



FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

NEWSLETTER NO 4 – SPRING 2011

From the Chairman - Rupert Hall

Pausing for thought after three years.

The Friends of Markstakes Common was formed approximately three years ago and, following survey work, drew up a management plan for the site with action points focussing on clearing glades on the edge of the woodland, clearing the mire and restoring the High Pond. The long term aim was to restore a more open mosaic of woodland, grassland and heath rather than the current dominance by bracken, bramble and birch.

Through regular task meetings on Mondays and one Sunday a month, the Friends of Markstakes Common have made good progress and the initial action points have been now been achieved. The Lewes District Council have provided invaluable assistance and organised work by other volunteer groups and contractors leading to the restoration of the High Pond and regular mowing of a large part of the northern bracken field. There is now a need for the management plan to be reviewed.

The last three years has increased our understanding of the site. Most notably it has been established that there is a healthy population of Dormice, a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species. Two other BAP species, Great Crested Newts and Adders have also been confirmed as being on site.

The presence of these species is an exciting discovery and the revised management plan will need to adapt to this new information. However, the

original objective of restoring wood pasture (Identified by Natural England as a priority habitat) remains valid and the Friends of Markstakes Common are liaising with The Lewes District Council to ensure that the revised management plan reflects an appropriate balance between competing conservation objectives.

In the meantime, following a temporary cessation of work during the winter, the Friends of Markstakes Common are once again going out on Mondays doing surveys and practical conservation tasks.

Here is a picture of us clearing more of the scrub and coppicing the willow in the Mire area.



Membership Matters

As this year ends, the subscription renewal becomes due. I do hope that you have been kept in touch with our activities on the common and been able to come along and join in our working parties or have seen the work which is being done. We are pleased with the progress and I thank everyone for their interest in our projects

and work. You will read elsewhere about the developments at the common, especially in respect of the dormice, and the future plan to take into account their presence.

I have attached a subscription renewal reminder to this newsletter, and hope that you will renew your subscription, to help us with our work on the common. Thank you for your interest and we look forward to seeing you sometime.

William

SURVEYS and SURVEYING

Ancient trees on Markstakes Common

This winter we completed a survey of ancient trees on the Common and entered our records on the ancient tree hunt website (www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk). In total we recorded 34 trees of five species: 11 hornbeams, 15 beech, 4 oak, 2 ash and 2 silver birch. We measured the girth at 1.5 m above ground level and recorded the tree as ancient if it met the criteria for that species (girths of 450 cm for oak, 300 for ash and beech, 230 for hornbeam and 150 for silver birch). We also recorded the grid reference, its form (maiden, pollard, multi-stemmed) and other features such as the presence of fungi, moss and lichen, and whether there were hollows and crevices where birds might nest and bats might roost. For multi-stemmed trees we had to measure the girth below the height where the multi-stems arose and record the height of our measurement. At first glance multi-stemmed trees look, from the size of the individual stems, as if they may be quite young but when one examines the base it becomes obvious from their huge dimensions that they are indeed ancient.

Of the 34 trees, only five could be identified as pollards with any certainty, two were beech and three hornbeam. Some of the beeches that we recorded as maiden (never having been cut) may have

been pollarded once but it was hard to tell. Pollards would be expected in Markstakes Common, which was historically managed as wood pasture – a form of management that was widespread at the time of the Domesday Book of 1086. Pollarding is the practice of cutting a tree between 2 and 3 metres above the ground, leaving a permanent trunk called a bolling. This sprouts to form a crop of poles, which were lopped at intervals either to provide leafy browse for stock or for wood. The practice allowed woodland to have a dual purpose of keeping livestock and producing wood for fuel and other uses. The older trees with their wide-spreading branches tell us that the wood was once quite open, with widely spaced trees among pasture. The two ash trees and several of the hornbeams old enough to qualify were boundary trees, with several stems arising from a large bole, relics of a former hedge perhaps. It is hard to tell the age of these old trees, but estimates using formulae worked out by others suggests that the largest hornbeam pollard may be perhaps 215 years old and the oldest beeches around 200 years old. It is possible that the beeches were planted in the wood but without historical documents, we cannot be sure of this.

Another interesting feature of the woodland is the frequent occurrence of companion trees, especially in the northern part of the Common. In the past it is believed that bundles of seedlings or saplings, either of the same or different species, were placed in the same hole in the expectation that one would prosper. But sometimes several would become trees and as their girths increased individuals might fuse together. Why not look out for these when you next visit the Common as well as enjoying our ancient trees.

Jacqui Hutson

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Bynski's Beech



If you wander off the beaten path in the woods at Markstakes you may notice that several of the older beech trees have initials and dates carved into the bark. I recently came across a group that were carved in May 1944. One in particular (see photograph) gave rather more detail than most – a name (Bynski), initial (C) and location (Kenora, Ontario). I contacted the local paper in Kenora (the Kenora Daily Miner and News) and, together with local reporter Mike Aitken who traced surviving relatives in Canada and some enthusiasts on the 'Canada at War' internet forum, have pieced together this story.

The carving was made by Charles Bynski on 14th May 1944. Born in October 1922 in Beausejour in eastern Manitoba, Charles' father worked on the railroad. The family moved to Kenora in Ontario and Charles had enlisted with the Lake Superior Regiment based in Thunder Bay. Charles was an infantryman with the motorised regiment that was part of the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps they arrived in England in August 1942. The Regiment stayed in England until the Normandy

invasion, shipping to France on July 20, 1944. From there, the record shows Charles Bynski fought for the liberation of the Netherlands.

Charles Bynski was killed in action on 27th April during the advance of the Canadian 2nd Corps into northern Germany, and across the Ems, just two weeks before victory in Europe was declared.

Private Bynski's sacrifice is recorded on the Memorial Park cenotaph in Kenora, as well as at Lakewood School and the Royal Canadian Legion. He is buried, along with 1,393 others at the Holten Canadian War Cemetery in the Dutch province of Overijssel.

After this story was published in the Kenora Daily News and Miner in December 2010 I was contacted by the relatives of other Canadian veteran's from Kenora asking whether there were any traces of their uncles and grandfathers. I am particularly keen to find any trace of another infantryman from Kenora who served alongside Charles Bynski and is buried with him in Holten. If anyone comes across the initials 'HB' or the name 'Henry Boucha' please let me know.

Ian Seccombe

Notes from our Ranger – Thyone Outram

By the time you read this I'm sure the first few days of sunshine will have flourished into full blown spring and we will be looking forward to another lovely display of wood anemones and bluebells.

At this time of year newts return to ponds and ditches to breed. Adults spend the most of the year living on land in damp places feeding on slugs, small insects, worms and snails but from Feb or March, they head for the ponds looking for mates

especially at night when they become more active.

We are trying to keep dogs out of the High Pond (by far the best pond for wildlife at Markstakes) especially during the amphibian breeding season, so I have put up signs asking people not to let their dogs in the water. We try to keep the signs at Markstakes Common to a minimum but dogs love water and there are a number of dog walkers that simply do not know that letting dogs in the pond disturbs the wildlife.

We will be watching with interest any changes to the ponds at Markstakes Common which dry out in the summer, since the work in the autumn by the Friends, volunteers and contractors has deepened the western 'Shallow Pond' and allowed more light to the water. In 2009 the high pond had some very dark areas with almost no vegetation. The work we did in Autumn 2009 letting light in to some of these areas produced quite dramatic results with pond plants all through the areas that now get light to the water. We are not expecting such immediate results for the Shallow Pond yet but we hope to see some improvement.

Look out for newts at the High Pond over the next 2 months. Occasionally on a sunny day they can be seen swimming to the surface and then 'hanging' in the water as they slowly sink again or just stare hard at the bottom of the pond and hope to see one move!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday April 19th 2011 7.30.p.m.

**The AGM at the Horns Lodge Pub,
South Chailey**

Thursday May 12th 2011 – 9.30.a.m.

Bluebell Walk from the gate in the flint wall – Markstakes Lane South Chailey with Rupert Hall

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

NOTICE OF 2nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
THE 'FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON'
WILL HOLD THEIR
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
ON
TUESDAY APRIL 19TH 2011
IN
THE HORNS LODGE PUBLIC HOUSE SOUTH
CHAILEY
AT 7.30.P.M.
ALL ARE WELCOME

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
TUESDAY 19TH APRIL 2011
AGENDA
1. APOLOGIES
2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND ADOPTION
3. TREASURER'S REPORT AND ADOPTION
4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS
5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING
Followed by a Talk by
Thyone Outram
Asst. Community Ranger



Friends of Markstakes Common

Subscriptions – 2011

I/We* would like to renew my/our* subscription to The Friends of Markstakes Common:

Name(s).....

(Mr./Mrs./other).....

Address.....

.....

Post Code.....Telephone No.....

Friend: £2.00.....Junior: 50p.....

I/We enclose the sum of £.....

(Cheques should be made payable to “**Friends of Markstakes Common**”)

Please return form to:

*William Coleman, Evergreen, Vicarage Lane, Scaynes Hill, West Sussex,
RH17 7PB. Tel: 01444 831098*

Thank you