Friends of Epping Forest

Newsletter Spring 2014

www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk

FRIENDS TO OPERATE VISITOR CENTRE

Photo: David Young

The Friends of Epping Forest are soon to re-open the Epping Forest Visitor Centre at High Beach, from Saturday 5 April. Our involvement begins a new chapter in the Forest's history and gives the Friends a place at the heart of Epping Forest. We see this as an important opportunity for Forest visitors, as well as for the development of the Friends.

We welcome this opportunity to work with the Conservators of Epping Forest in a new partnership, to continue and develop the services for the estimated 180,000+ visitors who come to High Beach each year. Our "new" volunteer Information Assistants will be sharing their love of the Forest with visitors and enabling them to explore and enjoy the Forest.

Since the new visitor centre, The View, opened in Chingford in 2012, the centre at High Beach has remained open only at weekends and Bank Holidays. It closed at the end of December to enable our new recruits to be trained to work there.

The Superintendent of Epping Forest, Paul Thomson, said: "We are delighted that the Friends of Epping Forest have offered to operate the centre at High Beach and we are now working with them to provide appropriate support and training. We are confident that this new partnership will secure benefits for visitors, the Conservators and the Friends."

As you might imagine, we have been pretty busy, working to our start date of 5 April! More than 30 volunteers came forward, and 25 have now come to one of our information sessions. We soon begin our more formal training.

We are grateful to the Green Team of the Epping Forest Centenary Trust, who have been undertaking some management work at High Beach and at the entrance of the Centre to better "reveal" the Centre to the public.

We plan to open initially on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. Opening hours will be 10am until 3pm in winter and 11am until 4pm in summer. We hope to increase the number of days we open – which very much depends on attracting additional volunteers…so be assured it is not too late to register an interest in getting involved.

We've also been very pleased about the positive response to our involvement from members, staff of the City of London, Forest groups, local groups, local people and councillors and we will be working hard to meet their expectations. Cllr Jill Angold-Stephens, Mayor of Loughton, wrote to us saying: "The Council is delighted to learn that the Visitor Centre will reopen in April and has asked me to send our grateful thanks to you and to the Friends of Epping Forest who have volunteered to run this facility."

Judy Adams

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Committee Members are the Trustees of the Charity.

Views and opinions expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friends of Epping Forest Committee.

Dear Friend...

I do hope that you are enjoying the spring weather. The Forest is beginning to dry out already, so you can get about more. I have just been reminded by the Corporation that the summer visitor surveys are soon to begin, so it must be nearly summer.

You will see from Friends Matters in this *Newsletter* (page 6) that there is much going on in the Forest, from the Highams Park dam to the stadium site in Chingford. As the Friends gear up for the High Beach Visitor Centre opening, we have been doing our fair share of thinking too!

Our first committee workshop was in November, where we began to look at the Friends' priorities. As you will imagine, increasing our membership and attracting more volunteers featured and are essential to our operation. A key priority is tackling the website, as that may help us with both. We also continually work to make contacts with other groups involved in Epping Forest and, given the recent works in the Jubilee Pond and Highams Park areas, groups in these areas have been our focus. The key project of this year, re-opening and running the visitor centre, is also of course of great importance, along with improving our influencing capability.

Our second workshop, early this year, looked at what I will call Forest "concerns". These may have come from informal conversations with members or members of the public we meet in the Forest or through emails, or have been raised in our committee meetings. Topics including the perceived parkification of the Forest, cycling and fly tipping spring to mind along with wood pasture restoration, pressures on the Green Belt and the impact of localism.

We will soon be looking at how we can best contribute to these. Some may require research on the potential impact, others may need an exploration about how they are being tackled in other areas, or will entail the preparation of proposals or strategies. If you would like to be involved in any one of these issues concerning the Friends or the Forest, please get in touch. We will certainly be developing a group/virtual group for some of these topics (eg website), but note that we will need to set priorities first.

Judy Adams

Plaque marking John Clare's years in the Forest.
Photo: Peter Read

A new stream emerges from saturated ground, near Loughton Camp. Photo: Ron Andrews

A WET WINTER

Those who can remember the Forest 50 years ago will have seen many changes. Some of these may be affected by the rose-tinted spectacles of memory but others are very real. Seasons were much more distinct and rhymes with references to March winds and April showers bringing forth May flowers, and "February fill dyke" – good indicators of likely weather. Summers were generally warm and dry and winters cold and wet. Since then things have undoubtedly changed with a great deal more uncertainty, at least some of which is caused by global warming.

In the 1950s and early 1960s the network of rides, much smaller than it is now, were narrow strips of land marked by wooden posts or symbols attached to trees. There were only a few associated drainage ditches. The large amount of horse riding that then occurred throughout the Forest churned up the rides, and after the cattle were released onto the Forest they churned up both the rides and the open grasslands even more. In the winter months areas like Fairmead Bottom were much marshier than they have become since.

In the mid-1960s concern increased about this damage being done to the Forest, and Superintendent Alfred Qvist started the process of putting metalled surfaces on the rides through the woods north of Chingford, and this process has since been extended through most of the Forest. People would not then have thought of going for a walk without being properly shod. Now some people seem to think that a more sanitised, park-like landscape is more appropriate where you don't get your shoes wet or muddy!

Although the worst flooding has been in other parts of the country, the seemingly endless rain and gales this winter have had a large impact on the Forest. Rainfall has been substantially more than usual. On the gravel soils of Wanstead Flats most of the water drained away quite quickly, but more football matches than usual had to be cancelled. Both Jubilee Pond and Alexandra Water extensively overflowed their banks. The higher parts of the Forest also drained quite quickly, but the water then emerged as springs and streams where the gravel soils meet the underlying clay.

The heavy clay that forms the base of most of the Forest has been completely saturated, with streams full to overflowing and ponds such as Connaught Water flooding the surrounding land. In same area, one of our members mentioned seeing more small mammals during the day running along the top of the leaf litter than ever before. Had the saturated ground forced them out of their homes?

Trees too have been affected by the saturated ground. In the very high winds many have not only had branches snapped off but in some case the whole tree has been up-rooted. In these difficult conditions the ground has also been badly cut up, not only by mountain bikers but also by people just out for a stroll. To some extent all these problems have been experienced many times before. The Forest is very resilient and after this winter it will be interesting to see quite how long its impact lasts. After even the recent short spell of mild weather, it is amazing how quickly it begins to dry out.

Peter Adams

FOREST MATTERS

Quick-witted Friend saves land at stadium

Friends member Keith Foster has helped to ensure that a lesser-known "part" of the Forest will still be protected. He contacted the Friends after he heard in a meeting that Waltham Forest Council considered that all the land in front of the soon-to-be-developed Walthamstow Greyhound Stadium belonged to it. Planning permission to redevelop this historic east London site for housing was secured on 8 May 2012 and a housing development is now being progressed.

Keith told us he was sure that the grass verges in front of the site beside the road were part of Epping Forest. With the help of earlier maps, we were able to confirm that it was Forest land at least until 1926. The Land Agency and Planning Officer at the Epping Forest Office, Sue Rigley, has now confirmed this and also advised us that she has been in touch with the London Borough of Waltham Forest – and they are now clear about this too.

Although the land legally remains as Epping Forest, it was dedicated as Public Highway many years ago. Should it cease to be dedicated as Highway, it will revert to open Epping Forest land. The Conservators, as is their duty, continue to press for the protection of the Forest, including similar pieces of land as this one.

Highams Park dam and beyond

Surveying the current dam at the southern end of Highams Park lake. Photo: Royal HaskoningDHV

The City of London Corporation has submitted a planning application to improve the safety standard of the dam at Highams Park lake. The lake was created on advice from the famous landscape designer Humphry Repton in 1794. Walthamstow Scouts have used the lake for canoeing for over 30 years.

The works will involve the reconstruction of the dam to increase its resilience to flooding, the removal of the small car park along The Charter Road and the building of a wall around the Scouts canoeing base. There will be a better pedestrian entrance off The Charter Road (the site of the existing entrance). To protect the bank from erosion, no trees will be allowed on the reservoir banking.

We attended the information evening in late February and viewed the plans. If you would like to find out more about the dam improvements, including the detailed plans, go to www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/about-us/Pages/Highams-Park.aspx

While the dam works are focused on essential works for safety, they have been designed with an eye to working with the Highams Park lake landscape. The City of London Corporation has commissioned the production of a Conservation Management Plan for the area. This will promote a wider look at the area, which is to be welcomed. It should be available for consultation later this spring, and the Friends are looking forward to taking part in those discussions.

Geoff Sinclair, the City of London Corporation's Head of Forest Operations, said the proposed works will cost the City of London Corporation in the region of £1.7 million.

As we noted in the summer 2012 *Newsletter*, Highams Park lake, stretching between Whitehall Road and The Charter Road, Chingford and Woodford, is classified as a reservoir (under the Reservoir Act 1975), owing to its size and volume of water. The Reservoir Act provides the legal framework to ensure the safety of large raised reservoirs. While the Environment Agency is the enforcement authority for the Act, the landowner is responsible for safety and the management of flood risk.

The lake is classified as a "Class A (High Risk) large raised reservoir". Following a detailed Flood Study, which showed that the dam would not be able to cope in an extreme flood, the City has a statutory duty to reinforce the dam to comply with the safety requirements of the Act.

Continuing threats to the Green Belt

Eighteen months after the government put in place its National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), a Local Government Information Unit survey commissioned by the National Trust found that 51 per cent of the councils it surveyed with Green Belts within their areas said they were now likely or very likely to allocate Green Belt land for development (this is based on responses from 59 councils with Green Belt).

More than half of the 147 councils that responded to the survey said that their local authority had brownfield sites available that could help meet the five-year housing land supply target, but that these hadn't been considered viable.

During consultations on the NPPF in 2011, ministers including the prime minister stated firm commitments to protecting the Green Belt – while promoting an explicit brownfield first policy. Now both policies seem to be coming undone in practice.

This research also confirmed evidence from the

Campaign to Protect Rural England that the number of houses planned for the Green Belt has doubled since last year, to 150,000.

In Epping Forest District, the Friends have responded to a number of planning applications within the Green Belt, and to our relief several have been turned down. But we are mindful that in 2012, when the Friends responded to the District's Issues and Options report, many sites proposed for development were in the Green Belt.

The Friends now await the consultation on the District's draft plan during this summer. The draft plan will identify sites for development and the Friends will be responding on your behalf.

Our thanks to the National Trust for their research. To read more, go to the National Trust website, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/article-1355816496611/, for an expanded article and other related articles.

Wanstead Park

The main lake at Wanstead Park, whose lake system is to be looked at by an expert consultancy. Photo: Judy Adams

The City of London Corporation, acting as the Conservators of Epping Forest and working in partnership with the Friends of Wanstead Parklands, has appointed an expert hydrological consultancy called JBA Consulting to advise on the sustainability of the Wanstead Park lake "cascade" of five water bodies.

Regular visitors will know that the lakes have experienced prolonged periods of low water levels, which have had a negative impact on the historic landscape and amenity, and also threatened the nationally important heritage status of the park.

The study is now nearing completion. It is reviewing and trying to accurately measure how water enters the lakes system through rainfall and groundwater, and then leaves through evaporation and leakages. By creating a "water budget" for the park lakes, JBA should enable the Corporation to review the feasibility of restoring the water bodies as part of a wider consideration of funding bids to restore and regenerate the whole park.

Red to Bed

A farewell to the red "uniform" on the golf courses. Photo: Clare Eastwood/City of London

For the past 126 years, it has been compulsory to wear an item of bright red clothing while playing on Chingford, Woodford and Theydon Bois Golf Courses, land owned by the City of London Corporation and providing public access.

On 21 March 2014, the red rule is being abolished,and no golfers on those courses will be required to wear red. The origins of the rule are somewhat obscure, but seem to relate to players' visibility where golf courses also have public access, and perhaps also to the very early golf clubs, which had a red uniform rather like a military uniform.

To celebrate the end of the red rule, the City of London Corporation is having a charity golf day at Chingford Golf Course, where golfers can play for a penny and a voluntary donation to Sport Relief.

Great Gregories Farm

The City of London Corporation has now received planning permission for the construction of additional buildings at Great Gregories Farm, Theydon Bois, to support the overwintering of cattle. This will allow the Corporation to increase the size of the cattle herd from 50 to 150 head (plus younger stock) to implement the wood pasture plans.

Epping Forest Events Diary 2014

The Diary is now available. You can find it on the Corporation's website, at the Forest Visitor Centres (including the High Beach Visitor Centre, where the Friends are re-opening the centre from April 5!) and on our walks. The Diary lists hundreds of events, covering those organised by the Corporation and by other organisations, such as the Ramblers, local historical and nature societies – and of course including the Friends walks.

Judy Adams

FRIENDS MATTERS

The Big Tree Plant

Planters of all ages were in evidence during the Big Tree Plant at Gifford Wood. Photo: Clive Totman

On Saturday 14 December we welcomed a crisp and sunny morning for the Big Tree Plant at Gifford Wood in Upshire.

Run jointly by the City of London Epping Forest team and the Friends of Epping Forest, we were pleased to be joined by nearly 100 enthusiastic "planters", each thrilled with their chance to plant a tree in Epping Forest. Over 2,000 young trees were put in place, working to a varied planting scheme of shrubs and Forest trees prepared by Geoff Sinclair, Head of Forest Operations. Our special contribution – along with planting some trees – was making tea, coffee and chocolate for the willing band of participants,

It was good to see groups and individuals from all over the Forest. As you will know, the "new" wood has been a major project for us since the City bought it in 2012. Fundraising in 2013 included a quiz, walks and other activities, and culminated in the Big Tree Plant.

Sir Roger Gifford, then Lord Mayor, joined us along with Alderman Gordon Haines, Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee. The Superintendent also came, as did a number of Forest staff and four of your committee. Christmas hats for all heralded the festive season. A team of rabbits got to the young trees the next week, and must also have thought Christmas had come early. A swift response by the Conservators meant all was not lost. Tree guards were placed around each individual tree. Perhaps the rabbits did not welcome the New Year with the same enthusiasm!

Annual General Meeting 25 June 2014

We do hope you will join us at the AGM in June (details on page 11). It provides a good chance to see what we have been up to and to share your views! The AGM will be followed by a talk by Peter Warne, biologist and wildlife photographer, who will share his explorations of the Forest with us! His pictures are truly fantastic. For a sneak preview, please see www.flickr.com/photos/14865557@N04/ or simply google Peter Warne Photographer.

New Trustees – you'd be welcome

If you love Epping Forest, have time to get involved, and wish to contribute your skills to something very worthwhile, your interest would be welcome. We are particularly looking for team players, individuals who have skills in one or more of the following areas:

Helping to organise some of the events we run
Able to secure for the Friends a presence on social media and to support our developing website
Marketing skills
Planning and policy work
Business experience

If you are interested, please give me a ring and have a chat. Judy Adams, 020 8418 0730, judith.adams21@btinternet.com. The nomination form is at the end of the AGM Agenda on page 11.

Peter Read – not the retiring sort

Peter Read, a longstanding committee member, has now decided to retire from the Friends committee. We owe him our thanks for all the things he has done for the Friends over the years. Most recently, he was one of our members providing updates on the rabbit situation at Gifford Wood. He provided great support for our fundraising effort for Gifford Wood.

Peter Read: a picture of him from the 1980s, at the Hunting Lodge and in typical pose – hard at work.

In the last *Newsletter*, we mentioned his work on restoring benches the Friends (i.e. Peter) installed some years ago. One of his recently restored benches is in use near the High Beach Visitor Centre; the second one is still awaiting installation at The View. I know you will enjoy them!

His knowledge of the Forest is extensive and I enjoyed working with him on many a Friends stall as we toured the area, sharing our enthusiasm about the Forest. Many thanks, Peter, and may you continue to support the Friends for many years to come.

Judy Adams

FOREST QUIZ

You may find this Mystery Picture a hard one to solve. The question is easier if it is simply this: Do you know to which group of plants these belong? They are not palm trees – but were growing in Epping Forest. ***Ken Hoy***

Answer: It is a Liverwort (*Marchantia polymorpha*) that is often found growing with mosses and lichens on old bonfire sites in the Forest. This is a close-up photograph showing some of the sexual, not the vegetative, reproduction parts of the plant. You don't need to know the Latin names or the rather complicated reproductive processes to appreciate the strange and intricate beauty of such primitive flowerless plants. As it is an ancient forest, Epping Forest has a great variety of liverworts, lichens and mosses growing on its logs, stumps and stream banks. They are more easily seen now as they are 'fruiting' – distributing their spores – while the woodland is moist and before the leafy foliage shades the forest floor.

Sometimes reproduction is aided by the wind and sometimes by a rain drop! (A magnifying lens allows even greater appreciation. The photographs were all taken in Epping Forest.)

THOSE CUCKOOS...

Here is the latest news of the radio tagged cuckoo Chris, who we have been following for three winters now. Remember, he transmitted on a previous return journey in the spring from a point just east of Epping on his way back to Norfolk.

Chris was first radio tagged in the summer of 2011 when two years old – and he is still alive in Africa! Early last summer, he left us once more and arrived again in the Congo where he has spent previous winters. Then at the end of November, he and other cuckoos who were also wintering in the tropical swamps of the Congo rain forest moved nearly 700 miles farther south into Angola. It is not known why this movement was made, maybe a shortage of food, but this is the farthest south that any of the tagged cuckoos have been recorded.

In January Chris began to move northwards again, presumably beginning his 2014 migration back to Norfolk. At the end of February (at the time of writing), he is continuing to transmit from central Africa and does appear to be on his return migration. Let us hope by May he will reach Norfolk again for his fifth birthday.

Longevity evidence from ringing records suggests that, up to a point, the older a bird lives the greater can be its expectation of further life – experience seems to count. Few birds die of 'old age'.

[With thanks to the British Trust for Ornithology] ***Ken Hoy***

WALK REPORTS

An Autumn Stroll in Gernon Bushes for Fruits and Fungi (27 October 2013)

Fifteen enthusiastic folk joined Warden Brian McGee and myself for the annual visit to Gernon Bushes to look for the various fungi found there. The weather during the previous weeks had encouraged a range of species to grow, and we found more than 40 different species, including some more additions to the local list.

The fungi found on rotting wood were well represented and included the white-tipped spikes of candle snuff, a large collection of yellow sulphur tuft toadstools on a dead tree trunk, and the grey- and white-striped small brackets aptly called turkey tails. Several larger brackets on a fallen branch were squeezed and shown to be examples of the blushing bracket, which turns pink when damaged.

Lichens on a dead branch. Photo: Ken Hoy

It was encouraging to find a number of fruiting bodies from the various mycorrhizal species, which benefit specific plant species by assisting water and mineral uptake through the roots and also help guard their host plant against attack by parasitic fungi. Two common groups of mycorrhizal fungi are the milk caps, *Lactarius* species, and the brittle gills or *Russula* species. Associated with birch trees, the ugly milk cap lives up to its name. Two others found were the oak milk cap and the hornbeam milk cap, both growing beneath their host trees. Each *Lactarius* species releases a white juice when damaged, and experts taste this as an aid to identification!

The skin on the top of a toadstool of a brittle gill is often brightly coloured, and if a finger is rubbed over the surface of the gills they break up to resemble flaked almonds. Purple and yellow ochre brittle gills were noted. Specimens of purple jelly fungus, red boletus and pink fairy bonnet showed some of the vivid colours of fungi that delight the eye at this time of year, while the green-tinged aniseed toadstool smelt as expected.

Once again we were able to find the golden yellow caps of butter waxcaps in the ancient grassland site, but the large parasols were yet to reach their full potential – caps the size of a dinner plate! It is encouraging that these and other species are still present where they have been recorded on previous visits, and there were opportunities to photograph many of them to gradually build up a visual record of species found in this important woodland site. ***Tricia Moxey***

Trees, Woods and Fields (10 November 2013)

A group of 22 people joined Mike Smith on a lovely fresh day for a walk in the more southerly parts of the Forest starting at the Harrow Road pavilion. We explored the area round Wanstead Park in a walk of around 4 to 5 miles. The flats themselves were initially formed by melt water being carried by the Thames. Much later, drovers led their cattle across the Flats to Smithfield Market.

From the Pavilion serving 16 sports pitches mainly for Junior and female football, we walked north towards Bush Wood, where we found the double row of trees known as Evelyn's Avenue. It formed one of a number of such avenues originally radiating from Wanstead House. Restored relatively recently, it is still visible. In Bush Wood we had two minutes' remembrance service silence among the trees.

A bright November sun greeted walkers in the more southerly parts of the Forest. Photo: Julie Smith

Entering Wanstead Park from Bush Wood, we skirted around Heronry Pond and arrived at the old brick bridge. We thought we had spotted the rare wild service tree, but it was later identified as another unusual tree, the North American thorn. From the Park, we entered the former sewage works area which closed in 1978 and was formally added to the Forest in 1994. It had also been the site of an isolation hospital which closed in 1936. Little remains of these buildings or the London Group Control Civil Defence centre in Northumberland Avenue, which was demolished in 2000.

Carrying on alongside the Roding and next to the City of London Cemetery there were few other people, and we enjoyed the river and the thick trees of the cemetery. We turned east along the railway and arrived at the City of London Cemetery entrance on Aldersbrook Road.

Heading east, we journeyed on past Alexandra Lake, built by the unemployed at the turn of the century, across some of the football pitches and viewed the recent works at Jubilee Pond. While works were yet to be completed, many ducks and geese had set up residence again.

The walk was an interesting route on a lovely morning, showing how Wanstead Park, the Flats, the River Roding and Bush Wood are all joined up. It was longer than advertised, but well worth the effort. We'll be sure to allow more time for it in future! ***Mike Smith***

Mistletoe, Holly and Mince Pies (9 December 2013)

First, a little history: the start of the "Christmas" walk just south of the Hunting Lodge. Photo: Peter Wrobel

The depredations of the Forest by lords of manors, property developers and many others were so extensive in the 18th and 19th centuries that it is amazing that any of it remained to become Epping Forest again through the 1878 Epping Forest Act. That Chingford Plain survived at all is probably because it is not good for growing crops and is isolated from main roads, and because the railway did not arrive until the mid-1870s (which led to subsequent urban development in Chingford). Nevertheless the plains and woods around Dannet Hill, on which the Hunting Lodge stands, show signs of their restoration and management since 1878.

To the south of Rangers Road, Whitehall Plain has been kept open in the absence of grazing cattle by the Conservators' annual mowing. Large numbers of horses from the Nightingale Stables used to keep open the network of rides in this area. Since its closure many of these rides have become increasingly overgrown due to the lack of use by both horses and walkers.

The Conservators have kept the main routes open, although we saw that flooding around the River Ching can make this a seasonal challenge. Along the banks of the Ching there is a rich variety of shrubs and small trees to be found by those brave enough to search among the thorn bushes.

From Warren Hill, we tried to imagine what "the great swamp" was like before the construction of Connaught Water, circa 1883, an early drainage scheme to improve it for cattle and public access. A month or two later flooding around Connaught Water would have given us a much better idea!

As a complete contrast to the more open plains, we cut through the woodland to join the Jubilee Ride before emerging once again onto Chingford Plain. Once part of Henry VIII's deer park, this area has more recently been levelled as football pitches and a site for fairs, and is still used for flying model aircraft. The climb back up Dannet Hill was not a challenge to anyone, as drinks and mince pies awaited us at The View. ***Peter Adams***

The Poets' Forest (13 October 2013)

A number of poets have been associated with Epping Forest, some for significant periods of their lives, like William Morris, some briefly, like John Donne and George Herbert, and some as occasional visitors such as Keats and Lamb.

Several of them seem to have been here at times of stress and unhappiness. The young Rudyard Kipling lived as a boy on Goldings Hill after his mother discovered him in his boarding school so frightened of the school mistress that he was in a state of nervous breakdown. He recovered by running wild in the Forest for several months in the kindly care of a farming family. The war poet Edward Thomas was for a while in the building which is now Suntrap in Church Road, High Beach, convalescing while his battalion was stationed in wooden huts at High Beach. He was killed in 1917. He said the beauty of the Forest surprised and delighted him.

Not all of these literary giants wrote about the Forest as such but it must have had an effect on sensitive, creative minds.This was to be the underlying theme of our October walk: seeing the Forest through the poets' eyes and comparing their Forest with ours today.

The weather leading up to the walk promised leisurely pauses in sunlit glades, considering the verses and their origins. In the event torrential rain reduced our numbers to a dedicated handful, but as one remarked, "Well, it must have rained in John Clare's day", so we pressed on.

We met at Suntrap Forest Education Centre, built in 1895 on the site of a house called Forest Lodge, which in the 1830s was called Fairmead House. This was one-third of a lunatic asylum run by Dr Matthew Allen. The other two parts were Lippitts Hill Lodge, then known as Leopards Hill Lodge, and Springfield House. Both are still standing.

Fairmead House has been described as "full of gentle disorder, idiocy and convalescence" whereas Leopards Hill Lodge was "full of real madness, of agony, of people lost to themselves". At a time when asylums like Bedlam were places of sawdust-covered floors, whips and shackles, Dr Allen believed in judicious exercise of mind and body. Patients were encouraged to tend the gardens, edit a newspaper, play games and some had their own door keys. We looked at copies of the plans of the house and grounds. The back part of each house was divided into cubicles for those who needed isolation, set off galleries from which they could see other patients who were sufficiently recovered living a family life with the doctor and his staff, as an incentive to try to regain a measure of self-control themselves.

We were very interested to see the page from the admissions book for the asylum, which records that on 15 July 1837 John Clare, aged 44, a "labourer-poet" from Northborough, was admitted. Today we would say he was a victim of celebrity culture. Although born a country child, helping his father on the threshing floor from quite a young age to pay for his own schooling, he was quite solitary, frail and sickly, the weaker of twins even though his more robust

Suntrap Forest Education Centre in Church Road, High Beach, where the walk began. The previous building on the site, Fairmead House, was part of the lunatic asylum where John Clare was a resident. Photo: Judy Adams

sister had died just a few weeks old. He loved books and had an amazing memory for text and for the country ballads which his father sang. By twelve years old he was writing poetry. In 1820 he published his first book and in the same year married Patty.

There was a fashion for pastoral verse and Clare, with his idiosyncratic spelling and lack of punctuation, became the darling of London literary society, their "Peasant Poet". He stayed in his Northamptonshire village, isolated from other writers such as Lamb, Coleridge and Keats, who sent letters and messages, and isolated from his own community by his celebrity. His work was manically prolific, not only minutely observed poems about nature but also about the effects of the enclosures and all his fears for rural society. He said, "I found the poems in the fields and only wrote them down."

Then tastes changed and the literary world lost interest in him. By the time Clare came to the asylum, he had become depressed and distracted and was prone to wandering off into the fields. He was desperately anxious about earning enough money to support his family and suffered bouts of delusion – including the conviction that his childhood sweetheart, Mary, from whom he had been separated when he was 23 and she 19, was in fact his wife and Patty was his second wife.

Matthew Allen concluded that the excitement of excessive flattery, then neglect, extreme poverty and over-exertion of mind and body overcame his feeble frame. In many ways he blossomed in the four years in the Forest – he put on weight, became fitter and carried on writing, although mostly about homesickness and his delusions about Mary. He loved the Forest and worried that it should remain free for all, protected from the "tearing plough".

In spite of the amount of freedom Clare still felt like a prisoner, and in 1841 he walked back to Northamptonshire and was admitted to another equally enlightened asylum. It was there that he died, on 20 May 1864.

➤ *O take me from the busy crowd,*
I cannot bear the noise!
For nature's voice is never loud,
I seek for quiet joys.

And quiet Epping pleases well,
Where natures love delays;
I joy to see the quiet place,
And wait for better days.

We followed Clare's "Brook without a bridge" up to Old Church Plain and found the remains of the foundations of St Paul's, predecessor to the present High Beach Church and Clare's chapel "Peep(ing) between the hornbeams" in its "chapel yard enclosed with pales and oak trees nearly top(ping) its little bell".

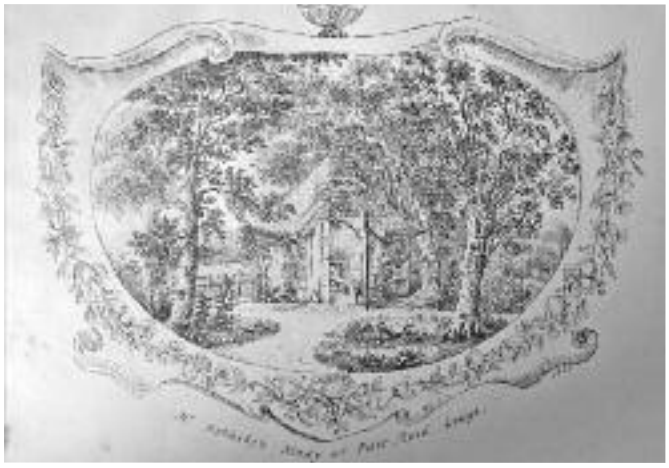
As we carried on up his "hill of fern" towards the "beech hill mounting high" we wondered whether Alfred Tennyson took this route from Beech Hill House on his visits to Dr Allen (Tennyson's brother was treated for melancholy for a short time). While living at Beech Hill House for three years with his neurotic mother, Alfred entered into a failed business venture with Dr Allen involving wood-carving with machinery.

Tennyson's time here fell in his "silent and morose decade" – not that he wasn't writing but that he wasn't publishing. He would rather have been in Lincolnshire but chose Beech Hill House because it was near London. He complained about the absence of birds and men. The local people were hospitable but "not in a good old fashioned way – artificial, frozen cold and lifeless". He described Dr Allen's patients as the most agreeable and reasonable persons he had met with. Part of *In Memoriam* was written here, including "Ring Out Wild Bells", inspired by Waltham Abbey, and also parts of *Maud*. The only direct Forest reference in his work illustrates how High Beach has changed:

A mound of even-sloping side,
Where on a hundred stately beeches grew,
And here and there great hollies under them;
But for a mile around was open space
And fern and heath.

We crossed Clare's "break-neck hills, that head-long go and leave me high and half the world below" and dropped down to Fairmead Bottom. The spire of the church at Buckhurst Hill, which Clare often walked to, is just visible above the trees. This was Clare's "Buckets Hill, a place of furze and clouds".

We stood at Fairmead Bottom on the site of Fairmead Lodge, home to the poet William Sotheby, who died four years before Clare came to High Beach. The family had been Lords of the Manor of Sewardstone and William's son Charles,when he succeeded to the role,gave the land for the building of the old church. In 1791,William moved to London and divided his time between there and Fairmead Lodge. Sotheby was a prominent figure in London literary society and a leading light of the Dilettante Society. Among his London guests and associates were Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Mrs Siddons, Byron, Southey and Hallam. It is



An illustration by "Miss H." of William Sotheby's study at Fairmead Lodge.

interesting to wonder if any of them came to Fairmead. Although Byron described him as one who wrote poetry with sincerity, Sotheby doesn't seem to have had much success with his original verse but he was a brilliant translator of Virgil and the German poet Christoph Martin Wieland.

There seems not to be any writing significant to the Forest but Sotheby's study, a round structure of wood and thatch,impressed a lady known only as Miss H., who in 1827 wrote a 30-page poem entitled *Rambles in Waltham Forest for the benefit of the Wanstead Lying-In Charity*. She illustrated her book with engravings on stone, including *Mr. Sotheby's Study* and *The Brocket Well in the grounds of William Sotheby*.

We now know Miss H. to have been Marguerite Power, Countess of Blessington, a lady of many talents and a highly colourful lifestyle who also moved in the literary circles of London and Europe. She had close associations with Lord Byron. We are curious as to the location of the Brocket Well. The most likely place is the Alder Pond, but we would be glad to hear of other suggestions.

As we walked through the bracken to cross the Beech Knoll on our return to Suntrap, the rain stopped and gave us the chance to appreciate Clare's sentiments about the Forest:

The brakes like young stag's horns come up in Spring,
And hide the rabbit holes and fox's den.
They crowd about the Forest everywhere,
The ling and holly bush and woods of beech,
With room enough to walk and search for flowers,
Then look away and see t≥he Kentish heights.
Nature is lofty in her better mood,
She leaves the world and greatness all behind,
Thus London, like a shrub among the hills,
Lies hid and lower than the bushes here.
I could not bear to see the tearing plough,
Root up and steal the Forest from the poor,
But leave to freedom all she loves, untamed,
The Forest walk enjoyed and loved by all.

Sue McKinley

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 24 April 10.30 am – 12.30 pm
Bluebells in Wanstead Park
Naturalist Tricia Moxey will lead a gentle stroll to see the bluebells and other spring flowers and to hear some of the early spring migrants in this historic park. Meet at the entrance to the Park on Warren Road, Wanstead E11 2LS. Grid ref: TQ414 876

Sunday 18 May 10.30 am – 12.30 pm
Galleyhill Wood in Springtime
Discover this little-visited wood with Verderer Peter Adams. The ancient hornbeam coppice was once part of the estates of the Abbey at Waltham. Meet at Aimes Green, off Galleyhill Road, Waltham Abbey. Grid ref: TL397029

Sunday 8 June 10.30 am – 12.30 pm
The Lower Forest in Summer
Join Sue McKinley to discover a little more about the Lower Forest. See what wildflowers we can find. Meet in the Woodyard Car Park, on Woodyard Road, off Epping Road, Epping. Grid ref: TL475032.

Saturday 21 June 7.00 pm – 9.00 pm
A Midsummer Evening Walk
Come with Peter Read on a walk for good views from Pole Hill, and to find out about William Morris, the Greenwich Meridian, wartime defence and the link between T E Lawrence of Arabia and the Forest. Meet in the Forest car park on Chingford Plain, next to the Royal Epping Forest Golf Club car park, Bury Road, Chingford E4 7AZ. Grid ref: TQ394949

Sunday 6 July 10.30 am – 1.00 pm
A Linear Walk from Epping Long Green to Waltham Abbey
A brisk walk exploring the high lands from Epping Long Green. Good views across the Cobbins Brook, Nazeingwood Common and beyond. Meet in the Cornmill Meadows car park on the Crooked Mile B194 north of Waltham Abbey. Then some cars will drive to Epping Long Green for the gently descending walk back to the remaining cars at Cornmill Meadows. Grid ref: TL384016

Sunday 14 September 9.00 am – 5.00 pm
The Annual Epping Forest Centenary Walk
Discover a little more about the whole Forest. Walk the entire length of Epping Forest in the day or take part in one of the local sections of the long walk. Celebrate how lucky we are to have Epping Forest! Arranged by the Friends of Epping Forest, with support from the Ramblers and the Corporation of London, the walk marks the centenary of the passing of the Epping Forest Act. For more details, contact 020 8418 0730 or visit www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk

Thursday 27 November
Forest Supper
Booking is not yet open, but as Hawkey Hall is closing we shall be at Chingford Assembly Hall this year. We'll be working again with Alan Beere Catering as last year. But mark the date!

THE FRIENDS OF EPPING FOREST

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND FORM OF NOMINATION FOR OFFICE HOLDERS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE 2014, 7.15 PM, BANCROFT'S PREP SCHOOL HALL, WOODFORD GREEN

(Access off Whitehall Road, just to the west of Woodford High Road)

7:15 pm	AGM
8:00 pm	Tea/coffee
8:30 pm	Talk by Peter Warne, wildlife photographer

Agenda for AGM:

1. Minutes of the last AGM held on 3 July 2013
2. Matters Arising
3. Chairman's Report 2013/14
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Election of Treasurer
6. Election of Committee Members
7. Election of Independent Examiner
9. Any Other Business

Honorary Committee members at present are:

Chairman	Judy Adams (2012- 2015)
Vice-Chairman:	Sue McKinley (2013-2016)
Secretary:	Mike Smith (2013-2016)
Treasurer:	Alan Curran (2011-2014)
Membership Sec:	Jean Brockington (2013-2016)

Committee members: Tricia Moxey and Pete Wrobel (Editor).

Committee members are re-elected each year. To submit nominations, please complete the form below and send it to: Mike Smith, Secretary, by Monday, 2 June 2014. The AGM will be followed by a talk, *Finding Wildlife in Epping Forest*, by Peter Warne, biologist and wildlife photographer.

NOMINATION FORM **(either cut out or photocopy)**

I nominate for the office of Treasurer/Committee member:

Name

Address

Tel

Signature of candidate

Signature of proposer

Print name ……Tel.....

Signature of seconder

Print name ……Tel.....

Statement by nominee (up to 100 words on your experience and how you will contribute to the Friends).

SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT EPPING FOREST

High Beach Festival – one of the many opportunities to help the Friends raise awareness about the Forest. Photo: Gill Hopkins

Why not join in some of the community festivals and events going on in the Forest this summer? Put them in your diary now!

The Friends will be there, so you can give us a hand too if you like. We would welcome more assistance. Share your love of the Forest, have a good day out and help us get members and money. Outline details are here. When we know more, they will appear on our website, www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk, or the next *Newsletter*.

Saturday 3 May	Swaines Green Festival on Swaines Green, Epping
Sunday 6 July	Loughton Sunday Market
Saturday 12 July	Highams Park Day,11am – 4 pm
Saturday 19 July	High Beach Festival, 11am – 4 pm
Saturday 26 July	Epping Festival along the High Road, 10am – 4 pm
Saturday 2 August	Working Woodland Day, Epping Forest Burial Park, North Weald, 10am – 3pm
Sunday 7 September	George Green Community Fun Day, Wanstead, 12pm – 5pm
Saturday 11 October	Suntrap Open Day, 1pm – 5 pm

If you are keen to assist, please contact me on judith.adams21@btinternet.com or ring 020 8418 0730.

Judy Adams

EMAIL ADDRESSES, PLEASE!

If you have not yet given us your email address, please act now! It will mean we can communicate more up to date news between *Newsletters.* And don't worry – we will not send the *Newsletter* by email unless you have requested it.

QR code – from phone to web

If you have a smart phone and can scan a QR ("quick response") code with its camera, either with an application that you download or via software that's already installed, scan this QR code and go to the Friends of Epping Forest website.

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF EPPING FOREST

The Friends want Epping Forest to be a natural environment rich in wildlife, available and increasingly appreciated, used and understood by the public.

Our main aims are to support the preservation of Epping Forest as an open space for recreation and to preserve its natural aspect; and to further the understanding, appreciation, enjoyment and use of the Forest.

Our activities include responding to planning applications and the many consultation documents that affect the Forest emanating from central and local government and the City of London, which manages Epping Forest.

We also run a programme of guided walks including the annual Epping Forest Centenary Walk and we produce publications about the Forest.

Increasingly we are working with local groups around the Forest, to support their activities and to contribute a Forest-wide view on local issues and opportunities.

We are a membership organisation funded by voluntary subscriptions and donations and run entirely by volunteers.

Become a member of the Friends of Epping Forest and help us protect the Forest and help other people learn about and enjoy it.

Contact: Jean Brockington, Membership Secretary
jean.brockington@btopenworld.com 020 8529 3077
www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk/join.htm