

RML Newsletter round-up

DECEMBER 2015

HAVE YOU GOT A BUDGET FOR GROWTH?

The Chancellor's new target for affordable housing and 'Starter Homes', together with planning measures to accelerate the re-use of brownfield land, will encourage the industry to take a fresh look at some of the sites they put to one side during the recession. Whether enough sites can be found for 400,000 new units of affordable housing by 2021 may be uncertain, but what is certain is that some of this land will have a Japanese Knotweed problem. **Don't forget that the knotweed hasn't stopped growing during the recession!**



Have you got a budget for this kind of growth?

Now is the time to check those sites for knotweed, so that the cost and time needed to eradicate it can be factored into the programming of development plans.

- Sites which have no knotweed are more attractive for early development
- Sites with knotweed could be cleared at minimal cost if a herbicide treatment programme is started in 2016, ahead of development
- Knotweed-infested sites which are also prime candidates for early development can be treated quickly using the **Klaro** on-site remediation process, avoiding the cost of removal to landfill.



Herbicide treatment is almost always the lowest-cost solution to eradicating Japanese Knotweed, but this option is only available when treatment starts early in your programme. Delaying site survey or treatment usually means that the knotweed will grow a bit in the intervening period and a more expensive solution has to be adopted.

If your site is on a priority list then an on-site remediation such as **Klaro** can be eligible for Land Remediation Tax Credit. This credit effectively refunds a tidy slice of the costs, increasing the financial advantages over the landfill alternative.



A service from GroundCoverDBM

Thoughts of place and home.



The concept of place as a specific human experience has been important to my colleagues in RML. Writing about a concept can be problematic.

In January this year in our newsletter [Writing is for reading](#) my colleague Idris commented on the quality of writing and how one should try one's best to provide the reader with pleasure and encouragement to read on. Writing about things is all very well if you have the words to describe your feelings. In a series of future newsletters our principal landscape architect Andrew will discuss aspects of the integrity of landscape. He will mention our development as human beings and especially of our ideas of home and a home-place and will mention [cynefin and hiraeth](#), two Welsh words that define these feelings. There are no equivalent single words in English. The Cornish word hireth is clearly a close relative. The concept of hiraeth is equally well developed in the Portuguese word [saudade](#) which is said to be the only direct equivalent of the Welsh word. Manuel de Melo describes saudade as *"a pleasure you suffer, an ailment you enjoy"*.

We are fortunate to have words in the Welsh language that vocalise these specific feelings of place, home and thoughts of home.

I have mentioned before how emotion can and should play a significant part in one's professional work and would suggest that cynefin and hiraeth are from the same spring from which burst our emotions about challenges in work. I have encouraged my colleagues in the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators to find and exploit their emotions about the science, art and practice of water and environmental management.

[Cynefin](#) is the state of being influenced by multiple pasts of which we can only be partly aware: cultural, religious, geographic, tribal and linguistic pasts for example. Cynefin describes that relationship: the place of your birth and of your upbringing, the environment in which you live and to which you are naturally acclimatised. Cynefin is also knowledge and a sense of place that is passed down the generations and can also refer to fleeting moments in time: a place or the time when we instinctively belong or feel most connected. In those moments what lies beneath mundane existence is unveiled and the joy of being alive can overwhelm us. It can be a great release if one has a word that describes these feelings.

The counterpart of cynefin is [hiraeth](#), the longing for home when far away, *"We will kiss away the hours of hiraeth when you come home again to Wales"* says the poet. Like cynefin, hiraeth has no direct translation into English. Some define it as [homesickness](#) tinged with grief or sadness over the lost or departed. It is a mix of longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness, or an earnest desire for the Wales of the past. I know what hiraeth is, hiraeth is real, I feel it, it is much more than homesickness, certainly not homesickness

tinged with grief, but sadness yes, sadness if one can think of sadness as something that can breathe love. A sadness that hiraeth describes is made up of the physical and spiritual influences that can well up in one when cynefin comes to mind. But especially so when one is far away from home. Love and pride and longing spring to mind as English words that go some way to composing the same feelings.

I am not claiming that other nationalities do not have the same depth of feelings as Welsh people but simply commenting that the Welsh have been able to find single words that encompass these deep feelings, as have the Portuguese. The gift of these words is something that one must treasure.

There are a number of Welsh words that were used by the Saxons, afon (avon) is one of the most obvious. One wonders why words for important concepts like cynefin and hiraeth are missing. Experts in Old English may be able to provide an explanation.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

If you are a regular reader you will know that RML has worked throughout Europe on a range of interesting projects, and encourage our team to develop their language skills in support of that work. We find that learning just a few simple words of greeting and thanks to use in Estonia or Spain, for example, goes a long way in making the human connection with the clients and local people that we meet.

For many years we welcomed young graduates from Spain and Italy to work in our Ruthin office as part of the EU 'Leonardo' programme, designed to give young people the opportunity to develop their language skills in a work-related setting and at the same time to experience and share cultures across Europe. We British are notoriously poor at learning other languages – partly because excellent spoken English seems to be the norm in so many countries around the world – so having these visitors was a good stimulus for us to learn a little of their languages, even if it was just enough to order a coffee on holiday!

On Friday last week we had the lovely surprise of a visit from Carmen, who spent some months with us fifteen years ago as part of her studies. Carmen's enthusiasm for her environmental work, her grasp of English and above all her infectious smile are often remembered in the office, so it was a great pleasure to meet her again and see that none of those characteristics have been lost. She applies her training to her work in forest and wildlife management in Spain.



Travel broadens the horizons, not just for the traveller but also for those who welcome visitors and share a little of their cultures. At a time when some would-be politicians seek to close borders against people they do not know or understand, it is good to know that there are others who are promoting travel and connections between people around the world.

VEGETATION 1 - WHAT'S VEGETATION WORTH

When he was President of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1994 Professor Edmund Hambly commented that communities placed far too little value on civil engineering and what civil engineers produced and that engineers should react to this. Why was this attitude amongst the public so negative? Much of what works in civil engineering actually lies below-ground and is generally out of sight and out of mind. Visual impressions of surface features like roads and railways are important. Pipelines can also be included in this group because they are usually shallow in depth and involve a great deal of surface disturbance. Successful completion of surface work is vital if the image of construction is to be a positive one. If it's underground the finest concrete and sweetest alignment in the world unfortunately count for little in the minds of casual observers. Poorly performing vegetation can remain in the memory for a very long time. I mentioned in August (Earthworks 2) how the industry has grudgingly accepted that this is the case.



Healthy vegetation is important, and worth a great deal because it can enhance the work of the civil engineer for generations to come.



Vegetation prevents physical scars occurring because of its protective capabilities, it gives pleasure because of its variety, and it can be hard-wearing when needed. Vegetation encourages and supports wild life, responds to management and as it develops is a point of interest for the long term.

I mentioned the importance of patterns in RML's work in September and how some industrial patterns have turned out to be relatively short-lived. We view vegetation as a contributor to very long-term patterns which gives our work a sense of purpose and permanence. Therefore achieving a good performance with vegetation is in our professional and personal interests.

What kind of good performance are we thinking about?

- Healthy trees, shrubs and grasses that have 'settled in' well and this is reflected in their early growth;
- Vegetation that is responding to management;
- Vegetation that is making a positive impact on the environment and the community;
- Vegetation that is supporting and encouraging biological diversity;
- Vegetation that is performing an engineering function such as surface protection reflected in the absence erosion scars, off-site siltation and blocked drains;
- Sites that attract great interest from fellow professionals
- Sites that attract positive feedback from the local community.



These **positive features** and results can be achieved by exploiting a detailed appreciation of the context in which one is working and this means taking a holistic view of the project. ‘Holistic’ was the in-word a few decades ago! I mentioned our familiarity with the holistic approach earlier this month when I discussed how our learning and experience supports this approach to design and construction. Vegetation 2 will take this discussion further.

A CHRISTMAS REMEMBERED.

I quoted John Ruskin recently who had made the point so well about remembering things. You may remember that he said *“tis a rich pleasure to look back on anything”*.

I have been asked by Idris to write something for Xmas. Idris has a different view of celebrations at this time of year and he says “Mid-winter is a time when dark evenings bring memories flooding back, indeed they bring richness and hope for the future too as the sun begins to rise earlier each day.” He’s right, of course he is.

I am no Dickens, so I thought that I would relate to you my memories of Xmas day 1956. 1956 was the first time that Marj and I enjoyed Xmas with one another. Fifty four more were to follow but because it was our first, 1956 is very special to me.

It was the second Xmas for me to spend my holiday from university delivering the Xmas post. Our sorting office was in Mountain Ash a few miles up the valley from my home in Abercynon. Getting there in good time involved catching an early bus, a very early bus. Once there, we were loaded with Post office bags that were bursting at the seams and then waved-off by cheery postmen. By 1956 the postmen had realized that they had overloaded us in the previous year so our loads were reduced by increasing our number. I still had to get around half of the village which included terraced rows, semi-detached villas and scattered farms and houses. My home was the last of my calls, job done!



On Xmas morning in 1956 it snowed. Apparently it is rare for us to have snow on Xmas day, well we had plenty in South Wales that year. I lived in the Royal Oak with my father, mother and Howell my older brother. The pub had once belonged to my great great grandparents. The Oak was a popular pub and stood on its own just a little way outside the village. That Xmas morning I had to trudge through a foot or so of snow. If I had to knock on a door to deliver a package the response usually involved me coming face to face with a customer from the night before in the pub. “Come on in for goodness sake and shake off that snow. You’ve had an early start. You’ll have a drink” was the frequent response. Although my load of letters and packages had been reduced from the year before my round still occupied all of the morning. I was probably home by mid-day feeling very pleased with myself. The pub was filling up, men only on Xmas morning of course, because there were many things to be done at home. I’m sure that most were escapees. My father gave everyone a Manikin cigar, non-smokers were like hens’ teeth in those days. The Oak had opened some time in the morning when the men had started to appear. Everything had been cleaned and washed from the night before and there was sweet smelling sawdust on the floor. By mid-day the house was buzzing, just my father, brother and I looked after perhaps 30 customers. Xmas day was the day when my mother wanted everyone out by 2 o’clock, and believe me they all went like lambs when she appeared from the kitchen carrying some utensil or other.



Marj arrived at about 12.30 having walked the mile and a half from her home and had been accompanied by her brother-in-law Brian who was going on to visit his parents. Marj came in covered in snow, full of excitement and carrying a beautiful plant for my mother. Oh what a morning it was, when Marj appeared in the bar a huge cheer went up. She was already well loved that is for sure. Marj was 16 'going-on' 17 and my father had already told her mother "Marj is an excellent barmaid you know".

The pattern had been established that summer, if Marj and I wanted to be together at busy times then being behind the bar was where we had to be. Of course on many other occasions we were spoilt. Working behind the bar was hard work but working together was great fun. Over supper my father would ask Marj to count the takings... "Go and get the gold Marj" he'd say, meaning, go and collect the takings from the till in the bar. On a really hectic evening we might take £100 even when the beer was 7p/pint and drawn straight from the barrels.

On that Xmas day Brian returned and he and Marj went back home for Xmas lunch. Of course Marj and I spent the evening together in

her house and back at the Oak, more walking through the snow, there and back. I don't suppose that we even noticed the cold.

Our first Xmas together, exchanging gifts, having a noisy and exciting morning as the centre of activity in the village, and what with the snow and sharing one another, it was so special.

Along with Idris, David and my colleagues at RML I wish you all a merry and memorable Xmas.

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