

Volunteers Improve Popular Harbour Footpath

A team of volunteers from the Friends have put in a mammoth effort to improve the footpath on one of the most popular routes around Chichester Harbour.



Bernard Clarke, our Chairman, cutting a ribbon to open the resurfaced path at Salterns Copse

Last winter, the footpath alongside the harbour at Salterns Copse, Birdham was badly flooded and became almost impassable. The surrounding woodland was suffering with people finding alternative dryer routes. To solve the problem, the Conservancy, who manage the land, came up with the solution to resurface the path with shingle. To keep costs down the Friends stepped in and offered to fund and undertake the work during their weekly work parties.

Over the summer over 180 man hours were spent transporting and laying shingle. Over 300m of path were completed and 20 tonnes of shingle laid. Nicky Horter, AONB Officer said, 'the finished result is a path which still looks natural but will drain well and keep this beautiful route open throughout the year.'

The path was officially opened by Bernard Clarke, our Chairman, in December. Bernard added, 'I would like to thank all the volunteers who gave their time to such a worthwhile project. The strength of the Friends group is that we are able to offer both financial and practical support to projects throughout the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.'



Busy Autumn For Education Centre

Last autumn, the Education Centre hosted more field trips and workshops than ever before, at this time of year, for all age groups, writes Gary James, Education Officer.

These have covered a wide range of subjects including geography, biology, history, art and citizenship. The Junior Conservancy days (photo above) have again been very well received, with six local schools participating this time. 'We were also pleased to host six local secondary schools for Earth, Air and Water art events', Gary writes, 'and for two weeks at the beginning of December, South Downs college BTEC students braved the cold to complete their environmental education module.'

The Education Service have recently made links with the Wrenford Centre in Chichester, a centre for adults with learning difficulties. The group is now coming to the Education Centre every week. In conjunction with the rangers the group help look after Beaky's Wildlife Walk (the nature area funded with support from the Friends).

January and February are traditionally quiet months in terms of visiting schools but provide a useful time to prepare for the busy season of field trips. In addition, Gary James and Jane Latawski (Education Officers) will be working to complete the 'Learning Outside the Classroom' quality badge. Jane Fremantle (Field Teacher) will be developing the Harbour History days out (supported by the Friends) and we are hoping to provide more intergenerational days out following last year's successful program which was also supported by the Friends.

Welcome to our new Chairman!

Bernard Clarke, our new Chairman, took the helm of the Friends at the AGM in October. A resident of Chidham for 21 years, Bernard is passionate about the harbour.

A keen sailor, he began by exploring the harbour waters in his dinghy, and then graduated to ocean sailing. He is a past Commodore of Chichester Yacht Club and currently the Commodore of the Westerly Owners Association (with 3000 plus members the largest association of its kind in the world). A RYA/MCA qualified Yacht Master Ocean, Bernard recently sailed his Westerly Oceanlord *Golden Eye of Chichester* around the world and plans to sail to Chichester Harbour from Turkey this to fully 'close the circle'.

Bernard and his wife Jean take a keen interest in local affairs. Bernard is a Chidham Parish Councillor and an enthusiastic supporter of the Cobnor Activity Centre.

Bernard was educated at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). His career and background spans board level operational management responsibility, HR management roles, consultancy and people development throughout Europe and the USA.

Harbour Re-stocked with Oysters

We reported in our last issue that the number of oysters had declined seriously in the harbour, and work was under way to improve the situation.

There has been good progress. In November, a local fisherman was contracted by the Conservancy, Sussex Sea Fisheries and Natural England to dredge some two tons of oysters from areas of the harbour, and the Solent.

They were then carefully placed in areas of the harbour away from normal dredging procedures.

Our Chairman writes:

NEW CHALLENGES AHEAD

Whilst we can be justifiably proud of what we achieved last year there is little doubt that 2011 will bring new challenges to the membership, work and role of the Friends. Our aspiration must be to at least continue with the current level of support, both financial and practical, to help maintain and protect the harbour environment and shore line. Ideally, we will grow in strength in order to keep pace with the task that we face.

We expect that the practical and financial contribution made by the Friends will grow in its importance. We anticipate that threats to the Harbour and AONB, not least of which is the relentless continuation in housing development in the area, will grow whilst at the same time grants and funds available to the Conservancy are likely to be affected by the current economic climate and constraints.



The strength of the Friends lies within our broad membership and the kinds of support given. Our 'broad church' encompasses many aspects of membership. There are many who are happy to be a Friend by paying their annual modest subscription, often with an additional donation, alongside some local organisations, parish councils, resident associations and sailing clubs who are Corporate or Group Members. We have a growing number of Life Members and those who make donations and remember the Friends in their will and legacies. And, thankfully we have a large number of Friends who turn out on our regular work parties around the harbour supported and lead by the Conservancy Rangers, as well as the many members who distribute our newsletter to members.

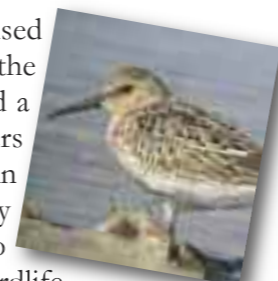
Our substantial achievements last year were made possible because of the collective support of all these members – on behalf of the Friends' Committee, we thank you and hope that we will continue into this year with your continued support. We can then, with more new members joining us, be sure to maintain and strengthen our important contribution to the AONB and Chichester Harbour.

Bernard Clarke



Friends Winter Birdlife Cruise

The first social event organised specifically for members of the Friends was fully subscribed and a great success. Some 30 members joined the solar boat in Itchenor in November, for a cruise past Pilsey Island and up Thorney channel to view the harbour's rich winter birdlife.



Ed Rowsell, the Harbour's Conservation Officer, was on board to provide a commentary, assisted by the two harbour rangers, Georgie and Keith. The binoculars provided on board by the Friends for members of the public were useful in securing a close up view.

We spotted thousands of Dunlin (above) and Knot, active as always on the tideline. The Brent Geese had arrived from the Arctic, and Ed was pleased to spot several juveniles who had made their way south to this winter feeding ground for the first time.

More unusual sightings included a Red-breasted Merganser and a Peregrine Falcon - and one of the Harbour Seals made an appearance as well.

Our thanks to Norman Payne for setting up this event. Further events for members will take place in 2011.

Two short films have been produced, part funded by the Friends, to highlight the special qualities of the Chichester Harbour AONB and the work of the Conservancy.

They have attracted a lot of interest - the film titled 'Why so special?' having been watched over 1,000 times. You can view them on the website - www.conservancy.co.uk.



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Newsletter



Friends Support Rural Resource Centre



The Friends have agreed to make their largest-ever donation to support a major new initiative by the Conservancy - the conversion of derelict farm buildings on Thorney Island into an education resource centre.

Work started on the conversion of the Eames Farm buildings in January, and is due to be completed by the Spring. The project provides an excellent example of how different organisations involved in the conservation of the harbour can work together to bring about improvements.

Initially, the Chichester Harbour Trust acquired a 999-year lease on Eames Farm to protect the large area of coastal grazing marsh that lies between the Army base on Thorney Island and the mainland.

The Conservancy saw the benefit of using the farm buildings as a countryside resource centre - to raise public understanding of the role of farming within the AONB; to encourage farmers to work in an environmentally friendly way; and to give schoolchildren a more comprehensive understanding of the countryside.

Apart from the Friends, who donated £30,000, other major supporters are the Woodger Trust (£35,000), the Ernest Kleinwort Trust (£25,000), the European Leader Project, administered by WSCC (£25,000) and the County Council themselves (£5,000).

The Conservancy will arrange an Open Day shortly after the Centre is completed so members of the Friends can tour the site.

See inside this issue for further details of the project.

A Rubbish Success Story

Congratulations to members who turned out for the big beach cleanup operation at Cobnor last autumn.

Twenty volunteers collected 12 sacks of rubbish from 600 metres of shoreline.

This part of the harbour receives more than its fair share of rubbish, as the prevailing westerly winds drive it on to the Cobnor shore.



Too Cold for Geese!

How did the harbour wildlife cope with the very cold weather in December?

The Conservancy's Ed Rowsell tells us that an RSPB survey found that 2,000 Brent Geese had left the harbour - almost certainly flying south to escape the snow. Most of the Little Egrets had gone as well - but in their case, probably inland to find fast flowing streams that weren't iced over.

New Move To Curb Sewage Pollution

The Conservancy are so concerned at the high level of storm discharges from the Chichester Wastewater Treatment Works at Apuldram that they have appointed a working party to examine the problem - a move strongly supported by the Friends.

For the year to 31 March 2010, Apuldram discharged storm water, which includes semi treated sewage, into the harbour for the equivalent of 108 days - nearly 30% of the time.

Acting Manager and Harbour Master Richard Craven says the Conservancy have serious concerns about both the frequency of discharges and its impact on the ecology of the harbour. They are asking the Environment Agency whether the requirements of the Habitat Directive are being fully met, and whether there should be curbs on development within the Apuldram works catchment area until measures are in place to reduce storm discharges to acceptable levels.

'The effect on the shellfish beds and the health of harbour users immersed in poor quality water are also of concern', Richard adds.



Why Pilsley Island Needs Special Care And Protection

What's so special about Pilsley Island? It's one of the few parts of the harbour where there is no public access - not even the military families stationed on Thorney Island are allowed down there. Here, Conservation Officer Ed Rowsell explains why this little corner of the AONB needs such special protection

Pilsley Island, the sand and shingle feature occurring at the South East corner of Thorney Island, is leased by the RSPB as a nature reserve and has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve protected by numerous bye-laws.

The management of the 'island', now firmly attached to Thorney, is a joint venture between the RSPB, the Conservancy and the MoD.

The bird interest is year round with the site acting as one of the key high-tide wader roosts in the harbour, if not the entire Solent. The site regularly hosts 10,000 birds, but this can get towards 20,000 on occasion. Regularly 25 different species use the roost including up to 10,000 Dunlin, 1,200 Oystercatchers and 1,000 Bar-tailed Godwits.

It also acts as a stopping off point for migrating birds - for example Osprey, Ringed Plover and Sanderling, but rarities such as Red-backed Shrike and Buff-breasted Sandpiper have also been recorded. In the breeding season waders such as Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover nest on the shingle areas, other species such as Skylark and Linnet also breed on the site.

The habitats on the island include sand dunes with Marram grass, Sea Bindweed and Sea Holly, vegetated shingle supporting species such as Sea Kale, Sea Sandwort and Rock Samphire. These habitats are very fragile and even limited trampling can have long-term effects. Various types of saltmarsh occur with



Aerial view of Pilsley Island
Top: Bird hide recently renovated by the Friends
Left: oystercatcher

Aerial: Matt Simmons Photography
Oystercatcher: Steve Trewella

species such as Sea Lavender, Sea Thrift and Golden Samphire. Also found on Pilsley Island is a very rare habitat type; sea heath saltmarsh which is only found in Chichester Harbour. A number of rare lichens have also been found in various habitats on Pilsley.

Invertebrate life is also highly diverse with numerous notable spider, beetle and moth species. It hosts an impressive number of butterfly species, regularly up to 12 species are recorded on the island including migrant species such as Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow, and resident species such as Small Heath, Essex Skipper and Common Blue.

As you can imagine with this amount of interest crammed into such a small site, it makes management a tricky balancing act.

Editor's note: although there is no public access directly onto Pilsley, there is a nearby bird hide (above).

The Eames Farm Project: From Redundant Farm Buildings To Rural Resource Centre



Eames Farm, just over 70 hectares in size, is situated at the north end of Thorney Island, bordered by the harbour at either side. The farm consists mainly of coastal grazing marsh, a few hay fields and open waters surrounded by reeds that teem with wildlife; it also has numerous farm buildings, including an old redundant stable block.

Farming has a significant influence on the AONB and the Eames Farm Resource Centre will enable the Conservancy to meet the demand for educational visits across the whole age range (previously three farm days on Hayling Island attracted over 600 participants). It also enhances the Conservancy's work with farmers, who own the majority of the land in the AONB and help manage the landscape and nature conservation interest and the wildlife which relies upon them. The facility will also give greater insight into the balances required to sustain important roosting and feeding sites for birds, which depend upon active farm management and grazing.

Work has already started on converting and restoring

the old stable block in a way that will preserve its character and yet be environmentally friendly. Rainwater will be collected for farming operations and energy obtained from solar panels. On completion, which is expected by the end of March, facilities will include an education resource room, a support office and two toilets. A further office, a kitchen and toilet, together with a storage space, will be let out commercially to help to fund the running costs of the centre. The centre will also be available for use by organizations such as the Friends and will provide a unique venue in the heart of the AONB.



Buffer Zone To Protect Fishbourne

At Fishbourne Meadows, arrangements are being made for West Sussex County Council to transfer to the Chichester Harbour Trust the nine acres of land that is currently leased to the Conservancy (see Ed Rowsell's article in the Spring 2010 Newsletter).

This transfer will be a gesture of good faith by the County Council, following their 2009 agreement to create a 'buffer zone' to protect the harbour from the impact of any large-scale housing development in that area. The land will continue to be managed by the Conservancy with the help of Friends' work parties but ownership by the Trust will provide added protection to this important part of the harbour landscape.

Meanwhile, at Maybush Copse, Chidham, planning approval has been granted for the improvement work to allow public access. That work, which includes the covering of nearly an acre of land with membrane and topsoil, will be carried out this Spring and, at the same time, 8,000 young trees will be planted. It is planned that the site will be open to the public by the Summer.

For further details of the Trust's work and a copy of its new brochure, contact the Administrator on 01243 777632 or admin@chichesterharbourtrust.org.uk.

Don't Miss The 2011 Harbour Guide!



The 2011 edition of the Conservancy's Harbour News and Guide has just been published, and as usual it is a mine of information about the wildlife, topography and history of the AONB.

There are articles about wildlife monitoring, local artists who have been inspired by the area, a forgotten Second World War airfield at Apuldram, and the centenary of the X-One Design class of racing dinghies, which occurs this year.

This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the formation of the Conservancy, following pressure from people living and working in the harbour, and the author looks at some of the past achievements and future challenges facing the Conservancy.

The Friends contribute to the cost of producing the guide because we believe it plays a key role in informing people about the conservation and enjoyment of the AONB. If you would like to receive a copy, please apply to the Harbour Office.

Chairman's report:

ANOTHER ACTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL YEAR

In his address to the AGM last October, our past Chairman, Martin Rhodes, reported that the charity was in a healthy state. Membership stood at around 3,000. Donations and subscriptions were well up but legacies down, giving an income of £48,000 for the year. Overall, the financial position was sound.

However, he said we needed to view this in the context of the likely financial constraints the Conservancy will be under given the financial climate. We provided £20,000 for specific projects in 2009-10, but this is expected to rise to around £60,000 in 2010-11, partly as a result of the Eames Farm project.

The end of 2010 also saw the introduction of 'Friends only' events, which have proved a popular development. Friends have also made a great contribution through their attendance at 42 working parties, which is equivalent to adding 50% to the Conservancy Ranger staff.

The Friends have provided committee members to the Conservancy's Advisory Committee, Chichester Harbour Trust and the Solent Protection Society. Members continue to be active on many other groups

The full 2009-10 Chairman's Report can be found on www.friendsch.org

A pupil from Chidham School and two older ladies enjoy a trip on the Solar Heritage as part of a Friends funded educational project

that impact the AONB. Where appropriate we have also lobbied organizations in the interest of protecting the AONB. As always, members are encouraged to spread the news of the important contribution that the Friends make and to encourage involvement in our work and events.

Martin said there was a long list of projects that the Friends have contributed to in terms of funds and/or labour. These included assisting the public in enjoying the AONB through publications, competitions, funded 'Get Afloat' trips for the disadvantaged and the maintenance of Terror. Labour contributions included scrub, bramble and weed clearance, planting and coppicing. We have also provided both labour and funding for footpath maintenance. Finally we have helped to fund a series of imaginative education programmes aimed at all age ranges to give greater insight into and appreciation of our beautiful harbour.



Better Cycle Routes For Hayling

Cycling members who have been frustrated by the lack of good cycling routes to the east of the AONB on Hayling Island will be pleased to hear that a group of enthusiasts has got together to remedy the situation.

'Cycle Hayling' plan to improve and extend on and off road cycle routes, and in the longer term are working for a cycle route running the whole length of the island on the eastern side, ultimately completing a cycle circuit right round Hayling Island, linking with the popular Hayling Billy trail on the western shore.

The Friends have funded the installation of safe sites to secure bikes at North Common on Hayling Island, and other parts of the AONB.

For further information, contact Sue Underwood sue@techtrans-online.co.uk.



Paul Conella

Wanted: Your Harbour Memories!

To mark the 40th anniversary of the formation of the Chichester Harbour Conservancy, a special project is being launched to collect hundreds of memories of harbour life from the public.

Called 'My Chichester Harbour', people are being invited to contribute their thoughts on any special events in their lives that they link with the harbour, as well as views on how the harbour has changed, whether global warming has affected the harbour, and other topics.

People can contribute their ideas via the Conservancy website, or by completing postcards which will be dis-

tributed in the area, or through local community events.

As the Friends have a particular interest in the harbour, it is hoped that as many members as possible will take part. And on Wednesday 13 April, we are invited, along with members of the Conservancy, to go to the Harbour Education Centre offices at Dell Quay between 3pm and 7pm for a glass of wine and an opportunity to view the new website and add your own memories. Please bring any old harbour photographs as well!

The Friends are supporting this project financially; more details from Ali Beckett at the Conservancy (allie@conservancy.co.uk).