

# Friends of Jubilee Country Park

## Newsletter Autumn 2021



### Chairman's Report by John Bruce

Last year's autumn report started with "*What a strange year this has been!*" Well, I could use that line again, though now we seem to be getting used to the ever changing rules and restrictions that Covid has brought us.

It has been another quiet year in terms of fundraising events, walks and talks, but on 31<sup>st</sup> March we had our Annual General Meeting for 2020 via Zoom. About twenty of us gathered around our respective screens to hear an impressive presentation by Ian Wright from idverde on The History of the Countryside. This took us from pre-history right up to the latest re-wilding projects (a case of learning from the very distant past). I then gave a brief presentation of photos from the park over the last year and an update on our new interpretation boards.

The accounts were approved and the committee was unanimously re-elected:

John Bruce (Chair), Sarah Coulbert (Social Media), Zara Jolly (Secretary), Ros Martin (Events and Publicity), Jennie Randall (Project Manager) and Peter Runacres (Treasurer).

The committee has been serving for several years now and we really need some new ideas and additional help. Please consider joining us and we'd be happy to have a chat to discuss details. Even if you can only spare a little time, any offers of help would be greatly appreciated. You can contact me on 07956 801761 or email me at [john\\_bruce@ntlworld.com](mailto:john_bruce@ntlworld.com)

The weekly Conservation Work Party re-started on April 19<sup>th</sup> with our ranger, Angela Wood supervising. This group of 10 to 15 volunteers meets every Monday morning at 10am for our scheduled conservation work, but it's very sociable too and we always enjoy a chat and a tea break.



*Some of our regular conservation volunteers take a break*

Unfortunately for us, our ranger Angela has done such fabulous work with us and other volunteer groups, that she has been promoted and we are losing her. We wish Angela all the very best in her new role and we have yet to meet her replacement.



Although our events programme has been rather depleted, early on a very wet Saturday morning in May, around twenty of us joined Peter Smart of the RSPB to hear the Dawn Chorus and Peter explained the many calls of the birds in Jubilee Country Park. Then, at the end of June, on a beautiful summer morning, I led a party of around thirty people on a walk to identify 60 or 70 wildflowers in bloom, including the beautiful Common Spotted Orchid (*left*).

Our scheduled Butterfly Walk in August went ahead, despite less than ideal weather which was cool and damp, but several species were sighted. Our regular butterfly transects are led by Peter Smart and Terry Pyle, assisted by Ros Martin and her team. Thanks to all involved for carrying out this important ongoing work to monitor butterfly species and numbers in the park.

Because of Covid, the Petts Wood May Fayre was postponed until August Bank Holiday Monday. We have been regular participants for many years and we usually raise funds by selling plants, especially tomatoes. It was too late for that this year, so instead we focussed on our branded goods and fun crafts for children. We also promoted the park and our membership, making a couple of dozen new Friends in the process. Fortunately, the rain which had threatened all day never arrived and we enjoyed a very successful day, meeting local residents and catching up with some old Friends too.

In October we had our first afternoon meeting, when Russell Miles came along to a socially distanced gathering in the Garden Room, to show us some stunning photos of seals and seabirds he has seen from his stretch of the North Kent coast.

We are really looking forward to getting our events diary fully up and running again soon. Meanwhile, I hope you will be able to join me for my "*Walk off your Christmas Pudding*" stroll around the park on Tuesday 28th December. We'll meet at 10.30am in the Blackbrook Lane car park. If you need to contact me on the day to check we're going ahead, please call 07956 801761.

Until then, please look out for further information on our website, Ros's email updates and the posters in the park.

Thank you for your support for the work of the Friends of Jubilee Country Park and please remember to renew your membership for 2022. All your membership fees and donations directly support our work.



*Raking after mowing the meadows in late summer*

Finally, as we rapidly head towards the end of the year, the committee would like to wish you all the very best for the holiday season and a happy and healthy new year.

## **Woodland Dwellers by Jennie Randall and Naomi Parker**

Many people enjoy visiting Jubilee Country Park, but there can be very few who can say they have actually lived there. In 2013, I was contacted by Naomi Parker (nee Wright) who told me her remarkable story. This article was originally published in 2013 and we are telling it again in memory of Naomi, a lovely lady and a Friend of Jubilee Country Park, who passed away on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

*"I have no war memories at all, although I do recollect a man at the door alarming my mother. Many years later, I learnt that he was the owner of the bungalow where we lived and he had fled the bombs and gone to live in Argentina for the duration of the war. This had posed a problem with the building society from which he was buying the property. They held the deeds but could not sell it, although they did not receive his mortgage payments. To compensate for this, what they could do was to rent out the bungalow. Now the owner wanted it back. It was early 1946 and we were evicted.*

*My parents, Cyril and Daisy Wright now had two children, but no prospects and no home. They were not alone. We lived in 'bomb alley' and the extent of the damage at the end of the war was enormous. To compound the problem, returning troops were eager to settle down and start families and there was a tremendous shortage of houses.*

*Some people descended on their relatives, and that is what my parent did. Grandma Rangecroft took them into her bungalow which had two bedrooms and a box room. The two bedrooms were both already occupied, so our family of four crowded into the box room.*

*It was lovely to be living with my favourite grandparents, but not so lovely for them. One day, Grandma stood at the box room door, holding up a wet sheet and scolding Stephen for wetting the bed. However, they coped and never threw us out, nor lectured my parents for improvident living. Truly, my parents believed that 'the Lord will provide' and they retained their innocence in all worldly affairs for many years.*

*There was another answer to the housing shortage. All over the country stood military stations, almost empty now as personnel were being demobbed. Increasingly, homeless people were taking these over as squatters. Provided they were not caught in the actual act of breaking in, the law protected them to some extent. The Government did not approve but decided to turn a blind eye as conditions were so desperate.*

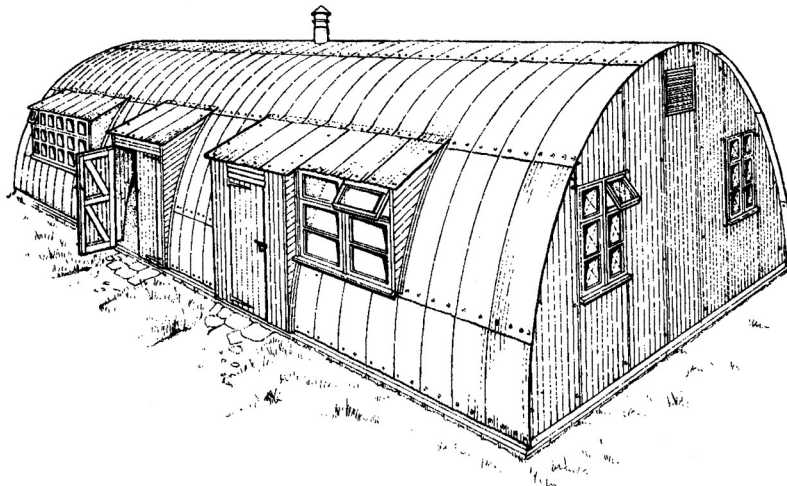
*My father met up with some other homeless young husbands and broke into Thornet Wood Camp. This camp was one of a series of wartime heavy anti-aircraft gun sites. Now the guns had been removed, though their towering concrete bases remained in a large field with nearby, a dozen or so huts to house the troops.*

*My father later told me of throwing bedding over the top of the fence, before burrowing under it to spend the night in a hut. The next day, he opened the gates for the rest of the family. He was traumatised by the temerity of illegally entering government property, but he had a family to provide for. Two huts were still occupied by soldiers, but they did not interfere. We took over a rather superior hut near the entrance and at last, our grandparents regained the use of their home."*

The illustrations and notes below were provided by Richard Ewing, a member of the Home Guard, who served at Thornet Wood.

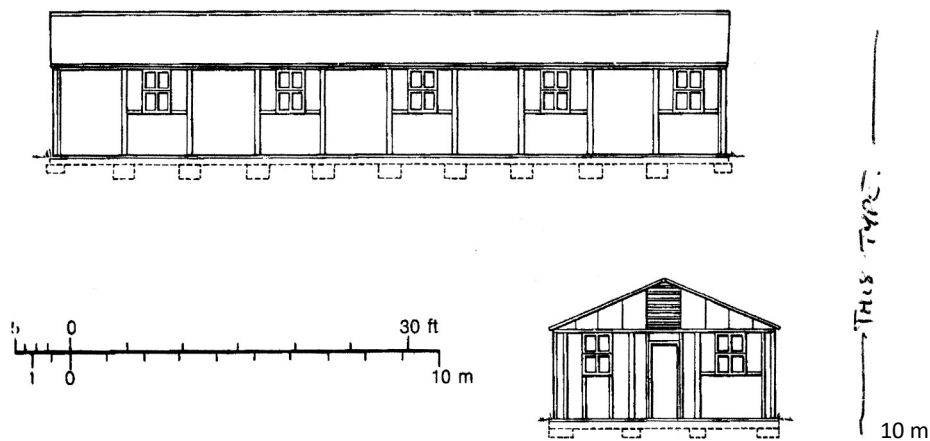
The type of Nissen hut which the Home Guard initially used during World War II at Thornet Wood.

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THIS IS THE ONE WE HAD  
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The 24 foot Nissen hut, shown in a domestic variant with two alternative types of dormer window.



The MOWP Standard hut. Designed by the Ministry of Works and Planning, this building used standard panels made from a wide variety of alternative materials.

The main camp at Thornet Wood was made up of huts similar to these.



*"At the camp were several other homeless families, who were to form a society for several years at various addresses. We were all on the overburdened council housing list. Slowly, council houses were being built- chiefly by cutting down swathes of woodland to build the Coppice Estate, but a points system operated and we never got to the top of the list despite nine years of hoping. Our family had only two children and a husband with a regular job. Such self-discipline was not rewarded.*

*The huts were very convenient as emergency housing. They were sturdy and water-tight and had electricity which, like water, came free. In the centre was a free-standing coke stove and I also remember a fireplace. At any rate there was a warm centre to the home, with chilly accommodation round it. Our hut had one large room. A counterpane was suspended across it to provide a bedroom for my parents and a living room for all of us. At the back were small bedrooms for us children and a chilly bathroom.*

*The winter of 1946-7 was a cruel one. Britain was exhausted after a long war and still suffering shortages of food, clothing and fuel as the entire country dragged itself out of poverty. Ration books ruled the family economy and it was even more of a worry finding sufficient coupons than sufficient money.*

*The stove in the camp hut was always alight and somehow fuel was found for it. The hearth also held a coal fire so (apart from brief interludes when half-smothered by low-grade dusty coal) there was a warm centre to life, a colourful rug before the fire. Our weekly baths took place in a zinc bath on this rug, lit by the fire. The adults used a very cold bathroom at the back.*

*Greengrocers were popular at the time; for a few pence they provided nut barrels, apple boxes and above all orange boxes to desperate homemakers. An orange box makes an ideal bedside table with a cloth thrown over it, and they have many other uses. To my amazement, they are being expensively polished and sold as trendy 'retro' pieces now, at a price of nearly £200 each!*

*Outside it was bitterly cold, but wrapped up, we went outside to play in the ice and snow. Long icicles hung from the eaves of the hut and we sometimes snapped them off, wrapped one end in a comic and licked them like lollipops. No-one seems to have worried about germs. It was well known that 'you have to eat a peck of dirt before you die' and I suppose it was hard to believe anything could survive in such chilly conditions.*

*However, the summer that followed this winter was equally extreme. Weeks of fine weather encouraged us to play, not just around the huts but far out on the gun site. The grass was waist-high and feathery and we spent many happy, unsupervised hours out there with the other children and often with Digger, our dog. To clamber up the concrete steps of the gun emplacements was only an occasional adventure, for although the actual guns had been removed we were still in awe of the great ugly reminders.*

*Instead, we played endlessly in the meadow the grass had become, hiding and chasing, or creeping up to catch the noisy grasshoppers which were perched at the top of the taller stems and posed, soaking in the heat and sunshine as enthusiastically as we did."*

*"I was four and a half when I started at Southborough County Primary School. The school stood in Southborough Lane, about a mile from where we were living at Thornet Wood Camp. My mother walked me to school in the mornings and came to meet me coming home – often still near home, as she was always very unpunctual. She pushed along a ladies' heavy, black bicycle, with my little brother sitting over the back wheel in a child's metal seat. Mother wore a cheerful scarlet cape that meant I could identify her a long way off.*

*We had few chores to do at this young age, and we were happy and carefree. Sometimes, two huts were occupied by young soldiers. On very rare occasions they would invite us inside, give us tea in huge, enamelled mugs and make much of us. It was so hot, they were in rolled-up shirt-sleeves and braces. They sat us on a table so we could talk face-to-face and sometimes we watched one of them, nicknamed Ginger, win a darts game.*

*Grandma and Grandad Rangecroft lived about a mile away, so we often visited. Stephen and I would play, engrossed with our own affairs but half listening to the adults talking overhead. One day my mother came into the living room to collect us, still wearing her scarlet cape, and full of the dreaded news- "The soldiers are coming back. We've got to go".*

*Together with other families from 'the camp', we were soon re-housed in emergency quarters elsewhere and we bid farewell to Thornet Wood Camp".*

If you would like to read many more fascinating stories about the history of Jubilee Country Park, its story is told in *Jubilee Country Park – Its History and Heritage*, which is available from W.H. Smiths on Queensway, Petts Wood or from Petts Wood or Southborough Libraries. Priced at only £5, it makes the perfect local interest gift or Christmas present. All profits from the sale of the book help to support the work of the Friends.

## **The Story of Holly Pond by Jennie Randall**

Whenever I'm on a walk with a group at Jubilee Country Park, it never ceases to amaze me how fascinated people are to know the origins of the names of its ponds. On countless occasions, I've been asked to repeat the stories of how Ray's Pond, Marcus' Pond, Jennie's Pond and the Loosestrife Pond all acquired their names.

However, perhaps not quite so familiar is the story of Holly Pond which is in Thornet Wood. When the Friends of Jubilee Country Park was formed in 2003, what we now refer to as Holly Pond wasn't really a pond at all, it was simply a rather muddy, shallow depression in the ground. It was greatly beloved by dogs, who very much enjoyed wallowing in the mud, but I suspect their owners were not quite so appreciative! However, as a result, it acquired the nickname of Dog Pond and so it remained for many years.

In 2009, the decision was made to dig the pond out further and eventually the Friends created a so called *dead hedge* to encircle it. Doing this served the dual purpose of being beneficial to wildlife, by helping to protect anything living in the water and making it safer for dogs for whom stagnant water can be extremely harmful. The Friends spent many hours working on this, predominantly using holly. The results of our efforts looked spectacular – like a giant Christmas wreath. As the water was no longer accessible to our canine friends, it was deemed necessary to change the pond's name and in view of the construction material, it was renamed Holly Pond.

Very sadly, over the course of time, the Holly Pond has frequently been the target of vandals. Generally, their attacks involved lobbing litter or branches into the water. However, one sad day, it was discovered that an arsonist, using accelerant, had set fire to the dead hedge. Such was the force of the blaze, the beautiful green circle was entirely destroyed. To help avoid a repeat of this vandalism in future, when it came to replacing the hedge, a more conventional post and rail fence with wire mesh in between was installed.



*Holly's first visit to Holly Pond in August 2020*

One of the Friends, Alan Saban, spent many hours hand carving a beautiful wooden sign for Holly Pond and it was proudly attached to the fence, in recognition of the holly circle that was formerly there. The sign was a lovely finishing touch as it meant anyone passing by would be aware of the pond's name.

Earlier this year, when passing the pond, the Friends noticed the sign was missing. Looking into the water, we saw it floating upside down, in a very poor state. Needless to say, it had not got there of its own accord!

With some difficulty, one of the Friends succeeded in retrieving it, but it was totally water-logged, green with slime and part of the reverse of the sign had rotted away. It looked to be damaged beyond all hope of redemption.

One day, whilst my attempts at renovation of the sign were still underway, I was chatting to a dog walker in the park. On discovering I was one of the Friends, he asked if I knew the whereabouts of the Holly Pond sign. He looked rather puzzled when I replied that it was in my airing cupboard! I then went on to explain why. His question to me had been posed in such a way that it implied the sign was of some special significance to him, so I asked if there was a particular reason for his interest. His response was a rather lovely one; his dog, quite coincidentally, is called Holly and every couple of months or so, while out on her walk, Holly poses by the pond sign for a photo. This had become quite a tradition, so the absence of the sign was keenly felt and its return was greatly anticipated.

Happily, after considerable use of wood filler and many coats of wood stain, the Holly Pond sign has been restored to its former glory and is back where it belongs.

Holly the dog is very happy too and her owner has kindly shared some memories from the photo album for us all to enjoy.



*Holly in the snow in February 2021*

## Keeping in the Loop by Jennie Randall

The London Outer Orbital Path, known as the London Loop for short, is a 150 mile route around the capital, split into twenty-four sections, passing largely through green spaces and open countryside. Section two ends and section three commences in Jubilee Country Park.

Since it was set up twenty years ago, funding for the maintenance of the Loop has ceased, resulting in the signage deteriorating with little prospect of this situation changing.

Having been walking the London Loop in recent months, I have discovered just how exasperating it is to follow a waymarked route when the signage is inadequate, hidden, missing, broken, graffitied, faded or has been deliberately turned around in the opposite direction!



*The new  
signage will  
make following  
the route easier*

This all makes things particularly difficult for those of us who are not blessed with good map-reading skills or are following instructions, which are at best vague and on many occasions either misleading or totally incorrect. I felt a great deal of sympathy with the numerous ramblers I've encountered in Jubilee Country Park in the past, attempting to follow the London Loop and getting totally lost in the process.

However, this will no longer be the case in Jubilee Country Park. Having researched suitable materials, the Friends have funded replacements and additional signage throughout the route in our park. The new signage is far superior to the original, being made of a material which will be light-fast for many years and is both scratch and flame resistant. The signs are extremely solid - unlike the previous ones, they cannot be broken - and if they should be graffitied, it can easily be removed. With due consideration for the environment, at the end of their useful life, many years hence, these signs are 100% recyclable too.

The signs have kindly been installed by Kevin Brown, one of our conservation work volunteers, who spent many hours working on this project. I'm sure these new signs will be of great benefit to all those following the London Loop in future and will give them a very favourable impression of our park.

### How to get in touch and useful contact details

We would love to hear from you with your feedback, so please get in touch via our website [please note our new website address www.jubileecountrypark.chessck.co.uk](http://www.jubileecountrypark.chessck.co.uk) or by email to [jubileecountrypark@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jubileecountrypark@yahoo.co.uk) You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Please send in your photos with captions and don't forget to share with your friends and family. You can find us at [www.facebook.com/jubileecountrypark](https://www.facebook.com/jubileecountrypark)

If you have any questions or would like to find out more about volunteering with us, please contact the number mentioned on our website or call us on 07840 542261.

The Friends of Jubilee Country Park work with Bromley Council solely in a conservation and preservation role. To report any of the following issues, please contact Bromley Council's Customer Service Centre on 0300 303 8658

Overflowing bins (dog waste and rubbish), fallen or dangerous trees, anti-social behaviour, vandalism/graffiti, dog related issues including dangerous dogs, maintenance issues including uncut grass, damaged fences, gates and paths and dumping of rubbish.