

FRIENDS OF THE FLITCH WAY & ASSOCIATED WOODLANDS

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2015

It must be summer because the roads are so quiet after the schools breaking up for summer.

Flitch Way work parties

Spring and summer are usually the quiet seasons of the year for work by our volunteers along the Flitch due to the need to avoid disturbing nesting birds and wildflower sites. Anyone who regularly uses the track will know that nettles in particular have gone absolutely mental this year, drastically reducing the width of the path to less than a metre in a number of places. As a consequence several work parties have taken place to cut them back and restore the width of the path. If you know of any stretches of the Flitch that remain badly overgrown, not just with nettles but with other growth as well, please let us know. I would add that the stretch from Braintree Station to Pods Brook Road is the responsibility of Braintree District Council.

To give a positive focus on the stinging nettle, it might not always be appreciated by those having to push their way through but it is one of the most important native plants for wildlife in the UK. It is the ideal habitat for insects to lay their eggs as the stinging hairs are a defense against all but a small number of grazing animals. The most notable nettle patch inhabitants are the small tortoiseshell and peacock butterfly larvae which feed in large numbers, hidden in silken tents at the top of the nettle stems. Red Admiral and Comma butterfly larvae can also be found on nettles, as can the larvae of several moth species. Many nettle patches carry over-wintering aphids which gather around the new spring growth and provide an early food source for ladybirds as well as blue tits and other woodland birds agile enough to dart around the stems. In late summer, nettles help sustain many of our seed eating birds by producing a huge quantity of seed. It can be seen, therefore, that the much maligned stinging nettle is a very valuable part of the environment although that may not provide instant understanding if you've just been badly stung.

Since the spring, a lot of maintenance work has been done around Rayne Station with fences and gates re-painted, grass cut and the platform weeded on several occasions.

The station sign has also recently been replaced and looks splendid. With regard to Rayne Station itself, we were pleased to be advised that, following application by English Heritage, the buildings have been given a Class 2 listing which will give protection to their structure and appearance. The Friends supported the application for listing, as did a number of members individually, and it was good to see a positive outcome. Although unlikely to happen, it would be good to see similar listing being given to the other features of the former branch line, in particular the bridges, that at Mill Lane for one being in a very poor state of repair and having to be supported. Responsibility for repairing and maintaining the structure of the bridges lies with Essex County Council Highways department.

If you have any suggestions on work which could be done along the Flitch Way by the

Friends, after consultation with the Country Park Rangers, please let us know. All reasonable suggestions will be considered. As mentioned earlier, summer is a relatively quiet time for Flitch Way volunteers with only one weekly work party taking place until the beginning of September when that is normally increased to two, each Tuesday and Thursday. We always welcome new volunteers, particularly during the Autumn and Winter months and if you would like to know what's involved and what our volunteers get up to, please visit our website, www.friends-of-the-flitch-way.org.uk Alternatively, why not pay a visit to our Community Railway Carriage at the station in Rayne where you can see lots of photos of the Flitch and the work that our volunteers do.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3)

Unlike the Flitch Way, work done by volunteers with the P3 group continues throughout the year with work parties taking place every Wednesday at sites throughout the County. Work done by the P3 team centres on footpaths, bridleways and byways, under the control of Public Rights of Way officers based at County Hall and includes such work as installing or replacing bridges and way marker posts and clearing or re-instating footpaths, many of which have fallen into disuse because of overgrown vegetation or blockages, fallen trees etc. As with Flitch Way work parties, a lot of photographs and information on the work done by the P3 team can be found on the Friends website at the above address. If you would like to know more or are interested in joining a P3 work party, please give Peter Lane, the leader of the team, a ring on 01376 343567.

Railway Carriage

We try to change the items on display in the carriage from time to time and if you haven't visited for a while you will probably find something new inside. The model railway is a big attraction to children of all ages and thanks are due to Brian and Roy for maintaining the model. Now that the school holidays are with us, you will usually find the carriage open and manned by a volunteer or two on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in addition to Saturday and Sunday. We know that it can be disappointing if you find the carriage closed but I'm sure that you will understand that it can only be opened to visitors if we have a volunteer on duty for health and safety purposes if for no other reason. We continue to seek carriage volunteers to enable us to open regularly. You don't have to be an expert as we explain what you need to know and try to have a more experienced volunteer on duty with you. It's good fun, you get to meet lots of nice people and you even get to operate the model train after being shown how to do so.

If you are interested and can spare a couple of hours either during the week or at weekends, please get in touch with Pam Maskell, who co-ordinates the carriage volunteer team, on 01376 329939. Alternatively, contact Wendy Moss on 01376 329245 or Stan Davies on 01376 348054.

We have always intended the carriage to be used by local groups, organizations and, in particular, schools and the low take up by them has been somewhat disappointing to date. Rayne Beavers held one of their meetings in the carriage one recent evening and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. A Ramblers group celebrated one of their members' notable birthdays one afternoon and we have also had visits from a local Scout support group and a group of clients and carers from a local dementia club. Use of the carriage by schools and organizations is free, you need only to pre-book by contacting Stan or Wendy on the

numbers shown above and providing details of numbers etc. We can arrange for somebody to talk to your group if required and if you belong to an organization and would like to visit during the day or in the evening, please get in touch. Schools would be particularly welcome.

Miscellaneous

In June, we were pleased to welcome Stephen, Bishop of Chelmsford to the carriage, his visit being part of an annual walk around different parts of his Diocese. He was impressed with what he saw in the carriage and went on to enjoy tea and cakes in the adjoining scout hall provided by All Saints church, Rayne.

Friends members had an outing in July to the vineyard at Great Bardfield with good company, an enjoyable lunch, a talk on the vineyard and, last but not least, some very pleasant wine. Thanks to Margaret, our organizer.

We get many comments from cyclists and walkers visiting the carriage on the difficulties in negotiating the route around Great Dunmow. For those who don't know, there is a gap in the Flitch Way at Dunmow which was caused by the building of the by-pass which follows the line of the former railway line. Users of the Flitch have to leave the path on the north side and follow the main road before returning to the path beyond the town. After many years of discussion, it appears that a new and safe off-road route may have been agreed. A Flitch Way Action Group has been formed to take the matter forward and the Friends have a representative on that group.

Finally, congratulations to Josh and Grace, now formally known as Mr. and Mrs. Josh Meehan, of the Booking Hall Café at Rayne Station, following their recent wedding.

If you have any comments to make about this newsletter or have any suggestions on what you would like to see included in the future, please let Stan Davies know on 01376 348054 or via stan@keatsave.freeseve.co.uk

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