

FRIENDS OF THE FLITCH WAY AND ASSOCIATED WOODLANDS

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2014

Flitch Way work parties

Because of the need to avoid causing disturbance to nesting birds and the Rangers' involvement in and around Great Notley Country Park, the number and frequency of work parties on the Flitch Way reduces from late Spring onwards, particularly during the summer school holiday period. As a result, volunteers' work has generally been confined to light cutting back of encroaching vegetation along the track and some maintenance work at Great Notley replacing fencing. Volunteers also spent some time re-instating a garden border at Danbury Country Park where regular local volunteers are in short supply. Andrew and Irene Adair attended several events in surrounding villages during the summer, publicizing the Flitch Way and the work of the volunteers.

A group of Friends' volunteers led by Pete Lane had previously built two sets of steps for Rayne Parish Council to improve access to and from the recently created Oak Meadow nature reserve which is located on land next to the village hall. Further work at the site was done by Pete and the volunteers in late summer, installing a dipping platform at one of the ponds on the reserve.

After the long summer break it was good, therefore, to get back to work in September with the annual visit to Dunmow Cutting which usually accounts for around ten consecutive work parties. Reducing the vegetation on the south facing banks of the cutting is something which has been done for a number of years, even before the Friends group was formed, in order to improve the habitat for wild flowers which would otherwise be choked by the spread of vegetation. In recent years some of the north facing banks have also been opened up to allow more air and light into the cutting. The results of the work can be seen every spring in the increase and variety of wild flowers and insect species. The work which we do involves volunteers using hedge trimmers and brush cutters on the steep slopes and dragging the cut material to fire sites. This job is probably the longest and hardest one which we do but the resulting aching backs and joints are more than offset by the satisfaction of seeing what has been done each day and the knowledge that the longer term benefits of the work will be seen the following spring and summer. At the time of this newsletter, volunteers have started clearing the final area at the Buttleys Lane end of the cutting. We are ahead of schedule due to the hard work put in by an average of 15 volunteers on each work party. Several toads, frogs and lizards have been moved to a safer habitat during the cutting back of the vegetation. It has been pleasing to see most of the volunteers who joined the Friends at the start of 2014 returning for the new season. Work will continue on the cutting and the boardwalk until at least the end of October. If you have never visited this area of the Flitch Way, you are missing a treat and please try to do so at some stage. At this time of the year it can be very wet and muddy in parts but in spring and summer it is a delight. Access to the cutting can best be gained from Buttleys Lane off the old Braintree Road on the Bishops Stortford side of Dunmow where limited parking is available or from Dunmow bypass, B1256, for the boardwalk end. There is no parking at the bypass entrance which is

marked by a Flitch Way sign at the roadside.

If you would like to join one of our Flitch Way work parties, please get in touch with Wendy Moss on 01376 329245. All you will need is suitable clothing and your lunch.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3)

The Parish Paths Partnership (P3) was an initiative set up a few years ago between Essex County Council Public Rights of Way and local Parish Councils all over the county. Its purpose was to give advice and assistance to PCs in the maintenance and improvement of footpaths and bridleways for walkers and riders in their respective areas. The Friends signed up to the P3 scheme initially to work on footpaths linked to the Flitch Way and that was soon done. Not all Parish Councils have the resources or expertise to do this work and as the experience and good reputation of our P3 group has grown, we have undertaken work on footpaths right across Essex. The work can involve clearing overgrown paths, installing way marker posts and installing and repairing bridges. A lot of work has recently been done around Good Easter and High Easter and in and around Ashdon near Saffron Walden. Requests for the group to do this work come from the Public Rights of Way officers based at County Hall who liaise closely with Pete Lane who leads the Friends P3 group. There are a number of jobs currently on hand for work to be done at a variety of sites and if you would like to join us, P3 work parties take place on Wednesdays throughout the year. If you are interested and would like to know more, contact Pete Lane on 01376 343567.

Railway Carriage

It is amazing to realize that a whole year has gone by since the carriage arrived on 16th October 2013. Having said that, a tremendous amount of work has been done on the carriage, led mainly by our coordinator Gordon Cameron, by volunteers in that twelve months inside and outside the carriage and in the surrounding area of the station. The formal opening ceremony took place on Friday 25th July with Councilor Mrs. Sue Wilson, leader of Braintree District Council, doing the honours, unveiling a plaque and cutting the tape. Many of those who had given funds or supported the project in other ways were invited and it was good to see so many people in attendance. Bocking Concert Brass Band played splendidly and Josh from the Booking Hall Café very generously provided the refreshments. Although some areas surrounding Rayne had rain, we were blessed with good weather throughout and it was a lovely afternoon.

Since the opening in July, over 1500 visitors have been to the carriage and many complimentary comments have been received. The museum area has information on the former railway line and the working model of Rayne station as it was around 1920 has attracted a lot of interest. Thanks are due to Brian, Ron and Roy for all the work they have done on building the layout under Gordon's supervision. The layout appears almost complete, waiting only for the model of the main station buildings to be installed and which is currently being built. The wife of one recent visitor, a keen model railway enthusiast, did speculate, however, that it would never be completely finished and would always be found to be in need of an adjustment here and a bit of tinkering there. Displays on the Flitch Way and the diversity of its flora and fauna are also an integral part of the museum area, as are the many photographs on the work done by the volunteers. Displays will be changed from

time to time and if you have any photographs or items of interest relating to the railway or local history, we would be pleased to show them and acknowledge their source. From the early days of the carriage project, it has been the Friends' intention that the carriage be seen as an asset for the community, for use by local schools, clubs and organizations. That continues to be our aim and while our intention has not yet been realized, it was good to see help in the carriage refurbishment being given by local people who have been supportive of the project throughout. Once the work was completed, it was decided to open the carriage to visitors on as many days as possible. To enable that to be done volunteers need to be found to be in the carriage on open days, to answer enquiries and give information as well as for security and health and safety reasons. Pam Maskell took on the role of coordinating the volunteers and a small but growing number of people continue to give up their time to help. It is important to note that if no volunteers are available on a particular day, the carriage cannot be opened to visitors. Volunteers are always needed to share the load so if you have any time that you can spare and would like to help in manning the carriage when it's open, please contact Pam on 01376 329939 or Gordon on 01245 354267. It is not too onerous a task. Sessions run from 10am to 1pm and 1pm to 3pm, full training is given and you get to meet lots of very nice people who will tell you what a grand job you're doing.

Following the success of his visit last Christmas, Santa has agreed to return and spend another day in the carriage, on Sunday 21st December, meeting youngsters of all ages when we also plan to have a variety of fundraising activities in and around the carriage. Looking further ahead, we are planning to have a model railway show over the weekend of next year's May Bank Holiday in order to raise funds towards the upkeep of the carriage. More details to follow in due course.

If you have any comments about this newsletter, please contact Stan on 01376 348054

October/November 2014