

# Westcombe Woodlands Newsletter

Friends of Westcombe Woodlands  
Spring 2013 Issue No. 2



*EC members and volunteers standing beside newly planted apple and pear trees*

The next **VOLUNTEER DAYS** will be on Saturday 6th, April at Lasseter Place and Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May, at The Glade when we will be working on habitat creation. For further details contact: [westcombewoodlands@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:westcombewoodlands@hotmail.co.uk)

## **CHAIR'S LETTER**

We have achieved a lot in the last few months, and look forward with confidence to the year ahead. We have obtained clearance from HMRC so that we are registered as a Charity for Gift Aid purposes, and can begin actively soliciting Friends and their subscriptions!

A detailed Management Plan has been drawn up and approved by the Committee of the Friends. This sets out the objectives which we have set ourselves as a group. Further details are provided in this newsletter.

With the help and advice of Peter Coomb we have an impressive web-site up and running. Look for yourself at [www.westcombewoodlands.org](http://www.westcombewoodlands.org). We hope to keep this up to date with a combination of articles about the history of the woodlands, and details of the work which we are doing to maintain and improve them.

A Friends' leaflet has been prepared and circulated in the streets adjacent to the woodlands. These include the dates of our volunteer days for the rest of 2013, and an invitation to join the Friends with a membership form attached. If you have not received a leaflet the same details are provided in this newsletter. As an incentive to join, (and the subscriptions will hopefully not put anybody off!), the first 50 members will be invited to a drinks party on June 8<sup>th</sup>. So that the party is not invaded by people who would like a free drink without paying their subscription, we will only give the address when the subscription is forthcoming!

But it is on the ground that we are making most progress, and it is that part of the Friends activities which we would hope would draw in larger numbers of volunteers to our monthly work days, and to become Friends. We have made progress in clearing the glade area and have purchased and planted the apple and pear trees in a grid formation to replicate the pattern which would have existed when there were orchards on the site. Again further details are provided in the newsletter. We also have done a lot more work of clearance in both the glade area and at the Lasseter Place end of the woodland, and there are plans to plant meadow grass and wild flowers. We also are considering the location of a pond which would be a great feature.

I should say that my six-year-old grandchild had a ball at one of the recent volunteer days and there have been other children who love the digging and exploring. So come along to a volunteer day and join us.

*Tim Barnes*

## **VOLUNTEER WORK UPDATE**

The system of monthly volunteer days is now well established, meeting alternately on the first Saturday and Sunday of each month.

Our work over the winter months has been concentrated in the glade area. We have left the old pear tree, but have cleared much of the rest of the area from a mass of brambles, weeds, nettles and sycamores. At our March volunteer day, (well supported by about 20 volunteers) we planted apple and pear trees, (see picture on the front and back of the newsletter). These were a mix of Cox's Orange Pippin, Flower of Kent and Bramleys Seedling, as far as the apple trees were concerned, and Williams Bon Chretien for the pear trees. These are traditional types of fruit trees which might have grown in the woodlands when part was set out as orchards.

The holes which were dug to accommodate the root balls were deep and the earth enriched with accumulated ages of leaf mould. We look forward to our first crop.



*The chair, Tim Barnes assisted by the vice chair, Frank Smith, hammering a stake*

The continued clearance of the glade will be necessary during the summer months to clear the soil again of nettles, brambles and other invasive species. But we hope at our May volunteer day to begin sowing meadow grass and wild flowers in the glade. Don Albrecht is preparing a detailed plan of this area which will provide a blueprint for our future works. We still have in mind the construction of a pond to attract more wildlife into the glade.

In April we will be concentrating on the Lassester Place end of the woodlands. We need to clear the encroaching brambles from around the path which we built last year, and to construct a destination point at the end of the path, before the land falls away so sharply as to prevent further penetration of the woods, (except to the intrepid!). One idea is to build a hide from which to observe the bird life. Speaking of which, we hope to have Joe Beale at either the April or May volunteer day to bring us up to date with his plans for the bird survey. And also the bird box construction which was a success last year.

We have a kernel of at least 10 volunteers who turn out religiously, but with the coming summer months we hope to increase that number. We have the major project of clearing the path down from the glade to the Seren Park Car Park (where we hope to provide an access gate), to embark on. Details of the nature of the work to be carried out on the volunteer days and the access point from which to join the group will be posted on the web site at least a week before the event.

## **BIRD SURVEY**

We intend to have a bird survey carried out by Joe Beale, who will be known to many of you as the author of the leaflet concerning the bird-life in Greenwich Park. Joe will be monitoring the birds in the early mornings, and it may be possible for one or two Friends to accompany him on these monthly sessions.

We hope that the survey will be up and running by the summer of this year. Details will be provided on the web-site as to when they are to take place and how you can introduce yourself to Joe with a view to accompanying him.

We had a survey carried out for the BPT Woodlands company in 2006/2007 and it will be informative to see whether the numbers have varied over the intervening years. As a matter of interest between 7am and 9am on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 the following birds were seen or heard; five black headed gulls, five blackbirds, three blue tits, two carrion crows, one chaffinch, one coal tit, one collared dove, one dunnock, one great spotted woodpecker, two great tits, five long tailed tits, one mistle thrushes, four ring-necked parakeets, one robin, one sparrow hawk, two starlings and four wood pigeons.

But what about owls? Or nightingales? Or buzzards?

If you volunteer and have the knowledge to recognize birds by sound or by appearance while working in the woodlands, do keep a record and let Joe know what you have heard and seen

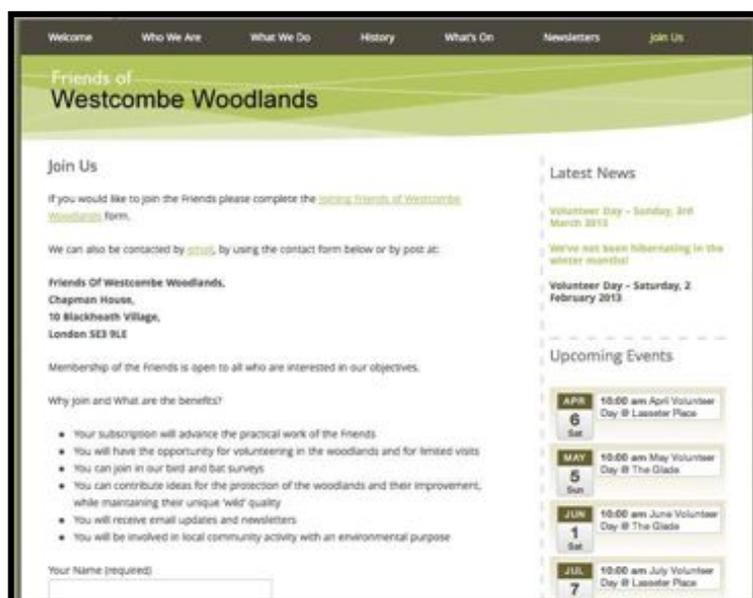
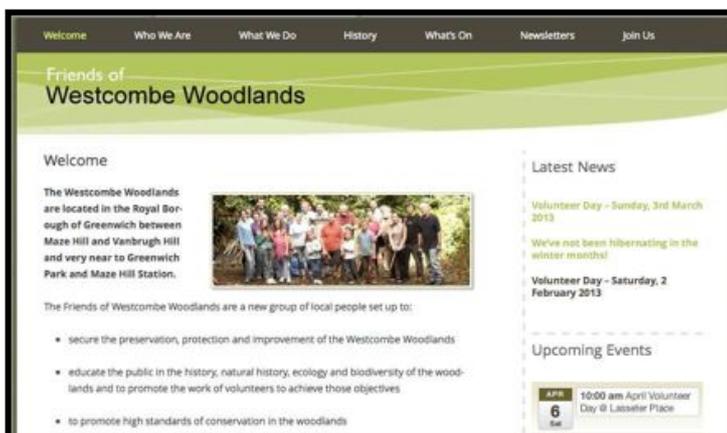
## **MEET JOE BEALE, OUR BIRD SURVEY EXPERT**

I was born in Greenwich but lived for several years on the south coast. I did an MA in Illustration at University of the Arts, London and I do some freelance illustration work from time to time. I also have a CELTA certificate so I can teach English as a second language. Since moving back to Greenwich I've tried to get more involved in community and environmental groups and I am a voluntary weekend Wildlife Ranger at Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park. I teach English to beginners at Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network once a week and record birds in Greenwich Park and Blackheath on a regular basis. I am a member of the London Natural History Society. I'm also a member of Butterfly Conservation and the RSPB. My interests/aims include wildlife, the environment, making very good tea, trying to increase a sense of community and respect for our local area, plus illustration, art and design amongst other things.

## NEW WEB SITE NOW ONLINE by Carolyn Watkins

The Friends of Westcombe Woodlands are pleased to announce the launch of their web site at [www.westcombewoodlands.org.uk](http://www.westcombewoodlands.org.uk)! This web site has been created with the expert help of Pete Coomb and the input of trustees and local residents. It is full of useful information, interesting history and exciting plans to improve the woodland habitat so that creatures and plants can flourish.

You can see from this illustration of our homepage that there are seven sections, covering a host of topics. The **Welcome** page introduces you to our objectives, has an interactive satellite map of the area and gives a brief overview of the site and its recent history – you may have read this in our new leaflet, which should be popping through your letterbox very soon. If you are keen local historians, turn to the **History** pages, compiled by Alex Grant, who is one of the trustees and a local councillor, or find out who the other trustees are on the **Who We Are** page.



Keep up to date with the **Latest News** and **Upcoming Events** using the links that appear on the right hand side of every page of the web site, or look back at archived **Newsletters**.

Most importantly - go to the **Join Us** page to contact us and find out how to become one of the Friends of Westcombe Woodlands. If you sign up as a **Friend** before the end of April you will be invited to an

**exclusive drinks reception on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June** – we hope to meet you there.

## MEET PETER COOMB, OUR WEB DESIGNER

Pete suffered a period of unemployment during the noughties and decided to retrain as a web designer to satisfy his creative streak. He finished his course at Exeter University in 2008 and has since specialised in designing and building web sites for creative professionals – photographers, stylists and publishing types – as well as a number of sites for community and charitable organisations. Having completed his course, Pete was tempted back into the world of regular paid employment, but still spends much of his time juggling code and checking web analytics. He sees it more of a way of life than a job. Pete's other job as a data governance auditor gives him a useful background in the complexities of data protection relating to web sites. He lives with his grown up family in Westcombe Park and has been a parent supporter of the environmental initiatives at Halstow and Thomas Tallis Schools.

## **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE - MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Here is an extract from the Management Works Programme for Westcombe Woodlands 2013

### **Objectives for the whole site**

- Safety and security; (a) inspect and maintain boundary fencing with repairs as necessary, with agreement of neighbours and possible contribution to the cost, (b) arboricultural inspection of trees, especially those within falling distance of boundaries, and felling/lopping of trees which create a potential danger, (c) removal of rubbish, (d) inspections for evidence of land slippage.
- Control of invasive species; (a) control and removal of sycamore in locations where there is natural regeneration of other native species, or where re-planting is feasible with better quality trees/shrubs, (b) control and cut back ivy and brambles, digging out roots, (c) control of non-native garden invasive species and clearing dense undergrowth.

### **Objectives for access to the woodlands**

- Research into the feasibility and costs of accessing the woodlands, (a) from Tom Smith Close and (b) from the Seren Park entrance, and obtaining a topographical survey.
- Obtaining the necessary consents to the creation of an entrance point to the woodlands when the decision has been made as to the preferred access. Liaising with the Fire Service as to their advice on this issue.
- Planning the route from whatever access point is chosen to the glade, e.g. zigzag path through the woods, or steps. Obtaining estimates of costs as to these alternatives and considering whether they are susceptible of volunteer activity or would require professional involvement.
- Obtaining consents from neighbours in Maze Hill for accessing (with volunteers) the glade and lower part of the woodlands, during the time when there is no direct access from Tom Smith Close or Seren Park.

### **Objectives for the glade**

- Formulating and approving a plan for the glade, showing its precise location within the woods, and the areas which may be given over to meadow grass with wild flowers, a small orchard, paths, and the planting of shrubs, specimen trees and plants.
- Considering the feasibility of a pond within the glade area.
- Clearing the whole of the glade area, and if so advised, using weed killer to control invasive species such as bindweed, nettles etc.
- Erecting bird boxes in the glade.
- Considering the viability of bee hives.
- Obtaining estimates of the cost of the works reflected in the plan, and approving such expenditure.
- Using volunteers to carry out the work to the glade area under proper supervision.
- Maintaining the paths to the glade and planting bulbs along the route of these paths.

### **Objectives for the Lasseter Place end of the woodlands**

- Preparing a plan of the area inside the Lasseter Place gates on which our efforts for improvement will be concentrated. This will show the extent of the area in question and the type of planting which may be decided on.
- Once the decision in principle has been agreed as to the parameters of the area involved, a design should be worked out showing the planting proposed.
- Volunteers should assist in clearing and maintaining the area in question, and after estimates as to cost have been received and approved, helping with the planting.

### **Surveys**

- There should be a survey of both flora and fauna in the Woodlands. Initially there should be bird and bat surveys conducted by volunteers.

## **ACCESS TO THE GLADE**

At present we are dependent on the good-will of Nick Mountfield who has bought 77 Maze Hill, for accessing the glade area. But we cannot continue to be dependent on his generosity and it is important that we obtain some permanent access to the glade and lower part of the woods.

The Lasseter Place entrance is currently the only legal entry point but leads to a limited area before the land falls away steeply towards Seren Park.

The best access would be from the Car Park adjacent to the Seren Park development. Indeed we have found traces of an old and overgrown path which used to lead down to that point. This could be cleared and improved.

The Friends have recently shown Adam Carter, the Station Manager for East Greenwich Fire Station, around the site. He has responded as follows, "The current access arrangements, from an LFB perspective, are insufficient if we are to tackle potential fires in the woodland quickly and efficiently. The single point of access in Lasseter Place is limited and serves only a small part of the woodland; from here, due to the precipitous nature of the woodland, it is not possible to move our equipment or personnel to lower areas nearer to Seren Park."

His recommendation is for "a large single gate, within the current fencing of the Seren Park Car Park area." This view reflects our own. In that it would help to safeguard Seren Park from fire in the event of this breaking out within the woodlands we would hope that it would be acceptable to the owners of that development.

The Committee of the Friends is seeking to engage for this purpose with the owners, on the understanding that the gate would be installed at no cost to the owners, and that it would only be used on a limited number of times a year when volunteers are accessing the lower woodlands, or on the odd occasion when we might have an open day – or, of course, by the London Fire Brigade in an emergency.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

We now have a membership leaflet telling people about the woodlands and about the Friends and what we do. The core message is "Come and join us!"

We have started putting the leaflet - with an insert giving details of all our volunteer days in 2013 - through letterboxes in the roads immediately surrounding the woodlands and publicising our existence through articles in the *Westcombe News* and the newsletters of the Greenwich and Blackheath Societies.

Already we have over 30 members signed-up, including seven life members.

You can join either by completing the form in the leaflet or by going to our web site [www.westcombewoodlands.org](http://www.westcombewoodlands.org) and following the links.

If you haven't received a leaflet directly and would be prepared to help with distribution in your street / area, please get in touch with us. We'd be very grateful for your help in informing the local community.

Finally, if you haven't already joined as a member, please do so – the more members we have the more we'll be able to do to improve the health and biodiversity of the woodlands! We welcome both active volunteers and well-wishing but less active supporters who are keen to help a worthwhile local project. As an encouragement, if you sign up before the end of April 2013 you will be invited to a private drinks reception on Saturday 8 June!!

## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I hope you enjoyed our second Friends' newsletter. We've seen a lot of great things happen over the last few months from the creation of the web site, getting charity status and planting of the orchard, and we are looking forward to seeing much more. We welcome your letters, comments, photographs and articles for the newsletter. You can take a look at one of many letters written below. Also here's a good piece of news that is 'hot of the press' we've just been awarded £650 from the Capital Cleanup Grant. Which is excellent news! Look forward to seeing you at the next volunteer's day.

*Denise, Editor*

## LETTER

*Dear Friends of the Westcombe Woodland,  
I would be interested to know the different types of trees that presently grow in the Woodlands. I see that it is planned to hold a bird survey, and I welcome that; but if we are to restore the woods to an old woodlands with the variety of trees habitually associated with such an area, we need to know what is presently there. That would surely enable the Friends to select the right type of trees and shrubs for planting. I would have thought that with some supervision from those who 'knew' their trees, a tree survey might be an activity which could be incorporated in one of the forthcoming volunteer days.  
Yours sincerely,*

*A tree-loving neighbour*



### Friends of Westcombe Woodlands 2013 Volunteer Days

**April, Saturday 6th, 10am – 1pm**

Lasseter Place: habitat creation

**May, Sunday 5th, 10am – 1pm**

The Glade: habitat creation

**June, Saturday 1st, 10am – 1pm**

The Glade: creating a pond

**July, Sunday 7th, 10am – 1pm**

Lasseter Place: clearing & maintenance

**August, Saturday 3rd, 10am – 1pm**

The Glade: clearing & maintenance

**September, Sunday 1st, 10am – 1pm**

The Glade: clearing & habitat creation

**October, Saturday 5th, 10am – 1pm**

Lasseter Place: prep & bulb planting

**November, Sunday 3rd, 10am – 1pm**

The Glade: preparation & bulb planting

*Please see our web site for further details & updates throughout the year (activities may vary) and to register for volunteer days - [www.westcombewoodlands.org](http://www.westcombewoodlands.org)*

