

Tam O'Shanter Times

Spring 2014

Issue 63

Meet the Angoras



This spring we took a field trip to East Ridings in North Yorkshire to visit a herd of Angora goats, with a view to possibly starting our own little herd. If all goes to plan we hope to introduce two does with a kid at foot in early June. The does are five years old and the kids will be born this spring. They have very curly hair that grows rapidly covering their faces making them look very cute. This particular breed are smaller than our Golden Guernseys, Marigold and Mona, they are a light grey/dark white colour, they have horns and produce mohair which can be harvested twice yearly.

Angora goats would be a great visitor attraction, with being so adorable and friendly! And they will give

us mohair which we plan to put to good use! We have recently been donated two sheep fleeces which we are cleaning, carding, spinning and dyeing using natural materials like brambles and bracken, red cabbage, beet root, onion skins, pine cones and much more.

Eventually the wool will be woven using peg looms to sell hand crafted items from the farm. This is what we would like to do on a yearly basis using our own Angora mohair, our own onions and our own cabbages! Look out for the craft activities (Cottage Crafts for Kids) that we will be running on the farm during school holidays to raise the money for the purchase of the goats.

WUFA - Thirty years old!



Wirral Urban Farm Association, or Friends of the Farm as it is usually known now, was officially formed in May 1984. This followed 18 months of research and study by a group of local people, keen to find a site for an urban farm, who initially gathered at Fender Youth Club in Woodchurch, then used donated office premises at the Turntable Youth Club on Laird Street. All those who helped bring the farm to fruition are too many to list, but I feel some of the founding members should be mentioned. They include Jenny Duffy, Ken Archibald, Alf Mullins, Neil Oxtan, Sue Critchley, Sheila Waters, Eileen Ashton, Ivor Griffiths, Horace Bell, Brian Davies, John Emmerson, Edith Girvan, Joan Watts, and the Ranger then based at Tam O'Shanter, Kris Fox. Apologies for any omissions. John Jakeman arrived during the setting-up period and eventually became Farm Manager.

WUFA was keen to find a site close to urban areas that would provide educational and recreational opportunities, and giving people the chance to see farm animals they would not normally meet at close quarters. The probation service also considered such a place would provide excellent work placements for community service volunteers. Members of the group visited other urban farms and attended workshops run by the Bristol-based National Federation of City Farms, as it was then known.

Sites in Moreton, Meols and

Leasowe were considered initially, but found to be unfavourable. Then a site on Tollemache Road was looked at, but had been earmarked for housing. From there it was a short stroll through Flaybrick Memorial Gardens to the Tam O'Shanter Cottage and Field Study Centre for Bidston Hill. The buildings had been renovated in 1977 under the guidance of Birkenhead History Society, after being saved from demolition. The Nursery Field just down Boundary Road was also looked at, but attention soon centred on the area around the Cottage itself. Meetings were held with the Tam O'Shanter Cottage Trust to decide how the organisations could work together. WUFA achieved charitable status late in 1984, which enabled the Association to apply for grants to develop Wirral's first urban farm.

Negotiations with Wirral Council were lengthy, with many people involved, but in May 1985 the decision was made to proceed with plans for an urban farm on the area surrounding the Tam O'Shanter Cottage. I first learned of the plans from Jenny Duffy (later Marshall) at the Countryside Fair at Wirral Country Park, and I have been involved one way or another ever since. I worked on the farm for its first two years as part of the Manpower Services Commission scheme, which provided funding for the construction of the farm, and staffing.

During the building phase the

first farm staff worked out of a motley collection of buildings, the only survivor of which is the Nissen hut. For a while the farm office was in what is now the activity room. Some innovative fund-raising ideas were carried out, too; I have clear memories of a fancy dress pub tour around Birkenhead's North End, led by the redoubtable Alf Mullins. We must indeed have been keen, to venture into the hostelries (I was Bo Peep, with a sock puppet lamb) shaking a donation box! Once the animal house was built, but before we had the animals to put in it, the area was used as a shop to raise funds, and also for a barn dance. A folk concert was held in a marquee on one of the paddocks. Spring Fairs, Teddy Bears' Picnics, Autumn Fairs and Santa's Grotto events were run by a band of volunteers, as indeed they are to this day. Burns Night Suppers were held for a few years as a social event for staff, Trustees, WUFA committee and volunteers. Talks about the farm were given to local groups, and information displays mounted.

In 1988 the new Tam O'Shanter Cottage Urban Farm Trust was formed, consisting of five representatives from Wirral Council, five from Birkenhead History Society, and five from WUFA. This remains the same, with the amendment that additional people can be invited to be Trustees if they have skills or knowledge beneficial to the Trust, which has proved to be a positive move. WUFA can apply for small pots of funding that might not be open to the Trust, and now has a membership scheme which brings in a small amount of funding and gives people a simple way of demonstrating their support for the farm 'on paper' which can be useful when applying for grants. Through all the years of its existence WUFA has played a part in helping the urban farm. WUFA members have helped to keep the funds coming in, working behind the scenes and running a wide variety of events and activities; they support the work of the farm in many ways, and I hope they will continue to do so.



Arnie - Sad news

In February, the farm's Shetland pony Arnie became very unwell with colic and the vet had to be called to end his suffering. The term colic covers a variety of intestinal problems, and among domesticated horses is a major cause of premature death. Arnie had been on the farm since 1999; he was very popular with visitors young and old, and will be missed. Shetland ponies usually live between 18 and 25 years, and Arnie was around 18. Fortunately his paddock pal Jacko does not seem to be pining, but we are keeping a watchful eye on him.

Wirral History and Heritage Fair

The farm, which has an interesting history of its own, was represented at this busy and fascinating event on Saturday 1st March. Among stalls from Wirral and further afield our colourful stall, set up by WUFA members Sue and Lesley, attracted a lot of interest. Some people said they knew of the farm but had never visited it, and a few thought it was not for them because they did not have children, but we persuaded them otherwise! There is something for everyone at Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm, regardless of age.



Santa's Grotto 2013 - a Winter Wonderland

Once again Liz, Andy and the creative team worked their magic and created a wonderful spectacle in the activity room, transforming it into a mysterious snowy hideaway for Santa's Grotto, and making sure there was some queuing space inside for his visitors, in case of bad weather. The Grotto was also available to be booked by groups for a couple of weeks after the event, which helped to raise some funds for the farm. The Santa's Grotto event in December is not set up to make a profit, so it is very good value for families who are watching the pennies.



Gloria Wood

Sadly, In late September 2013, Gloria Wood died. She was a dedicated Trustee of the Farm and a committee member of the Birkenhead History Society, which she represented for many years.

Gloria moved to Birkenhead as a child when her father became the manager of the Argyle Theatre in Argyle Street. Unfortunately this was destroyed by a bomb in the second world war. Apart from her interest in local history, as an adult, Gloria was dedicated to keeping the spirit of the Argyle alive in her lifetime. She had a selection of variety acts in her repertoire and put on many affordable shows, beginning in the Woodside Hotel and then in various venues until they were held at monthly intervals for a number of years, in the Birkenhead Town Hall, building up a regular, friendly audience. The 'Music-hall' atmosphere was unique, Birthdays were acknowledged and the shows always concluded with a 'singalong' of "The Old Bull and Bush" (a famous song of that era) We are sure both Gloria and her shows will be sadly missed especially by our senior citizens and, of course, her fellow committee members.

Events and activities

All events are free unless otherwise stated.

Cottage Crafts for Kids

Tuesday 15th to Friday 18th April and Tuesday 22nd to Friday 25th April 1.00 – 3.30pm. Suitable for ages 3 - 11 but must be supervised by an adult please. No need to book, just come and have a go at making something from natural or recycled materials such as a mini raft, sock puppet or an elder friendship band. One activity per day. There will be a charge of £1

Egg decorating and mask making

Easter Sunday April 20th 12.00 - 3.00pm. There will be a small charge to cover the cost of materials.

Summer Fair

Sunday August 17th 11.00 - 4.00pm. Stalls, games, activities, fun for all the family. Free admission.

Santa's Grotto

Sunday December 7th. Time and charge to be confirmed nearer the time. Grotto tickets are usually for sale from the gift shop and office from the beginning of December.

These are our main events, but there may be others, details will be listed in future newsletters, and keep an eye open for posters when you visit the farm.

Thanks to:

Charles Brotherton Trust £200 (2103 Awards Distribution).

'Green Blade' (including Helen McCall) for their carol singing and mumming in West Wirral raising £250 for the farm.

Everyone who voted for us in the 'Love Wirral' Grant scheme of Wirral Council. We were successful in getting £500 towards hanging baskets and planters for the farm this summer.

Everyone who has made generous donations and standing orders including Sue Taylor, Gill and Patrick

Downey, Patrick and Monica Toosey, Thorning, Mrs Ellison, Mrs Garroch, Mrs Blackmore, Mr Robertson, Miss Fox, Ms Clay, Mr Dutton and family and friends.

Apologies to anyone we may have missed.

Last but not least, many thanks to Des Dougherty for providing wonderful entertainment for children with his carousel ride. Des has been coming for many years during school holidays and on event days. He has been a very willing friend of the farm and we shall miss his kind and generous support but wish him well in his retirement.



Friends of the Farm is the working name of the Wirral Urban Farm Association (Charity number 515789) based at: Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm Boundary Road Bidston, Wirral CH43 7PD Tel: 0151 653 9332 Fax: 0151 652 4236 Email: tamoshan@wirral.gov.uk

For further information about the farm and past history look at our

old newsletters on the website. www.tamoshanterfarm.org.uk

Membership

£5 / address / year. due on the 1st April. New members joining after October 1st will not be due for renewal until April the following year. Please make cheques payable to: *Wirral Urban Farm Association*. You will receive three newsletters per year, an invitation to the AGM and the opportunity to become more

involved by joining the committee. We do appreciate donations either through the box in the Animal House or with your subscription.

Membership renewal due NOW

If you have received a membership form with this newsletter then your renewal is due now. Please consider making out a standing order and gift aid.