

Celebrating
25 years



Friends of Thetford Forest

Newsletter #70 / 2020 / Autumn / Winter Edition

W e l c o m e

Winter Edition



This Newsletter's cover shows Autumn trees at Mildenhall Warren Lodge

Your Current Committee

Anne Mason
Chair

Alan Spidy
Treasurer/Membership Secretary

Dave Goodrum
Secretary/Conservation

Katherine Jones
Volunteering Co-ordinator

Owen Moore

Clare Tough

As you will be aware from our mail shots over the last few months, we have been limited to online communications, both for the committee and with yourselves, our members. However a great deal of effort has gone into preparing for the return of our regular volunteering groups, in a manner that is safe in the current CV19 situation which looks like it will certainly affect at the very least our upcoming Winter and Spring schedules.

L o g o

The front cover of this magazine shows the full-size version of our new logo, depicting some of the many activities that take place in Thetford Forest.

It is based on the original version that we have been using for nearly 25 years on all our literature.



Friends of
Thetford Forest

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An Introduction

Hello!
I'm Alex Brearley,
the new Forest
Management
Director for East
England Forest
District.



I took up position in March this year, in fact on the same day we went into lockdown, so I haven't had the opportunity to meet the Friends of Thetford Forest in person... yet!

Although I have come from the private sector, I have a long history with the District, having started my career at Santon Downham in 2001 as a Forester.

I was promoted in 2004 to lead the Thames Beat in Upminster, although remaining under the leadership of Jim Lyon in what was then East Anglia Forest District.

In 2008 I moved out to British Columbia, Canada for a year working on land reclamation projects, before returning in 2009 to set up my own consultancy. I was fortunate to hold several contracts with Forestry England in my private sector role, working with both the East England Forest District and national teams. I have passed on the leadership of my own company to a new Managing Director, which has allowed me to take

up this exciting position as Forest Management Director.

We have some significant challenges and opportunities ahead of us, particularly around Forest Resilience in the Thetford block. We will see long term changes in the way the forest is managed to ensure we have a sustainable and value environmental, recreational and timber resource for this and future generations.

The Friends have been such a strong advocate of the forest and I am looking forward to working and engaging with you on these future changes and opportunities. Recent months has demonstrated how important the forest is to our communities, as more people than ever before have headed out into their natural environment.

As soon as this devastating virus has passed, I look forward to meeting you all in person, hearing about your thoughts for the future of the forest, and discussing how we can continue and enhance our strong working relationship.

Stay safe and enjoy the forest!

Alex Brearley FMD

FoTF welcomes Alex to the role of FMD and looks forward to the day when we can meet in person rather than just by phone or email.

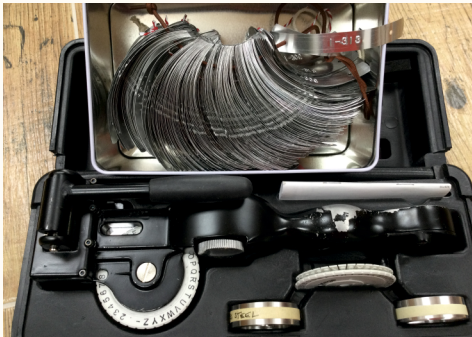
Tree Tagging at Lynford Arboretum

Anyone visiting Lynford Arboretum will know it has a lot of trees, open spaces and wildlife. But maybe not all visitors will know it is also an important research site for Forestry England.

The existing and newly planted trees are monitored to check their growth rate and health. This is to see how they cope in the dry Breckland landscape and withstand the ever-increasing number of pests and diseases.

In order to do this, all the trees are on a database. Having been checked and updated as described in a previous newsletter, it was now time for each tree to have a new numbered tag as many had been lost or become unreadable.

So just how many trees are there in the Arboretum? Well, it turns out the Arboretum's divided into 12 sections and in the first 6 there are 937 trees.



I had volunteered to make the tags prior to knowing just how many there were.

Having put off the task for a while, lockdown hit us all, so with boredom and the time it became a useful job to do from home.

The wheel on the printing machine must be moved for each individual character.

So, the tree tag 1-1 took 3 separate movements to complete, and yes, halfway through I did wonder why I had volunteered.

However, it is very satisfying seeing them all finished.

The next task is for a team of volunteers to attach the right tag to the right tree, but that is another story...

Clare Tough

New Play Equipment

at High Lodge

This September High Lodge was excited to open its new Working Forest play equipment, which has replaced the Bell Tower in the Sound Trail.

The new equipment, which **The Friends of Thetford Forest kindly made a financial donation towards**, was designed by **Green Play Project**, and cleverly tells the story of the working forest.

The story begins as you wind your way through the Plantation Trees, where you can find your favourite stick and sound out the chimes. Then clamber around the Fallen Landscape, which is the forest scene after trees have been felled or fallen over due to windblow.



Next is the log stack, which normally you must keep off, but this one has been especially designed for you to climb up, over or even through!



The crane is used to load the timber trailer, but our crane is a super swirly nest swing! Finally, climb up onto the Timber Trailer's big wheels and race pinecones down the ramps!



We love that this piece is accessible and helps to tell the story of the working forest.

Thank you very much to The FoTF for enabling us to increase the budget to deliver the 'wow' centrepiece we felt the sound trail deserved.

Helen Winter, Recreation Ranger.

Corporate Members

As Chair of FOTF, I have the very rewarding task of being the main contact for our corporate members and so I'd like to give a special 'thank you' to them for their continuing support in this very difficult year.

Despite not being able to enjoy the benefits of two complimentary tickets and a picnic at the concerts and their passes for entry when High Lodge was closed, all have renewed their subscriptions and been very understanding.

The corporate membership scheme is important because it provides us with income from subscriptions and it is an opportunity for local businesses to visit the forest and to enjoy learning more about it.

Anne Mason

Our Corporate Members receive these benefits:

- two complimentary tickets with a picnic hamper for a High Lodge summer
- concert of your choice
- a further ten tickets at a 10% discount
- four complimentary site entry passes for High Lodge Centre (car registration system for employees only)
- a special annual event to learn more about the forest.
- a Christmas Tree
- publicity in the twice-yearly newsletter and at High Lodge Centre

Membership is £ 300 annually

If you would like to become a Corporate Member, please contact the Chair at information@fotf.org.uk



Conservation Group



It has now been 7 months since we last met in March at Mildenhall for what turned out to be our last event, rather than the start of the Spring jobs that we undertake.

We recently started a conversation with FE to establish which sites had suffered the most from a lack of attention this year and are now heading towards a plan for when we are permitted to start our work again.

We also have just sent out a revised version of our welfare form (to cover

the CV19 aspects) to all our registered volunteers, (and a pleasingly large number of people who have contacted us over the last few months), and we can now see we have some solid foundations to work from, but we are always looking for more enthusiastic helpers of any age.

Please see the inside back page for further details on what can offer to our volunteers, and how to join us.



Heritage Discovery

Earlier this year, as Spring arrived and brought some warm sun and fine weather, I was out and about on foot and on my bicycle exploring the west side of Brandon Warren. It is an area that I had not really taken much interest in previously though there is much to see and a great deal of history to learn and try to unravel too. The warren and parish banks can be followed almost all of the way along Fire Route 4, crossing Shaker's Road, on through the Goshawk Trail, around Spink's Lodge,

crossing the A1106 Bury Road, finally intersecting with the southernmost tip of Downham Highlodge Warren and its shared banks at Mother Quay's Corner.



I travelled up and down Fire Route 4 many times in those warm and sunny weeks and I was aware of passing an area of clearfell where there were a number of old, dead trees still standing as is typical of such clearings but one of these caught my eye as it looked much too straight to be a tree so I took a closer look. It was made of concrete, had a large service or access chamber at the base, metal ladder rests at about 4m and climbing pegs most of the rest of way to the top and there were some rusting reinforcing rods protruding from its shattered top. Looking through binoculars across the clearfell there appeared to be another two similar posts with the top of one

more visible over the trees in an adjacent plantation block.

My first thought was that they might be old lighting standards surrounding a long disused compound, perhaps dating from WWII or the early days of RAF Lakenheath.

It was not until I was at home and had plotted their locations that I realised they were in line with the current landing lights.

A few emails were exchanged with other FOTF members and replies came back suggesting that lines of them could be made out on old aerial photos of the area and somewhere close by there were stacks of them along with broken concrete and demolished buildings.

A while later, out walking with a friend along a path towards the remains of the Grange, we came across a pile of these concrete columns, laid alongside their excavated and broken bases and a considerable amount of broken brickwork and masonry.

Another FOTF member remembered the lights being in place having spent some time working at Wangford Hall Farm in the early 60s, looking after cattle, some of which grazed where the lights stood.

Some of us considered that these concrete columns, as remains of the early RAF Lakenheath, were an important part of the history and heritage of the area, even though they were

comparatively recent, and that some note should be made of them, at least of the locations and condition of those remaining at this time.

In June 2020 I submitted a report on the standing columns through the FOTF Archaeology Monitoring Scheme and I was pleased to receive notification soon after that these four landing light columns have been recorded and included in the Forestry Commission's heritage dataset.

Andy Carter.

Anne Mason added: This discovery and subsequent report by Andy shows how important the FOTF Archaeology Monitoring Scheme is to the historic landscape of Thetford Forest.



Not only do volunteers record the condition of sites on an annual visit, but they find new sites and put them forward for protection too. If you would like to be part of this scheme, please email us at volunteering@fotf.org.uk

S a n t o n D o w n h a m

The Bridge

Photographs of Santon Downham bridge, crossing the Little Ouse river between Norfolk and Suffolk will be instantly recognisable to many in East Anglia and beyond given its unusual construction and appearances in episodes of the TV series 'Dad's Army'.

Several members of FOTF and others involved in the 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge' Project (funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund) became interested in researching the history of the bridge and its significant role in the early days of Thetford Forest and the Forestry Commission



Common narrative suggests that the bridge was erected by the Canadian Army for the Home Grown Timber Board during the First World War in order to transport felled timber by light railway from various parts of the woodlands then standing in the High Lodge area to sawmills and main line sidings adjacent to the nearby Santon Downham level crossing.

One weekend a number of us assembled at Santon Downham and walked through the village to look for the route of the light railway to High Lodge. We did not come across anything to suggest that we had found the actual route of the railway used in the logging operations. However, a significant event that day was that we were shown a sepia postcard of the bridge, with its stamp franked 1913, belonging to a Santon Downham resident Image: Santdowndownham.org



The 126th Company of the Canadian Forestry Corps did not arrive in Santon Downham until 27th July 1918 having moved down from similar operations in Amptill, Bedfordshire. Locomotives were not ordered until 13th November, two days after the Armistice was signed. So, it seems that the bridge cannot have been erected by the Canadians, hence the need for research.

We found that there has been a bridge at Santon Downham for some years.

'The river Ouse hath these bridges at Euston, at Thetford, at Downham, and Brandon.'

Suffolk in the XVIIth century: the Breviary of Suffolk (1618), Reyce, Robert, -1638

In 1677 the Right Honourable Henry, Earl of Arlington who lived at Euston Hall, took on the works of straightening and deepening the Little Ouse channel and acquired the rights to the tolls once the navigation was completed.

The Bury and Norwich Post of Tuesday, 2nd July 1878 reported.

A Meeting of the Thetford Navigation Commissions was held on Tuesday morning last, at the Guildhall, Thetford for the purpose of altering or varying the tolls upon the Thetford Navigation. Mr. Mackenzie drew the attention of the meeting to the need for a pier to support the centre of his bridge over the river at Santon Downham. There was a central span of 40 feet, and he thought a pier might be erected as a support. The Clerk remarked that the objection to this had been that a pier would produce silting, adding that the question was one to be dealt with by the Council and the managers of the Navigation.

Documents held in the Buckinghamshire Archives, Fawley Court Records dated towards the end of the 1880s record that some works had been done and enquiries sent out regarding works to and replacement of the bridge.

It does not appear that a replacement was installed or much in the way of improvement works carried out as The Bury Free Press of Saturday 13th November 1889 reports:

Quarterly meeting of the Town Council was held on Tuesday.

Towing Path – A letter from Mr. Downie of Santon Downham, called the attention to the dangerous state of the towing-path near Mr. Mackenzie's private bridge of the river, was read and the Clerk instructed to write calling upon Mr. Mackenzie to attend to it at once without further delay, also stating that the bridge

itself is in a dangerous condition, and that it must not fall so as to impede the navigation on the river.



We ran out of any definite and dated information at this point but we do know that the connecting plates used are embossed “Stockton MI Co”, these from the Stockton Malleable Iron Works opened in 1860, relocated in 1889.

We have seen a copy of a drawing of the bridge and sketches of locations of sawmills made by the Canadians.

In 1920 the Brandon RDC Minute Book records:

10th September 1920 Met at Santon Downham; In attendance Mr. A. G. Read, secretary to Major Kenny.

The question of repair of the road leading from river bridge to the Thetford-Brandon Roads was discussed.

It was found that the road was in a very bad state of repair and that a light railway had been placed on the road, near to and over the bridge.

The Council was prepared to allow the railway to remain on the road as at present for a few months longer on condition that Major Kenny accepted liability in respect of all damage caused by such construction.

In 1994 West Suffolk Council submitted a planning application for demolition and reconstruction of the bridge at Santon Downham. Fortunately, this application was withdrawn.

So next time you walk, cycle, or drive over the bridge, you will know more about its history and its survival.

To find out more about the Downham Estate and the Railway, please go to <https://highlodgeheritage.fotf.org.uk/>

Written by Andy Carter, with main research by John Rayment, helped by Clive Scott, John Bowes, Tim Bridge and Anne Mason.

Direct Production

Harvesting Update

2020 has been a challenging year, and the abundance of new guidelines and restrictions we have all had to adapt to because of the Covid pandemic have led to many working practices being altered to maintain a steady flow of timber from Thetford Forest throughout the year.

Forestry staff have responded to these challenges excellently and since the first nationwide lockdown in March, have worked continuously to ensure timber has been harvested and extracted to roadside for our customers throughout the country.



March saw the arrival of two new additions to the harvesting fleet as we replaced both a harvester and a forwarder which have been in continual service for the last five years.

Our new Komatsu 931 Harvester and John Deere 1510 Forwarder took the long trip down to Thetford from Cumbria just before the nationwide restrictions started to take hold.

They have been in continual service since, allowing the team to take advantage of some of the newest technology available in forestry operations.

Alongside the larger forestry machines, we have been putting our new Mini-Forwarder, the Alstor 833, through its paces. This has been an invaluable tool on harvesting sites with important heritage and conservation features as we have been able to take advantage of the significantly lower weight and ground pressure in comparison with the main fleet machines.

Its compact nature allows us to move this machine with a 4x4 and trailer into areas unsuitable for larger machines, and deal with trickier and more intricate timber extraction operations.



Finally, as well as the arrival of new machines, we have also taken on two Trainee Machine Operators, and whilst it has certainly not been the easiest of years to start a new job, they have quickly become important members of the Direct Production team.

Whilst restrictions on travel and training led to many planned courses being cancelled and rescheduled, with tuition from our more experienced operators both have now progressed onto operating Forwarders full time, and are expected to progress onto the Harvester in the New Year.

Scott Osborne Forest Ops

Working from Home

Since the start of April, over 200 hours of “volunteering from home” have been completed to keep Friends of Thetford Forest running, and prepare for a return to volunteering. Since the re-opening of High Lodge, memberships of FoTF through the High Lodge membership pass have re-started along with the accompanying administration. Annual High Lodge entry passes for volunteers who had completed 35 hours of volunteering in the year to March were organised ready for the site re-opening, with the assistance of FE staff. The monthly treasurer reports have continued to be compiled to ensure we continue to keep track of our finances, and grant applications prepared to help maintain the position of FoTF at this challenging time.

To prepare for a return to volunteering, the committee have continued their regular committee meetings online from home; new risk assessments have been written, logistics discussed with FE, additional equipment such as gloves have been sourced so volunteers will not have to share, and hand sanitiser purchased. The committee has ensured that once we have the go-ahead from the government and FE, we will be ready from our side to get going! Alongside these tasks a new volunteer database has been written to more easily track welfare forms and volunteer hours, this newsletter has been prepared, and nearly 1000 tree tags are ready to go for Lynford arboretum. We have also been spending our time researching potential future projects, so watch this space.

Katherine Jones



*Found on a walk at Brandon Heath
Alan Spidy*

In future issues of the newsletter we hope to feature articles and images from our members on this page. Please send them to us at: newsletters@fotf.org.uk

V o l u n t e e r i n g

We offer lots of opportunities – and they all come with the appropriate training:

Checking the Walking Trails.

Monitoring the condition of the various walking trails at High Lodge and in Thetford Forest generally so that they are safe from hazards and litter-free, on a monthly basis.

Looking after Lynford Arboretum.

Carrying out day-to-day maintenance of the Arboretum at Mundford, including tree-planting and looking after the shrub layer, two to four mornings a month.

Conservation.

Enhancing habitats for rare plants and animals “somewhere” in Thetford Forest, under the guidance of the Forestry Commission’s East of England Ecologist, on the third Sunday of every month.

Archaeology.

Monitoring the condition of archaeological sites annually and investigating and caring for archaeological sites within the Forest, as and when required.

High Lodge

Having seasonal work parties to support maintenance of the Heritage Trail and High Lodge in general; helping at the concerts and at special events.

Please email volunteering@fotf.org.uk for further information.

Please note that all volunteers will be required to complete a welfare form and comply with the risk assessments and safety guidance.

REGRETFULLY, AFTER THIS ISSUE WAS PREPARED THE PAUSE IN OUR VOLUNTEERING IS SET TO BE IN EXTENDED UNTIL AT LEAST THE BEGINNING OF DECEMBER 2020, DEPENDING ON THE LOCKDOWN RULES IN PLACE.



With thanks to all of our corporate members for helping us increase understanding and enjoyment of Thetford Forest, and helping us to fund various projects.



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Waitrose

Corporate members receive many benefits from the Friends of Thetford Forest. If you are interested in becoming a corporate member, please see full details at www.fotf.org.uk

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Office 4, Keystone Innovation Centre,
Thetford, Norfolk. IP24 1JD

www.spcprinters.co.uk

Tel: 01842 775002

email: sales@spcprinters.co.uk