

BCV News

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'Hedgelaying Heroes'

Colin Mather

This year's John Leather Hedgelaying contest was held at Blackleach Country Park, and, in spite of the weather forecast, 18 to 25 volunteers turned up (depending on who was counting).

Paul and Fred, last year's winners, had to defend their title - and the honour of the BCV - by putting in a good show against several newcomers and some of Salford's finest. As usual, the teams were made up of an experienced and a novice hedge layer selected at random until five teams of two had been assigned their stretch of hedge to hack. Rick, being far too experienced to compete, was sent away to cut down a few branches from a willow tree, but came back and continued to hang around offering advice like a very large version of Yoda (minus the large hairy ears... relatively speaking).

The hedgelaying Jedi began their work. Billhooks glinted in the Salford gloom like large flashy things. Despite a shortage of tools, possibly a ploy by Fred to impede the opposition, the teams made quick work of Blackleach's hedges, while the fire minders burned brash and wondered when the baked potatoes were going to arrive.

A photographer from the Salford Advertiser turned up. He took a few pictures, asked a few questions, investigated the laying that is hedge, and was told by Dave Foy to mind his own business. Sometimes its better not to ask a person's age, specially when they are waving something sharp.

Educational bit - pay attention: Blackleach Reservoir was first constructed in 1778 as an industrial lodge supplying Walkden's mines with water for driving their steam engines. The reservoir continued to be used by industry up until 1976, when one of the last factories to make use of it was the Thorpe Chemical Works. This factory produced bleach and magenta dye resulting in the local population being imbued with a healthy pink glow. In honour of this great local tradition Salford Council, after consultations, meetings, pre-meetings, focus groups, consultant's fees, long, long lunches and claims for flexitime, adopted their new corporate colour - pink. Anyway back to the competition.

After lunch the battle continued. Some teams disbanded and reformed with new members. Not quite sure how that would affect the judging but it is an informal competition after all. At around four o'clock Noell Leather arrived for the judging. and the splitting of wood ended.

Judging was difficult, the standard of hedgelaying was exceptional, especially as half the competitors had only received one day's training.



Judging in progress with Noell looking inscrutable and stern.

Noell judged, slowly walking up and down making notes, shaking her head, looking inscrutable and stern. Everyone waited with baited breath, among other clichés, shivering with anticipation or cold - it was hard to tell. Then, the decision. Was Fred first? Had Paul prevailed? Was a second win in their grasp?

The verdict: Anthony Prescott and co-competitor, Norman Beaver, claimed their fame and victory over last year's champions with an outstanding piece of work, a near faultless hedge that earned them their names engraved on the competition billhook and, more importantly, a pint from Rick. Second place went to Paul Crawshaw and Kath Middleton.

Well done Anthony, the force was with you.



Paul Crawshaw and Kath Middleton came second in the hedgelaying competition, seen here proudly holding their award, John Leathers Gurkha Kukri