

**100 YEARS**  
of Thetford Forest

Special Edition



**Friends of Thetford Forest**

*Newsletter #73 / 2022 / Summer/Autumn Edition*

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# W e l c o m e

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*Summer and Autumn Edition*

**Welcome to this special issue which contains many articles to celebrate the centenary of the creation of Thetford Forest.**

Many of these images and information are from the FE archives and are reproduced with its permission and where known, the credits for the images are shown.

We hope that you enjoy reading and looking at the history of our local forest, and are able to visit High Lodge in person where there is a display documenting the entire period of this history.

There is a small collection of images from these archives on the next page where the location is unknown, and we would appreciate any thoughts you might have on them – emails to [info@fotf.org.uk](mailto:info@fotf.org.uk), and please show the subject as 'location ideas', thank you.

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## **Your Current Committee**

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Katherine Jones  
*Volunteering Co-ordinator*

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*Arboretum*



**Friends of  
Thetford Forest**



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These local photographs were taken by District Officer Mr R G Forbes in the late 1920s and 1930s but the locations were not recorded. Can anyone suggest where ?



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# Thetford Forest Celebrates its Centenary

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One hundred years ago this year, the Forestry Commission began to buy up the land for the planting of Thetford Forest to help replenish the nation's timber resources devastated by the demands of the First World War.



The first purchase was a small area near Swaffham and then 1,275 hectares of the Elveden Estate as leasehold. In 1923, the Downham, Lynford and Beachamwell Estates were bought, followed by Methwold in 1924; parts of Cockley Cley (leasehold), Croxton and Didlington in 1925; Weeting in 1926 and Mildenhall in 1934.

Estate owners were often eager to sell, given the poor nature of the land and their finances. By 1935, the Forestry Commission was the largest landowner in East Anglia.



The establishment of the forest brought employment opportunities and by 1939 there were nearly five hundred forest workers. Many were given a cottage and a piece of land varying in extent from one to ten acres as well as being guaranteed a minimum 150 days' work each year.



Santon Downham became 'the foresters' village' and by 1931 there were 353 people living there, whereas in 1901 there had been only 93.

The Forestry Commission built detached

houses for the 'officers' and semi-detached for the 'workers', reflecting the military-based organisational structure where 'orders' were issued down through the 'chain of command'.



When World War Two began, foresters joined up so the Women's Land Army came to Thetford Forest, with a training camp set up at Wordwell. Known as 'Lumberjills', there were 228 full-time and 29 part-time volunteers who took over all the forestry work from clearing the undergrowth, working in the nurseries and planting out the seedlings to thinning the plantations.



Being far from the coast and possible immediate invasion, Thetford Forest and neighbouring estates were chosen as army training areas. Nissen huts for the troops were concealed within plantations, hidden from enemy aircraft and officers were billeted in Cockley Cley and Didlington Halls. Santon Downham became an ammunition depot, away from the main centres of population. The Royal Engineers guarded the roads into the village and residents were given identity cards.

In 1947, Lynford Hall became a training school for foresters, recruiting ex-servicemen to work for the Forestry Commission. Many planted the specimen trees that became Lynford Arboretum.

By the early 1950s, the plantations of Scots and Corsican Pine were being carefully managed to ensure that the maximum volume of timber was produced.

Brushing took place when the trees were sixteen to twenty years old, trimming off all the branches to a height of six feet (just under two metres).

Every four years, plantations were thinned out to give the best trees more space and air to develop to maturity and all the misshapen or damaged trees were removed. Thinning was very labour-intensive, on a rotational system for the compartments across the whole forest. Gangs of foresters cutting down the grasses and bracken around the trees, using only reap hooks and sickles.



It was only in the 1970s that the plantations established in 1920s and 1930s reached maturity and could be felled, using saws and axes. The smaller timber was taken out by hand and lifted onto the waiting lorries. The larger trunks were dragged out by tractor and a grapple was used to hoist them onto the lorries.

The felled trees were transported to Brandon Central Depot, adjacent to the

railway where seventy-five Forestry Commission staff converted most of the timber into pit props which were sent by rail to the coal mines. The thinnest poles were sent to a local wallboard factory and the discards went to a paper mill in Kent.



Mechanisation came to Thetford Forest in the 1980s with specially adapted tractors and trailers known as 'forwarders' which transport the larger felled logs to the roadside and lift them onto the lorries in one operation. Forwarders are designed to carry logs clear of the ground to reduce the impact on the forest floor.





In 1991, the first Harvester was used in Thetford Forest, imported from Sweden. This machine grabs the tree; fells it; strips off the branches and then cuts the trunk into specified lengths, ready for extraction by the forwarder. With the help of a computer, one skilled operator in the cab controls all these functions.

Three mills near Norwich take the timber from Thetford Forest and process it mainly for fencing, with the residue going to particle board manufacturers or for biomass.

Though the Forest was planted with the single purpose of growing trees, by the late 1980s it was gradually developing a more complex, multi-purpose role,

considering wildlife habitats and public access for recreation, with car parks, waymarked trails and picnic places.

High Lodge was built as the visitor centre for Thetford Forest in 1992 and, following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act in 2000, the Forestry Commission voluntarily designated all its freehold land as open access land.

In 1999, Forest Stewardship Council certification recognised that forests such as Thetford are responsibly managed to promote biological diversity and benefit the lives of local people and workers as well as being economically sustainable.

## Some things have not changed 1922 – 2022

The whole of the forest is divided into compartments, each with a number given to it at the first planting.



Early days Planting



Much the same today!

Planting still begins in November and finishes in March. Thinning still starts at around 25 years after planting and continues regularly every five years to improve the quality and size of the more promising trees.

Harvesting of the timber crop is around 50 years for Corsican Pine and 55 for Scots Pine. Cleared areas are re-planted with nursery grown seedlings and the forest cycle begins again.

## Thetford Forest in 2022

There are 29 miles of walking trails across the Forest, while at High Lodge the walking trails total 14 miles and 30 miles of cycle trails.

Four thousand years of landscape history are conserved beneath the trees, as the planting of the forest meant that the archaeological features were never destroyed by deep ploughing.

There are 25 Scheduled Monuments, including prehistoric burial mounds and two medieval warren lodges. In addition, there are over 1,100 unscheduled features including Neolithic and Napoleonic flint mines, warren banks and military structures from both world wars.

Thetford Forest is highly important for its wildlife. It has international designation as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for its woodlark and nightjar and is a nationally designated Site of Special Scientific interest (SSSI) for its birds, plants, terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates and geology.

The Forest also has a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) status, encompassing the 1,300ha of open grassland within it, managed for its rare wildlife by Forestry England in partnership with conservation organisations.



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# Artwork at the Arboretum

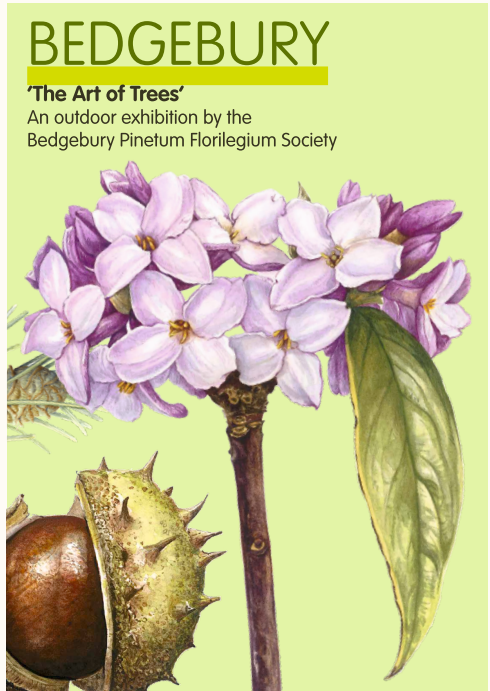
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If you go for a walk at Lynford Arboretum you'll see some wonderful artwork created by the volunteer artists of the Bedgebury Pinetum Florilegium Society.

A florilegium is a group of talented artists who create beautiful and botanically accurate drawings of trees and plants from living samples. The Bedgebury group are the only florilegium society in Forestry England, and they're continuing a tradition that dates back many centuries.

After being on display at Bedgebury, it was decided that rather than put the art works into storage, they'd make a delightful, temporary addition to Lynford Arboretum. Most can be found around the dog agility walk with a few in the main area.

A brochure giving a longer explanation and further details, can be collected from outside the Friends cabin. Although the brochure is based on Bedgebury, rather than waste them, they're in use here too as they're still relevant to the artwork and are a great addition to the display. However please bear in mind the brochures are proving to be very popular and although FE staff and Friends volunteers are restocking as often as possible, you may visit at a time when one isn't available.



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# GoApe Celebrates 20 years

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Over the past 2 decades, the UK's No.1 Adventure company, Go Ape, has encouraged more than 12 million explorers to live life more adventurously!

Go Ape was founded back in 2002 with the core values to "Create worthwhile careers, "Do the Right Thing", "Keep the Adventure in 'Adventure'" and "Be Socially and Environmentally Friendly".

Fast forward twenty years, Go Ape have created more than 50 sites in the UK and USA.

We've played host to a wedding and numerous wedding proposals, school trips, corporate team days, life-changing adventures and even launched a banana into space! We've donated more than £1m to charity, given thousands of tickets to underserved communities, and raised more than £110k for Go Ape's national charity, the Prince's Trust, in our first year of partnership.

In 2021, Go Ape continued onto its next stage of development and became Employee Owned and is also on the journey to becoming a B Corp. This means that they will join a collective of companies worldwide, setting new standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability.

Go Ape is celebrating our milestone 20th anniversary with a years-worth of prizes and rewards and we held a birthday bash celebration at Thetford Forest on the 26th of March. Find out more at [www.goape.co.uk](http://www.goape.co.uk)

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# Thetford Forest Centenary Open Day

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In 1992 High Lodge opened to the public as a place to walk and cycle with a small café, run by Forestry Commission staff. Thirty years on the site attracts over 500,000 visitors and works with a number of business partners to enhance the customer offer.

We've recently had a major refurbishment of the cafe and introduced a new food and drink offer with our provider Churchill Catering.

As part of our plans to celebrate Thetford Forest's Centenary, there will be an Open Day at High Lodge on Thursday 28 July. Amongst the activities planned, we're taking the opportunity to highlight the work we do across the district, to support telling the story of Thetford Forest past, present and future with a static exhibition already in place close to the site information point.

The event will be open to the public. Parking will be free and there will be no entrance fee.

Friends of Thetford Forest will be present and we have invited the Forestry England Retirement Association to join us.

*Contribution from Roger Woods, Forestry England*

## **Some comments received in response to our request from our members views on their experience in the forest.**

Thetford forest is a most beautiful place to be in all seasons for the freedom, fresh air and the chance to enjoy the vast wildlife that can be seen and heard. The feeling that I get when I have decided to go for some quiet time in the late night /early hours is a feeling that cannot be felt anywhere else that I have been. The cool, dark nights are an amazing place to be able to sit and just be. Thetford forest means Health and Wellbeing to me, and I couldn't be happier than when I am there!

*Dylan and Haley*

Thetford Forest provides me with so many lovely places to escape the noise, the hustle and bustle of modern life, to be at one with nature and to explore the history and heritage of one of the first inhabited parts of this country.

*Andy Carter*

We have spent time in the forest since we moved into the area in 1979.

Both our children learned to ride their bikes along the Peddars Way near Thompson.

A classic quote from our weary young son. 'Will we ever get to Peddar's House?'

*Julia and Tony*

Memories of enjoyable and happy times spent with family and friends

*Kevin*

For me, Thetford Forest is special because it belongs to all of us. It's one of the forests that constitute 'the Nation's Forests' or 'the Public Forest Estate'. These forests are managed on our behalf by Forestry England and voluntary groups such as FOTF can have a voice in their management.

From being planted primarily for timber production a hundred years ago, Thetford Forest now provides a range of habitats for wildlife and is a place for recreation. I'm fascinated by the historic landscape beneath the trees and the opportunities to contribute to knowledge of the archaeological sites. Through FOTF, I've made treasured personal friendships and am always inspired by the enthusiasm and dedication of all the volunteers who help care for the Forest.

However, many times I visit and whatever the season, I'm always captivated by Thetford Forest's beauty and amazed that it is only a century old

*Anne*



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# The Next 100 Years

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## *of Thetford Forest*

Trees play a key role in greenhouse gas removal but can only help mitigate the impacts of a changing climate if they are resilient to those challenges themselves.

As well as climate change, pests and diseases threaten the Forest. A fungal disease, *Dothistroma* needle blight, has affected the Corsican Pine in particular, reducing the needles held on the tree and causing poor and limited growth and in the worst cases killing the trees.

So that there will be a thriving and resilient forest for the future, foresters have been trialling new species and management techniques as well as working to improve habitats for wildlife and recognising the importance of archaeological and heritage sites.

Here are some of the tree species which will be grown in the Forest in the next one hundred years:

### **Which one would you choose?**

**Macedonian pine**, from the mountains of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania and Montenegro.

It is frost tolerant and thrives in a wide range of soils. In the past, the resin was used to cure wounds, pectoral, (chest) conditions, skin and stomach diseases and varicose veins.



**Western Red Cedar**, from the Pacific North-West of America and is suitable for calcareous (chalky) soils. Its timber is used for construction; roof shingles; sailing boats; kayaks and guitar soundboards.



**Douglas Fir**, comes from the west coast of North America and prefers acidic soils. It is drought-tolerant but needs shelter from frost.



**European Silver Fir**, comes from the mountain ranges in Europe and benefits from being grown in the shelter and shade of existing trees.



**Giant Redwood (Wellingtonia)**, is from the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. It has a fire-resistant bark but grows best when sheltered from low temperatures.

The Cherokee name is 'Sequoyah' and the oldest known giant sequoia based on ring count is 3,500 years old.



**Silver Birch**, grows in the wild across Europe and Britain, as far south as Spain and as far north as Lapland. It mixes well with conifers and regenerates naturally.

In Celtic mythology, the birch symbolised renewal and purification and birch twigs were used to drive out the spirits of the old year.





## The Future - A Resilient Thetford Forest

Forestry England has a bold ambition to develop a large-scale long-term strategic plan to improve the resilience of Thetford Forest to help it deal with the challenges of the next century.

Foresters are working with other organizations, voluntary groups and forest users to ensure that a well-balanced, multi-purpose forest is sustained into the future.



Thetford Forest is being made more resilient by matching species and management systems to site conditions and increasing species and habitat diversity.

As you enjoy the forest, look around you for evidence of the resilience approach that will guide the use and management of the Forest into the future.

When the Forest was planted one hundred years ago, it was a landscape-scale change brought about by the work of those first foresters. It has continued to evolve and adapt as a working landscape which now includes wildlife and heritage too. Whatever the next one hundred years will bring, Thetford Forest will always connect people to the trees.



*Anne Mason, Chair FoTF*

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# Volunteering

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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](mailto: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 and the current Covid19 regulations.**



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.



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](http://www.fotf.org.uk)

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