



Friends of Thetford Forest

SPRING/SUMMER 2017 NEWSLETTER No. 63

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Welcome to our latest newsletter, which we hope you will find interesting. The year did not start so well with much clearance work to do thanks to Storm Doris hitting the forest quite badly. Although not all completed, FC have made great efforts to ensure fallen and damaged trees were removed and public pathways and areas made safe again.

On a lighter note, the good weather on 2 April resulted in over 5200 visitors at High Lodge to take part in Discovery Day organised by FoTF with the Forestry Commission and with other groups participating too. FOTF had displays and activities to help people learn more about the forest, all of which proved very popular.



Our stand at Discovery Day April 2017 -Pic: James Cross

As this issue was being finalised, I was told that **Maggie Marshall**, a founder member of The Friends and our first Treasurer & Membership secretary has sadly passed away. When, in 2003, Maggie gave up the post and moved abroad our personal friendship remained ,and when visiting her in Spain & Hungary her love for Thetford Forest and appreciation of the Friends work continued.

It is true to say that her enthusiasm for the group in its formative years put down the firm foundations that we have had the good fortune to work with.

Our condolences go to her husband, Laurie.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR FOTF MEMBERS

**A Visit to the Stanford Training Area (STANTA)
originally known as the Stanford Battle Area**



Tuesday 12 September 2017.



Two free coach seats for FOTF Members

It needs members of Friends of Thetford Forest to help to:

FOTF is very fortunate to have an evening visit to the Stanford Training Area this year as these tours are eagerly sought after.

On Tuesday 12 September, we will meet at the Forestry Commission District Office Car Park at Santon Downham (IP27 0TJ) at 4.30pm to leave here on the coach at 4.45pm.

We will travel to West Tofts Camp to be met by our guide and be given a short briefing before entering **STANTA** for the tour which lasts approximately three hours.

We will learn about its use as a military training area; its historic churches and its archaeological landscape and why parts are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) for their rare species of flora and fauna.

STANTA was used in the filming of many of the episodes of the comedy series **DAD's ARMY** and there will opportunities to get off the coach to see one church and some of the training installations.

Because of the military use of the site there are some restrictions:

No person under the age of 18 years.

No dogs allowed.

Cameras and Video Recorders are not permitted without prior consent.

No fee is levied for the tour but FOTF will make a voluntary donation to be divided between the Army Benevolent Fund and the Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association. You may wish to contribute to a collection made on the coach.

For FOTF members, places are free (TWO per membership).

For non-members, the charge for the coach is £5.00 person.

Early booking is advised as this visit has proved very popular in the past - so please contact: info@fotf.org.uk to secure your place or request payment details if you are a non-member.



LYNFORD ARBORETUM VOLUNTEER GROUP

THE FIRST TEN YEARS

A short history by Mark Sullivan, a long standing volunteer.

2017 sees the 10th anniversary of the Friends involvement at Lynford Arboretum.

The volunteer group at the arboretum started following a request by the Forestry Commission to the FoTF to consider the possibility to take on the upkeep, at ground level, of this important area.

Two committee members, Mike and Shelia Hume, arranged for anyone interested to meet at the Arboretum on a cold February morning in 2007. Sufficient came to allow the first working day to be arranged in March. The promise was that it would just be “Gardening on a Grade Scale”, by a group with enjoyment and friendship at its heart. Initially we used some of our own tools together with those bought by the Friends, just pruners, small hand saws and loppers- not much- as they had to fit in the back of Mike's little Skoda!

To start with it was just a case of finding our way around what seemed a large area, clearing the paths from encroaching tree and shrub growth and removing wooden benches that had become a danger.

For the rest of the first year the six to ten regular volunteers got to know both the Arboretum and each other better, gaining the confidence to explore more than just the main mature planted arboretum. They began to look at the wider area that included the remaining commercial planting area plus the wilder more natural section down to the stream and lake and also to consider ideas on how to improve access for the public. The result of this was new paths cut by the mowing contractors to give circular walks some designated for dog walking and others within a wildlife area, all with new waymarked posts. Planting of new specimen trees and shrubs in various areas was another task that commenced.

The most important event of 2008 was the arrival of the Friends Lodge building funded by the Lynford gravel workings restoration project which was now nearing

completion. The group soon set about making best use of the tool shed by adding a work bench and were grateful that the Friends could purchase more tools and wheel barrows. In the visitor's side cupboards arrived from the refurbishment of the High Lodge café and Mike and Shelia soon added a variety of information posters chairs and a table. The next welcome addition was the toilet!



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With a permanent “home” established Mike was able to further his belief that the other main purpose of the group was to inform and educate the public, so he put together an “Around the World” Walk and Talk which, with youthful enthusiasm, he gave at every opportunity to groups of visitors. Requests from Scout leaders for their Cub and Scout packs to do Badges and Duke of Edinburgh Award participants were accepted to encourage the next generation. Each year a regular session is a joint working day with the Friends Conservation Group which usually concludes with hot soup and cake.



A few of the the snowdrops at the arboretum

During the next 3 years the group got into a routine of working around the Arboretum doing what was needed during each season as well as creating new shrub beds with plants that would give interest all year. New tree planting continued including the Cathedral Oaks. New benches at regular intervals around the paths where installed. Meanwhile, back in the Lodge, Mike and Shelia added to the library of books and information displays for both the group and the public, whose numbers now seemed to be increasing.

The purchase of a generator gave us the welcome power for heating and tea making and petrol lawnmowers enabled us to trim around areas the mowing contractors could not get to.

From the start it was always a partnership with the Forestry Commission, they provided funding for the storage compounds, paving slabs, interpretation signs, water butts and new fencing. Our main contact was Recreation Ranger Nicky Russell who had the idea to install the Human and Dog agility course around the dog walking section. This has proved to be a great addition which continues to provide interest and amusement to many visitors.

In 2014 the group was surprised and delighted when it was announced that we were to be given the F.C East of England Volunteer Group of the Year Award. This was a testament to the years of dedicated work by Mike and Shelia and well deserved.



Roger Powell clearing up

Mike and Shelia decided that in April 2016 they would “retire” from the group and a special morning was arranged with the Friend's committee, Forestry Commission, and Arboretum group members past and present. After gathering at the Lodge we all walked down to the central ride of the mature extension where following suitable speech's and presentations a commemorative sign inscribed “Hume Avenue” was unveiled.

Over the years many people have joined the group stayed for a time and then left as life needed them too, sadly one, Bernard English, has died. Hopefully all can remember their time at the Arboretum with affection for the place and the friendships they had.

The group meets each month on most Sunday and Wednesday mornings starting at 9 o'clock.

If you would like to come along you will be most welcome.

SAVE OUR FORESTS CAMPAIGN REPORT

Since the initial success of the campaign to prevent the sell-off of our public forests in 2010 led to the Government of the day abandoning such plans, FoTF have continued to play a leading role fighting to keep Thetford Forest in public ownership.

Our strategy has focused on three main areas:

Legislation and the transition of Forest Enterprise England (FEE) into the body that will manage the Public Forest Estate (PFE).

Ensuring that the public have representation at the highest level of the new managing body.

Providing a sustainable level of public funding to continue the huge social and environmental benefits that come from properly managed woodlands.

Recently, it is the third of these that has come to the fore with proposals to begin charging for access to St. Helen's picnic site. FoTF understands the financial pressures that FEE is facing. In Thetford Forest, income from forestry operations will suffer as the quantity of timber reaching economic maturity approaches a cyclical low combined with the effects of diseases such as red-band needle blight which affects tree growth. Financial support from Defra has reduced over recent years and FEE has to look to other ways to balance the books.

While FoTF has no objection in principle to increased efficiency and more commercial activity on the PFE, we have concerns as to where this might take us. We do not, for example, object to sensitively-sited forest holiday lodges that can make a significant contribution to a Forest District's income, even though some find these highly controversial.

But we do object to charging the public for general access to forests and land that they already own and we fear that once established, charging will become the norm for all Thetford Forest picnic sites.

Social and environmental benefits are hard to quantify in financial terms and even harder to make an income from. That is why we fully support the Independent Panel on Forests (IPF) Report in 2012 that asked for £22 million of public money per year to ensure the provision of these benefits for the long term across the whole of England. This relatively small amount of money equates to 80p per household per year. In 2013, the PFE cost the taxpayer £63 per hectare - payments under The Single Farm Payment scheme to lowland farmland cost £200 per hectare (Rod Leslie - "Forest Vision"). It is clear to us that properly funded, the PFE is the most efficient way to provide public benefits from public money.

FoTF remains committed to working constructively with the Forestry Commission on all aspects of our work within Thetford Forest, including proactively seeking sustainable solutions for difficult funding decisions. But we will also publicly voice our concerns when necessary.

The public consultation over St. Helens will be run again during the summer.
We encourage everyone to have their say!

JUST ONE REASON THE CAMPAIGN IS STILL NEEDED...

If ever we needed a reminder to remain vigilant in the defence of our woodlands, that came recently when Germaine Greer told listeners to BBC Radio Four's Farming Today programme that we should 'fell Thetford Forest'.

Professor Greer trots out this tired dogma from time to time. It is disappointing that she continually fails to understand the importance of Thetford Forest not only for the wide range of plant and animal species it supports but also for public access, archaeology and the local economy.

Thetford Forest is in the forefront of conservation management, with a mix of habitats, large conservation rides that provide connectivity for animals and plants on a landscape scale and water resources largely uncontaminated by modern agricultural chemicals. It is internationally important for species such as nightjar and woodlark and for some plants, like the prostrate perennial knawel, it is almost their last stronghold. Many other species thrive here while in other places they struggle.

What does Professor Greer imagine would be here in Thetford Forest's place? It almost certainly would have suffered the same fate as much of the rest of the Brecks during the advance of the modern agricultural practices of the Twentieth Century - ploughed up to become sugar beet fields or turned over to pig units. Most of the archaeology - from Bronze Age barrows to Medieval warren banks to Napoleonic flint mines - would have been destroyed. And it would certainly have remained in private ownership, completely inaccessible to the majority of us who now take so much pleasure from its surroundings.

A recent on-line poll by the Eastern Daily Press had well over 90% of respondents in favour of keeping Thetford Forest. It is much-loved by the local community, a fact proven time after time when a threat to its existence arises. Glib remarks from celebrities who never take the time to research the facts will never change that.

FOTF CONSERVATION GROUP

The last year has seen us involved in many new projects with other groups as well as out long standing sites, so why not come and join us – We meet every third Sunday in a month and operate a mailing list for details. You can contact us on conservation@fotf.org.uk



THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THETFORD FOREST PROJECT

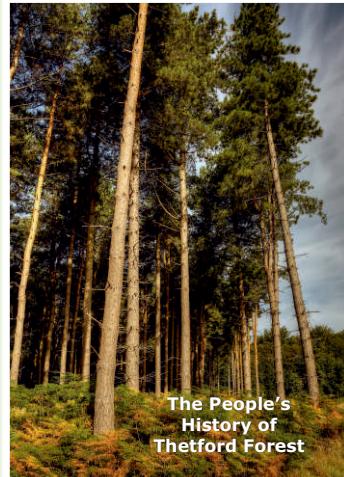
Written by Jacqui Cameron

A very special celebration took place at Santon Downham on 12 March 2017, to acknowledge the achievements and success of this project which had been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, through the Breaking New Ground Landscape Partnership Scheme.

It was a wonderful day, exceptional in that so much had been achieved by enthusiastic volunteers. Following training in oral history interviewing, they had carried out interviews with retired foresters, to capture their memories of working in Thetford Forest and the changes to its management they had seen.

Working with retired Forestry Commission staff, volunteers had diligently sorted through hundreds of old photographs and identified people and places and organised material for archiving, all eventually impeccably co-ordinated and prepared for display by Victoria Tustian as project manager and Anne Mason in her consultant's role.

My personal interest in the project was because I am the daughter of a forester who had spent sixteen years of his long forestry career at Santon Downham and Brandon Park. He was devoted to the development and care of Thetford Forest before his posting to East Suffolk in 1956.



I took part in some of the early photo sorting and then in training to interview some of the people who were willing to record their recollections of the forest. I was privileged to interview five people, all with widely-differing experiences of working and living in the area and with fascinating recollections of practical conditions and employment in times past. No Health and Safety then, but camaraderie and resilience and tenacity.

The project is not only invaluable historically and informatively, but truly heart-warming, commemorating the dedicated work of so many people in past years to ensure the future of this much-loved forest.

Copies of 'The People's History of Thetford Forest', including abridged interviews, are available from [\(free of charge; no cost to pay\).](mailto:anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk)

The full text of the interviews is at:
<http://soundcloud.com/user-325911427>

JIM LYON RETIRES AS EAST DISTRICT'S FOREST MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR

On June 1st, Jim Lyon retires as East District's Forest Management Director and after a life-long career with the Forestry Commission.

A Tribute from Anne Mason – FoTF Chair

Jim spent 24 years working for FC Scotland across the country, beginning as a forest worker and then in education and training and forest management. In 1999 Jim came with his family to East Anglia, to take charge of the region's forests and woods, including Thetford Forest.

I remember meeting Jim in the very first week of his new post and co-incidentally it was my first week as a member of the FOTF Committee. We were both attending an environment panel meeting and there was little time to talk but he did tell me that he wanted to know more about 'the Friends'. I don't think either of us had even an inkling of how we would work together in the ensuing years to develop the close partnership that now exists between the Forestry Commission and FOTF.



Elizabeth Truss with FC's Operations Manager Gareth Jones and Forest District Manager Jim Lyon (centre)

The FOTF Committee meets every six weeks and Jim has attended these meetings whenever he can. He has explained new policies and procedures to us and informed us of any new projects, as well as encouraging us to invite other members of staff to a meeting, if a more detailed briefing has been required. In return, he has listened to our views and opinions and had open and frank discussions with us when we have not agreed with, or have had reservations, about an initiative. He has always treated our ideas with respect, endorsing most of them and giving sound reasons as to why others are not feasible.

Over the years, Jim has come to many of our events and always made it a priority to talk to members, especially at the AGMs. He has encouraged and praised our volunteers and consistently recognised the value of what they do.

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Above all, Jim has helped us grow in confidence, particularly in the six years since the government proposed selling off our Public Forest Estate and FOTF led the campaign against this in the East of England.

Whilst we are looking forward to establishing a close working partnership with the new Forest Management Director, Tristram Hilborn, FOTF will never forget Jim and all his steadfast and wonderful support.

THETFORD FOREST TAWNY OWL PROJECT

Over the last year or so, Friends Conservation volunteers have been building nest boxes for use in a British Trust for Ornithology Tawny Owl research project in Thetford Forest. During February and March, our volunteers were invited out by the BTO to see at first hand how the research was carried out. We asked Mike Toms of the BTO to explain more about the project.

How long has the Tawny Owl project been running and how long do you expect it run for?

The project started in 2015 with the forest wide survey of Tawny and Long-eared Owls. Although we are very much in the early stages of the project we want this to be a long-term study, running over many generations of owls and researchers.

What are the aims of the project?

This first phase is about building up a marked-population - the birds are fitted with a metal ring by licensed bird ringers - and encouraging the breeding pairs to use the nest boxes made by Friends of Thetford Forest volunteers. We'll begin to get a handle on where the breeding territories are located, which individuals occupy which territories and how their breeding success varies with where they are in the forest. Longer term, we'll look in more detail at nest box use - probably by using tiny tags that will tell us which birds enter which boxes and when - and at the ranging behaviour of the birds. We'll also be able to look at survival rates - nationally the survival rate of a first year Tawny Owl is 33%, increasing to 64% in its second year, and we want to find out if the birds using the forest show the same pattern.

How successful have the nest boxes been and what other species have been found in them?

Because the first batch of nest boxes was put up during the 2015-16 winter, we didn't expect to find breeding owls in our first season. This is because the owls breed very early - most pairs will be on eggs by the end of March - and our boxes went up too late for the owls to find them. However, most of the boxes were used by something, with Stock Dove the species most commonly encountered; we also had two occupied by Great Tit and two occupied by Mandarin Duck - the latter a non-native species that nests in tree cavities close to water.

What do you do with captured owls?

During the winter months we target the adult owls, using recordings of male and female calls to lure birds into a 'mist net'. New birds are fitted with a ring and then we take a series of measurements, including weight, wing length and hind claw length. These measurements help us to sex the birds - the two sexes look similar and although the females are, on average, bigger, there is a lot of overlap. The birds are then released close to where they were captured.

And any interesting owl facts!

Tawny Owls have been recorded catching goldfish in urban gardens and they are quite happy hunting on the ground, venturing onto lawns and grass on wet nights to feed on earthworms. Although the average life expectancy for a Tawny Owl is just four years - the longest we have on record for a wild bird is 21 years 10 months 24 days. Tawny Owls are highly sedentary in their habits, even the young only move a few kilometres from where they were born.



*A captured Tawny Owl,
pictured in red light to
protect its night vision.
Pic -Mike Tom*



*The mist net
being deployed
in the Forest at night.*

Do you have an idea of the number of Tawnys in Thetford Forest?

Is Thetford Forest a stronghold for them?

The forest-wide survey suggested a population in excess of 70 pairs but this might be an underestimate (owls are difficult to survey). Given that the forest covers something like 11,000 hectares, and that the average size of a Tawny Owl territory in coniferous woodland is roughly 50 hectares, the population could be more like 200 pairs. Our work will refine the estimate. The forest is important for Tawny Owls because they favour woodland and so the area can support more birds than would be the case if instead of forest there was farmland.

**Mildenhall Warren Lodge
and the Rex Graham Reserve
share an Open Day**

Sunday 28 May from 9.30am to 3.30pm

***View the 600 year-old Mildenhall Warren Lodge and learn
how rabbits were farmed for their meat and their fur.***



The warren lodge is situated in Mildenhall Woods, north of the Barton Mills Roundabout.

From the A1065, the minor road (on the left coming south from Brandon and on the right coming north from Barton Mills) is signed 'Household Waste Site. Turn here and drive past the Household Waste Site to the Forestry Commission car-parking area, signed as 'Mildenhall Warren Lodge' The Lodge is about ten minutes walk up the hill. Temporary signage will be on the A1065. Grid Ref TL735752.

Tel 01842 810271 or email info@fotf.org.uk

**Visit the Rex Graham Reserve nearby to see largest colony
of military orchids in Britain.**

**This is your annual opportunity to go inside the Lodge and
to see the orchids.**



The Rex Graham Reserve is situated at Ride 306 in Mildenhall Woods, on the A1101 towards Bury St Edmunds, off the five-ways roundabout at Barton Mills. Parking is via ride 306 and will be signed off A1101 on the open day (locked at all other times). There is a boardwalk and steep steps down to the pit and no dogs are allowed.

Grid ref: TL 737746.

Tel 01842 810271 or email info@fotf.org.uk

STORM DORIS

Clearing up at the Arboretum after Storm Doris' visit earlier in the year



As mentioned in the lead article, There was much damage to clear up to ensure everyone could still access the forest safely. Both FoTF and TIMBER groups were involved in moving the smaller debris , with FC bringing in machinery to move the larger bits – another example of FC and voluntary groups working together.



You can now follow us on Twitter

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

FOTF EVENTS IN 2017

Sunday 7 May Lynford Arboretum Tea Party to celebrate FOTF's 10 years involvement.

If you would like to attend, please email info@fotf.org.uk

Sunday 28 May Mildenhall Warren Lodge and Rex Graham Reserve Open Day 9.30am – 3.30pm.

The one day in the year when you can go inside the medieval warren lodge and also see two rare plants, the Military Orchid and the Breckland Mugwort in nearby locations, further details overleaf.

Tuesday 27 June and Tuesday 4 July Nightjar Evenings, King's Forest

8.30pm. An unforgettable experience as the summer dusk falls on the forest.

Meet at the Kings Forest Picnic Site Car Park on the B1106 Elveden to Bury Road (Grid Ref TL825748).

Thursday 27 July High Lodge Open Day, celebrating 25 years as the Forest Centre.

FOTF will be helping to welcome visitors on this event.

On Thursday 27 July, from 10am to 4pm, you will find a number of exciting things to do from meeting the Sled Dogs that train in the forest to the local wildlife groups as well as all the usual attractions which help make High Lodge an amazing place to visit. There will be plenty to see and do at this Open Day which will feature some newly-added attractions in celebration of its 25th year.

Tuesday 12 September STANTA Battle Area Visit 4.45pm – 9pm.

Coach visit free to **FOTF** members but booking essential.

Please email info@fotf.org.uk to reserve your places – two per member.

Details of all events will be on the **FOTF** website at least three weeks beforehand or can be obtained from info@fotf.org.uk specifying "Contact Us" in the subject box.

As well as these events, you can take part in Conservation Tasks on the third Sunday of every month 9am – 12.30pm or help at Lynford Arboretum on most Wednesday and Sunday mornings or check a walking trail or do the 'Meet and Greet' role at High Lodge.

To volunteer for, or to request more information about any of these FoTF volunteering opportunities, please email volunteering@fotf.org.uk.

Friends of Thetford Forest

Your current Committee

Anne Mason
Chair/ PFE
Campaign

Alan Spidy
Vice Chair / PFE
Campaign

Dave Goodrum Secretary
/newsletter + www /
Conservation

Katherine Jones
Volunteering Co-ordinator

Owen Moore
Lynford Arboretum

Benedict Maher

To Contact any of us:
info@fotf.org.uk
or 01953 601105

Dave Goodrum

Or you can visit our website at
www.fotf.org.uk
or

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