

2004-2024



**BWT - 20 years at the heart
of the community.**

OUR FIRST 20 YEARS

Bearsted Woodland Trust is now in its 20th year. It is a private charitable trust, operated and managed entirely by Volunteers, with no external funding,

Our site now covers 28 acres and is maturing. The trees planted in the early years have formed canopies, but the distant and historic landscape views, which are so important, remain central to our current and future management of the site.

BWT has developed into a much-loved and unique asset to our community, with thousands visiting for walks or recreation each week. (We are always pleased to welcome new members for only £10 per year!)

We manage the site in line with the BWT Maintenance and Management Plan, with weekly work programmed for the seasons and for wildlife. We have installed extensive further dry hedging, bug hotels, bird boxes and log piles to provide more habitats. The native trees forming Jubilee Wood, planted by Thurnham and Roseacre Schools in 2022 are thriving.

A recent innovation has been the setting up of two litter picking teams, who add to the 5000-plus hours put in each year by our volunteers.

Thurnham CE infants school continue their annual science and nature walkabout, their questions showing how much they understand and value wildlife.

We have new teams using our Junior Football pitch.

Our website is very well used and regularly updated.

As you can read on page 3, the Green Flag Award judge was hugely impressed by what has been achieved, and we remain in the highest award category

We thank the community for their many appreciative comments to the volunteers working around the site: these help to keep us going!

John Wale

Chair, BWT Management Committee



Pauline Moore's land, bequeathed to the Trust in 2012

BWT SHOWS HOW TO DO IT

For the 14th year in a row BWT has received a top category Green Flag Community Award, with the visiting judge Dave James declaring it a benchmark example of how things should be done.

“The site is completely worthy of a Green Flag award for 2024/25. It is a testament to the Trustees who had the vision in the first place but also to the volunteers who have made it what it is today.

“Their hard work and dedication to the site is exemplary and this example should be used as a benchmark as to how to do it correctly,” he wrote in his assessment.



Our proud Chairman



“What struck me most was the range of areas and habitat within the site that makes it ultimately diverse. These include open areas for picnics and ball games to coppiced woodland and plenty of habitat log piles and bug hotels”

Mr James, a horticulturalist and park warden with Southend City Council, toured BWT with Management Committee chairman John Wale and vice chairman Adrian Bouwens when the bluebells were at their best!



The Green Flag assessor with deputy chairman Adrian Bouwens

EVERYONE IS A VOLUNTEER

As the Green Flag assessor pointed out, BWT thrives through the efforts of the many volunteers who work so hard to make the Trust so special.

Last month BWT’s Management Committee hosted a relaxing morning of coffee and cakes to say thank you, an event blessed with good weather as well as good company.

On the invitation list this year - the maintenance volunteers who between them put in thousands of hours (of unpaid work) each year to maintain and enhance our 28 acres, the litter pickers



who keep it clean, the teams who deliver your newsletter and the BWT Trustees.



Where would we be without them?

BWT AND THE COMMUNITY

Bearsted Woodland Trust sits at the very heart of our local community. As well as our close bonds with the membership and volunteers we have established long term relationships with many other local organisations.

These continue to flourish and new ones are continually being formed. These are just a few examples.

FOOTBALL'S COMING HOME

We are really pleased to see the return of junior football to BWT.

An under-7s team from MPE FC, based in Madginford, will play their home games at BWT, continuing a tradition which began when we hosted Roseacre Raiders for several years.

MPE FC has a number of teams, ranging in age from under-7 to under-18 as well as more senior sides, and describes itself as a club providing competitive football for all ages, but with an emphasis on enjoyment, not just success.

Maintenance volunteers look after the pitch with regular mowing and removal of mole hills whilst the pitch marking is done by specialists.



From its earliest beginnings, BWT has sought to involve as many younger members of the community as possible with regular visits from Roseacre and

Thurnham School, the planting of Jubilee Wood and now we hope that by playing outside youngsters will come to appreciate the benefits of BWT and use it as they grow up.

THURNHAM CHILDREN VISIT

This year's visit by Year 2 pupils from Thurnham Infants School was again another great success - with lots of challenging questions from our young guests.



OUTREACH

A busy schedule of talks to different local and Maidstone area organisations has helped raise awareness of BWT's open spaces, maturing landscape and all the work that our volunteers do.

It has also brought in new memberships, tree sponsorships and generous donations.



A follow up visit by 20 members of Larkfield Women's Group was hosted by John Wale on a sunny evening in June. The photo shows the group enjoying the wild flowers and old farm machinery in Moore Meadow.

FIREWORKS

BWT will again be supporting the Parish Council's annual village fireworks display, as we have done for many years.

This year's event is on Friday 1 November.

The fireworks are operated from our land opposite Elizabeth Harvie Field, a safe distance from the crowds that gather there, and our volunteers will be hedge trimming and mowing in that area specially as a further safety precaution.

DOGS AND BATS

As we went to press final arrangements were being made for a busy day at BWT.

In the afternoon the local Guide Dogs Fundraising Group were holding a family dog walk and treasure hunt.

In the evening local Bat expert John Puckett was due to lead a Maidstone Bat Group walk - possibly a little quieter?

COFFEE TIME

Visitors to BWT can now pick up hot and cold drinks or snacks from a converted vintage Citroen van parked just inside our main gate on the Landway.

The Petite Retreat, is a new business set up by Bearsted couple Ceri Porter and Neil Burrell. Initial hours are 10.00-15.00 Wednesday to Sunday, but these could be extended in the future.

We have been happy to support them and obviously wish them well with their new venture.



AND REMEMBER

We know that movement is good for our bodies but exercise can improve our mental health too. If we are coping with stress, depression and anxiety a regular amount of exercise, say 30 minutes a day, can make a big difference to our mood.

Exercise is a powerful fighter of depression as it releases endorphins which are natural hormones in the brain. These hormones can alleviate pain and improve our sense of wellbeing.

There has been significant research that shows that being in nature is vital in keeping us emotionally, psychologically and physically healthy.

Walking can serve as a positive distraction, allowing us to be more aware of what is going on around us. We can all get wrapped up with negative thoughts and feelings from time to time but exercise outside helps us become more aware of them. Once we can see that we are dwelling on thoughts that are not helpful we can then start to challenge them and so feel more in control.

So... Walking at Bearsted Woodland Trust can help you to feel happier, grounded and more connected with the natural world without having to join a gym or buy expensive exercise equipment.

J. Ward - Counsellor



THE RAINS CAME....

CAR PARK UPDATE

We will be re-opening the car park once we have completed works to remedy drainage problems on site.

The car park, accessed via the A20 (Ashford Road), was opened in March 2023, but the heavy rains last autumn caused the entrance area to become waterlogged and rutted and in October BWT had to take the decision to close it.

On site investigations since then have revealed that, although the plastic interlocking grid that was laid to provide



a firm surface is still intact, there is the need for a new drainage system at the car park entrance.

Contractors are now being chosen to carry out the necessary work and BWT hopes this will be completed by the autumn of this year.

PATH MAINTENANCE

Our many footpaths were not immune to the problems caused by the heavy rains, which created large puddles all over the place. But our ever-resourceful volunteers came up with plans to deal with these as best we can.



There is now a new linear drain in the path by the football pitch. This takes the water that flows from Church

Landway through our entrance and forms puddles along by the parallel bars. This drain now catches this water and redirects it onto the grass to soak away, reducing the puddles noticeably.

By Gore Cottage and Jubilee Wood we have filled some puddles but with the clay soil here it does not soak away well, so we have started drilling holes through 2 ft of clay to the ragstone base and filling them with hardcore to form soakaways, we then

skim the surface of the path and refill with self binding gravel. This seems to work but it is slow progress as we can only do this on dry days - of which there have been very few.

KM75

The set of steps between Lilk Stream and Gore Cottage became difficult to navigate following the unprecedented heavy rainfall in autumn and winter months, which caused the original bark chip treads to deteriorate rapidly.

As they form part of the Public Footpath KM75, which runs across our land, we contacted Kent Council Council's Public Rights of Way Unit. They were swift to acknowledge the problem and to offer to rebuild the steps with robust timber steps and stone treads.



...THE SITE FLOURISHED

Special thanks to BWT archivist Brian Carter who has collated all our images and taken many of the photographs himself.



NATURE NOTES

It is an ongoing balance between supporting wildlife and having a facility where people and dogs can roam freely but we do make a good fist of it, thanks to the work of the volunteers and the respect that our users give the Trust.

Probably 8 to 10 years ago we did some major work in **ROLLER BENCH WOOD**; thinning and pruning many of the trees and at the time this seemed drastic, making it appear less like a wood. But now as you walk through you can see that it has recovered and regenerated with healthier trees and flowers including snowdrops, winter aconite and cyclamen growing in the undergrowth thanks to the new light they get.



When we did this work on Roller Bench Wood we used to burn our trimmings, all the cuttings and brush. Then we discovered the benefits of dead hedges. We no longer burn the trimmings, these now form dead hedges which now extend along Old Avenue which is now so full we have started a new one along the old fence in Moore Meadow.



Dead hedges not only provide habitat and food for a large variety of wildlife but also serve as a safe highway for the inhabitants to move about.

As you walk around the trust you will notice there are **LOG PILES**. These are not our way of tidying them away to keep the areas neat and tidy but are deliberately piled to provide habitat for mammals, insects and amphibians. Our latest piles are in Old Wood opposite Manning Maze. These have been made from two Ash trees that we had to cut down due to dieback disease - so instead of being destined to the log burners of Bearsted they continue to make a contribution to maintaining our wildlife and environment.



Our volunteers have been busy on rainy days making **BAT BOXES AND WREN NESTING BOXES**. The bat boxes have been placed in trees at the top of the slope coming from the bridge and you can see the wren boxes in Roller Bench Wood. We are working on other boxes and even wild bee hives.

RAGWORT has been the basis of a discussion as to whether it is a weed and a pest for horses and it being a major habitat for the caterpillars of the Cinnabar moth. It was decided that we would let the ragwort grow but take action to prevent it becoming overwhelming.

The bright colours of the caterpillars warn predators that they're poisonous, but they only build up their poison after feeding on the ragwort. They spend the winter as cocoons on the ground before emerging as moths in the summer. Cinnabar moths can be seen flying during the day and night and are often mistaken for butterflies.



Cinnabar Moth

It was sad to see that our neighbours at Major's Lake had to fell so many of their **ASH TREES** due to dieback but their programme of replanting should pay dividends in years to come. At the top of the steps leading into People's Wood there is the stump of a large tree which tells us when it started life. It was in the same year that George VI was crowned, there was a typhoid outbreak in Croydon and 999 was introduced as the emergency services number.

There has been a lot of excitement with the discovery of a **WILD ORCHID** growing by the Tudor Park gate. In Britain we have 57 native species of orchids, some are surprisingly common and widespread, while others are sought after rarities found only in a few select places. One of the things about orchids is their immense variability, even within species, which can make accurate identification extremely difficult.

A.B.



Orchid



Growing on the Turkey Oak - *Volvariella bombycina*

Volvariella bombycina, commonly known as the silky volvariella, silky sheath, silky rosegill, silver-silk straw mushroom, or tree mushroom.

BUILDING (and maintaining!) BRIDGES

Our relationship with the Gurkha regiments stationed in Maidstone continues and has now been marked by the planting of a commemorative tree.

In late November a team of six Gurkha Engineers used pressure hoses, waders (and their enthusiasm) to give the Lilk Bridge a good clean.

It was built from a South American hardwood by the Gurkas back in 2007 and immediately nicknamed “The Gurkha Bridge” and a structural survey by BWT and the Royal Engineers earlier last year showed that, while it remains sound, it needed a “deep clean”.

BWT volunteers Jeff Winn, Adrian Bouwens, Dave Green, John Gregory and John Wale were on site to manage the operation and especially the Saturday foot traffic. It was a great opportunity to explain the background to what was happening and the public were very appreciative of a chance to chat with BWT volunteers and the soldiers.



COMMEMORATIVE TREE

Later a tree planting ceremony was held to commemorate the work. The Gurkhas, their new Commanding Officer Lt Col Ryan Castro RE and BWT’s Founder Trustee Richard Ashness took part.

Also present on site representing the 36 Engineer Regiment The Queens Gurkha Engineers were Major Govinda Gahadur Rama, Major Ben McGauley and Cpl Devi Ram Rai - leader of the Ghurkha group and our contact for BWT works.



BWT sourced the tree, an English Oak, and prepared the site and plaques and we are very appreciative of their continuing Community involvement on a structure which is so important in linking the two sides of BWT.

DAVE WARD



Dave Ward, now 84 and one of our longest serving volunteers, has retired from the Management Committee after running our tree and bench sponsorship scheme

for more than 15 years, raising valuable funds for the Trust.

Since taking on the role in 2008 he has been liaising with donors and ordering and fixing the plaques which identify the sponsor of each tree, all of which are carefully numbered and plotted in an A3 book of plans taken from satellite images.

We now have upwards of 350 sponsored trees and 46 benches!

Dave and his wife Ann first became involved with BWT in 2005 after watching volunteers clear the rubbish-strewn site, which had lain derelict for many years.

He quickly learned how to use a tractor and was soon spending three days a week working as a Maintenance Volunteer. He has also used the professional skills he acquired during an international career in engineering to jointly project manage major works like the Lilk Bridge and the Tractor Barn.

“BWT means a lot to me. I retired when I was 60. You need to find something to keep you occupied, physically and mentally healthy.

“I am grateful to Richard and Dena Ashness for giving the community such an asset. My involvement has been very important to me, my sense of community and my health and I have made close friends”.



“Special thanks this year to David Ward. His careful work is in clear sight all around BWT” - John Wale, Chair of Management Committee.

Tree sponsorship is now being managed by Peter Lawler but Dave will continue as a maintenance volunteer, on hand with background knowledge if ever needed.

WOODLANDER DESIGNER STEPS DOWN

Sue Fuller, who has been designing The Woodlander to great acclaim since 2020 is stepping down after this issue.

We would like to thank her for the energy and style she has brought to the newsletter and wish her well.

She will be a hard act to follow - but we're confident that within our community there will be someone willing to take on the role, which only requires work on one bumper newsletter a year.

If you would like to offer your services please contact us via the website.

HORSE HEAD SCULPTURE

The Horse Head sculpture in Moore Meadow has been much admired and become widely recognised since it was carved from the trunk of a fallen ash tree by Steve Andrews in 2017.

Sadly a number of inspections this year have shown that the base is now rotting so badly that, for both safety and preservation reasons, radical attention is needed.

The decision has been made to separate the upper carved section and build an entirely new base for it using recycled railway sleepers.

The upper section (the horse's head) will then be remounted on this platform in a location close by.

Thankfully, we have a number of well qualified engineers among our maintenance volunteers and we will be able to minimise costs by hiring in the necessary specialist equipment and doing the work ourselves.

Life member Michael Lawrence of Family Funeral Service has kindly offered to pick up the bill for this project as part of his wider financial support (reported on page 14.)

We will take progress photos for inclusion on our website.



NEW LOOK

We will be unveiling a new-look stall to the Market on the Green on Sunday October 6th, where we'll be spreading the word about the many successes touched on in this newsletter.



Surprisingly, after 20 years, even many of the hundreds of people who enjoy Bearsted Woodland Trust regularly remain unaware of our history as an independent local charity dependent totally on volunteers and donations.

Eye catching backdrops and free standing signs have been designed showcasing some of our favourite views of the 28 acre site. We hope existing members will stop by and see us – and that others may be persuaded to join.

NEW CARDS

You will also find our latest 2024 Christmas cards on sale alongside other BWT merchandise.



This year's big sellers are expected to be our mixed packs, which proved particularly popular last Christmas although single-design packs are also available.

The cards will also be on sale at the following week's AGM and can also be ordered through Membership Secretary Chris Street for free delivery within the village.

Prices have been pegged at £3.50 and each pack contains six cards, whether of individual design or mixed.

Contact Chris at membership@bearstedwoodlandtrust.org or on **01622 739713**.

BWT FROM THE AIR

Aerial photographs of BWT in this Woodlander were taken for us by Mark Sheepwash, who often walks his shih tzu dog Fred here.

Mark has also produced a video which you will be able to access via our website.

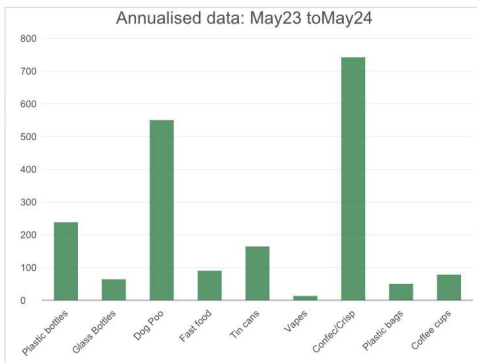
LITTER

Year two - and not only have our litter picking teams been busy keeping BWT'S 28 acres spick and span, led by team member Erica Wentzel, they have been busy analysing all the rubbish they have collected during their first year.

Two dedicated teams meet either weekly on a Monday or on a Saturday every other week. The focus is on picking up - then the Monday group sorts litter into recyclable and non-recyclable, which are processed appropriately.

So here are the figures:

742 confectionary and crisp wrappers and 550 discarded dog poo bags plus other frequent finds like plastic and glass bottles, tin cans, vapes, plastic bags and coffee cups.



The team also retrieved a car bumper, a motorcycle wheel, soiled nappies - and worse!

We thank them for their efforts.

WEBSITE

Our website has continued to provide more and more online visitors with information on Bearsted Woodland Trust's popular features and activities over the past year.

An average of just over 2,800 visitors per month used the site during the first six months of 2024, slightly up on last year which saw a new record of website hits set over the same period.

During the first national Covid lockdown in 2020, the website attracted a then record 2,000 visitors during the months of May, June and July. Prior to that, the website had been receiving around 1,000 visitors per month.

BWT Web Editor Martin Herrema said: 'It is clear that our web site continues to provide essential information, both for those planning a first visit to Bearsted Woodland Trust and for our many longstanding members and friends.'

BWT AGM 2024

The Bearsted Woodland Trust AGM will be held at Bearsted and Thurnham Bowls Club in Church Landway on the afternoon of **Sunday 13 October**.

Start time 2.30. Doors open 2.00.

It would be helpful if Members would let the Management Committee know in advance if there are any specific ideas or questions you would like discussed so we can make sure they are on the agenda.

You can do this by email via the website contacts page. However, if you do not have internet access, leave a message on **07807 917533** and someone will call you back.

THANK YOU!

BEQUESTS AND DONATIONS

Altogether, over the year, new memberships, tree sponsorship and generous donations totalled almost £8,000.

BWT has received substantial gifts in memory of supporters who have passed away and we would like to thank families for thinking of us at what is always a difficult time.

We have also received one-off donations over the year.

Both are always welcome and the donation forms on our website make contact and giving easier. They cover both members and non members, with our bank and contact details and current Gift Aid guidance notes.

Please note that if you are sending a cheque and write it out to "The Woodland Trust" we cannot cash it. We are Bearsted Woodland Trust.

This is also an important distinction if you are considering remembering us in your Will. Please ensure that we are referred to as Bearsted Woodland Trust **(Charity Number 1103585)**.

REPLACEMENT TREES

Michael Lawrence of the Family Funeral Service, Bearsted, a Life Member of BWT, has offered to fund the purchase of trees or replacement equipment as gifts to BWT. We are most grateful.

We have already replaced some trees in the eastern end of the site, close to the boundary with Ashford Road, and will repeat this in other areas across when the planting season resumes later this year.

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

Out of the blue, a substantial cheque dropped through the BWT letterbox a few weeks ago.

It had been posted from Newcastle-Under-Lyme by people who, until very recently, do not appear to have known about Bearsted Woodland Trust at all!

It transpires that the Kent countryside and wildlife had been a passion of Sue Ellam's late brother, Ray, and when he passed away she and her partner investigated various projects in the county to decide where to make a donation in his memory.

They chose us.

This donation is in memory of my brother who loved the Kent countryside. He had been a keen member of The Conservation Volunteers working in the West and Mid Kent areas.

place that was open to all, with a great many trees and flowers that Ray would have loved. With best wishes Sue and Brian Ellam

Last year my husband and myself looked up various charities and decided to visit Bearsted. It was a lovely tranquil

We are, of course, both grateful for the funding and proud of the fact that we were the charity chosen to receive it. The Management Committee will be looking to see how the money can best be used to the benefit of BWT.

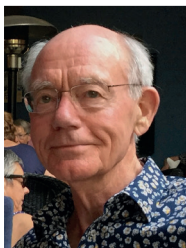
We would like to thank our friends who have access to electronic banking and are now paying their membership direct to our bank, rather than by cash or cheque. This saves us a lot of time and effort.

OUR MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

MEMBER NEWS

Sadly we have lost several of our longest standing supporters and volunteers this year.

Brian Prior, who died in June, had been a valued member of the weekday Maintenance Volunteer team for more than 10 years before having to stand down for health reasons.



John Wale recalls him as always conscientious and thoughtful about the work, with a warm sense of humour adding “We will miss him very much”

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In last summer’s Woodlander we reported that **Geoff and Gill Rands**, two of our original volunteers, had retired as delivery volunteers. Sadly they were to pass away within months of each other but the donations BWT received in their memory mean their legacy continues.



Geoff Rands helping to dig the maze, June 2009

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Substantial donations have also been received in memory of Bearsted Upholsterer **Alan Croucher**. With the agreement of his family the money is being spent updating and upgrading the design of the stall we use at public events to raise awareness and attract new members.



The blossom of a Tulip Poplar tree (Liriodendron tulipifera) near the Play Area in June.

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Sue and Tom Corkery, the Bearsted couple who died so tragically in an accident with a car while walking their dog in Thurnham Lane, were also long standing members of the BWT community, with Sue joining the delivery team in 2019.

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MEMBERSHIP

The number of people who have signed up to support BWT continues to rise. We now have 1125 members, including 607 holding life membership.

Every member receives a copy of these newsletters and we remain hugely grateful to the Delivery Team who take on high, low and stiff letterboxes across Bearsted to hand deliver 870 of them.

With a second class stamp now costing 85p that’s saving BWT about £875 a year. There are more savings being made by the 238 members who now receive their newsletter by email.

THE CHERRY TREE

A E Housman

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

BWT WHO'S WHO

THE TRUSTEES

Richard Ashness (Chair)
Dena Ashness
Martin Gray
Kim Martin
Christian Esposito

THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Chairman - John Wale
Deputy Chairman and Ecology Lead -
Adrian Bouwens
Hon. Treasurer - Martin Gray
Membership Secretary - Chris Street
Website/ Publicity - Martin Herrema
Newsletter/ Publications - Barbara Long



Bearsted Woodland Trust

Registered Charity No: 1103585

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Up to date news and further information can be found at www.bearstedwoodlandtrust.org

Contact Us: The website contact page is the easiest way to send us messages or to request this newsletter by email. We also welcome nature notes from BWT Friends.

Telephone: 07807 917533 Please leave your name, number and message, and we'll return your call.
Postal address: Bearsted Woodland Trust, 8 Fauchons Lane, Bearsted, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 4AH.