

REIGATE HEATH NEWS

Friends of Reigate Heath Newsletter Summer/Autumn 2006 Issue 3

FoReigateheath@aol.com or c/o Heath Farm, Reigate RH2 8QP

“The experience of history in the landscape is never in the tidy and purposeful order reassembled by historians.....

“Layers are out of sequence, displaced, often flaunting a significance they haven’t really earned.... Landscape, as a language, is pure pidgin. It’s full of slang, mimicry, and faddish jargon, yet with the odd knack of being comprehensible.....”

- Richard Mabey in ‘Nature Cure’ brilliantly describing how difficult landscapes are to interpret & yet endlessly fascinating. So much of how we view a place is based on our own personal experiences and understanding. He goes on to write, “Our imaginative affinities with the natural world are a crucial *ecological* bond, as essential to us as our material needs for air and water and photosynthesising plants.”

When you visit Reigate Heath, I wonder what you perceive. On **Sunday 24th September**, you have the opportunity to see it with fresh eyes on a joint **Walk with the Friends** and the **Betchworth & Buckland Society looking at the landscape history of the Heath**, led by the combined talents of Helen Neve and Dennis Turner from the Heath’s Steering Group. Please see the attached flyer for booking details; early booking is recommended as places are limited.

Heathlands, now a rare and fragmented habitat with highly specialised flora & fauna, were essentially developed in the Bronze Age and maintained over time by human activity, which held back natural regeneration to woodland. Inextricably linked with their development are tumuli - Reigate Heath has 8! These are now listed **Scheduled Ancient Monuments** (see over).

Over the last century, sporting activities on Reigate Heath have been a major factor for maintaining the thrill of open heathland and the precious spring jewels of acid grassland despite also unwittingly causing losses to the Heath’s biodiversity through ‘improving’ the land

by draining, fertilisation of turf, etc.. Inevitably throughout their history, heathlands have been subject to man’s changing sense of land value usually at a considerable cost. You can see from old maps that pines were planted on the Heath in ambitious programmes of land ‘improvement’ as a result of Parliamentary Enclosure, often on tumuli mounds causing a real problem now in their conservation.

On 6 June, the **Reigate Heath Steering Group Annual Walk** was led by Ian Wright who provided a fascinating insight into how the Heath is managed for the few that turned up (next year we will advertise this better). The Friends held their first event with an insect foray on 18 June led by the renowned entomologist Roger Hawkins; thank you to Roger and to all who came young and old!

2006 marks the beginning of the implementation of the new **Reigate Heath Management Plan** - vital for its preservation and enhancement as an SSSI and site of archaeological importance. We should never forget that, without this legislative protection, the Heath’s future would be extremely vulnerable. Please contact Reigate & Banstead Borough Council if you wish to view this document. Anyone wishing to assist the Steering Group in making this a success – such as in monitoring wildlife, archaeology/local history projects (details overleaf), or by contributing to our conservation fund - please contact the Friends.

For **Reigate Area Conservation Volunteer dates** see overleaf. And please do keep a regular check of the Flanchford Road noticeboard. Come and join in with our exciting plans to rebuild the biodiversity of the Heath thus securing its future, which will be of benefit to both wildlife and us all.

Susan Medcalf, Secretary

Wheels on the Heath

From Ian Wright, RBBC Officer - a plea to all that love and use the Heath... As we all know, Reigate Heath is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is very sandy and this means we all have to be very careful how we use the site. There is growing concern about cyclists who ride indiscriminately across it and therefore increasing the erosion that is suffered. Whilst supporting alternative transport to get around, **cycling is not allowed anywhere on the Heath apart from the few designated public bridleways which are:** bridleway from the Heath Church to Bonnys Road and the Skimmington Castle, & Heathfield Lodge to Flanchford Road.

The permissive horseride is not suitable for cycling and should never be used.

On the subject of horses, we have had a plea from horse-riders for drivers to avoid parking where the bridleway crosses the Flanchford Road car park.

A blast from the past

Roger Davies, of the Capt. W E Johns Appreciation Society, writes “On 29 July 2006, a plaque commemorating one of Reigate’s most famous residents was unveiled by the Mayor (Cllr David Pay) in Colley Manor Drive where Capt. W E Johns, author of ‘Biggles’, ‘Gimlet’ and ‘Worrals’ and many other books, lived from 1938 to 1947. The house has been lived in for the last twenty years by Mr and Mrs Macmillan who hosted a convivial party in the garden for the occasion. The plaque and general hospitality were provided by the Capt. W E Johns Appreciation Society.”

Have you got a story on local Heath history for a Friends newsletter?

Check out our new website: www.reigateheath.org and help it grow!

SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS

The round barrows on Reigate Heath

In 1987, one hundred extant Bronze Age barrows were identified throughout Surrey - only a fraction of those which originally peppered the landscape, including eight on Reigate Heath. These round barrows, comprising of mounds with now largely infilled ditches surrounding them of 2-3m wide, were probably constructed sometime around the 15th century BC (early to middle Bronze Age) - the period in which progressive tree clearance, burning and agricultural activity led to the formation of the acidic soils of the heathland. Not all round barrows contain burials and current thinking is that they should be viewed more as cenotaphs acting as the focus for ritual activity.

Over time, the mounds have become eroded so we can only guess at their original dimensions. Four were partially excavated in 1809 prior to the planting of pine trees. In the largest barrow a circular hole containing ashes and charred wood was found dug into the natural rock beneath the mound. Another contained what is known as a collared urn with ashes and charred wood. In the late 1950s, an early Bronze Age palstave (a kind of axe) was found very close to the barrows. This has been interpreted as evidence of contemporary settlement. Otherwise settlements of this period are scarce. There are likely to have been further examples of barrows on Reigate Heath though there appears to have been some problem in certain identification due to the confusion here with tree clump circles. In the late 1990s Nicola Bannister identified another possible barrow as part of her historic landscape survey.

What is a Scheduled Ancient Monument?

The eight round barrows on Reigate Heath are scheduled. This means they are listed within the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 which is carefully restricted to include only the most important sites of each type of monument considered of national importance and worthy of preserving for future generations. These range from the prehistoric period (as with the barrows on Reigate Heath) to the Cold War. Some monuments have no visible remains above ground. (For further information see the Department of Culture Media and Sport website: www.culture.gov.uk).

What is the effect of a monument being scheduled?

It is a criminal offence to carry out unauthorised 'works' on a scheduled site such as destroying, removing, altering, or tipping material onto the monument or to cause - intentionally or through recklessness - damage to a scheduled monument. Metal-detecting and removal of objects on a scheduled site without a licence is illegal. (Works can only be carried out with special written permission known as Scheduled Monument Consent.)

The future of the round barrows

Taking care of these significant monuments is of paramount importance. Much unintentional damage has been done over the years by visitors on foot, bicycle and horse. The soft sandy heathland soils are very susceptible to erosion and it is worth all visitors being aware of and vigilant to the potential harm which can be done.

Ann Clark

*English Heritage Field Monument Warden
Surrey and West Sussex*

The Reigate Heath Steering Group is embarking on various archaeological/local history projects. Is there anyone out there who would like to be involved? *Dennis Turner*
Please write to me at: 21 Evesham Road, Reigate RH2 9DL (not on email).

NATURE NOTES *from Simon Elson, of the RACV & Reigate Heath Steering Group*

It's that time of year when the Heath looks really pretty with all the heather in flower. Did you know, we have three native species of heather on Reigate Heath? Common heather or ling, Bell heather (flowering slightly earlier and a richer purple) and Cross-leaved heath - the latter flowers the earliest and is a much paler pink, preferring the wetter areas and is found only in two places on the Heath.

If you would like to help restore the Heath, the **Reigate Area Conservation Volunteers (RACV)** are holding work parties on Sun 5 November, Wed 13 December & Sun 31 December 2006.

Meet in Flanchford Road car park at 10am.

Anyone interested in helping with bird, bat, butterfly or moth monitoring, please contact the Friends!

The MILL CHURCH, administered by Reigate Parish Church, has evening prayer services at 3pm on 17 September & 15 October, with a Christmas Carol Service at 3pm on 17 December.

The Friends of Reigate Heath now have a mailing list of over 80 people. Thank you everyone for all your support! Your contributions and feedback are essential to our work in supporting the conservation of the Heath. Cheques made payable to 'Friends of Reigate Heath'.