

Friends of Petersfield Heath

Chairman's Report

Welcome to our Spring 2007 newsletter, and my sincere thanks to all our contributors. After the very wet winter, I am sure that you are now looking forward to what we hope will be another excellent summer.

Since our last newsletter there has been a dramatic change to the Pond. Thanks to all the rain that fell during late autumn and the winter, it is now full to overflowing. The sub-committee that the Town Clerk specially set up to review the lack of water problem has certainly achieved its objective!

The enhancement work to the island is now complete and we have had many compliments on the improved appearance (see photograph on page 3). In addition, the work has stabilized the ground. Thanks are again due to all those involved in the project.

In the autumn we addressed heather regeneration when twelve scrapes were formed at various locations on the Heath. Three members of the Sussex Wealden Greensand Heaths Project then cut heather toppings from Iping Common, transported them to the Heath and spread them over each scrape. We are extremely grateful for the help that the Project Team gave us, and hope to repeat the exercise this September.

We have arranged for three experts in the fields of Archaeology, Wildlife and Flora to act as leaders for guided walks around the Heath on 6th July. Further details are contained elsewhere in this newsletter.

Unfortunately our work parties this year have been badly affected by the extremely wet weather and we have had to cancel three, with others being curtailed for the same reason.

We look forward to welcoming members to the AGM on Tuesday 8th May. We have invited a panel of experts to speak about wildlife on the Heath and in Hampshire and to answer questions from the floor.

Like so many local societies, we are in great need of new blood on the committee. There are three vacancies at present. We have just five Committee meetings a year, with occasional sub-committees who run specific projects. We would welcome any member who would like to become part of our 'team'.

I look forward to seeing you at our Annual General Meeting on 8th May.

John Pike

Friends of Petersfield Heath

**Annual General Meeting
7.30pm on Tuesday 8th May
The Rose Room, Petersfield Festival Hall**

**Following the formal business, a panel of
speakers will answer questions from the floor
about wildlife on the Heath**

Refreshments will be available

All welcome

The Restored Island



A recent photograph of the restored island. It shows the oak panels which have been fitted all round the island, replacing the ugly concrete slabs. Only the tops of the panels can be seen, due to the high water level in the lake. Several members of the Friends of Petersfield Heath have worked hard on this restoration, which included the planting of a new willow tree donated by Mark and Derrie Greef.

This is YOUR Newsletter

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this newsletter.

The wet winter has meant that not a lot has happened on the Heath since our last newsletter. Several of the **work parties** had to be abandoned because of the weather, but many saplings and other undergrowth were cleared. The result was a huge bonfire supervised by the work party on 1st April. The Town Council hired a brush-cutter to clear some of the brambles and bracken, and this will be repeated later this year.

In the circumstances, the team working on the **restoration of the island** (see page 3) did very well indeed to complete the new cladding before the rising waters all but submerged it ! All that remains to be done is some tidying of the ground on the top of the island. The anglers will be pleased to see no cormorants hanging out in the willows on the island.

Several members have commented on the **clearance work** between the cricket pitch and Heath Road East. The area seems somewhat bleak at present, but should recover quickly. A police car was spotted driving along Heath Road East one evening, using a hand-held spotlight to look for miscreants on the cricket pitch. Has anyone ever seen a real policeman in uniform on foot on the Heath ? Members have also commented on the pruning and pollarding of trees around the lake, which is being done as part of the Heath Management Plan.

Our congratulations to **John Bridle**, whose 100th birthday was on 24th March. John's articles "Some Memories of Petersfield Heath" in both of our newsletters last year were very interesting. Perhaps you saw the interesting article about John in The Petersfield Post of 28th March.

Martin Harbord
Editor



Recognize me ?

See page 10.

Letters to the Editor

Letters should be sent to Martin Harbord, 110 Heath Road, Petersfield GU31 4EL (Tel 01730 265373) or e-mailed to him at martinharbord@tiscali.co.uk. The editor reserves the right etc etc....

No letters have been received for publication.

Martin Harbord

Guided Walks Round the Heath on Friday, 6 July 2007

10:30am **Wildlife Walk**
and
7:00pm **Archaeological Walk**
or
7:00pm **Botanical Walk**

Meet at the Sussex Road car park.

No charge for Friends of Petersfield Heath members
Non-members will be asked to make a donation of £2.00 per person

Numbers will be restricted to 25 per group
(people can book for the morning and an evening walk if they wish)

Please ring Petersfield Town Council office on 01730 264182 to
book a place

(Remember - booking will be on a first come, first served basis!)

Photographs of The Heath

Various photographs of The Heath have been sent or given to members of the Committee, which tend to get passed round at the next Committee meeting and then left in the recipient's in-tray. Hilary Bonney has volunteered to take charge of these, and to collate them in a portfolio.

Among the photographs passed to Hilary are some interesting snapshots taken by Sheila Laing of the upheavals when the lake was last dredged in nineteen-what-ever-it-was. My own recollections of the exercise are somewhat skimpy. A small boat on the lake, sucking up silt and pumping it through a long pipe to an area surrounded by banks ("bunds"), where the water seeped or evaporated away. It all took many months, and was supposed to be a money-spinner for the Town Council who planned to sell off the silt as 'fertilizer' (I don't think they had many takers). One day, walking round the Heath with my son, we lost his football, which drifted off towards the middle of the lake. When we failed to find it anywhere the next day, we told my son that it had been sucked up by the dredger. Which is probably why there was no dredging for the following few weeks! I remember one of the bunds bursting, releasing sludge all across the golf club's first fairway and causing some annoyance. Afterwards, the bunds area rapidly became completely overgrown with trees and undergrowth that obviously appreciated the silt. Does any reader have better recollections of this exercise?

Mention of annoyance to the golf club reminds me of an occasion when a passing Chinook helicopter had an oil-pressure warning and decided to drop in on the Heath, right in front of the (then) clubhouse. My son had a brief moment of joy sitting at the controls, before the machine was cordoned off. It was fixed and departed two or three days later, leaving a sizeable oil slick on the precious turf and, I am led to believe, a very happy lot of golfers in the clubhouse. Again, does any reader have better recollections (and perhaps even some photographs) of this event on the Heath?

Martin Harbord

Petersfield Area Historical Society and The Heath

Some years ago, Petersfield Area Historical Society published articles about the Heath in two of their Bulletins:

Vol. 1 No.4 p.13 Mesolithic Remains on the Heath

Vol. 2 No.8 pp.1 - 10 Various Aspects of the Heath, including
The Barrow Cemetery
How the Heath came into the possession of the town;
Recreation on the Heath.

If anyone would like to read these articles, the Bulletins are available in the Local History section of Petersfield Library, and at Petersfield Museum.

Around the Heath – Autumn 2006 / Spring 2007

In early **October** there was welcome rainfall that raised the level of the pondwater, but the downside was a dearth of wildfowl apart from the resident Mallards. My records for this month show only two sightings of a male Mandarin and one of a Heron. With mild conditions right through the month there were still insects to be seen. Red Admiral and Small Copper were the only species of butterfly on the wing. Also Common Darter and Migrant Hawker dragonflies plus plenty of grasshoppers and hoverflies. While observing a feeding party of small birds they suddenly started a cacophony of alarm calls when a Kestrel flew in and perched nearby. The Kestrel rarely takes birds as prey but these small birds are obviously alert to any threat. A minute or so later I disturbed a small grass snake that was making the most of perhaps the last warm sunshine of the year. This reptile would be much higher on the Kestrel's menu.

Early **November** saw the first frosts of the winter and with them came two male Tufted ducks to break a long sequence of just Mallards at the pond. Alas this cold spell was short lived with the mild and wet regime returning for the remainder of the month. A single Cormorant, a pair of Mute Swans and two Great Crested Grebe were seen mid-month but little else. Common Darter dragonflies were still on the wing as was a Bumblebee tempted out by the unseasonable warmth.

A small increase in the number of Cormorants was noted at the beginning of **December** and apart from a lone Heron and two Great Crested Grebe the pond had little to offer in the way of wildfowl. At this time most of the trees had finally lost their leaves. This at least gave the birdwatchers amongst us a better view of the smaller avifauna. Around mid-month a flock of 40 Canada Geese returned to the pond having been absent throughout the autumn. They were followed a week later by small numbers of wildfowl that included Shoveler, Pochard, Gadwall, Wigeon and Teal. A single Barnacle Goose came in with the Canadas for a couple of days only, which is a shame as they are handsome birds with finely marked plumage.

Anyone hoping for a change in the weather as the **New Year** came in were disappointed as the rain just kept coming. Confirming just how mild the conditions were at this time, I saw Pipistrelle bats feeding over the pond at dusk. The only wildfowl of note were a pair of Shovelers, a Great Crested Grebe, a Greylag Goose and a Tufted duck. A lone Cormorant was present on most days. By the end of **January** Snowdrops, Dog Violet and Red Dead Nettle were in flower on the Heath as was the majority of the Gorse which normally shows well in March.

In early **February** a pair of Greylag Geese arrived with a single Pink-footed Goose for company. They have been present ever since and remained as a threesome. These particular birds are not truly wild but are part of an ever-increasing feral population in the southern counties. I expect the Greylags to attempt breeding as they have done in recent years. Up to four Cormorants were still coming to the pond daily. Their numbers this winter have been much lower than previous years. Whether this is down to the recent cull or the warmer weather I can't say. Both have probably had some effect. A few night frosts in the first week encouraged some wildfowl to the pond with Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Wigeon, Mandarin and Great Crested Grebe all recorded. The remainder of the month was mild with yet more rain, but on the brighter days Bumblebees were enticed out of their winter hibernation. I expect they visit the nearby gardens in search of nectar as there is little in flower on the Heath apart from the Gorse. On the adjacent Heath Farm I found a pair of wintering Stonechats, a bird that breeds on the heaths and commons especially to the north and east of Petersfield. At one time it may well have bred on the Heath and Rival Moor Common. It would be particularly satisfying if we could encourage this species back to our Heath.

Thankfully, the beginning of **March** saw the end of the winter rainfall and dull overcast days. This dreary weather was replaced by warm sun which stirred many dormant insects including a few butterflies. I noted Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma during a FoPH work party and as I left the Heath the small colony of bee wolves were emerging from the sand near the childrens' play area. These insects have developed from eggs laid at the end of last summer with a bee corpse(s) for the larva to feed on. They are obviously impervious to rainfall! Several mining bees hatch at the same time. The bee wolves instinctively attack them but lack the venom they possess as mature adults in late summer, so are only a nuisance to the bees at this time. The first spring migrant, a Chiffchaff, arrived on cue mid-month and immediately the weather changed to something like winter but these little birds are quite robust and do occasionally overwinter here.

The winter period was disappointing with very little wildfowl and surprisingly few gulls. There was no record of a Lesser Black backed Gull and only small flocks of the very common Black headed Gull. If there was a shortage of birds the same could not be said about rainfall and it has filled the pond to the brim. If this level can be maintained into May there shouldn't be a repeat of last year's problems when the temperature soars in the summer.

Alf Smallbone

Trees on the Heath – The Willows

There are four common types of Willow growing in the UK, forming part of their genus Salix. They are the White Willow, the Cricket Bat Willow, The Goat Willow and the Crack Willow. This issue of the newsletter will cover the White Willow.

White Willow (Salix alba) are so described for the silvery undersides of their simple but slightly toothed margined leaves that look particularly attractive when the wind blows.

The winter buds are set alternately along the twigs with only one bud scale. Like the Holly and the Yew, Willows are entirely male or female.

In the Spring the male trees are obvious because of their catkins covered in yellow stamens and pollen, and are often referred to as Pussy Willows.

The female catkins are less obvious with their whitish green catkins which eventually produce a mass of tiny seeds, each one tipped with white hairs. These seeds have a very short life span and will only germinate in ideal conditions, such as mud banks alongside water. This explains why they are so common around our Heath Pond.

Willow wood has a pale brown colour and is very light. It is principally grown for the production of thin shoots that are ideal for basket making. In order to produce this type of material the trees are cut regularly – known as pollarding. Something of this system can be seen around the Heath Pond this year although in this case it is being done mainly for the benefit of the anglers. This system has little effect on their general heathland lifespan.

A well-known painkiller relies on the Willow (genus Salix) for the production of Salicylic acid used in the manufacture of Aspirin tablets. However, I would not advise a habit of chewing willow leaves for the relief of hangovers.

Silva

You Recognized Me ?

The photograph on page 4 is of a derelict Victorian drinking fountain on the Heath. It is hidden in the hedge immediately on your left as you go onto the Heath at the junction of Heath Road and Heath Road West. The Petersfield Museum have said that they would be happy to restore and house it. Your Committee have agreed to this proposal, and have written to the Town Council Grounds committee about it. If you have any views on this, please let us have them !

Sweat Shirts

We now have our own sweat shirts and polo shirts (with embroidered logo), priced from £14.50. If you would like to purchase one, please call Vivien Pike on 01730 268394.

Petersfield Town Council

are Trustees of and are responsible for Petersfield Heath. Any problems, complaints, comments (or even praise) should be addressed in the first instance to the Town Clerk, Neil Hitch (tel 01730 264182).

Budgets and action priorities for the Heath are supervised by the Council Grounds committee and administered through the Maintenance and Contracts Officer, Peter Jones.

At the time of writing (April 2007) the Council Grounds committee are Chris Jenner (chairman), Hilary Ayer, Linda Daubney, Brian Dutton, Hugh Sandeman and Mary Vincent.

The Friends of Petersfield Heath

are an independent group committed to the preservation of the Heath as a beautiful area of natural heathland for the enjoyment of all who use it. We make recommendations to (and provide management plans for) the Town Council. We have no direct control in the management of the Heath, but we are a powerful lobby group that works closely with – and has a happy association with – the Town Council.

The Friends of Petersfield Heath committee are John Pike (chairman), Vivien Pike (secretary), David Burstall (Treasurer), Martin Harbord (Membership secretary and newsletter editor), Hilary Bonney, Alan Catchpole, Robin Hart, Ken Heppell, Jackie Phillips, Katie Pitt, Peter Price and Alf Smallbone.

*We need **more members**, particularly members willing to serve on your committee. If you are able to spare a couple of hours, about six times a year, please give Vivien Pike a call on 01730 268394.*

Bird Flu (Avian Influenza)

We all sincerely hope that the epidemic bypasses the United Kingdom. However, we are all asked to be vigilant. In particular, if any unusual bird deaths are noted on the Heath they should be reported to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on 0845 335 577 and also to Petersfield Town Council on 01730 264 182. In no circumstances should any dead birds be touched.

Injured animals

If you find an injured animal, call the RSPCA on 08705 555 999. They will give you a reference number. Take the injured animal to a vet and give them the RSPCA reference number. The RSPCA will pay the vet's bill.

The Editor is indebted to David Schutte for this information.

Data Protection Act

I keep details of Members' addresses, subscriptions etc. on my computer, solely for Friends of Petersfield Heath use. If any member has a concern about this, please let me know.

Martin Harbord
Membership Secretary