

Rye Meadows Newsletter – No. 8

The last Newsletter was in May this year so it is time to bring all the “Friends” up to date with what’s been happening on Rye Meadows.

Fundraising

We could not survive without a steady income from fundraising or donations. We have moved into merchandising in a modest way and now have Rye Meadows mugs and Rye Meadows Tea Towels for sale. The designs on both items were made by local artist, Cathy Brett (www.cathybrett.co.uk), who, on our behalf, arranged to have her designs printed on the mugs and one design on the tea towels. Both items have been sold at Village Day and were sold on the Heritage Weekend. If anyone wants to have one, or some, you can contact us direct and we’ll come and deliver them to you. Just email rmadmin@ryemeadows.org.uk.



The Tea Towels are priced at £5 each and the mugs £4 each or three for £11.00. Both are useful small presents for Christmas or end of year presents for the teacher.

We regularly promote www.easyfundraising.org.uk and via this source we have, over the years, raised £1,000. It is simplicity itself to join, and all you do when shopping online is to visit www.easyfundraising.org.uk first and from that site transfer to your retailer site. Clicking the following link will take you to our own page to join <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/invite/26KLH6/127BII/> then every time you buy from Argos, Amazon, Expedia, Ebay, Apple, Sky and countless others you will raise funds for Rye Meadows, plus feel virtuous without it costing you any extra. It is often only pence the retailer donates, but if sufficient of our Friends and their families take part the sums mount up. It is quite astounding how many online retailers take part in the scheme, so rather than just think “No, they’re far too small to be included!”, make a Search and be surprised. Of course if you just want to make a donation just email us and we’ll send you our Bank details.

Boundaries

Rye Meadows has long boundaries and many of these abut private residences. We have come to arrangements with some of the householders regarding the boundary and these pay an annual rent for the land they are borrowing. Some boundaries have become swallowed in the ever-growing and expanding blackthorn and this Autumn we’ve been removing much of the growth to reveal the true boundary line. As a consequence of this and other work clearing the blackthorn growth along the Rye, we have mountains of

cut blackthorn to dispose of. We tolerate small fires and ensure the wind is blowing away from private houses. Sometimes at the whim of the wind the direction changes 180 degrees but by then we are committed to burning. With so much to dispose of we plan using a Contractor who will hire a mobile chipper to reduce the piles to simple wood chip thus saving the atmosphere, the neighbours and the hands and arms of the volunteers who would otherwise need to carry spiky blackthorn to the fire site.

Let there be light!

This year we were successful in obtaining a Grant from the Developers Fund with Mole Valley Council to install electricity to the barn. We hired a Contractor to excavate the necessary trenches for UK Power Networks and took the opportunity whilst that was being done to extend the mains water pipe from the nearby stables. This meant for the first time we had running (cold) water, and electricity to light the barn and to enable us to charge the various batteries for the power tools. Perhaps more importantly for some of us, it allowed us to boil water for the teas and coffee and we could enjoy our mid-morning break under cover. We were donated a sink, drainer, taps and a cupboard, and one of the volunteers, Bob (not the builder) but a retired plumber, set it all up for us.

Wildflower Meadows



It has been a long-held part of Mrs Burnett's original vision to return the land to wildflower meadows. Rye Meadows is to undertake an experiment to create a wildflower meadow in Fraudings field. This is the field opposite the Centenary Field and until recently had been a concessional path between Footpath 596 and Footpath 24. With work due to start shortly on ground preparation it has been necessary to close this concessional path. We are aware this has come as a disappointment to those dog walkers who used the route but it will be necessary for the land to remain undisturbed during and after the work.

For a wildflower meadow to become established the land must be prepared during the winter. The top grass surface needs to be virtually scraped away and native seeds spread. We are seeking professional advice on the most likely wildflowers to succeed on Rye Meadows either wet clay, or concrete hard clay.

If this one field experiment is successful the scheme will be expanded to other fields. We will then need to ensure any flowers we plant are not harmful to horses that will still graze the areas. Wildflowers such as ragwort, an attractive bright yellow flower, is injurious to horses and that is why the ladies who graze their horses in the fields of Rye Meadows and elsewhere pull up the plants and burn them each year. Some landowners have been unaware of the dangers of ragwort and allow the plants to flourish, and when in the late summer the seeds all start to blow away, the hard work trying to eradicate the weed from other grazing fields can be undone. Sadly, the flowers of ragwort also attract butterflies, but we hope the remaining wildflowers will similarly encourage more butterflies.

Another attractive plant that can flourish near the brook is Himalayan Balsam. Himalayan Balsam is an attractive, non-native invasive plant that commonly grows near waterways in the UK. Growing up to 2.5m high, it



was first introduced to the UK in 1839, and has since become the largest annual plant in Britain. Himalayan Balsam is also known for spreading rapidly, with the 800 or so seeds each plant produces being shot up into the air and travelling up to 7m away.

Also referred to as Touch-me-not Balsam, and Policeman's Helmet because of the shape of its flowers, Himalayan Balsam was originally introduced as an ornamental plant by Victorian gardeners. However, due to the rate in which it has spread, Himalayan Balsam is now a naturalised plant in the UK that can be found growing alongside riverbanks and streams, as well as near ponds and lakes.

In the summer months volunteers have been scouring the river banks and pulling up the plant before it is able to seed. The River Mole has the problem too and parties of volunteers pull up the plant each year.

Centenary Field

The next big project for Rye Meadows will be in Centenary Field. The Rye Brook in this area was artificially straightened in the 1950s. River management back then was to try to get the water away as soon as possible. New thinking is to keep the water upstream and delay its flow by creating meanders and widening the existing river bed.

In previous years we have carried out this work in other fields, widening the brook by dragging back the banks, and building deflectors called 'berms' to recreate meanders. It is similar work we want to carry out in Centenary Field. However, before any work can start there are the inevitable 'hoops' to be jumped through. Although the Rye Brook is a relatively small stream (though as I write this, after the persistent rain we've been having, it is a raging torrent!) it is classed as a "Main River" and before any work can be carried out, we need the permission of the Environment Agency. We will also need Planning Permission after that from Mole Valley Council. Both of these requirements involve substantial fees and we cannot start without obtaining grant funding. So, if anyone is feeling generous.....

A company called Aquamaintain is going to prepare plans and applications, but all that will come to nothing if we cannot get a grant to cover the cost of the applications.

Gates and more expense

A couple of years ago Mrs. Burnett paid to have all the perimeter gates replaced with oak gates. We attached field name boards, kindly made by the Lower Mole Group volunteers. The gates cost several hundred pounds each as they are oak and long lasting – in theory. One of the gates was damaged by a car, we know not by whom, and has had to be replaced at a cost of £542.

The less exciting bits!

The summer and autumn months have been taken up with the ongoing general maintenance. Hedges have to be cut, the new trees re-staked, fields mowed and hay bales stacked, fallen trees cut up and removed, culverts cleared of debris and litter, rotten gate posts replaced, strimming, maintaining the two public footpaths, more strimming, dead hedging, tool maintenance, ragwort and himalayan balsam pulling, and of course more



strimming. Although originally 14 acres, when it comes to maintenance items it seems much larger than that.

The volunteers meet on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month and there's certainly enough work to keep the group going twice a month. Regretfully, we do though have to stop each time at 11am for tea and coffee, plus usually a big slice of delicious cake made for us by Doreen (the Bob the Plumber's Mother-in-Law)

There's always room for more volunteers, so if you fancy some not-too-taxing work in the fresh air together with friendly group of like-minded people, do come along. Either contact us on rmadmin@ryemeadows.org.uk or just come along to the barn at the top of Footpath 596. It's not just "old fogeys" need apply either. We had two enthusiastic young Mums come to help, but sadly later on their motherly commitments made volunteering difficult. The door is open for them to return at any time, and if any other younger resident wants to come along, you'll be very welcome.

David

Chairman, Friends of Ashted Rye Meadows Wetlands