



# Friends of Markstakes Common

## NEWSLETTER SPRING 2015

### From the Chairman

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.

Following what feels like a very wet winter with paths reduced at times to glutinous quagmire it is good to see some spring weather, sunshine and paths that have become more passable.

The Volunteers have been active during the winter extending the corner glade clearing the invasive birch so as to reveal a fine mature Oak. We believe that this part of the Common was formerly wood pasture and the broad spreading crown of this Oak would seem to confirm this. At ground level the area cleared last year was quickly colonized but most notably by Rush species implying a rather wetter area. This was confirmed during operations this year when it seemed as if there was water was springing from an underground source rather than accumulated rainfall.

An important part of the volunteers work is maintaining what has been cleared to date by weeding out invasive plants. This work is essential if we are to maintain the enhanced wildlife value arising from previous clearance work. . This year we noticed that young willows have been seeding in the mire and it has been a major effort to clear the area. Given the stubbornness of some of these roots winter, when the ground is soft is the best time to do this. While the impact is not dramatic, it is vital,

and I would like to thank the team for their persistence in dealing with this.

Thanks also to Ian Seccombe and Ian Woolsey for their efforts in surveying for butterflies and birds. It provides evidence of the benefits of what we do. At a more subjective level I also take great pleasure from the more varied landscape found on the Common with glades and open spaces rather than the vast swathes of bracken that were found almost everywhere before we started operations.

Rupert Hall

#### **NOTICE OF SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**THE 'FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES  
COMMON' WILL HOLD THEIR  
SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL  
MEETING**

**TUESDAY APRIL 21st 2015**  
**At HORNS LODGE PUB SOUTH CHAILEY**  
**AT 7.30.P.M**  
**ALL ARE WELCOME**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> APRIL 2015 7.30.p.m.**

**AGENDA**

- 1. APOLOGIES**
- 2. MINUTES of 22<sup>nd</sup> APRIL 2014**
- 3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND ADOPTION**
- 4. TREASURER'S REPORT AND ADOPTION**
- 5. ELECTION OF OFFICERS**
- 6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**
- 7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Followed by Talks and light refreshments**

## **Membership Matters**

We approach our Annual General Meeting in April again, and this is an opportunity for Friends to come along to the Horns Lodge pub and meet together and hear about the work going on at the common and also plans for the future.

Our Friends have continued to support us and our recent posters advertising our Volunteer Days have caught people's attention and we have new volunteers coming along and finding out what we do. Fresh air and exercise are the bonus!

Our website is at 'chaileyccommons.org.uk' and select 'Friends of Markstakes Common' from the left hand Menu/

Thank you all for your support of our continuing work at this beautiful and valuable site.

## **Surveys and Surveying**

Markstakes Common: an ancient woodland

In 1984, when the Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England) compiled the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Sussex, Markstakes Common was not classified as ancient woodland. However, the revised Ancient

Woodland Inventory for Lewes District, published in 2010 included the Common as a Ancient Wood Pasture, sub-category of Ancient Woodland. The report can be downloaded from [http://www.lewes.gov.uk/Files/plan\\_Lewes\\_ancient\\_woodland\\_survey\\_report.pdf](http://www.lewes.gov.uk/Files/plan_Lewes_ancient_woodland_survey_report.pdf)

So what is Ancient Woodland? It is defined as an area that has been wooded continuously since 1600 AD, i.e it has not been ploughed since that time. The trees could have been felled and replacements planted soon after or coppice taken and the stools left to regrow. So ancient woodland, perhaps having been cut over several times over the centuries, may not have very old trees. But why the 1600 AD date? The reason that was chosen is because it was the time in our history when good maps started to become more common. Maps dating from 1600 AD do not cover all areas so it is assumed that if a woodland was depicted on the Ordnance Survey drawings of 1795 and first edition Ordnance Survey maps then it probably would have been well established and already existing some 200 years ago.

There are other clues that help to identify ancient woods; old boundary banks and ditches, position of the wood on parish boundaries or on steep or very wet land that would have been difficult or impossible to cultivate, and the species that grow there. Many woodland flowers would not survive if a wood were to be cleared and not replanted soon after. And none could survive the plough. Most of them require the special conditions of humidity and shade that trees provide. Many are very slow to spread. There is a list of 100 species of woodland flowers that are characteristic of ancient woodland in South-East England and if more than 20 of these are found in any one wood in some quantity then it is a good indication that the wood is ancient. Markstakes Common has 37 Ancient Woodland indicators, including the rare Violet Helleborine *Epipactis purpurata* and Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor*, as well as the better known bluebells, wood anemones and primroses.

**WEB SITE** – <http://chaileyccommons.org.uk/page21.htm>

## From our Ranger

A new visitor to the pond.



Towards the end February we had an unexpected visitor to the High Pond. A Kingfisher was seen for a number of days near the pond perching and flying, presumably looking for something to eat in the pond. For most people, the image of a kingfisher is a flash of colour at high speed over a river or stream so it seemed unusual to see one at a woodland pond. They will however feed at any reasonable sized body of water and are quite often found near ponds, or by the sea, fishing in harbours and rocky pools. The bad news is that it may have been looking for any newts that had moved into the pond to breed. They do not usually take adult great crested newts but will take juveniles and smaller newts like the palmate newts in the High Pond. February was mild so a number of newts may have moved into the pond but the young great crested newts, which kingfishers will take, will not be seen until May or June. So, in February, it was just a thrill to see it.

### **More horses, more mud.**

This winter, there seemed to be more activity by horse riders on the main part of the common than in previous years. Unfortunately hooves break the surface of the paths up into mud much more quickly and thoroughly than feet so there are paths which are much muddier than in previous years. This could become a problem if

it continues. I'm sure most riders would be happy to stick to the bridleway (Balneath Track) if it did not become impassable and dangerous when wet. East Sussex County Council have a limited budget and can only thoroughly restore a limited number of bridleways each year. However the more people that are affected by a particular bridleway, the more likely it is to be addressed by ESCC.

So if you are affected by this bridleway either as a walker or a rider, ESCC need to know <http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/contactus/reportaproblem/streetproblem.htm>

Thyone Outram

## Dates for the Diary

### **Monday Weekly (most Mondays)**

This is our regular volunteer group time to meet.

We gather at the gate in the stone wall by Markstakes Lane at 9.30.a.m. and usually work until around 12.30. Tools are provided and suitable clothes are recommended according to the weather. We have a break so bring along light refreshments to keep you going.

If you have not been already, do come along and help us with this worthwhile and sensitive conservation work which is very rewarding and keeps you fit.

No phoning required, just come along and join us – we shall be pleased to see you.



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