

## A TRIBUTE TO PETER WILLSON: TRUSTEE AND LIFE PRESIDENT

Peter Willson died in July, and in this edition we remember his contribution to make Bearsted Woodland Trust what it is today.

Our Chairman, Richard Ashness, spoke of Peter's achievements at the funeral service in Holy Cross Church on 1 August, and also at the AGM on 29 September. This article is therefore a celebration of Peter's involvement and achievements at BWT.

The legacy of Peter's vision, his energy and his work is all around us, but what we see today came from unlikely beginnings. A meeting with Richard Ashness at "the gate" in 2003 led to a strong and productive partnership. At the time BWT land looked like a bomb site – log mountains, derelict buildings, broken glass, and barbed wire. It was a very daunting prospect.



Peter made BWT his full-time job for 10 years. He did a great deal of the work himself: village-wide leafleting; personally leading the work parties on clearance and planting in the early years; preparing tedious grant applications; making presentations; 'selling' memberships and tree sponsorships. In a short period the local community had become aware of Bearsted Woodland Trust, and Peter had become the point of contact for everyone. It was Peter's enthusiasm, boundless energy and commitment which helped to make BWT.

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He also did a great job in persuading other people to get involved. We would not have had the massive contributions of John Monk, Chris Street, Sharon Bayne and others without Peter.

Peter was also responsible for cultivating Pauline Moore's interest in BWT, and his persuasion led to the purchase of the land to link her land to the original BWT site.

Ever mindful of the need to both raise money and use it carefully and wisely, it was Peter who persuaded the Ghurkas to build the bridge in 2007 and the Royal Engineers to build the shell of the tractor barn in 2009 (fitted out by BWT volunteers). For these projects BWT paid for the materials, but the building costs

were far less than conventional contracts.

Peter's fundraising ambitions were boundless: he secured the Biffa funding, against national competition, from far larger organisations and led the successful "Peoples Millions" campaign, supported by the parish and by the then Mayor of Maidstone, Richard Ash; this award funded the work on the circular path, used by hundreds each day, and the tractor barn. In 2009 Peter retired as Deputy Chairman and we made him Honorary Life President. He was supposed to "take it easy", but just carried on as usual... always brimming with new ideas about how to take BWT forward! His loyalty to BWT was as strong and clear as

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ever, and during his last illness he was still listing things to be done and making sure that they were followed up.

Peter was the key player in creating something which will endure for decades. In doing so, he has created his own memorial... which we intend to enhance by dedicating a new bench to Peter near the "Presidents Tree" (the black poplar in Barn Meadow), and by naming the cherry avenue "Willson Avenue".

When we look around Bearsted Woodland Trust, we will remember that it was Peter's dedication and commitment that helped so much to turn a plot of wasteland into a great community asset.



# Pauline's Land: update on the work carried out / planned on Pauline's 10 acres

In our last issue we summarised the responses to our survey about the future of Pauline Moore's land. Whilst there were several proposals which had considerable support, such as hard surfaced paths and a car park, there were some very strongly held views in opposition to the same proposals. Since the publication of the survey results we have mown a circular path which has resulted in a great deal of positive feedback and requests to leave the area as it is. The dominant feeling coming forward appears to be that the area should be left as natural as possible.

The Management Committee has therefore decided to 'park' any development ideas for the time being (with the exception of tree planting). This is because we do not want to do anything which is strongly opposed unless we are sure it is necessary. We are therefore adopting an 'if in doubt, do nothing' approach for the time being. We will monitor the situation during different weather conditions over a 12 month period before revisiting the subject of whether or not we need to improve access so that as many people as possible can enjoy the area.

Prior to reaching this decision, we had anticipated that significant capital expenditure would be required and had begun a preliminary fundraising project. We are very grateful to Barbara Long who has put in a considerable amount of work in this respect. This has now also been

put on hold pending future deliberations, although Barbara (basing her application on work by Peter Willson) had already secured a Pride in Maidstone grant of £4500 to fund signs for the new area and a memorial for Pauline Moore.

Our maintenance volunteers have cleared the northern boundary of the site in preparation for the planting of trees to form what Pauline wished to become known as Riders Wood. We will be planting the trees this winter and hope that many of our supporters will join in another community planting day at the end of November. Previous days of a similar nature have been great fun and achieved excellent results. Please do mark the dates in your diary and encourage friends and family to join in.

## COMMUNITY TREE PLANTING DAYS

### PLEASE JOIN US TO HELP PLANT RIDERS WOOD

**Dates:** Saturday 30 November  
& Tuesday 3 December 2013

**Time:** 9:00am to 12:00noon... come along for just half an hour or longer  
Wear wellies and gloves... and bring a spade if possible

Children are welcome... an event for all the family

Meeting point at Gore Cottage  
entrance off Ashford Road  
(parking available)



## Some recent photos of BWT

- Oak Avenue
- A butterfly in the meadow
- Toadstools by Major's Lake



# AGM highlights

70 Friends of BWT attended the AGM held on 29 September. Key points are mentioned in this newsletter, and full minutes can be seen on BWT's website.

## Maintenance and Projects: Jeff Winn

The number of regular volunteer numbers stands at 22, much as in previous years, including several from out of the area. This year's mowing regime has followed the three-year plan, with more areas left as hay-meadow, and wider margins around borders and hedgerows to encourage wildlife and gradually enrich the ecology of the site.

BWT has cut the Church Landway hedge and other hedges are being trimmed during the winter 2013/14.

Tractors and equipment have been serviced in-house, overhanging branches removed near paths, and soft paths

replenished with bark chips obtained free from a local sawmill; similar material was used for mulching trees. Problems with surface water at the top of Cherry Avenue have been solved by construction of a drainage channel; all other drains have been cleaned out in readiness for winter.

Much clearance work has been carried out on Pauline Moore's land; this included removal of electric fencing, stock fencing, and collection and disposal of oil drums and car tyres used for horse jumps. Work is now in progress to clear weeds and nettles, and to remove wooden gates which are no longer needed.





The mixed hedge planted by the community in 2011 continues to flourish, and the area has been maintained as needed. The mown path around Pauline's land proved very popular and opened up new areas not accessible previously.

The annual hay-cut was carried out by a local farmer in September, the hay was removed and the areas mown by BWT to ensure an even level for next year's growth.

Jeff also mentioned four external groups who have helped with "one-off" work; these include Marriott Tudor Park Staff (3 visits); KCC Highways; HM Passport Office; and KCC Communications Team (2 visits). Their efforts are much appreciated.

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## Trees and Benches

17 trees and six benches had been sponsored during the year, giving income of £5,000; several trees were currently available for sponsorship (if you are interested, please contact David Ward on **01622 737133** or [sponsorship@bearstedwoodlandtrust.org](mailto:sponsorship@bearstedwoodlandtrust.org)).

BWT volunteers now make benches for our site.

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## Treasurer's News: Bernard Head

BWT is in a healthy position overall. Membership fees and other income almost match expenditure for the past year, but with the additional 10 acres of Pauline's Land to look after maintenance costs and insurance are likely to increase. Investment interest rates remain very low. Bernard emphasises the importance of Gift Aid, which has to date generated £51,000 of income for BWT! The full report and statement of accounts can be viewed on our website.

## Green Flag Award 2013/14

Following an inspection earlier in the summer BWT has again secured the prestigious Green Flag Award for 2013/14.

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berries at BWT

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### STOP PRESS

**As this newsletter was going to print, we received the sad news of the death of Dave Johnson. Dave has made an enormous contribution to BWT as our project and maintenance manager for the past six years and will be greatly missed.**

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