



Friends of Thetford Forest

AUTUM/WINTER 2019/20 NEWSLETTER No. 68

E-mail: info@fotf.org.uk

Welcome to our latest newsletter for the autumn and winter.

Forestry Centenary Day Event 31st August 2019

Friends' has a long tradition of running activities at Thetford Forest's Discovery Days. This year's event was rather different though as the Forestry Commission was celebrating its 100th anniversary and events were held throughout Forestry England recreation sites.

31st August brought out the crowds at High Lodge both local and visitors enjoying their summer holiday.



A giant birthday cake was shared at High Lodge to celebrate this momentous occasion – this picture is courtesy of High Lodge Facebook team page.



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



Friends' volunteers ran several interactive activities connected to the forest.

Displays included deer management and archaeology as well as popular craft activities which were all manned by Friends' volunteers.

Were you one of the young or not so young visitors to our craft table at the Centenary event?

Did you make one of the 24 wooden squirrels, 19 wooden owls or 24 wooden woodpeckers? We also made 35 dragonfly fridge magnets, 28 butterfly mobiles and lots of bird feeders using recycled materials.

Much fun was had by all, and it was really gratifying to see some of the effort the children put into the decoration of their models.

Images by Dave Goodrum



Some sad news from FoTF

It is with deep sadness that I have to report the recent deaths of two of our members: Charlie Cooper and Bob Greef.

Charlie and Denyse came to the 10 year celebratory party for Friends' management of Lynford Arboretum in 2017 and both immediately volunteered to help there. They took on the task of updating the database for the tree species in the Arboretum, not done for many years. Though they were guided by Forest Research's Chris Reynolds, it was Charlie's extensive knowledge of tree species and his meticulous attention to detail which enabled him to do this so expertly. His sudden illness meant that he was unable to complete his work – but we hope this might be possible, as a fitting memory of his dedication to the Arboretum and his love of trees.

Bob Greef joined FOTF 12 years ago and then became a Committee Member. In his professional life, he was a lecturer in countryside management and his abiding interest was the historic landscape, especially parkland and gardens. He contributed to recent books on these subjects and he and I enjoyed many conversations about the heritage of the forest. Some of you here tonight will remember his leading the Historic Parkland Workshop, along with Rachel Riley and myself, for the Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge Project.

For Friends, he helped with training at Lynford Arboretum and particularly enjoyed events such as Discovery Day when he could talk to visitors. He was such a source of wise advice at committee meetings, always courteous, thoughtful and considerate. He will be missed so very much. Our sympathy goes to the families of both Charlie and Bob.

Anne Mason, taken from the 2019 AGM report by the Chair.

Thank You Friends Volunteers!

So far in 2019 Friends of Thetford Forest volunteers have given over 3000 hours of their time to support the forest in a wide range of roles. There are many fun volunteering opportunities available, to suit a wide range of interests, so please take a look at our website at www.fotf.org.uk or email us at volunteering@fotf.org.uk for more info.

For regular volunteers there are benefits after a qualifying period, currently for example you can get a membership pass for Thetford Forest after 35 hours in a 12 month period.

At High Lodge, volunteers have been regularly checking walking trails and greeting visitors. The archaeology group has also gone from strength to strength investigating

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the farmhouse site. One-off events have also been supported, such as the Centenary Event in August where we gave over 60 hours interacting with visitors and running children's activities. The concert series in June was also supported by 292 hours of walkway management, disabled car park marshalling, and running the arena information stand.

In the wider forest there are groups which allow you to dip in and out or volunteer regularly, whichever you prefer. Over 1000 hours of volunteering time has been spent looking after the fabulous Lynford Arboretum. This group meets on Wednesdays and every other Sunday in the morning, and is always looking for more volunteers, so if you would like to do some "gardening on a grand scale" in a beautiful environment come along and give it a try!



The conservation group, meeting on the third Sunday of the month, is also going strong with over 450 hours so far in 2019, and many other activities such as walking trail checking, and monitoring archaeological sites need volunteers too.

Some happy Conservation Volunteers

Future Forest Art Installation at High Lodge

Recently we were invited to attend the launch of the art installation at High Lodge as FoTF was one of the contributors to the funding of the project.

David & Sally Goodrum attended on behalf of Friends and were made welcome by a member of the FE Centenary team on arrival, when we were served coffee.

Once everyone had arrived, there were speeches from a number of the people involved, and the group was split into 2 sections for a walk around the trail, each led



by one of the artists involved Tom Piper and Lisa Wright – we were with Lisa who gave us a detailed look into her ideas behind each of the six installations which will be on display until mid 2020.

Lisa giving the group an insight into the third installation which is named The Three Graces.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOWNHAM HALL ESTATE 1917-1924

© John Rayment 2019

The year was 1917, when the small village of Santon Downham was introduced to the 126th Canadian Forestry Corps; it was a small party of officers & men doing a survey of the trees on the estate with a view to extracting any suitable trees putting them through a saw mill & using the processed timber for the war effort. It was also necessary to find a site for the mill & to find a route for a light gauge railway system to bring the felled trees to it with a standard gauge siding connection to the Great Eastern main line.

Once all this had been established, more Officers NCO's & men gradually moved to the village from Ampthill in Bedfordshire where they had been carrying out the same operation on the Ampthill Estate, by this time the Hall at Downham had been requisitioned from the Mackenzie family who had previously run the estate mainly as a shooting estate for pheasant & game. Edward Mackenzie was a Scottish banker & railway entrepreneur who had worked with his brother William, John Stephenson, & Thomas Telford, all engineers in their own fields to build the first canals & railways in England Scotland & France.



On retiring Edward bought Fawley Court in Buckinghamshire then extending his property portfolio by buying Downham Hall in 1883 as his shooting estate. On his death this then passed onto his son William Dalziel Mackenzie who made improvements to the Hall, Estate & buying a further property known as Croxton Park near Thetford. As time went by the Canadians settled into the hall & made

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various alterations to suit their requirements, one was to install electricity & facilities for the men's entertainment this became the Y M C A club which at a later date moved into a purpose built timber hut & had its own performing artistic group known as the Woodpeckers.

Every man was expected to pay a subscription for his entertainment & drinks bill, as a result in having this facility local families were invited to come to some of the evening events. During the course of this one particular family reciprocated by inviting some of the young men to come to their house for suppers, Mrs Carter was a good motherly cook so these meals went down very well with the young men who were far from their homes, pleasant conversations sing songs also went down well. Eventually one of these young men became attracted to one of the daughters Janetta & she to him this was carried out under the watchful eyes of Mr Carter, eventually William Lenny proposed but before a wedding could take place William decided once he was demobbed from the Army he would stay here in England & would set up in partnership with a friend & start a photographic business in London, if things went well financially he would invite Janetta to join him. Times were hard after the war so Read & Lenny could not make a go of it William on moving back to Downham married Janetta in February 1920 at St Mary's Church with the entire Carter members present.

A guard of honour was formed after the ceremony outside the Church by members of the estate being Gamekeepers warreners & hall staff. The happy couple settled down in the village with William finding work as a freelance commercial artist with some work coming from people he had dealings with in London. He also became involved with the construction of two Canadian log style houses which were built on land occupied by trees at the top of Thetford Road Brandon adjacent to the Santon Downham turn off, these became the homes of Mr & Mrs Woods to be known as the Chalet latter occupied by the Thorpe family Mr Thorpe being a market gardener on the site. The Second home was slightly bigger with a Small cottage at the back of the site for staff a Captain Joseph Ackroyd Whitaker first purchased this house; he was the son of Richard Whitaker who started the Cock of the North Brewery in Halifax West Yorkshire.

Joseph as a young man joined the 1st Battalion of The Duke of Wellingtons West Riding Regiment in 1900 & went out to South Africa during the Boer War transferring to the 1st Battalion of the regulars seeing action in all the major battles rising through the ranks to be discharge in 1906. He then joined his father's business as a director & in 1911 I think he was introduced to Suffolk by a friend, he eventually moved to Santon Downham & then bought the house built by Major Kenny's Downham Syndicate & Construction Company on the Thetford Road in Brandon known as Kenilworth. He became church warden to St Mary's church in Downham &

when he died in 1952 his wife Alethea bequeathed money to the church for the installation of electric lighting. In the church there is an oak plaque bearing these details.

Mr Basil Rought – Rought & his wife then bought the property & when they moved in re named it Viking Lodge, Mr Rought being one of three brothers of whom took over the running of the family business of their fathers W Rought- Rought Hatters Furriers based in George Street Brandon with a smaller factory in the north of England, these were businesses taking in rabbit skins from home sources & abroad. The skins would be cleaned graded & dried the fur then being stripped off & sent to manufactures of felt hats in Luton.

Janetta now Mrs Lenny & William also became involved with the local amateur dramatic society known as the Brighter Brandon Company with Janetta looking after the wardrobe & making some of the costumes, William using his artistic skills to design & make the stage sets .Flo Jannetta's sister married another of the Forest Corps by the name of Frank Hawkins & settled down locally.



Major Kenny – source unknown and supplied

After the war had finished the 126th Canadian Forestry Corps were disbanded some of the boys returned to their home towns in Canada & the USA others volunteered to stay on as did William Lenny & of course Major Kenny the commanding officer who established the Downham Syndicate & Construction Company, under his Directorship the operation was acquired from the Board of Trade.

The 126th Corps was considered to be one of the best operations set up by the Canadian Forestry Forces during their time during the war, before the war he was an employee of J R Booth a lumber tycoon who controlled some of the largest timber rights in Central Ontario Canada & operated the largest mill in the world on Chaudiere Island in the middle of the Ottawa river in Ottawa with its own docks for shipping processed timber to many countries around the world, he also built the Canadian Atlantic Railway & was known as one of the fathers of Canada helping to establish the new capital of Ottawa, so all excellent experience for major Kenny.

At Downham Hall a total of 1400 cubic feet of timber was harvested & converted into 200,000 lengths suitable for the making of material for war use. The total labour involved was approximately 180 officers & men of the 126th Corps & included 250 German prisoners of war of who were billeted in a purpose built camp on the site of

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the present community hall, all using two Canadian mills to machine everything up, one of these mills was on the site where the Creosote Plant used to be adjacent to the Great Eastern Railway line, now of course a part of British Rail Network, a siding was installed from this to allow for supplies to come in & timber to be dispatched out.



*Possible route of the narrow-gauge railway
courtesy Andy Carter.*

The operation had utilised the iron bridge across the Little Ouse river to enable its own narrow gauge railway to run from the siding for seven miles through the estate to High Lodge & a branch to Little Lodge Farm which utilized 3 No Bagnall 0-4-0 ST steam engines that ran on a 3ft gauge track, these hauled timber bolster wagons from the loading places along its route, a number of heavy draught horses were employed to haul the logs from the felling areas to these points & to haul wagons on other duties, other transport included 1 motor lorry & one car.

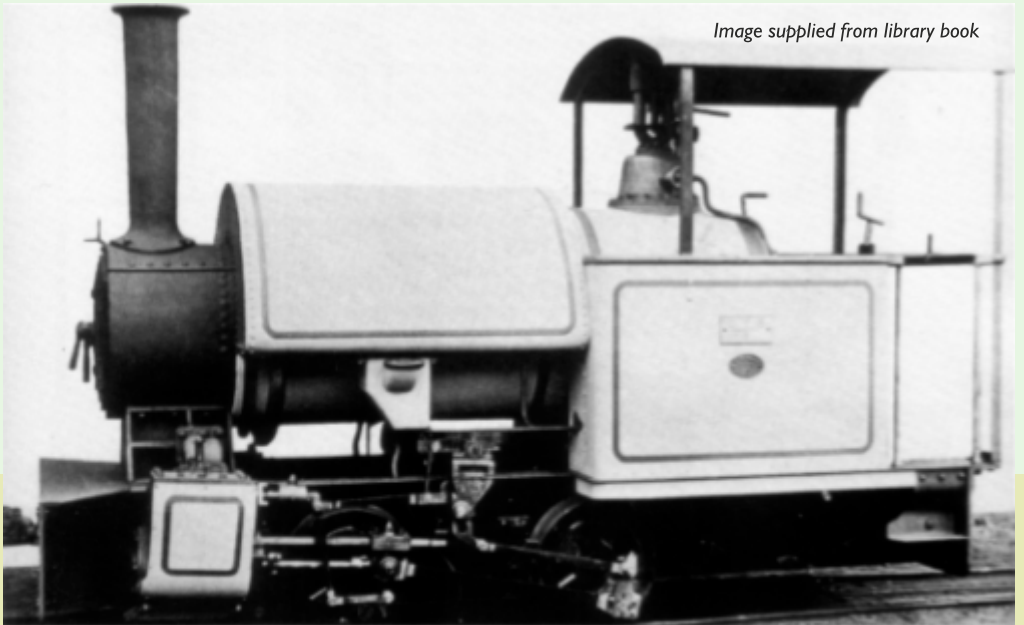


Image supplied from library book

A picture of a Bagnall 0-4-0 St engine possibly of the very same model as used by the Canadian Forestry Corps at the Downham Estate

The construction side of this new business built 4 houses in total in Brandon as show houses two of which are mentioned at the beginning of this story the others may have been at Rattlers Road & London Road the thinking behind this was that it would take off & the company could expand utilizing timber from other estates but unfortunately it did not mainly because of the style of houses so eventually the company wound up & everything was sold off.



Viking Lodge Cottage built in the grounds of Viking Lodge by the Downham Syndicate & Construction Company

This picture taken in 1960 when Mr & Mrs Ned Elmer lived there.

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Image supplied John Rayment



The house Major Kenny's Company built for Captain Whitaker with the picture showing Mrs Pamela Rought - Rought with her niece in 1963 the rear view, a drive came in to the front of the house through double gates from the Thetford Road with a circular turning of large proportions when the Whitakers lived here but Mr Rought closed the entrance & used a track along the Brandon town side to enter the large property.

Although the Downham Syndicate had the timber rights after the war the estate passed into the hands of a series of land speculators after the government put the land up for sale, but was then bought back in & it became under the control of the Forestry Commission so this year 2019 the Commission will have reached its Centenary as it was formed in 1919.

My interest in this history all began when I was a school boy as I had the opportunity to work for Mr Basil Rought – Rought for two years before I left school, mornings & evenings looking after the chickens, boilers in the house & cutting the grass Saturday mornings in the summer & other jobs in the winter, joining Friends of Thetford Forest which lead onto the Heritage Lottery Funded project about the History of Santon Downham & High Lodge covering the Canadians 126th Forestry Corps & Railway system they installed.

During the time that I spent at the various workshops that were sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund, one such workshop covered the Downham Estate. We all received an archival record document No RG12/2010 by the Forestry Commission & within it I noted in 1891 a Richard Dickerson aged 67 a Warrener had one Alfred Adams aged 19 living with him in his cottage & he is also down as a Warrener. From my searches into my paternal ancestors I think I can safely say that he was my

grandfather. This was during the time that the Mackenzies owned the estate & I think that Alfred's daughter Louie also worked at the Hall before she emigrated to America.

In later years my mother also worked on the estate in about 1939 at this time a lot of the trees had been planted by the Forestry Commission & had become established as I was told she did some brashing work. Bob Levett was the Ganger at High Lodge & I believe he did this until he retired so he must have seen the filming of Dads Army.

The Final Report: Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge

The all-weather, multi-user trail was formally opened by the Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk, Lady Claire, Countess of Euston on 19th July 2019, to coincide with the centenary year of Forestry England. The 4.2 kilometre trail has a smooth surface, with benches and rest perches at 100 metre intervals and two shelters.

It is accessible to everyone, offers short cuts at 1km and 3kms, and is suitable for families, less experienced cyclists and those with access limitations.



Image courtesy Imogen Radford

An interactive touch screen monitor at the start of the trail uses photographs, maps and text to explain how the landscape has been used and changed over time. Audio recordings made by Forestry England staff tell the story of the heritage features along the trail. Interpretation Panels in the two shelters illustrate the seasonal highlights of plant, bird and animal life and the work of the foresters, as well as the current challenges that Forestry England faces in balancing the needs of timber production with those of wildlife, archaeology and recreation.

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The webpages on the Friends of Thetford Forest website, at <https://highlodgeheritage.fotf.org.uk> presents a comprehensive insight into the heritage of High Lodge with the information researched and compiled by volunteers. The webpages will be updated as new information comes to light.

The volunteers who attended the activities and received training and then used their research and investigative skills for the benefit of the project have been truly remarkable. They have contributed to the content of the interpretation and the learning materials and it is entirely because of their efforts that so much has been discovered about the historic landscape of High Lodge.



Already, the project is attracting interest from other Forestry England Districts and is being seen as an exemplar for engaging visitors with heritage on the Public Forest Estate.

Anne Mason
Project Manager.



Walk the Trail and Picnic Evening with FoTF



After the official opening on 19 July 2019, members of Friends of Thetford Forest and Forestry England staff, past and present, gathered to enjoy the trail on the gloriously warm and still evening of 23 July. Oak Lodge provided the setting for picnics on the grass afterwards.



25 Years of Friends of Thetford Forest 1995 – 2020

Next year, Friends of Thetford Forest will have been in existence for 25 years and we'd like to celebrate what we've achieved during that time and acknowledge the contributions made by past and present members.

As members, we need your ideas on how we should mark this milestone --- maybe for special events; workshops such as photography or art; time with foresters learning about the wildlife or seeing forest operations?

Please email your suggestions to us on this address - info@fotf.org.uk

The Farmstead at High Lodge.



Image courtesy Imogen Radford

The foundations and walling you can see in this photo were part of the farmstead at High Lodge from the 1800s to the 1970s.

Maps dating from 1675 and archival records from the 1400s provide evidence for a warren at High Lodge in which rabbits were farmed for their meat and their fur and were managed by a warrener. By 1800, records show that arable and livestock farming was taking over from farming rabbits.

A farmstead replaced the warren lodge and newspaper adverts for tenants tell us more about the buildings; and we are fortunate to have found a copy in some archives:

Text taken from Bury and Norwich Post 1809

To be let for a term of years and entered upon at Lady Day next, a farm in Santon Downham called the High Lodge, consisting of a comfortable dwelling-house, a garden wait'd in, a good barn, stable. granary and outhouses and about 1200 acres of land, which have hitherto been used as a warren.

And in 1828 it was again to let: The farm-house has just undergone thorough repair, and is well adapted for the residence of a very respectable family.

It was difficult to grow crops on such dry, sandy soil though there was enough pasture for eight hundred sheep.

After the First World War, the tenanted farms were described as 'derelict and untenanted' and were included in the sale of the Downham Estate to the Forestry Commission in 1922.

The farmhouse and its outbuildings were still standing in 1947 when they are shown on a photograph taken from the fire tower, but they were demolished before 1980.



Members Friends of Thetford Forest are continuing to investigate the site and will be producing a written report by Spring 2020.

Friends of Thetford Forest

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