



# Spring 2018

# Westcombe Woodlands

Newsletter – Issue 10

## Chairman's Letter for Friends of Westcombe Woodlands Newsletter

I would wish to start with paying tribute to Frank Smith for his crucial service to the Woodlands over many years. Frank has decided to stand down from his role as Vice Chairman, and Treasurer of the Friends. We understand and accept that having helped to launch the Friends, having been involved in the negotiations with the Woodland Trust which have guaranteed the future integrity of the Woodlands, and having put the Friends in a stable financial position, now is a good time from his perspective to relinquish further executive responsibility for the organisation. But he has promised that his enthusiasm for the project is as strong as ever, and (even more crucially!) he will maintain responsibility for refreshments on volunteer days. We are delighted that Miriam Hier has agreed to take on the role of Treasurer and that Nigel Duncan has assumed the position of Vice Chairman.

There are other trustees who do an enormous amount to carry forward the plans for the Woodlands and help to maintain the balance between maintaining the innate wildness of the place

and the need for people to see and enjoy the woods. I hope it is not invidious to other trustees if I single out 3 of our trustees who do so much for the cause.

Andrew Slade is the keeper of the hut in which all our tools and equipment are kept. If a prize

was offered for the smartest and best kept hut in SE3 ours would be in with a good chance of taking the prize. He is also bee keeper in chief on whose professionalism and regular attendance the bees in our hives off the glade are dependent for their well-being. He is also indefatigable in organising the works which the volunteers do on their monthly visits to the woodlands.

Don Albrecht is by profession a landscape architect working in Greenwich. His knowledge of flora and fauna and understanding of what is and (more importantly) is not appropriate to plant in the woodlands is crucial to our task. The bulbs, plants and trees which have been planted in recent months have been approved by Don and are naturally indigenous to a stretch of woodland like ours. He also liaises with the professional tree surgeon over what trees need to be cut down.

Rich Sylvester has an encyclopaedic knowledge of woodlands, and has the ability to share his enthusiasm with children through his involvement with forest schools. His skills come into their own on the Open Days when children are invited to participate in a wide variety of events. He is also central to our desire to develop links with local primary schools whose children (properly supervised) could enjoy the experience of being in such a magical space.

The woodlands themselves are now beginning to show the results of our efforts in the past few years. The oak glade on the way up to the main glade is now getting established and the cutting down of a



large Robinia has allowed much more light into this area. Clumps of native bluebells are now becoming established. In the main glade the pond now looks as if it has been there since time immemorial (rather than 2 years) and has a lot of pond life around and in it.



The bees are well established and we hope to generate our first jars of honey this coming summer. Some additional planting of trees particularly on the steep slope going up the glade have become established (although the need to remove sycamore

saplings is a continuous, never ending chore!)

**Tim Barnes – Chairman – April 2018**

## News from the Woodlands

### Grass in the glade

We do not use a motor mower and the grass in the glade is cut by hand, either with a scythe or with shears. The high fertility of the soil means that we are unlikely to obtain the high species diversity of a meadow as the grasses are dominant. But by cutting in the spring we hope to increase the amount of wild flowers in the summer. Paths through the grass were cut for the recent Open Day to make the glade attractive as well as ensuring that visitors did not get soaking feet!

### Snow in the Woodlands



This year saw appreciable snow fall and the woodlands were particularly beautiful as the photograph shows.

## Pond Dipping Grant from the Royal Borough of Greenwich



We are very grateful for a grant of £300 from Greenwich Council in the autumn of 2017. This enabled us to purchase several nets for pond dipping purposes. These are quite capacious and with a fine mesh which enables interesting catches to be made. In addition, the

money provided 2 microscopes which give children (and their parents) the ability to study what they have caught.

### Twitter account

This has now been set up under @WestcombeWood and is being used to share ideas and enthusiasms among volunteers and Friends. In addition, our website is kept up to date with events, such as volunteer days.

### Membership

We currently have 79 members but count 2 people living in the same household as one member. The subscription rates have not change since the inception of the Friends and as the years pass become ever better value for money. Annual subscription is £10 or £15 for 2 in the same family. Life membership is £100 (or £150 for 2 persons in one household). Our ambition is to bring the numbers up to 100 by the end of 2018.

In answer to the question “what do we get if we become Friends?” the answer is that you receive our Newsletter and an invitation to a summer party solely for Friends in the summer. Your subscriptions go to the Woodlands as there are no paid staff involved. We hope that Friends will also become volunteers and help on our monthly work days.

## Woodlands Bird Survey

Early on Sunday 4th February 2018, local ecologist Joe Beale joined several committee members and volunteers for our regular woodlands bird survey. Full results of Joe's observations can be found on our Website's Wildlife section. But in summary there were 18 different bird species identified, including blackbirds, goldcrests, jays, magpies wood pigeons and even a sparrow hawk. Robins and wrens were heard but not seen.

## Removal of Robinias and the Oak Glade

Two large robinias in the oak glade were removed by a tree surgeon acting for the Friends. They had passed their sell-by date and were taking a good deal of light from the oak glade where we have planted some 15



or so oak tree saplings. The cutting down of these trees not only provides us with a good supply of logs for edging purposes and steps but has had a transformative effect on the oak glade. Light now pours in and the clumps of celandines and bluebells are becoming established on

the woodland floor.

## Schools and the Woodlands

Both Rich Sylvester and Ruth Cracknell have experience of Forestry Schools and good contacts with some primary schools in the area. A group of children from Halstow School recently visited the Woodlands and thoroughly enjoyed the experience (as did their teachers). It is the hope of the Committee that it will be possible to arrange a limited number of such visits and for the children to learn and put into practice some of the ideas concerning wild life and plant and flower propagation. It is our intention to seek some grant funding to put these ideas into effect. But Friends and volunteers should be reassured that there is no question of such visits becoming so regular

or invasive as to compromise the innate wildness of the woodlands.

## Open Day – Sunday 29th April 2018

A week to the day after the hottest London Marathon Sunday on record, we held the Open Day in the Woodlands on one of the coldest days imaginable. No rain but a bitter wind and low temperatures.



So we were delighted and surprised by the number of people, and in particular families with young children, who visited the Woodlands. Between 60 and 70 attended and a good time was had by all. Cakes and snacks were available from a stall in the glade

under a tarpaulin which (erected without Rich's assistance) it had taken other members of the committee a considerable time to erect in the morning. Luckily the wind was not that strong, or we might have lost it.



There was pond dipping with large amounts of mud, weed and the occasional tadpole being fished out by children and parents using our large nets. The contents were transferred to dishes and microscopes enabled children to examine what they had found.



In addition, there was a stall where children were encouraged to colour cut outs of trees and make necklaces from things found in the woods. Large numbers of worms

were excavated and there were areas for children to dig (using the children's tools acquired by the Friends last year) prior to being planted with a wild flower mix. Finally, there were the bees. Posters set out the story of the Westcombe Bees and their hives, and Jeremy and Andrew (our two apiarists) were on hand to field the questions.



It would be over-stating things to say that there was a carpet of bluebells but clumps have now become established as have clumps of primroses. A pictorial quiz to find and identify flowers and leaves was prepared by Don and enthusiastically taken up

by children with some 12 completed surveys.

What was particularly encouraging was the number of visitors who had not been to the Woodlands before and said that they would become Friends or volunteers.