Chairman’s Message

At our adjourned AGM I was somewhat surprised but delighted to be elected your new Chairman. After the hard work and example of my two predecessors I have a very hard act to follow.

I have lived in Rainham close to the Reserve for 50 years and it has been a favourite of my children and grandchildren. Over the years the Reserve has changed considerably in its appearance and lay-out. It is an important asset to the local and indeed wider community and needs careful conservation and restoration. It is able to support a number of natural environments and I hope that FOB will be able to assist Greenspace Services in doing this.

Your new Committee has now held its first Meeting and the results of this are reported elsewhere in this Newsletter. My personal approach is on team-work and openness and your Committee are in accord with this approach.

The programme of activities being planned will provide a wealth of opportunities for participation by all. The emphasis is on welcoming all members to enjoy taking part in a very varied programme.

I look forward to meeting you at one of our activities. Everyone is very welcome.

Terry Clare, Chairman, FoB

What to look out for in the Reserve – Teasel

The wild teasel (Dipsacus fullonum) is the teasel to be found in the Reserve and the surrounding area. It is adapted to thrive in a wide range of marginal areas – edges of rivers, ponds, woods as well as neglected land, demolished building sites and former industrial sites.

It is a tall statuesque plant and has a dramatic silhouette in the winter. The flowers are popular with insects and its seeds are very sought after by birds, especially gold finches. A prolific self-seeder, it is a biennial. Sometimes used as a garden plant it is ideally suited for a wildlife friendly garden.

There are two closely related teasels – the native Small Teasel (D.pilosus) and also the introduced Fuller’s Teasel (D.sativus) which used to be widely grown for use in “pulling” (raising the knap on woollen cloth) and carding wool for spinning.

Rainwater and possibly exudences from the plant itself gather in the leaf axils (where the large leaves join the stems). Small insects fall in and
drown in this liquid. It is thought possible these insects are being broken down and absorbed into the tissue of the plant. If so teasels are evolving to adapt and mimic some bog plants such as the venus fly-trap and pitcher plants. — Terry Clare

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Report On Committee Meeting
Thursday, 4th October 2012

Present were: Terry Clare (Chairman), Eddy Newport (Treasurer), Pat Clare (Secretary), Liz Arnold (Rep for Berengrave Lane), Irene Comer (Rep for Berengrave Park Estate), Di Weedon (Rep for Lower Rainham Road), plus Brian Baker (Web Manager/Newsletter) and Fraser Miller (Historian)

An apology for absence was received from Jack Hughes (vice Chairman)

The Chairman welcomed Liz Arnold and Irene Comer to the Committee and acknowledged with thanks the efforts of former Chairs Brian Baker and Fraser Miller.

In his opening remarks the Chairman indicated that the new Committee had an opportunity to adopt an imaginative programme to further the interest of FoB and its members in conserving the Reserve.

The resignation of Mrs. Christeen Miller was accepted with regret and thanks were given for her previous service.

Matters discussed and action agreed were:
- previous Minutes, accounts, a recruiting and information stand in Rainham Shopping Centre, co-option of Brian Baker (Web Manager/Newsletter) and Fraser Miller (Historian), custody of records, Armistice Day, Meetings, Visits, Reserve visit rota, projects, Newsletter publication dates, public relations, guided walks.
- The Meeting commenced at 3.00pm and concluded at 5.25pm.
- Details of decisions are given elsewhere in this Newsletter.

All members are invited to view a full copy of the Minutes by contacting the Secretary on 233748.

Welcome

A big welcome is extended to the following new members:

- Mrs Terry Williams
- Alan Round & Mrs Sue Round
- Stephen Platt & Mrs Phyllis Platt
- Simon Marshall & Mrs Jill Marshall

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Members Meetings
All Commence at 7:00pm in the Methodist Church Hall, Station Road, Rainham
- Friday 15th February, 2013
- Friday 6th June, 2013
  (Includes Annual General Meeting)
- Friday 9th August, 2013
- Friday 29th November, 2013

Committee Meetings
All commence at 2:30 pm, venue t.b.a.
- Thursday 24th January, 2013
- Thursday 25th April, 2013
- Thursday 18th July, 2013
- Thursday 7th November, 2013

Armistice Day
Saturday 10th November, 2012
Riverside Country Park visitor centre

Members Meetings

Future Members’ Meetings will commence at 7:00pm and conclude by 8:30pm. Members are invited to bring a friend, or friends, with them, but there will be a small charge of £1.50 for non-members.

The meetings will consist of a short slot for business, followed by a guest speaker, after which there will be refreshments (tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits) and an opportunity to meet fellow members.

Armistice Day

This year Remembrance Sunday falls on Armistice Day so, in order not to clash with the official ceremonies and services being held on the Sunday, FoB will be holding its Armistice Day ceremony on Saturday 10th November.

This a-religious event is open to everyone and is held to remember the men from the Motney Hill Cement Works who died in WW1 and whom are commemorated on the plaque in the Riverside Country Park visitor centre. (It was FoB that discovered the memorial plaque in a Gravesham Council store and returned it to its present site)

Anyone wishing to attend is requested to be in the ground-floor room of the visitor centre no later than 10:45am. The ceremony will last approximately 15-20 minutes.
Subscriptions
Subscriptions for 2012/13 have been held at £5.00 per member per annum and became due at the AGM on 30th May 2012.

FoB’s constitution states that subscriptions must be paid within six months of them becoming due. i.e. they must be paid by 30th November 2012.
Committee members will be collecting subscriptions over the next few weeks.

Projects
Four projects or feasibility studies have been suggested. All of these will be undertaken by groups of members who will undertake the research and utilise the expertise of Greenspace Services and other experts. Briefs will be given to each team and the final proposals in the form of a written report will be presented to the Committee. The Committee will initiate discussions with the Greenspace team regarding implementation. All proposals must be within the constraints of the Reserve Management Plan.

The four suggested Projects are: -
1. Glades
2. Pond
3. History

Several potential Project Leaders have been identified but more are needed and so are Project Team members. How about you volunteering to join one of the teams. They should all prove to be fascinating projects?

Please ‘phone the Chairman on 233748 to discuss further.

Wildlife Crime
Like all Reserves, Berengrave occasionally suffers from shooting, destruction of nests, removal of wild plants and general vandalism.

So what is the legal position? Firstly, no shooting with a firearm (rifle, shotgun), air weapon, crossbow, bow and arrow etc. is allowed on any Medway Council land or property, this includes the Reserve. Nobody can claim that permission has been granted.

If shooting is heard coming from the Reserve (or the adjacent allotments) please ‘phone the Police at once on 999 to report the incident and ask for an incident number. Do not place yourself in danger but any information (car registration, descriptions etc) will be helpful to the Police.

As soon as possible ‘phone FoB on Tel: 233748, 234959 or 233014, giving details and the police incident number. This information will then be passed to Greenspace Services and we will ensure the Police Wildlife Crime Team is made aware of the incident.

Please ‘phone 233748 if you see any evidence of poisoning, disturbance of wild birds or taking of eggs, poaching (this includes fish), disturbing or damaging bats as well as removing or damaging wild plants.

Visits
It is intended to organise two visits (outings) to places of interest to members, such as other nature reserves, etc. Details will be circulated as soon as possible. Suggestions for visits will be very welcome, Contact the Chairman or the Secretary on 01634 233748.

Reserve Monitoring
A team has been recruited to monitor the Reserve and each team member will visit the Reserve at least once a month. Visits will result in a simple report being completed and handed to the co-ordinator, Mrs Di Weedon.

The concept of this scheme is for observations to be noted of birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, insects and other invertebrates. In addition the diversity and development of trees, bushes, shrubs, grasses, wild plants and the like will be recorded. Any hazards or safety concerns will be noted as well as suggestions for improvement.

It is intended that the scheme will commence very shortly once the details have been finalised and team members briefed.

More volunteers are needed. What about you?

Team members:
Contact: Mrs Di Weedon
Volunteers: Mrs Louise Owen, Geoff Graves, Mrs Terry Williams, Terry Clare, Mrs Liz Arnold, Fraser Miller, Alan Round, Mrs Sue Round, Mrs Sheila James, Harry Keane, Mrs Phyllis Platt, Stephen Platt, Simon Marshall, Mrs Jill Marshall

History of Berengrave LNR
Due to lack of space in this issue, the third part of Brian Baker’s series ‘History of Berengrave LNR’ is being held over until a future issue.
Rainham in the first part of the twentieth century. Part 1

This year is the one hundredth anniversary when the beginning of construction of the new cement works at Rainham began. These works received their chalk supply from the pit in Berengrave Lane which we know as Berengrave Local Nature Reserve. For those who are not familiar with the beginning of this enterprise I think you should be introduced to the main players.

The site of the chalk pit and surrounding land was purchased by Mr. Richard James Passby from the heirs of William Walter Esq. of Berengrave House for the sum of £9,750. This was for the Rainham Freehold Land and Allotment Company Ltd. This site was listed as having an extensive amount of chalk available.

The second party in our story was the barge owning family of Goldsmith from Grays in Essex. This was controlled by two brothers Edward James and Walter James Goldsmith who had inherited the business from their father. As the Goldsmiths operated a large fleet of barges in the Thames and Medway area covering from the Wash to the Solent they would know the area well. The brothers who traded as E.J. and W. Goldsmith Ltd. decided to expand into the cement manufacturing business and after purchasing the wharf at Rainham Creek they obtained the rights to extract chalk from the site owned by Mr. Passby, and announced their plans to construct a cement works on this riverside site in 1902.

Rainham already had a cement works as well as brick works in Otterham Creek which employed a large number of men. These works were old and inefficient; also the supply of raw materials was becoming scarce. This encouraged the Goldsmiths to invest in the latest process plant available. But first the access to the chalk had to be constructed and a railway was driven under the road to link the pit to the wharf which was being upgraded to a working dock. This meant changing the sea wall, which caused the Goldsmiths to be in conflict with Milton Council during 1904 /05. This Council controlled Rainham at this time.

We know of one man, John Albert Oliver, aged 29 who was employed as a labourer on the wharf, and had been employed previously as a brickfield labourer; he became behind with his rent and was taken to Court where he said he earned 18/0d per week and could clear his debt if given time and this was granted. He was probably employed as a digger at the start of the chalk pits excavation.

Unfortunately the demand for building materials was at a low point and there was little incentive to invest in the new cement works. It was reported in Nov. 1904 that there were a large number of men standing about and out of work due to being laid off by the old cement works. However, as a result of the great San Francisco fire and earthquake in 1906, demand for cement increased. Mr. Passby mortgaged the site to Sir James Whitehead in 1909. Mr. Passby presumably hoped the Goldsmiths would be extracting larger quantities of chalk as he would be receiving a rate per ton - he expected a better return on his investment via his Allotment and Freehold Land Company Ltd

In early 1911 Mr. Edward Goldsmith died at the age of 59 leaving the project in the hands of his brother Walter and his two sons. Walter decided to continue the project and construction started in August 1912.

During this period, Rainham was beginning to develop from a village situated between Sittingbourne and Gillingham into a small town. This is best recorded in a speech at the opening of the new water supply works in 1902 at which reference was made to the improvements in education with new schools, road improvements and allotments supplied by the Land Company to the men of Rainham (the company owned by Mr. Passby). The Free Library became available a time when a news paper cost five pence. Communications were improved at the Post Office with the additional telegraph and telephone services. There was the local Fire Brigade which was often called upon to deal with fires at the cement and brickworks as well as domestic fires. This was a horse drawn hand operated pump which was very old, and replaced in 1906 with a new one at a cost of £85. The cost of the Fire Brigade upkeep was 8 guineas (£8.40) per year.

The Health of Rainham was reported in Nov. 1906 and stated the population was 4,060 with no main drainage. Epidemics of scarlet fever were common, the disease spreading more quickly during the hop picking months. The solution would only be found with the introduction of main drainage many years later replacing the cesspits and open privies.


Fraser Miller, Oct 12, 2012
Historian, FoB
Members meeting

WE are delighted to announce that at our Members’ Meeting at 7.00pm on 15th February, 2013, in the Large Hall of Rainham, Methodist Church, Station Road, we will be welcoming Dr. John Puckett to talk on “Bats in Kent”.

John is a retired GP with a special interest in bats. He is Chairman of the Kent Bat Group and has been studying bats since 1983. His research includes monitoring of woodland bats and investigating bat swarming behaviour at certain hibernation sites.

The opportunity to hear such an expert should prove to be an interesting evening and give a good start to our new format for meetings. There will be a chance to ask questions and meet other members. Refreshments (tea, coffee etc.) will be available.

Please do come along and bring a friend(s). Admission is free to members and £1.50 to non-members.