

## The Meadowlark - Spring 2015



### EVENTS

#### Working Parties :-

April 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup>

May 15<sup>th</sup> with BITC volunteers.

May 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>

June 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>

July 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>st</sup> - this date may change depending on the hay cut arrangements.

August 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>st</sup>

#### Events where dates are to be confirmed:

Midsummer party in the grounds of the Old Vicarage - as always a fantastic afternoon and evening

Bridge Tea - the ever popular evening returns

Flag Day - your chance to help raise funds for the Trust

October wildlife quiz - as the nights draw in, come and test your knowledge



Winter has moved into Spring so quickly that Meadowlark is running to keep up! The Editor has finally been persuaded to come out of hibernation and the Meadows are waking up to a new year of possibilities. There is one element without which all this would be in vain - our Volunteers. Stalwarts who turn out in rain, sun, and even sleet to do the work that is slowly but surely transforming the Meadows from derelict farmland to a place where wildlife flourishes and children can play. Twenty years of neglect takes a lot of undoing, but we are getting there. So if you are already a Volunteer, thank you. If you aren't, why not come along and see what it's all about? And for a treat, take a look at our website for a superb video; "Today's green field" - a year in the life of the Meadows beautifully photographed by Xoanxo Cespon

The Editor.

This issue is dedicated to our Volunteers but for whose efforts and endurance we wouldn't have achieved even half as much. Fund raisers, land workers and providers of tea, cakes and superb beer you are all fantastic and the Trust thanks you very much.

And last but never least, the team from Waitrose who cleared the children's orchard site and the team from Friends of the Earth and Melvita Ltd who helped to create the Bee meadow and planted the first new osier thickets.

## It's Spring and a new year begins

Spring is here, and, to our surprise, the Meadows stayed dry throughout the winter. Long ago when the Meadows were an important source of grazing, this would have been something which would not have been welcomed by the farmer. Flood waters bring nutrients and keep the ground from freezing so that the new grass comes faster in the Spring and sheep and cattle can leave close cropped winter pastures for new lush grazing. On the other side of the A31, you can see the remains of the old sluices which the town's Drowning master would close to flood the Meadows, and the field in which they stand is still called "sluice meadow". This way of farming, and the Meadows themselves, are over 800 years old. In fact they are as old as Farnham itself - maybe a little older - and the Trust is here to make sure that they survive on into Farnham's future.

The Trust is sometimes asked why we need to do so much to the Meadows. Can't we leave them alone and let Nature take its course? It's a perfectly sensible question, and we'd be saved a lot of time, effort and money if only that was possible. Surprising as it may sound, the Meadows are a man-made area like so much of the local countryside. Without human intervention, they would become marshy alder and willow woodland with no open grassland and very few flowering plants. Paths would be swallowed up and the river would become a succession of pools and meanders.

The picture below gives some idea of what this would look like if left for long enough and you can see an example of this type of landscape in Moor Park. While the end result would probably be as good if not better for some wildlife (beavers perhaps) the human population would lose the open spaces and flowering grassland that makes the present Meadow so valuable as a green space in the heart of Farnham.



*Alder wood at Cefyn Brynn*

To keep them as they are and have been for so long, we need to do a lot of routine maintenance as well as restoration and re-creation work. That's where the Volunteers come in.

What sort of work is needed? Well those of you who garden or have allotments will have a fair idea already, just multiply it by 35 acres worth. For those who don't, let's take a look at the new 2015 programme.

In early Spring, we prepare the ground for the new hay crop. Brambles, nettles and blackthorn are beginning to send out new runners to colonise open areas of meadowland and these have to be cut back or sprayed using a chemical guaranteed harmless to wildlife and water creatures. We have already made a start on the central hedge cutting back one side this year and leaving the other side for next year. Preparation of a protected area for wildlife has begun. The brush mower is back in operation after its winter overhaul and we'd be pleased to give instruction to anyone over 18 who wants to experience using it.

Trees are inspected for winter damage and fallen or broken branches trimmed. In the children's orchard, the young fruit trees are treated for insect pests and fungi and the bramble and nettle shoots cut back to stop them taking over. Last year's bee meadow and the new extension is ploughed and harrowed and all are freshly seeded. It is also time to plant young trees to replace old ones lost to time and weather or to recreate hedgerows, copses and avenues which once existed.

In May, the persistent weeds are beginning to make an appearance. Ragwort, beloved by moths and deadly to horses and cattle, thistles and docks all contaminate the hay crop and have to be removed from the hay meadow. The picture below shows how attractive ragweed is



These plants are also attractive to wildlife so we have to keep a balance between removal and eradication. We do this by leaving untouched margins where insects can lay their eggs, caterpillars feed and birds collect seeds and insects for their young. We also leave bramble clumps because these are used as nesting sites by many birds and as safe havens by small animals. Another pest is beginning to make an appearance, Himalaya balsam. Although it's a pretty plant with pink flowers that bees love, this foreign invader can rapidly crowd out other plants. So far, hard work by volunteers has kept our river banks almost free but we have to check so it's on with the waders and off we go.



Summer - the grass is knee high and the weeds are growing happily so the work parties come out in force and uproot them. This is hot work because plants such as ragwort and dock are deep rooted and the ground is hard so they have to be dug out. The trees in the orchard need spraying against moth and watering at least once a week. At the moment, this means running a hose 250 metres across the boundary wall and over the cemetery to the only water tap for miles so it's work for the athletic. The orchard grass needs cutting and the brambles and nettles have to be discouraged from reclaiming their old territory.



*The orchard site - as it was*

July! And if all is well the hay is ready to be cut. There is just time for a last minute weeding party and a prayer that we haven't missed any ragwort before the cutters arrive to turn the gently waving grass into sweet smelling and very heavy bales of hay. From this-



To this



Now it's late summer and the young fruit trees should be showing signs of a crop. This will be their first year as fully established trees so fingers crossed and we hope that all the care has paid off and that there will be fruit for the children to take away with them. Weeds don't stop growing, so although the hay is cut we still have to keep on top of them. Fences and paths need looking at too so we can plan any repair work needed before the winter. The river is at its lowest so it's also time to look at the banks and see if any work needs doing before the winter floods come to test them.

Autumn.

More trees are planted, and it's a time for gathering black berries, sloes, crab apples and enjoying misty mornings....



In September the wild flowers are dying off in the bee meadow and the seed is ready to be collected for sowing next spring. The dead plants are removed and the ground is harrowed to cover up any seeds that have fallen. Once the leaves have fallen, the fruit trees are pruned and made ready for the next year. If any ploughing is needed this is the time for it. And then, winter comes and we clean and put away the tools and get ready for the next year when we start all over again.

This is what we volunteers do and no one else but us. So as you enjoy a walk in the Meadows or a stroll along the river, spare a thought for all the hard work that has gone into making this very special piece of land what it is. Better still, why not come along and lend a hand? We'd love to see you and it's a great way to get fit! Dates for the working party's are on the first page under "Events".

## Work in progress and plans for things to come

After the magnificent display in the new bee meadow last year, we are planning to re-sow the original acre and expand the area under wild flowers along the footpath towards the Central meadow. We have applied to Farnham Town Council to see if they can match last year's donation of flower seed and will be discussing ploughing and harrowing the new area with Andy McLaren.

A volunteer working party has already completed a major job of pruning and bramble clearance work on the hedgerow which runs from the BCA car park to Weydon Mill across the Meadows and we have also done a lot of work on clearing up the strip of land that runs along the boundary with Ferns Mead. This team excavated a large wad of wire mesh fencing, a watering can, several flower pots and a large black plastic object which defies description. The bonfire that followed was much enjoyed and welcome warmth on a chilly day.

Those of you who walk across the Meadows from the Church will be glad to know that we have taken the first step in repairing the footpath that runs beside the Tudor ditch and removed the old willow whose roots had wrecked the path. Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, over a ton of wood is now a large pile of chippings. Going.....



Going.....



Gone!



Now we can ask Surrey County Council to relay the tarmac surface, and the footpath is as good as new.

Thanks to a generous grant from Farnham Town Council, we are able to go ahead with a project to set up a wild life reserve next to the children's orchard. This fenced off area of blackthorn and grassland will be a sanctuary for wildlife and will we hope encourage small mammals such as hedgehogs to return to the Meadows. We have been promised 15 volunteers by British Industry in the Community so we intend to turn them loose on setting up this site. There will therefore be an volunteer day on 15<sup>th</sup> May to add to the planned volunteer days on 16/17<sup>th</sup> so please come long and lend us your support - and a helping hand.

There are already plans for other working parties so please keep an eye on our web site. Dates already set are on the front page of this newsletter. There has been a suggestion that we should hold volunteer days during the week as many of our members are ladies and gentlemen of leisure. What do you think?

## **Farnham in Bloom - the result.**

Last year Farnham won the gold for South East in Bloom and then the silver gilt for Britain in Bloom. As a one of the largest community projects in Farnham, the work of the Trust was taken into consideration by the judges so we played our part in this wonderful result. Then, to our surprise and considerable delight, the Trust was awarded a Certificate of Excellence by the Royal Horticultural Society! This is a fantastic tribute to the hard work of all our volunteers and the support of everyone whose generosity has helped them to achieve such fantastic results.

We have been in existence for a little over 5 years. In that time, we have acquired the Meadows, begun a major programme of restoration and made our mark as part of the community of Farnham. We do have to find another £58,000 before we are clear of debt so there will be no let up in the fund raising effort, but we are well and truly lunched on the long term programme to make the Meadows the beautiful place they were once and will be again.

## **We need your help.**

**The Trust is what its members chose to make it. Expertise, time or cash, however much or little you can spare, it's all welcome.**

What we have achieved has been the result of a lot of hard work by volunteers, schools and members. What we do now creates something new - an orchard, a bee meadow, an osier coppice even a new home for hedgehogs. Whether it's planting a new hedge or watering in the new fruit trees (a task that involves wrestling with 250 feet of fiendishly obstinate hose), there's a wide range of tasks going begging.

Help us to arrange the next event, join our fund raising team or work on planning the new wildlife reserve or, if you are feeling energetic, why not take the brush cutter for a stroll and clear swathes of rampaging brambles, be an artist with a strimmer or try your hand at harvesting wild flower seed. There is a lot to be done so please come and help us do it.

You don't have to be a Trustee or attend a single formal meeting. You don't even have to buy a pair of green wellies - although they do come in handy!

Tell the Board what you want to do or have to offer. They'll arrange for like minded people to get together and they'll suggest ways that you could help. If you have ideas about what needs to be done, made fun to do or just done better, these are always welcome.

## **Please don't be shy; giving a little time can make a big difference.**

If you prefer to give by subscription rather than by a lump sum we can easily arrange this. It can be as little as £10 a year so if you would like to do this, please contact our Treasurer at the e-mail address below.

Whether you give a little - or a lot - there's Gift Aid. Getting the Inland Revenue to actually give up money sounds impossible, but this is what it does. If you give, and are a UK tax payer please complete a gift aid form. It is very simple. If you have already donated and didn't, please, please do so. **It's never too late!**

Our gift aid form can be found on our web site, or you can contact our Treasure Graham Aston by email - [graham.aston@btinternet.com](mailto:graham.aston@btinternet.com) and he will email or post the form to you.

## **We thank**

Everyone who has contributed to our funds and particularly the executors of the estate of the late Beryl Mackay for their extraordinarily generous decision to allocate £10,000 to be spent "cheerfully" towards the upkeep of the Meadows. Those who knew her will remember Beryl as a great supporter of the Meadows and of many other Farnham causes and her gift is very welcome.

We'd also like to thank everyone who has generously agreed to convert their initial donation into an annual gift-aided subscription. This is an incredible help to the Trust, especially if we can claim gift aid on the subscription.

**Thank you all**

And finally....the ones who started it and carried the load in the very beginning.



(left to right) Emma Selby with Daniel and Maddie, Simon Jones, Ed Partridge and Jo Aylwin

And this is what it's all about - our Meadows on an early spring day. But where was the photographer standing?



*Photograph courtesy of Xoanxo Cespon*

## Acknowledgement

The Editor would like to thank all those who have suggested, prodded, encouraged, proof read, spell-checked and generally supported him in producing this newsletter. Thanks Team!