



wkps

Watch on
the Weald

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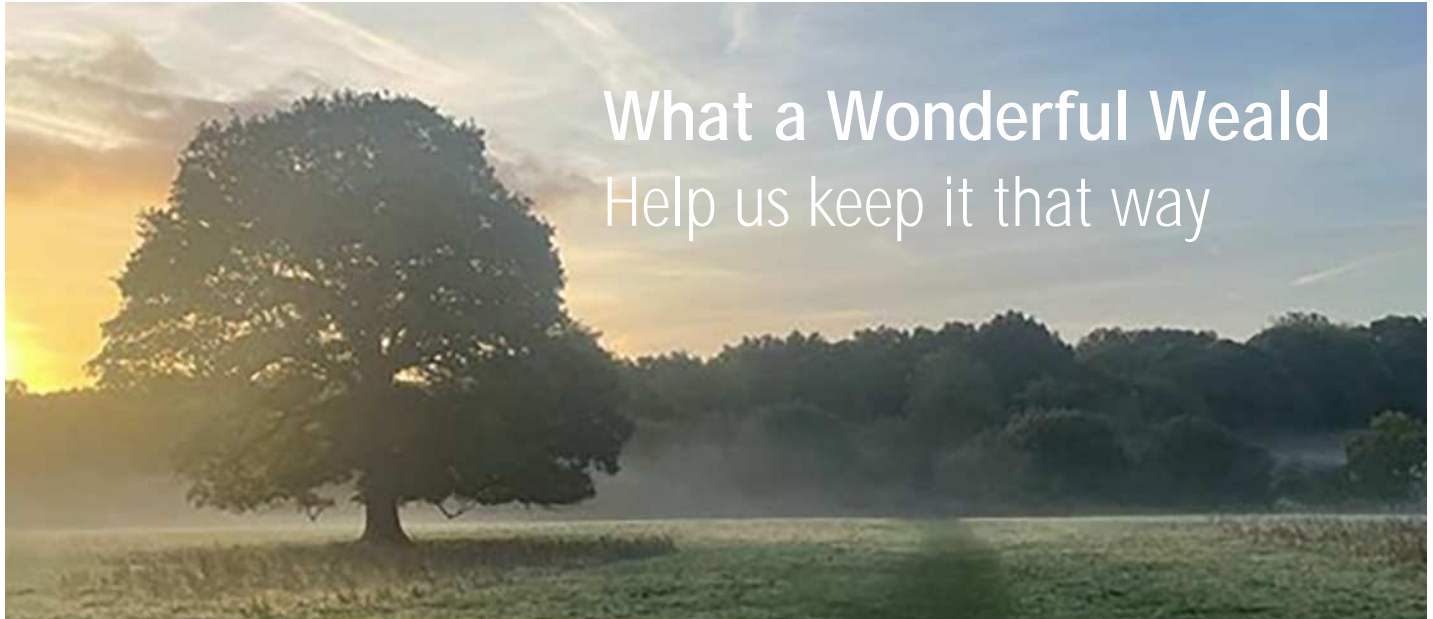
Newsletter of the Weald of Kent Protection Society

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No: 173



A Little Bit of Context

At last we are seeing Government initiative and legislation which will seek to improve the green environment, but let's just remember how we came to be where we are today.

The Kentish landscape is as beautiful and varied as anywhere in the world and started to take shape with sedimentation around 135 million years ago. Sands and clays were laid down leading to the formation of shallow seas teeming with plankton and crustacea. Those organisms died and became consolidated into about 1000 feet of chalk over a period of approx. 30 million years. That chalk was laid down on either side of what would become the Weald and the Greensand Ridge and all of that was eroded by glaciation over four ice ages starting about 1.5 million years ago.

It is only about 14,000 years ago that things warmed up with Kentish hills and valleys becoming covered in forest. About 5,000 years ago humans arrived with agriculture along the ridgeways and down the spring lines of the chalk and greensand ridges.

Much later came clearance of the Weald Forest by Anglo Saxons after the Roman Empire and man has been refining that landscape ever since.

Since World War 2 there has probably been more change in the Kent countryside than in the previous 500 years. You may now be expecting me to bemoan development, but actually much is attributable to the agricultural revolution necessary to feed a rapidly growing population. Farmers have been quick to respond to the introduction of Countryside Stewardship Schemes and other initiatives. Countryside Stewardship Schemes run over periods between five and ten years, and the Conservation Covenants that will accompany the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain will be for thirty years.

Much will be achieved, but we must never forget how long it took to create the ecosystem of which we are part and how quickly we have managed to dismantle much of it. Don't expect miracles in thirty years!

Quite a brain teaser!

Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman

What can be done when an application that many neighbours and residents object to and consent is granted by the Local Planning Authority (LPA)?

Following the approval to the 70 houses and medical centre in Hawkhurst (22/02664/HYBRID), I was asked what procedures were available to delay or stop the development. Based on the questions asked, I responded as follows:

Only the applicant can appeal against a planning decision. If you are a neighbour or interested party, you cannot appeal a decision. The only option is to apply for a Judicial Review (JR) through the Ministry of Justice in the High Court. JRs are very costly!

The grounds for a JR are illegality, procedural unfairness, and important material considerations. So, matters such as the LPA failing to discharge its statutory duties; its environmental duties; duties to provide reasons for its decisions; or acted unlawfully in some other way.

A JR examines the process by which the decision maker has reached its decision in order to ascertain whether that decision was properly made. It is NOT an appeal against the decision; it is a claim that the proper procedures have not been followed.

Calling-in a planning application to the Secretary of State (SoS) places the decision with the SoS (an appeal inspector would advise the SoS). This simply takes the decision out of the LPAs hands. As the Birchfield application has been decided, a call-in is not possible.

It will probably take a while for the Decision Notice to appear on the website as they have to complete the S106 Agreement (contributions to be made by the developer), and in this case because the consent is in Outline for the houses and medical centre, there will be a vast number of conditions attached to the consent that will involve further applications to discharge those conditions.

Peta Grant
WKPS Planning Secretary

Peter Allen

It was with sadness that we learnt of the death of Peter Allen in January this year.

Peter was a founder member of the WKPS and all through his connection with the Society played a large role in its development. He was, at different times, chair of the Administrative and the Planning Committees and Chairman of the WKPS from 2007 – 2010.

He had a profound understanding of the Weald, all its complexities, its history, its rural past and present pressures. He established the Cranbrook Museum and published THE HISTORY OF CRANBROOK.

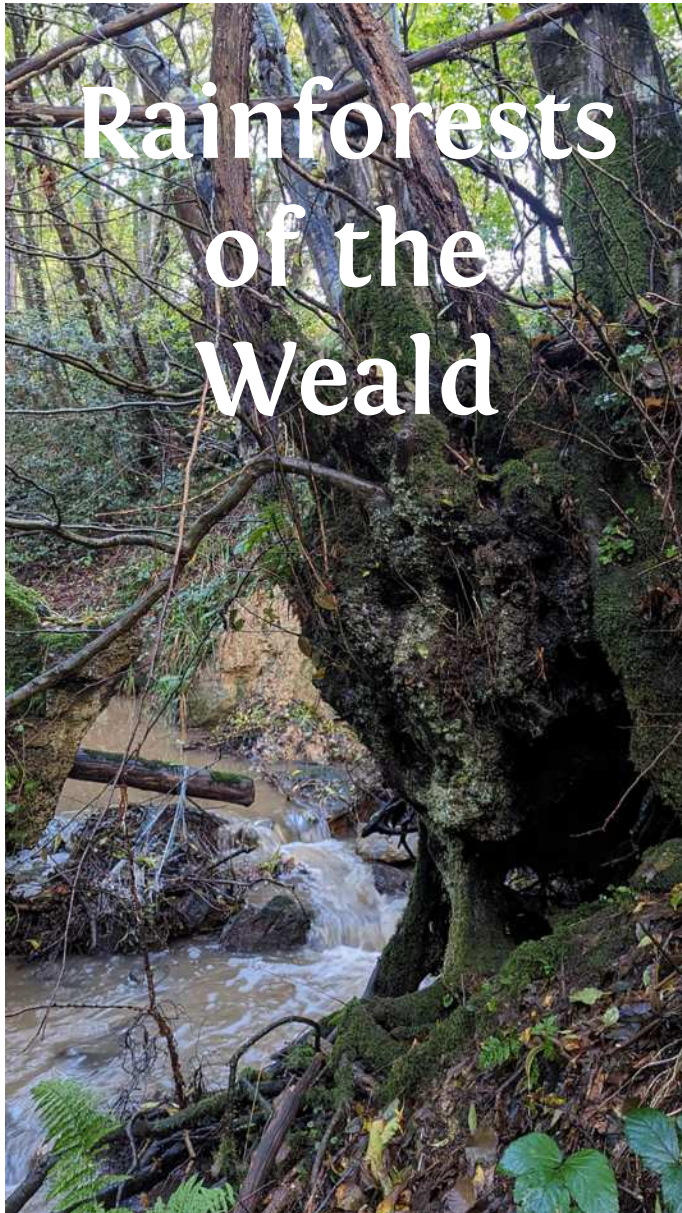
Together with the above he also edited Watch on the Weald for many years and wrote several of its articles. His experience as a master at Cranbrook School made him able to chair the committees with tact and efficiency. There was one occasion when we learnt that trees were being felled and the timber stolen from Cole Wood, a woodland on the North Downs which the Society managed. The police soon identified the miscreant who agreed to meet Peter and a difficult matter was settled amicably.

Another project which Peter, with Richard King, was heavily involved was the creation of a DVD about the Weald to mark the 50th Anniversary of the WKPS in 2010. Peter persuaded Cranbrook School to take part and the pupils made a very professional and enjoyable film looking at the Weald which they covered on their bicycles.

There were many ways that his helpful advice supported the Society.

We send our deepest sympathy to Valerie and her family. The WKPS was very lucky to have Peter on board.





Rainforests of the Weald

Temperate rainforests in the west of Britain hold plants adapted to living with high humidity resulting from being nearer to the Atlantic coast. Some of these 'oceanic' plants also find a home in the ghyll woodlands of the High Weald. Here they are isolated from their colonies in the west and probably best described as relics, surviving in what are now small fragments of suitable habitat created by the High Weald's geology and topography. The elevated ground with alternating outcrops of clay, sand and bands of sandstone allows water to permeate through the bedrock and soils to produce springs which over time have carved out the ghylls. The steep narrow sides help these ghylls retain humidity by increasing shade and reducing exposure to the sun and wind.

Ghyll woodland in the High Weald of Kent stretches from Cowden in the west to Wittersham in the east. Some fine examples of ghyll woods are found south of the B2086 Benenden road, between Hartley and Rolvenden. From west to east, they are Robin's Wood, Waterdown Gill, Netter's Hall, Little Nineveh, Great Nineveh, White Chimney Wood, Babbes Farm,

Parsonage Wood, Stream Farm, Strawberry Wood and Dingledden. These woods have the benefit of sitting on two or three geological formations: Tunbridge Wells Sand, Wadhurst Clay and Ashdown Sand. The geological junctions and fault lines are the source of the springs in these ghylls.

Hornbeam, Beech, Yew and Holly all thrive on the sandy acidic soils and can tolerate the shady conditions. Sweet Chestnut can be dominant but often less so close to the streams. Pedunculate Oak and Sessile Oak form huge and their hybrid is often present. Ash and Field Maple do well on clay and loam soils and Alder is common in flushes and along the streams.

The occasional Wild Service Tree (Chequer Tree) such as the large tree at Dingledden can be easily missed. Where these trees have been managed as coppice, their large stools become mossy forests. The rare Rusty Feathermoss *Scirohypnum plumosum* is virtually confined in Kent to ghyll woodland, including Waterdown Gill where it grows on Ash at the stream edge as well on nearby rocks.



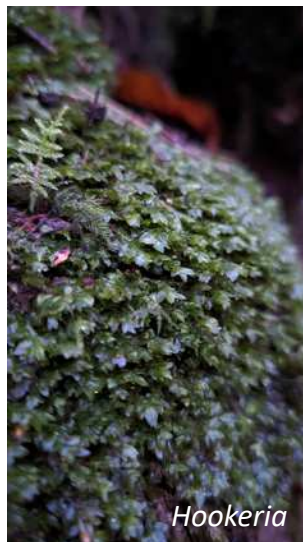
Rusty Feathermoss



Hornbeam polypody

The high humidity at the base of a ghyll allows larger plants to take root on trees, such as Polypody fern and Wood Sorrel which grow on a huge, coppiced Hornbeam along the stream at Dingledden.

The sandy and loamy slopes to the ghylls are the habitat of two iconic oceanic residents: Hay-scented Buckler-fern and a moss called Shining Hookeria *Hookeria lucens*. The buckler-fern has delicate fronds with crisped edges requiring year round humidity to avoid desiccation and has been recorded from Robin's Wood, White Chimney Wood, Parsonage Wood and Stream Farm. This fern is considered to be more frequent in the High Weald than in other parts of its British range, such as Snowdonia and the Lake District. Hookeria is a large moss with transparent leaves that die if they receive direct sunlight and has leaf cells large enough to be made out with the naked eye. It occurs along the ghyll streams in White Chimney Wood and Parsonage Wood and was previously recorded at Dingledden.



Hookeria

Although not confined in Kent to ghyll woodland, the Wild Daffodil is most at home in them and looks convincingly native when flowering along the edges of ghyll streams such as Waterdown Gill. It adds extra colour to the spring carpet of Bluebell, Wood Anemone and Early-purple Orchids that dominate the ground.



Wild Daffodil

When ghyll woodlands occur over Wadhurst Clay they are generally of shallower gradient, such as Nine Acre Wood on the north side of the B2086. They tend not to hold the more extreme oceanic species mentioned above, but an interesting plant that prefers the clay soils is Coralroot, a relative of the more common Cuckooflower. It grows along the stream at White Chimney Wood and also in Winsor Gill, north of Rolvenden. This curious plant produces bulbils which fall off and grow into new clones and has an equally curious native distribution in Britain, being confined mainly to clay woods in the eastern High Weald and to chalk woodland in the Chilterns.



The bands of sandstone that outcrop in and along these ghylls create picturesque waterfalls in White Chimney Wood, Parsonage Wood and Dingledden. They are also very important habitats for a wide range of mosses and liverworts, including oceanic species like Wry-leaved Tamarisk-moss *Heterocladium heteropterum*, a tiny moss which grows as wiry tufts on rocks in dark crevices along Waterdown Gill.



Coralroot

WKPS received a generous donation of £1,000 from Jeffrey Eker, a Life Member, when asked what was the reason for the donation, his response was:

"The reason is simple - it is recognition of the huge amount of time spent by Mike to pursue his love of the Weald!"

What a lovely acknowledgement of the hard work put in by our Chairman.

Tree-ring Dating the Historic Buildings of Kent

By Dr Andy Moir

Few historical documents survive before the 1700s and so it can be very difficult to know when historic buildings were built. As building listings were often undertaken only from the outside of a building these can be inaccurate. However, through the extraction of small pencil like cores from timbers, tree-ring analysis can often identify an exact year of construction of a building.

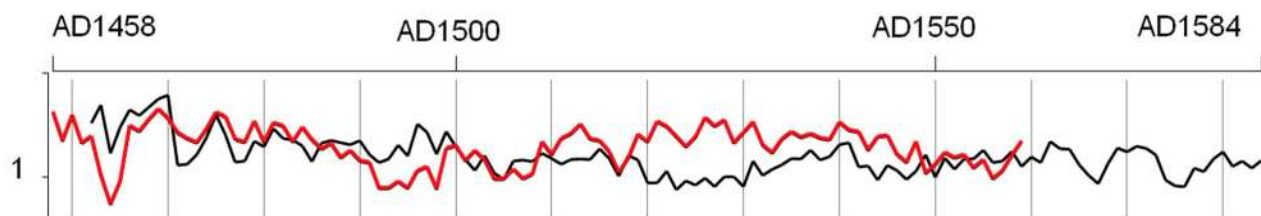


A tree-ring core and a pencil (for scale)

TREE-RING DATING

The science of tree-ring dating (or dendrochronology) began in the 1920s and it is based on the simple premise that one ring is laid down each year. Typically in 'good' years the ring will be wide and in 'bad' years the ring will be narrow. For example, during the droughts of 1976 and 1990, most trees tended to lay down a narrow ring. Tree-ring dating does not count the rings (which would tell you how old the tree was) it measures the ring width of each and every ring in series. With a series of over 60 rings, this climatically induced pattern of wide and narrow rings (much like a bar code) is unique and will match only one time in history.

By comparing tree-ring series sampled from building timbers of unknown date against databases of reference chronologies of known date, it is possible to identify precise calendar dates. The reference chronologies are created by matching and overlapping tree-rings series and by this process, it is possible to progress them further and further back in time. Tree-ring series from live trees are overlapped with those from medieval buildings, which in turn are overlapped with archaeological timbers preserved in peat bogs. Through this process reference chronologies of known date in the UK have been extended back to before 5500 BC. Tree-ring dating identifies when trees were felled, but as most medieval woodworkers use green wood (as seasoned wood is much more difficult to work with) a felling date is generally accepted to identify the year of construction.



A visual plot of two ring-width series showing the similarities of a match between the Quince Cottage (in red) and a previously dated reference chronology (in black)



Taking a small core from roof timbers using a 12mm hollow auger

KENT'S DATED BUILDINGS

Kent is fortunate in that the quality of its surviving medieval houses. Indeed, for this reason it was the subject of the first county wide tree-ring dating project, which was published in *The Medieval Houses of Kent* back in 1994. This project successfully tree-ring dated 53 building phases (17 with precise year dates). However, the project did not select buildings after 1540 and so did not date any buildings constructed during the Elizabethan period during which the flowering of the timber-frame building tradition occurred. The project also failed to concentrate on buildings which are located in some of the most picturesque villages of Kent, and even today only Canterbury, Chiddingstone and East Sutton have more than 5 tree-ring dated buildings.



*Watstock in Chiddingstone
Tree-ring dated 1455*



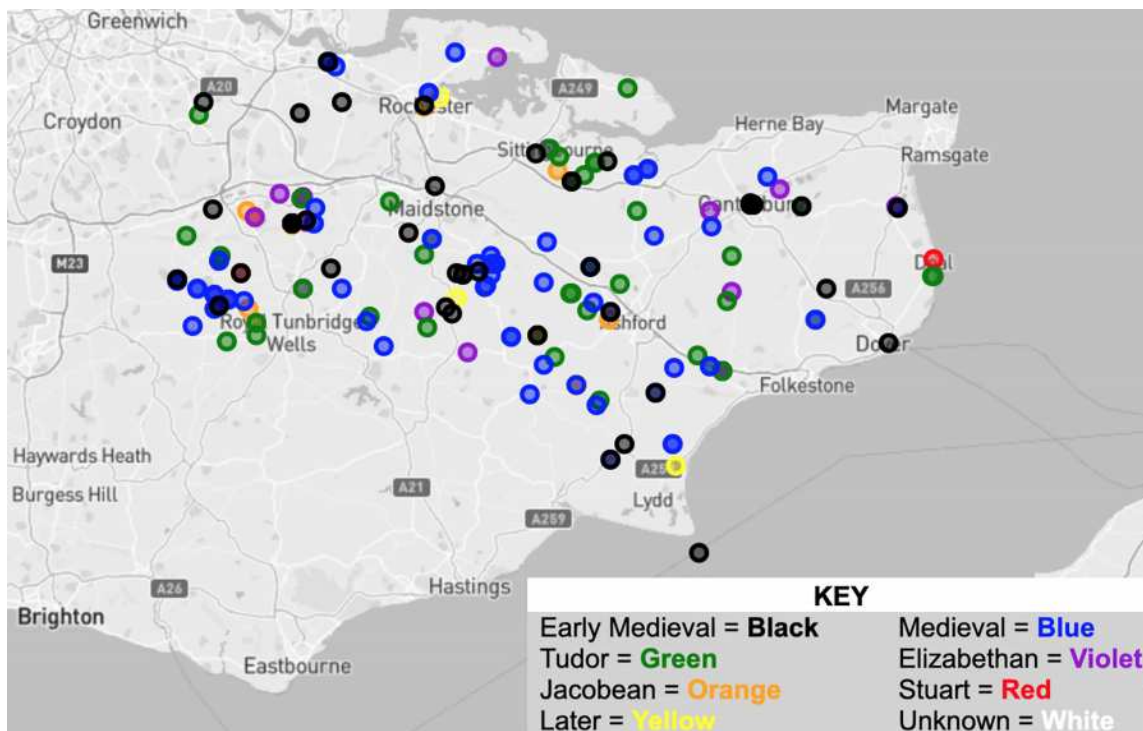
*Little Hearnden – Headcorn
Tree-ring dated 1493*



*Forge House – Lenham
Tree-ring dated 1466*

*Weavers Cottage – Plaxton
Tree-ring dated 1541*

The locations of some 2500 tree-ring dated buildings phases are freely available through the Building Archaeology Research Database (BARD) and the 203 building phases in Kent are shown below.



The location and period of construction of tree-ring dated buildings in Kent

Buildings from small private dwellings to large stately homes and castles are now routinely tree-ring dated in the UK. Whilst most often only the earliest phase of construction are selected for dating, the technique can often identify the complete development of a building.

CAN YOUR BUILDING BE DATED?

It is important to realise that not all wood can be dated by tree-ring analysis. Normally an assessment of the building timbers is required to establish:

- Are the timbers of a datable species? Elm is a commonly used building timber, but generally cannot be tree-ring dated. Also from the 1650's onwards an increasing amount of imported woods are used. In the UK native oak has the greatest potential to be tree-ring dated.

- Do the timbers contain sufficient rings to date? At least 60 rings are needed for a tree-ring series to be unique. Size of timbers is generally not a factor as larger timber can contain few rings and conversely small timbers can contain many rings.
- Has the bark survived? An exact year of felling (sometimes even distinguishing the season of felling) can only be identified where bark (or full sapwood) survives. Where no bark survives it a range for construction is established using the fact that statistically oak trees in the south of England are expected to have between 9 and 41 rings of sapwood.

Each year the majority of UK tree-ring dates are published in Vernacular Architecture (the annual journal of the Vernacular Architecture Group) which was established to further the historical study of traditional buildings. Through the ever increasing body of tree-ring dates, wider questions on why and when building traditions changed are starting to be answered. Further information on timber-framed buildings is available from the Wealden Buildings Study Group (www.wealdenbuildings.org.uk/)

References:

BARD www.buildingarchaeology.com

Image credits: Tree-Ring Services

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www.tree-ring.co.uk

what a wonderful weald

help us keep it that way



wkps

weald of kent protection society

The aim of our dedicated team of volunteers is to protect our beautiful Wealden towns, villages and countryside from the effects of damaging and unsuitable development, preserving its charm and character for future generations to enjoy. We welcome active members to help us with a range of activities, from scrutinising planning applications to organising events. If, like us, you care about the Weald, please get in touch and get involved.

find out more: www.wkps.org.uk
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Wetlands

by Kathi Bauers, South East Rivers Trust

Over the past five years, the South East Rivers Trust has worked on restoring natural processes in the River Beult catchment. The aim has been to reduce flood risk to local communities, plus improve the availability and quality of water to the river and public supply. Using spatial mapping and working closely with farmers and Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) through the Upper Beult Farm Cluster, we have identified locations suited to nature-based solutions and designed schemes that work for landowners and the river.

Despite being the only protected river in Kent, the Beult catchment is in poor condition and bearing the scars of centuries of human pressure. Once a watery landscape, with rainwater retained in a mosaic of wetlands, the land is now drained and the river vulnerable to drought. When levels are low, 75% of the water can be made up of treated sewage treatment effluent. When it rains, quick-running water from farmland and roads carries pollutants to the river, causing flooding and impacting the point where water is abstracted for human use across large parts of Kent. Our changing climate is already driving hotter, drier summers and wetter, warmer winters, further exacerbating these processes.



Nature-based solutions can reverse some of these negative impacts and adapt to climate change. We need to

- create connected ponds alongside rivers, to spill flood waters out earlier and in the right location
- introduce large woody debris into waterways to mimic the effects of tree fall
- meander shallow channels across wider areas to recreate the floodplains of the past.

We have done precisely that at Moat Farm near Shadoxhurst, where Mike and Jan Bax host our first headwater wetland restoration project – now our key Beult demonstration site.

During two weeks in July 2021, we created one hectare of wetland habitat. What first looked like a moonscape quickly began to fill with water-loving plants. It was amazing to see it retain water even during the drought of 2022. The tiny pools provided refuge to minnows, newts and insect larvae. The wider benefits to locally breeding nightingale populations, which could benefit significantly from the habitat, are being monitored by KWT.

While one site is already making a difference, the real impact comes with a catchment-scale approach. It has been incredibly exciting to see this develop. With local landowners' proactive support, 40 leaky woody dams funded by Southern Water were installed in February 2023. With these bedding in well we're in the process of designing further plans for wetland creation. Modelling has recently confirmed that this work is already reducing highest flow levels downstream at Smarden.



The Upper Beult streams have proved a valuable focal lens to start envisioning a healthier landscape for people and wildlife. We and our partners want to secure more funding to deliver our ambition for the Beult: a clean river running through a mosaic of wet grasslands and woodlands, watery corridors full of wildlife and a functioning floodplain, embedded within a productive agricultural landscape and providing benefits to the communities living nearby.

*All photos credited to the
South East Rivers Trust*

Chequer Tree Safari

Late October last year a group of members met at Shadoxhurst for a Chequer Tree Safari and what a great occasion it was. We started in the Barn, which was timely as it was pouring with rain, where there was a collection of chequer tree branches adorned with fruit from Moat Farm. Lou Carpenter had also brought fruit from Marden chequers. Surprisingly the fruit is very sweet and edible and can be used for everything from alcoholic beverages to cakes. The pips are quite small. We learnt how to propagate the seeds, and everyone went home with seeds which hopefully come Spring will burst into life and be planted up.

Thankfully the rain eased off and the sun came out, we then had the Safari looking at different chequer trees from young saplings to very old impressive trees. Chequers are much easier to spot in the Autumn as the vivid colours of the changing leaves ranging from orange to bright red stand out against the other trees.



Chequer Tree Project

The Chequer Tree Safari on 28 October 2023 was well attended and created considerable interest. Readers will remember that we asked for notification of specimens around the area, and we are still receiving responses.

Very gratifyingly we have information on a number of trees that were planted to mark the late Queen's Silver Jubilee and various WKPS Events and these are as follows:-

- At the junction of Rolvenden Road and Cranbrook Road, Tenterden.
- At the junction of Ashford Road and Ox Lane, Tenterden.
- Pluckley Churchyard.
- The Jubilee Field, High Halden
- Hawkhurst Moor.
- Sissinghurst.
- By the Car Park Hedge in Biddenden.
- By the Car Park in Smarden.
- Lower Recreation Ground, Egerton.
- Ringle Green, Sandhurst.

We also heard of other trees planted for the community:-

- In front of the Village Hall in Frittenden.
- St Michael's Churchyard.
- Mount's Lane, Rolvenden Layne.

And then others on private property for which we will not publish information at this stage pending consent.

In the spring we will photograph as many of these important trees as we can and decide how to publish those.

In the meantime, a seed propagation trial is under way in the refrigerators of a number of members. We are hoping that the seed is stratifying and can then be planted out, and this was all initiated at the Chequer Tree Safari under the guidance of Martin Anthony. 17 weeks in the fridge is recommended and so at some point in early March the seed will be taken out of the fridges to germinate in warmer conditions prior to sowing in pots or trays of seed compost in the normal way. Fingers crossed.

Any more news on sightings will be most welcome and please keep feeding in ideas as to how we can continue to celebrate this iconic tree.

Nature Notes

Making Space for Nature

The Environment Act requires a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) to be established in 48 areas throughout England. The LNRS will create a network at landscape scale to improve management of the natural landscape in such a way that it becomes “bigger, better and more joined up”.

Kent County Council is the responsible authority and will be seeking to collaborate with landowners and the community in producing a beneficial outcome. The initiative is necessary because 38% of species are in decline, with 34% holding on as against 27% increasing. 16% are threatened with extinction.

Step 1 is to map areas particularly with biodiversity importance and Step 2 will identify those areas where action needs to be taken, describing threats and opportunities, and identifying the measures which will be required.

Areas of particular importance will be included in a local habitat map which, with supporting statements, will form the basis for the LNRS.

The initiative will be locally led and collaborative and there needs to be a shared effort from all in providing input. The LNRS will in turn inform Local Plans, Green Investment and the Environmental Land Management System which is the vehicle for promotion of the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery.

Action will be directed towards the most important areas and any potential environmental losses will be diverted away from areas of value.

62.2% of rural land is used by agriculture, 14.7% by forestry and 6.6% by private gardens. Landowners, farmers, and property owners know their land best and a healthy natural environment supports the ecosystem enabling pollination, clean water, healthy soil, and clean air.

All are encouraged to take an interest in this initiative headlining the highlights of your local areas.

Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman



Annual Subscriptions Reminder

For those members who do not pay their WKPS subscriptions by standing order, please note these are due on 1st April 2024. The membership form is on the back of the letter and it would be great if you could encourage your friends to join. Thank you for your ongoing support!

Dates for the Diary 2023

Nightingale Tour

Tuesday 30th April

Drinks & nibbles at 6.30pm at Shadoxhurst followed by an educational tour of the farm before searching out the singing nightingales. Suitable walking footwear and outdoor clothing recommended. There will be quite a long walk with plenty of stops and no vehicle transport will be available.

If you would like to make a donation to WKPS (as a donation we are able to claim gift aid!) we would recommend a minimum of £15 per person or £20 per couple, but this is purely voluntary.



WKPS Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 12th June - Benenden Village Hall

Speaker Jeremy Hodgkinson "The Work of the Wealden Iron Research Group"

THE PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION

Thursday 18th July

Boldshaves Garden, Frog's Hole Lane, Woodchurch TN26 3RA



The stunning gardens will be open to members and a tour will leave from the Tea House at 5.30pm.
Reception 6-8pm in the Barn.

The reception is free to those members who have introduced a new member during the year. Otherwise a voluntary donation of £15 a head would be appreciated.

Weald of Kent Ploughing Match

Saturday 21st September

If you have any suggestions for future events WKPS could organise please get in touch with secretary@wkps.org.uk or call 01580 861246

Charitable Donations and Bequests

In these difficult times and thanks to generous legacies from members, we continue to financially weather the storm. WKPS now has a link on the homepage of its website to make it easier to accept donations directly. We also hope that you consider a charitable bequest to WKPS when you plan your estate.

Disclaimer

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