

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 30 September 2015

Chairman's Annual Report

Unusually, it has not been an entirely good year for the Trust: I have to start by recording the the sad loss of a number of members, good friends and supporters. Foremost in our thoughts is Bernie Bobbin, whose funeral coincidentally took place earlier today. As a life-long lover of nature, Bernie was the driving force in the purchase of Church Plantation and the formation of BACT in 1994, enlisting like-minded folk to join him as founding trustees. Without his initiative and foresight this Trust simply would never have existed, and many of our lives would have been so much the poorer. Characteristically, for decades he allowed our unkempt assemblage of tools a home in his otherwise immaculately tidy shed.

Unfortunately, it does not stop there: with the sad loss of Bill Boardman, also went an encyclopaedic knowledge of plants and an infectious enthusiasm for the natural world. Members may recall especially his remarkable capacity to find new and rare fungi, and his jovial friendship at our events. Derek Blake, who died in tragic circumstances in the summer, had guided us to the generous grant from South Norfolk Council for the power-scythe that has been so crucial to our management of valley marsh. Anyone who has attended our famous 'Breakfasts with the Moths', will have warm memories of the expert double-act of Judy and John Geeson, who amazed and educated us by turns. Sadly, Judy passed away in January, far too young. Yet another loss in the summer was John Guymer, the legendary digger driver, who had done sterling work for us at an age when most are long retired. We offer our sincere sympathy and condolences to all of their families and friends.

Perhaps the major event of the year was our attempt to buy a 5-acre remnant of derelict cherry orchard in Threadneedle Street for the village. We committed most of our own resources and launched a public appeal for the balance at short notice. The response of our membership, the broader local community, kindred organizations and other friends was tremendous and heart-warming. We exceeded what we had thought was an impossibly ambitious target of £35,000 in only three weeks. Unfortunately it was still not enough in the event to secure the orchard and so the monies raised were returned. The project was, nevertheless, another testament to the legendary community spirit of Bergh Apton.

Our summer excursion to a place of conservation importance was hugely interesting. On 19 July we travelled to Bayfield Hall just north of Holt, where the River Glaven Conservation Group has re-created a 1.2-km stretch of chalk stream, which had been buried in a tunnel for 120 years. This involved precise engineering of depths, meanders and riffles to create a full range of riparian habitats. We were given a guided tour of the new stretch of river by Henry Crawley (chair of RGCG) and Robin Combe (owner of Bayfield Hall). It was astonishing to learn that the new river had been opened as recently as October 2014, given the apparent maturity of colonization by diverse plants and animals. We are grateful to Carrie Kerry for organizing this visit to an exemplary ecological restoration.

Our quest for public engagement continued, starting with 'Wild about Norfolk' in October 2014. Our work days have again benefited from visiting groups doing community service and parties of Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, Beavers, Cubs and Scouts. The latter have

helped particularly with pulling of sycamore seedlings, cutting bracken and raking-up of cut vegetation, at the same time enjoying some pond dipping and finding animals under our sheets of tin. Brooke Scouts have built a luxurious 'Bug Hotel' in Church Plantation. We are grateful to Jacque Ratcliffe and Shirley Rimmer for organising and managing these visits.

The year started after the last AGM with another terrific talk by Carrie Kerry on 'Peregrines at Norwich Cathedral', also featuring Clive Britcher and his tiercel, Crecy, and accompanied by a film made by the Hawk & Owl Trust of the highlights of the 2014 breeding season. The fungus foray in October saw a return of the charismatic Dr Tony Leech as leader; it was very well attended by many local people and some from further afield. The dedicated pond-dipping afternoon in May was greatly enjoyed by the small group of young people attending, as well as us. Bob Kerry led his customary two hedge surveys, both at Bergh Apton Manor, on 10 June and 15 July. The traditional midsummer barbeque on the 'millennium pageant' field was held on Saturday 20 June, courtesy of Christopher and Liz Meynell. The 'do-it-yourself' Christmas party at Flint Cottage on 21 December proved as convivial as ever.

The trustees met formally four times during the year: on 28 October 2014, and 4 February, 8 April and 22 July 2015. Tony Davy, Stephanie Crome and Bob Kerry were re-elected chairman, secretary and treasurer, respectively. We would like to pay tribute to the two long-standing trustees are standing-down at this meeting. Lorie Lain-Rogers was a founding trustee in 1994 and has served continuously ever since, including as our first chairman and subsequently as secretary for many years. We are grateful for her immense contribution to the development and organization of the Trust. Dennis Moye is also retiring after many years as a trustee; we will miss his wise and practical council on a wide variety of matters. We look forward to their continuing participation in our activities at a slightly greater distance.