



BREAKING NEW GROUND PROJECTS TO GET UNDERWAY

Early March brought the fantastic news that the Heritage Lottery Fund had confirmed its £1.46 million grant towards Breaking New Ground, the landscape partnership for the Brecks. The Breckland Society has six projects in the mix, with the first two scheduled to start in the next few weeks.

Worth £2.2 million in total, Breaking New Ground will be hosted by Suffolk County Council and administered from Brandon Country Park (see page 3). The scheme will last for three years and will fund 37 individual projects across a core area of the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks, focused around Brandon and Thetford. Although project outputs must be delivered within this 250km² core area, volunteers and participants from all over the Brecks, and indeed beyond, are being encouraged to get involved.

The Breaking New Ground partnership is made up of regional, national and local organisations with an interest in the area, as well as community groups, and includes: Norfolk County Council, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury District Councils, RSPB, Natural England, English Heritage, Forestry Commission, University of East Anglia, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, The Breckland Society, Farm Conservation, Icení botanic Artists, Green Light Trust, Plantlife, Norfolk Geodiversity Partnership, Orchard Barn Environmental Education CIC and the Ancient House Museum.

The projects range from building restoration and the establishment of a new conservation volunteer centre to the creation of new walking and cycling trails and a wide range of local history and heritage interpretation projects. From the Breckland Society's perspective we are the leading community organization taking part in the scheme and one with a proven record of delivering high quality heritage projects. We already have over 90 archaeological and archive research volunteers on our database and hope that many of these will take part in these new projects, alongside participants who may not have been involved before but have an interest in conservation, heritage and local history.

Year One of Breaking New Ground will see two Breckland Society projects taking place: "Flint in the Brecks" and "The Internal Archaeology and Lodge Sites of the Brecks Warrens". The flint project is designed to enhance, conserve and promote the impact of flint in terms of the natural and historic landscape, its archaeology, built heritage and geodiversity. It will research and record the distribution of flint mines in the Brecks and the uses of flint as a building material, especially for ecclesiastical, public buildings and vernacular buildings, through a community-led thematic research project. No systematic survey of flint-mining in the area has been undertaken before.

The flint project will run from June to November this year and include training for participants in how to: identify flint mines in the landscape; survey churches for the use of flint; carry out

archival research into the flint industry; conduct oral history interviews with those who have worked with flint. There will also be workshops in flint-knapping and the use of flint as a building material. At the end of the project an illustrated report will be produced, an interpretation panel will be installed at the

Cont'd on page 2...

WHAT'S ON

forthcoming Society events

www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events

Thursday 8 May

Launch of The Breckland Bat Project—see back page.

Friday 6 June

Society AGM at Gooderstone Water Gardens. Access to gardens from 6.30pm, AGM at 7.30pm. Papers will be sent to members under separate cover.

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE AND VENUE

Saturday 19 July

Dragonfly Field Study Day, led by Dr Pam Taylor East Wretham Village Hall and Thompson Common, 10.00am to 3.30pm — see page 3.

Members £15, non-members £20.

Places must be booked and paid for by 27 June please.

Friday 12 September

Visit to Stone Curlew Roost at Cavenham Heath, with the RSPB. Members free, non-members £5.

See enclosed flier for events during the remainder of the year

If you need a lift to a Society event, please contact Sue Pennell on 01366 328452, as it may be possible to arrange transport with other members.

Cont'd from page 1

important former flint mine at Lingheath, and a series of dedicated webpages will carry information about the project and its achievements.

The internal warrens project will investigate each of the 26 warren sites in the Brecks, determine the extent and condition of surviving internal archaeological features such as trapping banks and enclosures and lodge sites, and compile a standardised record for each. Although the sites of the Breckland warrens are known and their perimeter banks mapped and recorded, no systematic survey of the internal earthwork archaeology of each warren has yet been undertaken. The project will run from October 2014 until March 2015 and provide participants with training in archival research, fieldwalking, surface investigation of sites, oral history

Pony Ashley was one of the last Breckland flint-miners, photographed here in the 1930s.



WOOD FOR THE WAR: HOW THE NEED FOR TIMBER HELPED CREATE A FOREST

Thetford Forest, covering 19,000 hectares, is England's largest lowland pine forest. An entirely manmade landscape, it owes its origins to the First World War, when Britain faced great difficulty in meeting the wartime demand for timber. Anne Mason looks at what prompted the decision to plant new forests.

In a war characterised by machine-guns, artillery, tanks and barbed wire, it is rather surprising to learn that one of the most basic essential resources was timber. Wood was needed on the British lines in France to construct and shore up the trench systems, as well as to support the miles of barbed wire and provide soldiers with a solid walking surface. It was also used to construct dugouts, bridges and compounds for prisoners. Most sadly and desperately, it was needed for coffins.

The Home Grown Timber Committee was set up in the Board of Agriculture on 24 November 1915 and the following April was given the power to acquire standing timber compulsorily, to purchase and convert standing timber and to build sawmills. However, with so many men having enlisted, there was a lack of indigenous forestry expertise in Britain. The Government therefore looked to Canada, the acknowledged source of timber know-how in the then British Empire. At first the idea was to harvest the trees from Canada's forests and import them but, with space aboard merchant ships at a premium, it was decided to bring over the Canadians themselves.

The teams of Canadian foresters had an amazing impact. In the immediate pre-war period, Britain had been importing 11,500,000 tons of timber each year; by November 1918, the Canadian Forestry Corps in Britain and France was producing the same amount solely for the war effort. In all, they produced 70 per cent of the timber used by the Western Allies. However, all this exploitation came at a high cost to our woods and forests. Half of the productive woodland in England,

interviewing and conservation work. An illustrated report will be produced, as well as dedicated webpages and an interpretation panel at an exposed section of warren bank within Thetford Forest.

Both these projects build on the Society's experience and expertise in flint and warrens, and offer the opportunity for members and non-members alike to make a real contribution to improving both scholarly and public understanding of two of the most important aspects of the Brecks history.

If you are interested in taking part and would like to know more, please contact Anne Mason on 01760 755685 and anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk

Forestry Commission

Nightjar Walks

The Forestry Commission will be leading two summer evening walks to hear—and hopefully see—nightjars. These birds fly all the way from Africa to breed in the forest, and sound like no other bird you will ever hear! Glow-worms are also possible.

Please come along to the entrance to Fire Route 5 off the B1106 Brandon to Elveden road (grid ref TL92841)

for an 8.30 pm start, on Tuesdays
24 June and 1 July.



Photo by Nick Ford

Scotland and Wales was harvested in just two years, from 1916 to 1918. It was the equivalent of nine Thetford Forests, in which every tree was felled!

To ensure that Britain would not find itself facing a similar timber shortage in potential future times of war, the Government decided to act. It set up a state organisation to coordinate a reforestation plan, and on 1 September 1919 the Forestry Act came into force. This set up the Forestry Commission and gave it responsibility for the promotion of forestry, the planting and development of new forests and the production of timber for woods in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It was a decision that would help transform the landscape of many parts of Britain, and of the Brecks in particular.

In forthcoming newsletters there will be articles about the effects of the First World War on Breckland's woods and plantations and the subsequent planting of Thetford Forest in the 1920s, as well as a look at evidence of the First World War in the landscape and what happened to some of those from the area who enlisted.



A NEW LOOK FOR BRANDON COUNTRY PARK

A refurbished visitor centre, expanded tea-room and new team led by park manager Chris Burton have helped signal a relaunch of Brandon Country Park. Now managed by Suffolk County Council, the Park covers 32 acres of landscaped parkland, forest and heathland just outside the town of Brandon.

The Grade II-listed Brandon Park House, now a private care home, was the residence (known then as Brandon Hall) of Edward Bliss, a wealthy local businessman who had made his fortune as a manufacturer of gunflints during the Napoleonic Wars. He remodelled the hall in the then fashionable Grecian style and built a flint mausoleum in the pleasure grounds near the lake. By the early 1900s the estate was one of the most impressive and well-managed in the Brecks, and the parkland still features many important specimen trees, including Wellingtonias and Blue Atlas Cedar.

A new Park logo has been designed, featuring a firecrest. Several pairs of this Breckland speciality occur in the park, and the large conifers around the walled garden are a good place to listen and look out for this tiny songster. The heathland supports classic

Brecks birds such as woodlark and nightjar, as well as scarce reptiles such as adder. A herd of Dartmoor ponies is now grazing the heath to keep it in good condition and help prevent scrub regeneration.

A network of trails gives access to all the main habitats and to Edward Bliss's mausoleum, as well as to the walled garden. Interpretation panels on the trails and in the visitor centre itself explain the history and ecology of the park, and the tea-room has recently been enlarged and its menu revised to focus more on home cooking and local produce. The park offices will also host the team responsible for Breaking New Ground, the Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership (see front page).

For more information and opening times for Brandon Country Park, see its page on facebook.

THE YELLOW STAR OF BETHLEHEM

According to the authorities on wild flowers, this small yellow-flowering bulb (Gagea lutea) is found widely across Europe and Western Asia. The Red Data Book categorises it as LC—a species of least concern. Websites claim that it may be locally abundant in damp woodlands from central southern England to central Scotland. Yet this bulb is not found in southeast or southwest England, northern Scotland, Wales or Ireland, as Sue Pennell reveals ...

The Yellow Star of Bethlehem is indeed a rare plant. However, this rarity may be found in Norfolk, and in just one location—in Breckland. For a few short weeks in spring the Yellow Star of Bethlehem may be found in ancient Wayland Wood, near Watton.

In early March the tiny bulb bursts forth with slender grass-like leaves that are quickly followed by a candelabra of delicate golden-yellow, star-shaped flowers that nod in the breeze. The dark yellow of the petals soon fades to a pale shade, seeds are set and distributed close by in the rich soil, the leaves die back and the Yellow Star of Bethlehem disappears until the following year.

But no matter how carefully one may time a visit to Wayland Wood, the flowers may not always be found. Local golden pheasants also watch carefully for the fleeting blooms—for them the flowers are a favourite springtime treat. But if you find only headless stalks among the leaves, the wonderful display of wood anemones, primroses, violets and bluebells should make up for any disappointment.

Wayland Wood is in the care of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and may be found just south of Watton on the A1075 to Thetford. The wood and car park are 1 km from Watton and signed by a brown tourist sign.



Yellow Star of Bethlehem (Gagea lutea) Photo by Sue Pennell

THERE BE DRAGONS!

Ever wanted to know the difference between a dragonfly and a damselfly?



Banded Demoiselle

Photo by David Kitchener

Now is your chance to find out, as the Society has arranged a study day on dragonflies and damselflies for **Saturday 19 July**. Aimed at beginners and non-specialists, the day will be led by the British Dragonfly Society's Dr Pam Taylor, one of the country's foremost experts on these fascinating creatures.

With almost 30 resident species, plus a few extra migrants, Norfolk and Suffolk are one of the best regions in the whole country for dragons and damsels. We shall start the day at East Wretham Village Hall with an illustrated presentation by Pam on their main characteristics and differences, habitat requirements and extraordinary life cycle: some species spend up to five years underwater in their larval phase! In the afternoon we shall travel the short distance to Thompson Common, one of the foremost sites in the Brecks, where Pam will show us some of these fascinating creatures in the field (weather permitting).

The day will start at 10am and finish at around 3pm. Places are limited and must be booked and paid for no later than Friday 27 June. See What's On on the front page for more information.

RECENT EVENTS

Time travel in Breckland, 28 February

The evening in the company of David Robertson, Historic Environment Officer, Norfolk, whisked members and guests back through the eons of time to discover the varied and extensive archaeology to be found in the Breckland forest.

We learned how the local Breckland landscape is filled with the evidence of past centuries, including ancient barrows, mines, warrens and military structures, many of national importance. A former quarry, close to the arboretum at Lynford, is of great archaeological significance. It was here that mammoth bones, and the tools used to butcher the animals, were found. Here too, other excavations had revealed rabbit bones, providing conclusive evidence that coney had been reared in Breckland since the Romans occupied the Brecks—centuries earlier than historians had believed.



In spring 2002, mammoth bones and a number of handaxes were found at Lynford Quarry, near Mundford.

Mining has been an important local industry for millennia. Neolithic man used reindeer horns as axes to extract high-quality black flints from Grimes Graves. Surprisingly, it was using this same basic technology, but with more modern axes, that miners dug deep near Brandon for flints in the heyday of flintlock gun production in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Visit to Euston Hall, 11 April

Twenty members enjoyed a visit to Euston Hall on a glorious evening on 11 April. Led by estate manager Andrew Blenkins and archivist Edward Wortley, we were taken on a tour of the John Evelyn and William Kent-designed landscape park and pleasure grounds, currently under restoration.



David explained how the definition of archaeology continues to expand. Nowadays, archaeologists recognise the importance of structures and sites used during WWII, and their significance to the families of those who served in Breckland. The camp used by the Desert Rats is one such site: a memorial, surmounted with a tank, commemorates their presence, and may be seen besides the A1065 at Ickburgh. A circular walk takes visitors around the former camp and information panels explain what was there during the Desert Rats occupation.

Our journey across time was completed here in the 21st century, with concrete cricket pitches and graffiti. Doubtless when on future walks members of the audience who stop to examine the hearts and initials cut into tree trunks will recall that these carvings are part of the archaeological discipline, and are called *arborglyphs*.

FORTHCOMING EVENT

Thursday 8 May at 7.00 pm

Earlier this year **The Breckland Society** awarded a grant to the Norfolk Bat Survey for the acquisition of bat-detecting equipment, to be used by Society members and others who live in Breckland. The kit will form the basis of a new project designed to find out more about bats across the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks.

Stuart Newson, the co-ordinator of the Norfolk Bat Survey, will launch

The Breckland Bat Project

Stuart will give a presentation on bats and the wider recording project. He will also demonstrate the bat kit funded by the Society and, of course, answer any questions. There will be an opportunity for people to participate in the project by signing up for a recording grid, booking a date to use the kit or simply finding out more about what's involved. No commitment required!

This event is free to all

Venue BTO (British Trust for Ornithology), The Nunnery, Thetford, IP24 2PO

Directions The BTO is on the south side of Thetford, close to the A134 and signed on the A134.

From Thetford on the A134, just after the petrol station on the right, take the **left** turn on to Nun's Bridges Road. The BTO is the second road on the right.

From Bury St Edmunds on the A134, just before the petrol station on the left, take the **right** turn on to Nun's Bridges Road.

The BTO is the second road on the right.

There is adequate parking at the BTO.

Enquiries to info@brecsoc.org.uk or telephone 01366 328 452

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email: lizdittner@tiscali.co.uk or tel 01366 727813