



# Friends of Thetford Forest

20th <sup>OUR</sup> YEAR

**AUTUMN/WINTER 2015 NEWSLETTER No. 60**  
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Welcome to this issue of our newsletter, the second of our 20th year of operation where we look at some of the events that were arranged to celebrate this event, but also looking forward to the next 20. Yet again this year there was an increase in visitor numbers at High Lodge, the main visitor centre in Thetford Forest, a trend that we all hope will continue into next year.

As we have said before much of what we have achieved over the years is in part due to our members, be it by helping physically or by joining and keeping us solvent !

One of our major tasks is to keep the Campaign for the Forests foremost in the eyes of those in power, and a report on this can be found inside. Although the media has gone a little quiet on this issue, rest assured we have not and will continue to fight for a solution that will ensure the forests of this country remain in public ownership and with as much access as they deserve.

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**The 2015 Annual General Meeting is being held as usual at Oak Lodge on the High Lodge site on Thursday October 22 at 1900 hrs.**

All members are invited to attend, and the meeting will be followed by a presentation on the current Heritage Lottery Fund bid for high Lodge –see article inside. Light refreshments will be available at the AGM

To book a place please email us at:  
[info@fotf.org.uk](mailto:info@fotf.org.uk) - with AGM in the subject matter.

We need to hear from you by the 12th October to ensure we can organise seating and the food.



You can now follow us on Twitter

 [@fotf\\_uk](https://twitter.com/fotf_uk)

## ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

**The wonderful diversity of Thetford Forest was highlighted to Friends' members this summer at some of our special Twentieth Anniversary events.**

In May, Forestry Commission Ecologist Neal Armour-Chelu gave a guided tour around Hills and Holes and in June he was joined for the 'Lychfowl Evenings' by renowned local nightjar expert Ron Hoblyn.

Hills and Holes is part of the large complex of surviving Ice Age pingoes that lie in the area around Hockham. Here, FC has removed the pines and allowed nature some breathing space. It is an evocatively wild place, home to aquatic plants and animals and quite unlike most other parts of the predominantly dry, sandy Brecks.



Some of the aquatic plants here such as water violet and the rare stonewort only thrive in good quality chalky waters that are free from pollution. During the visit we also saw some early dragonflies - broad bodied chasers, hairy and emperor dragonflies and the eggs of the orange tip butterfly on its food plant, lady's smock

The site is managed sensitively by FC, helped by grazing Highland cattle and once a year by a Friends of Thetford Forest work party which keeps some of the ponds clear of invasive plants.



Migrating from Africa, a significant number of the UK's nightjars make their summer home in Thetford Forest, an important habitat for their species.

Friends' members had two opportunities to hear their strange call and see their moth-like flight. Unfortunately the first evening was chilly and damp, insects were not flying and nightjar activity was limited to a few distant chirring calls.





In stark contrast, a week later the event was described as “the best ever!” when the warmth of a beautiful summer's evening encouraged the birds to call and display with seeming abandon as night fell. So spectacular was the performance that it inspired some graphic design from Friends' member James Cross as seen below





# AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGH LODGE'S HERITAGE AND FRIENDS' INVOLVEMENT

**In late June, the Forestry Commission heard that its Round One Application to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been successful and it had been awarded a Development Grant and a Round One Pass for the project 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge'.**

At present, there is no information about the ten thousand years of history at High Lodge nor any directed route into the forest that takes you to see its historic sites. This heritage project will create an all-ability multi-user trail through Thetford Forest at High Lodge to reveal and interpret its landscape history. The trail, up to 5 kilometres in length, will be accessible to everyone (excluding horse-riders) as it will have a smooth surface and be suitable for families and less experienced cyclists while those with access limitations will be able to use specially-adapted bikes available for hire on site. Benches and shelters will give 'rest places' and meet the needs of those with restricted health and mobility.

The Trail will explore the landscape features which make up the heritage of High Lodge. It will show how people have shaped that landscape, from prehistoric wildwood clearance to medieval rabbit farming; from gunflint mining in the eighteenth century to the creation of Thetford Forest in the twentieth and how its present-day management balances the needs of timber production with those of wildlife and recreation.

During the one-year development phase, there will be consultations with Friends' members and other forest users to help determine the route of the trail and the design of the shelters.

Consultation will also include the history and wildlife people would like to know more about and how these will be interpreted. Learning new skills such as how to investigate an archaeological site or lead a guided walk, will be planned too. The results of consultations will feed into the Round 2 Application at the end of 2016 and if this is successful, the delivery of the project will then go ahead.

Friends of Thetford Forest will be the main volunteer organisation in the project and the opportunities to take part and help with planning are very exciting.

If you are interested in receiving updates and news of how you can be involved, please email

[info@fotf.org.uk](mailto:info@fotf.org.uk) and mark your email 'Trailing the Heritage'.

## THE LATEST ADDITION TO LYNFORD ARBORETUM'S FACILITIES

The five new benches are now in place around the Dog Agility Tail, an extra which has been immediately greeted with much approval.



Like the other benches' sites throughout more than four kilometres of paths, (three kilometres of which are 'all ability') meander through both the Arboretum and the adjoining Zigzag path systems, they are spaced at approximately one hundred metre intervals. This spacing allows the less ambulant to progress, at their pace, through a variety of wooded scenery. This standard of spacing came about follow talks with The Disability Group, Birding for All (see its website)

## LYNFORD NEWS

Created in a small section of Victorian Parkland the arboretum can, sixty years on, boast of some champion trees. Of these the most imposing, and predating the Forestry Commission's arrival, is an Austrian Black Pine *Pinus nigra ssp nigra* standing majestically at a little over 34 metres in height. "But," you may be asking yourself, "Who says they are Champion Trees?" a valid question, the answer to which is The Tree Register of the British Isles. This is an organisation founded in 1988 that maintains a data base of information on over 200,000 notable trees growing in Britain and Ireland, to which a further 912 were added last year. Its aim is to include every tree which is exceptional for its size, age, historical associations or rarity. See their website [www.treeregister.org](http://www.treeregister.org)

The Tree Register has a dedicated band of volunteers who range across British Isles armed with clip boards, tape measures and laser range-finders. They seek out new champions and verify existing records. Their efforts are coordinated from the Register's Headquarters at Wootton in Bedfordshire and overseen by the Registrar Dr. Owen Johnson.

Their efforts are to be found on the organisation's website mentioned above, or in the Tree Register Handbook, 'CHAMPION TREES OF BRITAIN & IRELAND'. This weighty paperback, published by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, lists hundreds of the more notable specimens, county by county. The Register's Handbook says of Lynford Arboretum '.... mid-20th century collection with some of the best conifers in East Anglia'.

Of close to a thousand trees appearing on Lynford Arboretum's data base, 55 have been awarded County Champions status. Five of these also have the distinction of being English Champions, and one went further in also being ranked amongst the largest of its kind in Britain and Ireland. Sadly this tree, a Red Acer *Acer rubrum* 'Red Sunset' succumbed to disease and high winds, and as a consequence had to be felled. Other trees noted include Ponderosa Pine *Pinus ponderosa*, a name for those who remember 1960s black and white television to conjure with. Lodgepole Pine *Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia*, Striped Maple *Acer pensylvanicum*, White Cedar *Thuja occidentalis* which in fact is not a cedar at all. Just before last Christmas the arboretum team commenced work on marking thirty five of the Champion Trees. Each of the A5 signs not only gives the common as well as its botanical name, but also its place of origin, why it is of note and something about the tree. In the fullness of time we hope to have a leaflet on all the trees, in the meantime have a browse around the collection and see what you can find.

Regarding historical trees in the County, one known as Ketts Oak, can be found at Ryston Hall near Downham Market. The Handbook says of it '... is probably the only one of the three of this name in Norfolk old enough to be genuinely associated with the 16th century rebel'

In his foreword to the Tree Register Handbook Its Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales writes, 'This country has a remarkable tree heritage – indeed our history is founded upon wood that it has produced. Now, as never before, this heritage is threatened and it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to do all in our power to protect it and the biodiversity it supports. Whether it be by planting new trees or protecting the old, ensuring dangerous new species are not brought into the country or raising awareness of the disease and animal threats they face, from alien species, we have a part to play'.

## CAMPAIGN REPORT

**During the General Election, we challenged local Parliamentary candidates to state how they would protect our publicly-owned forests (see Spring/Summer newsletter).**

Our campaign received widespread support in the local press and social media. Of the twenty candidates challenged, fourteen replied. Most supported the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Forestry (set up by the last Government in response to the huge public outcry over the proposed sell-off) to safeguard the PFE for the nation, with a sustainable level of funding to pay for non-commercial benefits such as providing public open access and protecting nature. Elizabeth Truss told us:

*"I have visited the forest with FOTF, and on many occasions with friends and family. It is a fantastic amenity to have and I am fully committed to ensuring that access and the economic prosperity of the forest is maintained for generations to come.*

*This week (April '15) the Conservatives gave a commitment that public forests and woodland will be kept in trust for the nation. We also pledged to plant another 11 million trees; I do hope this reassures you that our forests and woodlands are protected so that we can all continue to enjoy them."*

So it is particularly disappointing that the new administration seems reluctant to deliver the legislation that will secure the PFE for the nation. In June, Lord Gardiner told the House of Lords:

*"As set out in our manifesto we will ensure that our public forests and woodlands are kept in trust for the nation in line with the 2012 Independent Panel on Forestry's recommendations. A great deal of preparatory work has already taken place, in which key interested parties have been involved. In the meantime, the estate will remain secure in the care of the Forestry Commission."*



Yet legislation is still not on the horizon. WHY NOT ?

**FoTF will continue to campaign to ensure that our forests are properly protected for the future, helping to build a broad alliance of stakeholders to convince the Government to deliver on its promises.**



While some things change, others remain the same. The General Election saw the Conservatives return to power with a slim majority. Elizabeth Truss - whose constituency includes part of Thetford Forest - continues as Secretary of State for the Environment but with no Lib-Dems in Government the new DEFRA Parliamentary Under-Secretary with responsibility for forestry is now Rory Stewart, MP for Penrith and The Borders. In the Lords, responsibility has passed from Lord de Mauley to Lord Gardiner of Kimble. The team of DEFRA civil servants advising the Under-Secretary has also changed.

This has meant that FoTF has had to forge new relationships in its bid to secure the Public Forest Estate (PFE) for the nation. We have already hosted a fact-finding visit by the new DEFRA team. John Coleman and Hugh Thomas visited Thetford Forest early in their new roles to discover how our forest supports the local timber industry, public recreation and open access and delivers huge benefits for wildlife.



## WE ARE 20!

**On 17 June 2015, members of Friends of Thetford Forest and Forestry Commission Staff celebrated 20 years of partnership working for the benefit of Thetford Forest.**

Over seventy guests gathered at High Lodge Cafe, with the guest-of-honour being FC's Chief Executive Simon Hodgson who made time out of his very full diary to be there.

During the evening, everyone listened to music provided by a band, looked at the night sky through the astronomical telescope provided by Committee Member Bob Greef or talked to the Wildlife Rangers and had the chance to see through their infra-red cameras.

Corporate Member Churchill Catering provided the fantastic buffet for us as a very generous gift and the Forestry Commission not only gave the venison but cooked it on the barbeque too. Vicky Tustain, Alison Lane and Rachel Riley (all FC staff) organised the evening for us and we'd like to thank them particularly whilst acknowledging that many others, including FC staff at High Lodge, did a great deal to ensure that the evening was such a success.



After speeches by Anne Mason as Chair of FOTF and Jim Lyon, Forest Management Director, Simon Hodgson proposed the Toast to the FOTF/FC partnership and then cut the birthday cake.

Though the evening was all about celebrating the past twenty years, we're already looking to the future and making plans for what we'll do next. We're determined that FOTF will continue to develop and evolve, building on all that we've achieved from 1995 to now.

## FOTF TAKES ON NEW WORK IN THE FOREST

FOTF has, over the years, saved two warren lodges from ruin: Mildenhall and Ickburgh (formerly known as Langford Lodge). The dwelling and work places of the warrener who farmed rabbits for their meat and fur, these are important buildings in the historic landscape.

In fact, Thetford Forest is rich in archaeology and history sites, from Neolithic flint mines to the gunflint mines of the Napoleonic Wars; from Bronze Age burial mounds to First and Second World War training sites; from warren banks to warren lodges - but decidedly less rich in terms of the Forestry Commission's resources to carry out general care and maintenance of them

and ensure access, especially when more sites are being discovered as trees are felled and increasing the demand on the budget.

To complement the work of the conservation volunteers, who help maintain and improve habitats for wildlife, FOTF is planning to look after some of the archaeological and historic sites with a visit perhaps once a year to carry out a 'tidy



*NCC copyright.  
David Robertson  
looking at a burial  
mound in the trees*



*Ickburgh Warren  
Lodge surrounded  
by bracken and  
brambles. A J Spidy.*

up'; ensure access is possible; any interpretation is in good condition and that vegetation is not encroaching. Initially, there would be up to five sites with an annual visit to each but no requirement to come to all five as it would be an informal group to be called upon when the work is needed. All tools and any training will be provided.

**If you are interested in helping, please send your contact details to [info@fotf.org.uk](mailto:info@fotf.org.uk).**

# Friends of Thetford Forest

## Your current Committee

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