

**FRIENDS OF CHORLEYWOOD COMMON
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 22 FEBRUARY 2013
CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

I believe, and I hope Members will agree, that the Friends have had a reasonably successful year. It is important that the Friends’ events and activities are useful and interesting to the Members, and I hope we can discuss what we are doing, and what else we might do, under item 7 on this evening’s Agenda. Members are always welcome to give ideas to members of the Committee.

There has been one innovation, which was under consideration at the time of my last Report: thanks mainly to the work of Stuart Marshall, the Friends now have a website, which is proving useful as a means of telling Members who have Internet access about what is planned to happen and also about what has happened. I think the particular advantage over circulating messages by e-mail is that everything is accessible in the same place.

Everyone will remember that Village Day was first postponed and then cancelled last year because of the state of the ground; but despite the weather, the Friends’ events all went ahead (eventually) and were all enjoyed.

- The planned meeting “Chorleywood on Thames, 2 million years BC” had to be postponed from March 2012; it eventually took place last month, January 2013, when it was very well attended. The final meeting of the 2011-12 season was a talk by Peter Monahan, the retiring Senior Parish Ranger, on developments in Commons management in the last 20 years.
- The outdoor programme began with a Field Day on Mosses and Lichens, and earthworms, led by Agneta Burton of the University of Hertfordshire, on 26 April, with a follow-up talk here in the library on 31 May. Pond Dipping, after a postponement, took place on 15 June at Darvells Pond under the supervision of Andrew Goddard. Victoria Stainsby led a Herb Walk on 24 June on the Shepherd’s Bridge side of the Common, and on 22 July, Martin Hicks of Herts Biological Records Centre led a Flower Walk which, as usual, concentrated mainly on Larks Meadow and the Pyramid Orchids. The last outdoor event was the Fungus Foray on 18 November, led by Steve Kelly of the Beds & Herts Fungi Group: I was afraid that date might be too late, but it turned out that I need not have worried – we found a wide variety of fungi, and Steve’s list of scientific and common names has gone to the Parish Council, and a selection of Simon Varnals’s photographs are on the website.
- The 2012-13 indoor programme started on 4 October with a talk on “The Honey Bee and its relations”, and on 1 November Rachel Sanderson from the Chilterns Conservation Board told us about the history of Commons and of Chorleywood Common in particular. On 10 January, Tony Morigi gave his postponed talk on “Chorleywood on Thames”, with the wonderful image of the Thames coming through

the Chilterns and turning left past Chorleywood until the ice came back and blocked the river somewhere around Watford, so that the water backed up and overflowed near Burnham Beeches and eventually settled into its present course.

- Still to come: this evening, Tim Venner will be talking on “The work of the Friends of Chorleywood House Estate; 21 March, James Shipman, “Bats without Belfries”, to be followed by an evening bat walk (date to be arranged); 18 April, Nick Besant on Reptiles and Amphibians.

Marilyn Hampton has organised the programme of talks, and we are very grateful to her. She has decided that for personal reasons she has to step down from the Committee, but she will see this season through and give us a note of what the talks organiser’s job involves; we are very grateful for all her efforts.

The volunteers, organised by Simon Varnals, have engaged in a variety of activities. There was a campaign of ragwort-pulling last summer, and in the autumn a group under the supervision of Andrew Goddard collected and spread heather seed to encourage further growth of heather in the areas either side of Darvell’s Pond: no new growth is visible yet but, literally, “watch this space”! Fixed point photography is now under way: the Rangers have identified suitable points for taking monthly photographs, and the first set have been done; anyone who is interested in taking part should get in touch with Simon Varnals.

A group of volunteers organised by Michael Hyde also went out on several occasions last summer to do a butterfly survey under the supervision of Bill Cattle, who has reported to the Parish Council on the butterflies for many years and has kindly agreed to pass on his knowledge. Unfortunately last summer was not a particularly good season for butterflies, and it is hoped that there will be further sessions this year. If you are interested in helping, please get in touch with Michael Hyde.

I have continued to report on discussions relevant to the Common at the Parish Council and Open Spaces Committee meetings: the notes are now put on the website. The main projects of interest continue to be the proposal for grazing, the suggested Play Area, and Pond maintenance. As to ponds, some of you may have seen that this week Christ Church Pond has been emptied and the silt taken out. The position on grazing is that the Council are investigating the possibility of using “virtual fencing”, an underground cable transmitting a signal to collars worn by the cattle, which give them a shock if they try to cross the line: details are on the website, and the Friends’ Committee will report on developments as they happen. The Play Area proposal is with Three Rivers and is a separate item for discussion on tonight’s agenda. On both these issues the Friends’ Committee are keen to find out what Members think, and will pass on representations as appropriate. If you have views please tell us; on grazing, tell the Parish Council; and on the Play Area, also tell Three Rivers. We are also considering asking members to complete questionnaires through the website and the Newsletter.

The last Newsletter, I have to admit, was delayed: new information about grazing, the Play Area, and the Butterfly Survey kept arriving and making it necessary to re-write; eventually we published in September. This year we are planning to do one considerably earlier than

that. If anyone wishes to contribute, please do: anything is welcome, long or short; please send it to Jackie Worrall or to me.

We have continued to make representations to the Planning authorities at Three Rivers on applications which might have an adverse impact on the Common or the Conservation Area: Alison Rubens is the Committee member principally responsible, and it is rather a thankless task trying to find out what relevant applications are being made. Thank you Alison.

The Cricket Club intend to replace the Pavilion, and have indicated that they will be inviting their neighbours, including the Friends, to see their plans: we look forward to that with interest and will try to comment constructively.

As the Treasurer will tell you in more detail, the finances are healthy. Membership is slightly down: that is partly because the first round of three-year subscriptions has just come to an end, so that three years of Members moving away, or dying, affects the membership list all at the same time, and partly because Village Day, which is normally our main opportunity for attracting new members, did not happen last year. A membership campaign is under consideration. Please feel free to encourage your friends and neighbours to join.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to all the members of the Committee for everything they do to make the Friends of the Common the successful organisation that it is. And as we said in the Notice of this meeting, there is a vacancy on the Committee, so please let us know if you are interested in becoming involved.

I said at this stage last year that I would try to make this Report shorter than that one, and I think I have at least avoided making it longer. If anyone has any questions, I will try to answer them.

GH
