

Chair's Report 2018:

After the euphoria of winning the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2017, this has been rather a quiet year for FOTF in which we've continued to support the Forestry Commission as much as we can, with our regular volunteering activities.

These have included checking the walking trails at High Lodge and across the Forest; fulfilling the 'Meet and Greet' role at High Lodge; undertaking conservation tasks one Sunday a month and the day-to-day care of Lynford Arboretum two mornings a week as well as helping write the Arboretum's Management Plan. FOTF held the sixteenth open day at Mildenhall Warren Lodge, a day shared with the Rex Graham Military Orchid Reserve Open Day and we also helped more than ever before at the summer concerts, giving a total of 295 hours over the four nights.

The monument commemorating the planting of King's Forest in 1935 was conserved by a stonemason and his fee met by Friends and we made a contribution towards landscaping the surrounding area too. Repair of our benches at High Lodge is underway, important because these are much-used by adults supervising children enjoying the play equipment.

One new venture this year has been supporting the British Trust for Ornithology in its research into cuckoos and why their populations are in decline. Friends has sponsored the cost of analysing the data from the trackers fixed to two cuckoos and we were invited to name them – so one is Thomas after Thomas Paine and the other is Sylvester after the Latin name for Scots Pine. The tracking revealed that both survived their migration journeys and are wintering in the Congo.

The second new venture was making a financial contribution to new deer silhouettes for use by the wildlife rangers and by us. Made by corporate member SPC Printers in Thetford. the silhouettes are life-size and were used to great effect on Discovery Day when they were placed in a wooded area and a Ranger led a 'spot the deer' walk for visitors to High Lodge.

The third new venture which will be on-going is the monitoring of the condition of archaeological sites in the Forest. Having received training, volunteers have 'adopted' a site or number of sites and make a minimum of a visit a year, filling in a standard form to record any damage; vegetation growth and the general condition and these forms are then forwarded to FC for action.

As some of you know, in my professional role as a heritage consultant, I've been managing the 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge Project' and I'm delighted that so many FOTF members have been involved in it and that project volunteers new to the Forest have subsequently joined Friends, benefiting from all the opportunities that this brings. Corporate Members have been involved too and their support is much-valued and appreciated.

One opportunity for members each year is a special visit and so in 2018 we went to Bedgebury Pinetum where we were shown round by Curator Dan Luscombe and able to learn from its management.

One sadness was that Terry Jennings was not with us – Terry was FC's Establishment Manager and unexpectedly died whilst on holiday early in the summer. He had supported us at the Arboretum and in our work generally – it was Terry who had nominated Friends for the Royal Forestry Awards at Mildenhall Woods in 2014 and at the Arboretum in 2017. The Committee always enjoyed having him at our meetings as he

understood our concerns and shared his own opinions with us – and he was a direct link to the forest operations side of FC.

This year, FC has moved further towards having its own direct volunteers and of course it is perfectly entitled to do that. However, FOTF will be alert to any adverse effects on its membership and those members who volunteer and the new Committee will be seeking ways of working that mean we don't have to surrender any of the volunteering we currently undertake. We are disappointed that FC Bristol has not consulted with 'Friends of' groups (certainly not with us) to discuss the implications of this policy.

One of the things we value most about being Friends of Thetford Forest is that we do not concentrate solely on 'recreation' but can understand and support conservation and heritage, deer management and forest operations and we hope never to lose that wider involvement. As the Public Forest Estate is multi-purpose, then so must FOTF be.

For FC, 2017 has been a time of staff changes and temporary appointments but through it all we have been supported and encouraged – so thank you to staff at High Lodge, particularly Owen Manson and Megan Bradsworth; Vicky Tustian and Nicky Russell at the Arboretum, Neal Armour-Chelu with conservation and members of the senior management team for attending our meetings – especially Tristram Hilborn who has so many demands on his time as Forest Management Director.

There is one person to whom we must give our very special thanks. We were delighted when Rachel Riley was promoted to Terry's role but so sad that she will no longer be able to continue as the FOTF / FC liaison. We are of course looking forward to working with Owen Manson, but Rachel will always have a special place in our hearts for her wonderful and steadfast support and enthusiasm for Friends. Rachel – these gifts are to say 'thank you' and in the hope that we will always have links to your new role.

Finally, I'd like to thank my fellow Committee members for their amazing dedication and their willingness to do so much to make FOTF a success.