

ENHANCING LOCAL WILDLIFE

Gavin - one of our participants - has a great interest in the history of plants - but did notice that the Castle Park trees need thinning. Like many he understands the need for the woodland to be opened up and made more accessible and safer. (See board on WIAT plans for the woods)

THE RICH HORTICULTURAL HISTORY OF THE AREA.

The history of horticulture and gardens around Bridgend, Cameron toll and Craigmillar is indeed rich and continues to this day, despite the spread of suburbs and the development of Cameron Toll Shopping Centre. The Inch Park is a wonderful green space with mature trees enhanced by the Braid Burn, which provides a superb wildlife corridor with - it's been said - even the occasional otter as well as dippers, grey wagtails and kingfishers.

It's also a rich habitat for great willow herb, water forget-me-not and, in the burn itself, monkey flower and long strands of water crow foot, with its white flowers blossoming midstream. Recent tree planting along the burn and lade in the grounds of the Inch have enriched what was already there. Wildlife and insects can only benefit from this to make the Inch an even more attractive place for all to enjoy.

The regeneration of Bridgend Farmhouse has provided a base for to rediscover the historical importance of this the area both for horticulture and farming. Bridgend's earlier oral history project, 'Place, Work and Folk' (2017-19), unearthed an vast amount of information - including Dickson's Nursery, which covered 90 acres supplying forestry and shrubs far and wide, as well as growing fields of roses - sold on eventually, bare-rooted and soil-free.

The creation of new allotments at Bridgend brought people from a wide area to grow their own veg and flowers. Many possibly had had no idea of the area's horticulture legacy dating back hundreds of years. And now there has been the successful campaign to save the once derelict Bridgend Farmhouse for use as a community resource.

CAMERON TOLL'S HIDDEN HISTORY

The Cameron Toll area reveals its place the history of gardening and horticulture in Lowland Scotland. Meeting at the toll, the city bound roads connected different parts of the city and outskirts. Did you know know that the shopping complex covers ground that contained the commercial nurseries of the 18th and 19th centuries? These businesses used then state-of-the-art methods for growing fruit and vegetables for the tables of Edinburgh's wealthy, who, by the second half of the 18th century, were building the Northern New Town, while at the same time - especially after South Bridge was built - the less



Bridgend - Looking towards Cameron Toll (1920's)



A dipper - you may be lucky and see one on Braidburn.



Braidburn at Cameron Toll.



Driveway and mature trees at Inch Park

well-known Southern New Town, including George Square and its surrounding area, Nicholson Street and Clark Street were developing, linking the Old and New Towns.

By the late 18th century, gardening in the south of Scotland was highly advanced. The established Lairds, 'new money' and professional classes all wanted to have exotic fruits to display on their dining tables to impress guests. Records reveal that the southern nurseries south at Cameron Toll area were capable of growing pineapples in heated beds - a particularly Georgian speciality.

This area also provided vegetables more commonly eaten by ordinary folk - potatoes, cabbage, turnips etc. In 1811, the newly-formed Caledonian Horticultural Society awarded one of its first medals to a gardener at Duddingston who had grown a fine crop of radishes. In the early 1800s, at St Leonards, less than a mile north of Bridgend, Andrew Duncan, pioneer of mental healthcare but also very keen gardener, had an allotment and glasshouse.

PARK LIFE

During the Park Life Project, we walked around the Millennium Woodland, planted on the north side of the park. It was inspiring to see a new woodland that had been planted 20 years ago, yet had already developed a forest canopy. But in this area, there is also have the mature trees of the Inch Park, which are wonderful. Still, it's particularly great to see a new woodland area created and planted with a wide variety of native trees. However, the Craigmillar wood was densely planted. So it's good news that Ben McCallum, from Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust, is working to thin and clear to allow shrubs and flowers to grow naturally as they would in forests. In turn, this will enhance the diversity of wildlife, but also naturally beautify a great local natural resource. This will aid not only the plants, but birds, mammals and insects - all thrive. Not to be forgotten is the well-equipped children's play area set in a lovely glade in these woods. And the importance of the park for dog walkers and people just wanting to walk or jog in a pleasant natural park.

Gavin Watt, Historian and Craigmillar Castle Park Life Participant

TOLLS? WHAT WAS A TOLL?

By the middle of the 18th century, many roads were little more than tracks that were often impassable in the wet and winter. They were supposed to be maintained by parishes utilising 'statute labour' - an obligation on landowners (and tenants) that was widely abused. Toll roads were seen as a solution. The situation began to change with the 18th century development of the turnpike system, whereby a road could be improved and maintained by levying tolls on users. Roads with toll bars were established in many areas - a system held in place until the development of the railways. Trustees were drawn from the landowners along the route. Next clerks and surveyors were appointed who in turn administered the operations of road contractors and toll keepers. The system then became embedded in dynasties of toll-keep-



A glimpse of the South Side before it was redeveloped.



Fine Georgian dining.



Cameron Toll before....

ing families. Perhaps unusually it was determined that a woman could bid for and hold a toll bar in her own right.

Each toll place was let annually to a named individual for an agreed sum. Experienced keepers became adept at positioning their bids to maximise the difference between the letting fee and the tolls collected - living expenses and profit depended on this margin. They were, however, in a precarious position. They became liable for the full sum bid for and if expected traffic did not match the bid the Trustees generally demanded the shortfall. Plans could be thrown awry by private arrangements made with the Trustees by businesses landowners and even communities along a route. Other hazards were failures of large businesses along a route (leading to a reduction in expected tolls). Toll keepers' protests against these eventualities and other sharp practices are common in Trust minutes; they were generally brushed aside.