative partnership with Living Levels in 2018 to produce a trio of beers celebrating the wildlife and heritage of the Levels – including using some of the rediscovered 'Levels Lingo.' We have subsequently brewed 'Stank Hen' IPA, 'Brinker' Imperial Stout and 'Patcher' Extra Pale Ale.

The eye-catching labels and associated beer mats were designed by Chris Harris from Living Levels.

In another Levels link, we take all of our 'spent' brewing grain to a local levels farmer who feeds it to the grateful cows!

The various beers are available at outlets around Newport and also online. We plan to continue brewing all three, even after the project comes to an end. We also hope to have a presence at some of the planned live Living Levels events later in the year! For more information please see our website: www.aobc.co.uk. Cheers!

Or meet us online at the '[Meet the Gwent Levels Brewer](#)' event on April 8th...

Connections I

Ahead of me the estuary
becomes Môr Hafren.
Behind me is my past,
both lived and imagined.

A reed warbler,
often heard but seldom seen,
confidently reveals itself, singing from a reed top,
its song a repetitive chatter and churring.

A cuckoo,
the reed warbler's exploiter,
calls from somewhere further over,
perhaps mocking the reed warbler's confidence.

I meet the man who photographs ships.
We watch Komet III from St. Petersburg enter the Usk.
"I saw a bittern last week," he tells me.
Truth is he prefers ships.

Michael Rees



Photo by Cath Davis

WORSHIP ON THE LEVELS IN 1851

Churches have played an important role in marking the history of the Gwent Levels. Research volunteer Cath Davis sheds the light on a little-known Victorian census of these places of worship.

Living Levels history researchers rely on many different sources of information. One that was very useful to me was 'Marshfield 1840–1885: Aspects of the History of the Parish', by Vera Thomas (of Marshfield). She details the part religion played in the community.

The Religious Census was a unique survey conducted alongside the normal population census on Sunday 30 March 1851. It identified places of religious worship then in existence.

Vera Thomas notes 'The large numbers of places of worship in a parish a little more than 500 hundred people indicates the importance of religion in their lives.'

A church is thought to have existed at Marshfield from the 7th century and a chapel at Castleton since the middle ages. Non-conformists have met in Marshfield since the 17th century. Evidently, 'the most substantial affiliation in the 19th century was to the Nonconformist churches.'

While the parish church reported a congregation of 35, the Baptists claimed to have 700, the Calvinistic Methodists 60 and the Wesleyans 50. The Wesleyans met in the loft of Castleton Mill, but after expanding in numbers they built a chapel in Castleton in the 1854, now the Masonic Hall (pictured).

RATS MINI TALKS IN ASSOCIATION WITH GLAMORGAN ARCHIVES

TOURS, DRIVES AND WALKS THROUGH THE LEVELS

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO VISIT THE GWENT LEVELS AREA IN THE TIME OF HENRY VIII? OR INDEED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY? LUCKILY, OUR HISTORY RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS (THE RATS) CAN TELL YOU BECAUSE TRAVELLERS RECORDED WHAT THEY SAW DURING THOSE TIMES.



ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, NEWSPAPERS ENCOURAGED PEOPLE TO GET OUT AND ABOUT AND EXPLORE THE LANDSCAPE BY PUBLISHING WALKS AND DRIVES. THE LIVING LEVELS TEAM ARE FOLLOWING SUIT WITH THEIR NEW LEVELS LOOPS AND LINKS PROJECT

BOOK YOUR PLACE ON OUR WEBSITE
FRIDAY 14 MAY AT 10.30AM



Spoonbill by Chris Harris

HELP SPREAD THE WORD

If you think of someone, or a group of people, who might be interested in finding out more about Living Levels and getting involved, please do pass this newsletter on or recommend our website www.livinglevels.org.uk

CONTACT US

We'd love to hear from you!

If you've any questions about the programme or getting involved, drop us a line on:

info@livinglevels.org.uk or call us on: 01633 292982

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