

**THE FRIENDS OF CHORLEYWOOD COMMON
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 28 FEBRUARY 2014
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

It has been a mixed year: partly the regular programme and activities, and partly discussions of suggested innovations – the Play Area, Nature Trail and Community Plan proposals. I will come to those, but first the regular activities.

Those of you who attended last year's AGM will remember it being relocated at short notice to the Memorial Hall; our thanks to the Parish Council and to Yvonne Merritt. There are reports on the events from the AGM through to the end of June in 2013 Summer Newsletter, which is on the website and was distributed in hard copy to members who have not given the Committee e-mail addresses, so I can take that part of the year quite shortly.

- After the formal business of the AGM, Tim Venner gave an illustrated talk on the work of the Friends of the Chorleywood House Estate – including the restoration of the Fire Pond, which is where the Rangers have been “re-homing” the goldfish taken out of Darvells Pond.
- The last two talks of the winter season, here in the Library, were “Bats without Belfries” by James Shipman from the Berks and South Bucks Bat Group, accompanied by a convalescent bat, on 21 March, and “British Reptiles and Amphibians” by Nick Bessant of the Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group, on 18 April. Both events were reasonably well attended and much enjoyed by those who came.
- The first of the outdoor events, the Dawn Chorus Walk led by Anna Marett on 28 April, was not by any means as well supported, but we were lucky with the weather, and we heard or saw 25 different species of birds. Anna kindly said she would be willing to try again, and we will circulate details of whatever can be arranged for this year. I am not going to tempt fate by asking for firm commitments, but can I have a show of hands, please, of people who would be prepared at least to consider getting up for a five a.m start on a Saturday or Sunday?
- Next was the Beating of the Bounds of the Common on Rogation Sunday, 5 May, organised and led by the Parish Council and well supported by the Friends. The event was made memorable (it only happens once in every

five years or so) in the traditional way, by turning upside down one of the children taking part.

- That was followed by the Pond Dipping at Christ Church pond on 7 June, when Andrew Goddard, assisted by the two families who turned out, did an “Opal” survey of the pond, which showed that it was recovering well from draining and dredging earlier in the year. The date for this year is Friday 16 May, 6 pm, Christ Church car park; we propose to advertise it more widely than we did last year, but those of you with young children or grandchildren who might like to get themselves wet can make a note now.
- Then we had Victoria Stainsby's Herb Walk on 23 June, when she identified 16 or more useful plants in a comparatively small area around Shepherd's Bridge and the cattle creep and suggested, among other things, deep-frying heads of elderflower in batter – did anyone try it?
- Village Day, after being called off in 2012 because of the state of the ground, went ahead on 13 July 2013 in good weather. The Friends had a good-sized and well-shaded site towards the Cricket Club end of the ride; many thanks to Marilyn Hampton for making the booking for the larger site; to the Parish Council for giving us the spot we asked for; to Les Dacre for making his gazebo available; and to Mike Warburg and Michael Hyde for showing the ever-popular newts to the children. We were able to include five months worth of Simon Varnals's photographs from two of his fixed points (more on that later in this meeting), and we experimented with a “Kids' Quiz”, asking them to identify photographs of birds and animals and specimens of leaves and flowers. And during the day we signed up a number of new members. Many thanks to everyone who helped.
- The Flower Walk on 28 July, led by Martin Hicks of the Herts Biological Records Centre, was fortunate with the weather, and well supported. We were too late to see the Pyramid Orchids in Larks Meadow at their best, but there were still some left, and a good number of other flowers.
- The last of the outdoor events was the Fungus Foray on 22 September, about a couple of months earlier than the previous year, led by Paul Adams of the Bucks and Herts fungi group, and supported by members of that group as well as some of the Friends of the Common; we found a good variety of fungi, considerably more in the woods than in the grassland, and photographed a selection of them.
- The first meeting of the indoor programme was an open discussion on 3 October, originally planned as a way of fine-tuning the Friends' representa-

tions to the Parish Council on the Play Area proposal; in the event the Council meeting was brought forward to 1 October, and our meeting became something like a post-mortem on the decision to reject the proposal for a Play Area up-slope from the Shepherds Bridge parking area. The Committee felt it was a useful discussion in an effective format, and after this meeting we will be doing something rather similar in relation to the Community Plan proposal.

- 2013 wound up with a more traditional talk on 7 November on “Butterflies of Hertfordshire”, given by Liz Goodyear of Butterfly Conservation, explaining how complicated and how varied the life cycles and the environmental requirements of different species of butterflies are. This was another well attended and well enjoyed talk.

Other regular activities have also been continuing. The talk on butterflies was an opportunity for a report on the work of the butterfly survey group, who went out regularly and found 2013 a much better year for butterflies than 2012 had been, here as elsewhere. Anyone who is interested in joining in the 2014 survey, please get in touch with Michael Hyde: the plan, I understand, is to go out every four or five weeks, usually on a Thursday afternoon.

The volunteers have continued to liaise with the Rangers about things to be done on the Common; anyone wishing to take part should contact Simon Varnals. Simon has also now completed a year – the first year of an ongoing project – of fixed point photographs; as I said, more on that later.

It is time to plan a Newsletter; contributions to Jackie Worrall, please.

The proposals for innovations particularly affecting the Common are the Play Area, the Nature Trail, grazing and car parking. I can mention grazing and parking quite shortly: the Parish Council has investigated further the idea of “virtual fencing”, controlling cattle by an underground cable and collars worn by the cattle which give them a mild electric shock if they get too close to the cable, and has decided to use the system, starting with a short grazing period this spring and a longer one in the autumn. As to parking, the Council has decided to discourage commuters at the Memorial Hall and Shepherds Bridge parking areas by introducing a system of requiring cars parked there between noon and 3 pm to display tickets, which will be free, but the machine will only issue them from after the time when commuters will want to leave their cars.

The Play Area and Nature Trail proposals are linked. To put it shortly, over the summer of 2013 Three Rivers obtained designs and quotations from (eventually) three companies for the site up-slope from Shepherds Bridge, and asked for the Parish Council's agreement to install one of them; at the meeting on 1 October the Parish Council rejected that request principally on health and safety grounds; I am sure everyone recalls the widely differing reactions of different sections of the community to that decision. The Parish Council also decided to investigate further the possibility of having a Nature Trail / Play Trail on the Common – a low-tech and low-intensity way of providing children with exercise, fun, and information on and interaction with the Common. On the Play Area side, towards the end of 2013 the Residents' Association suggested that representatives of that Association, the Friends, and Chorleywood Mums should meet to discuss the position and identify what common ground there may be; the Committee of the Friends decided that it would be a good idea to take part in such discussions, and Alison Rubens and Michael Hyde have been acting as our representatives – I understand that discussions are ongoing, and I am sure we are all grateful to Alison and Michael for their time and effort on the subject. Play facilities in Chorleywood will be one of the topics up for consideration, and consultation, in connection with the proposed Community Plan, and the Committee will be asking the meeting for views on the subject, after the formal business is concluded. I should mention that Bob Sutherland has agreed to join the Committee of the Friends and to act as our representative on the Community Plan Steering Group, and Gareth Hunt has agreed to act as his deputy; thank you to both of them

There are two more things I want to say, which are true every time I say them. First, the Committee wants to know what you the members think of what we are doing, and what else you think we might be doing; and secondly, I am most grateful, and I think all the Friends of the Common should be grateful, to everyone on the Committee for what they do for our association. There is a vacancy. And if anyone has any questions I will try to answer them.