

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

Occasional Titbits, issue 71, September 2022

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Autumn litter pick

FCHB's annual autumn litter pick will take place on Sunday 25th September 2022, to coincide with World Rivers Day. Meet outside the dentist, 97 Burnside, CB1 3PA at 10.30 am. We'll aim to finish by 12.30. Equipment will be provided but please wear suitable clothing. To help with planning, please email chair2021@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk to let us know if you want to join us.

FCHB Committee business

We normally hold FCHB's AGM in the summer, but with so much going on we have not been able to find a suitable date. We are planning to hold it later in the autumn and will advertise the date and location as soon as possible. FCHB is still looking for volunteers to help with the committee and organisational work, particularly someone for the role of Secretary. If you are interested, please contact us.

Thank you for all your help!

This was a difficult summer for the Brook. The heatwave led to much trespassing in the lakes, extensive littering and a worrying drop in the depth of the Brook. There was great anxiety about the plans for, and potential impact of, the proposed development north of the lakes and their opening as a country park. More positively, the Council's new project to protect the city's chalk streams has been a big boost for us and we still have a reasonably healthy population of water voles in the Brook: many thanks to Peter Pilbeam for doing his annual survey in April. We work closely with the Cam Valley Forum which is calling for more efforts to halt both sewage pollution and over-abstraction of water, and we are collaborating with a newly formed volunteer group for Coldham's Brook.

This year RiverCare and BeachCare, our main supporting organization, celebrated its 20th anniversary with an event in Cambridge in April. FCHB was one of the first groups to be set up. It is thus a good moment to extend our thanks to everyone (including Council staff) who has helped to clear litter, record wildlife observations, raise the profile of endangered chalk streams, and who has contacted us to say how important the brook and its wildlife are to them. Finally, thanks to those who have made donations: we no longer request these but they are always welcome for the occasional expenses that arise.



The photo shows Andrew Walters, the original RiverCare co-ordinator, and Lynsey Stafford, current Cambridge RiverCare Officer. Andrew sadly left RiverCare this year for an exciting opportunity with the Norfolk Broads Authority. We owe him many thanks for his help over the years, and Lynsey for her continued support. *Sue Wells*

FCHB awarded public art grant for a mural at Sainsbury's

For many years we have been trying to raise money for a mural to be placed on one of the walls of the Coldham's Lane Sainsbury's store, to raise awareness about the Brook. In September 2016, Sainsbury's gave us an initial donation of £500 and we have finally succeeded in raising the rest through a Cambridge City Council Public Art S106 grant. Hooray!

Rowan <http://www.rowanhumberstone.co.uk/>, an arts charity that works with adults with learning disabilities, will be working with us to produce the design, which will be approved before painting by FCHB and Sainsbury's. We are currently preparing the briefing for the design, which will involve all our favourite chalk stream wildlife: water voles, kingfishers, violets, meadowsweet, and other key features. We hope that it will attract people's attention and encourage everyone to take greater care of the Brook.



The mural will be made from marine hardboard and will be demountable, so that it can be moved if needed. We are working with Sainsbury's to identify the best wall for it. The Rowan students will be preparing the mural over the course of the coming year and we hope to install it in late 2023.

Identifying the best wall for the mural: From Left: Sarah Bowden, Gordon Mackenzie and Chris Dean from Rowan, Emmy Smart

Get in touch if you have any suggestions for the design or ideas about this project! Emmy Smart is the project leader. Contact her via: membership@friendsofcherryintonbrook.org.uk Emmy Smart

Brook restoration work

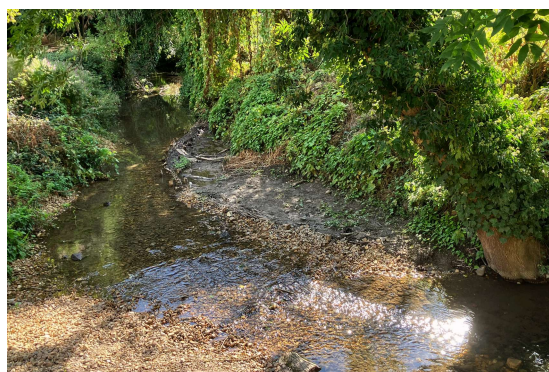
Many people have noticed the work done on the section of Brook adjacent to Blacklands Allotments and near Daws Lane. With the advice and help of the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire and the City Council, we are adding gravel and building out part of the bank to narrow the stream. This will create a more natural shape, provide shelter for invertebrates and increase flow and oxygenation of the water. Phase 1 took place in January (see Titbits 70). Phase 2 started at the end of July and received much publicity – we were visited by several Councillors, BBC Look East, the *Cambridge Independent* and the Mayor! The work was not completed as we found a moorhen nest and did not want to disturb the area further. The remaining gravel will be added to the Brook in October; we will let you know if volunteers are needed.



A gentle slope down to the water has been created, so that people can get a close-up view. The vegetation will grow back quickly in this area, and a natural path is expected to develop. As the Wildlife Trust explains “The access point was carefully chosen. It is not an access point for the lakes, but is fairly public so people can look more carefully at the Brook, on the basis that people won't protect what they don't care about. Right now we need everyone to care about their local watercourses”.

The deep area, on the other side of the bridge into the allotments, is being left as it is to act as a silt trap.

The wildlife is already enjoying the restored area – a heron was photographed catching a fish there (see next page). This spot is of particular note: in the 1950s, a local farmer was said to temporarily dam the brick allotment bridge in order to dip his sheep using arsenic. The gentle slope gave the sheep access to the resulting pond. Things are certainly better than they used to be! Sue Wells



Summer birdlife along the Brook

Many birds (water and hedgerow) have raised broods in spite of the hot dry weather. The Brook has been invaluable in providing water for them to drink with so little moisture in the plants and soil around. Sadly the swans that nest on the lakes have only raised two cygnets successfully this year; last year they had six that reached adulthood. In August both parents were present with both cygnets (one still grey, the other white). The swans at Cherry Hinton Hall, probably not such experienced parents, did not have any cygnets survive. Their nest on the pond was very close to the path round the wildlife area where, even though there is a notice asking people to keep dogs on a lead, some owners allow their dogs to run around which inevitably has an impact on the wildlife.



A heron with a fish on the newly restored area

Several years ago we had sparrow hawks nesting on Burnside and this year again a pair raised two chicks in the trees between the Brook and the Lakes. For weeks the plaintive high pitched begging calls of the young could be heard. Sparrow hawks lay their eggs in May and the female (which, like other birds of prey, is about 25% larger than the male) stays on the nest to incubate then care for the young. The male, which has a slate grey back, provides all the food at this time. The resident house sparrow population was depleted and evidence of pigeon feathers around the lakes indicated the chicks were well fed. Once fledged, chicks stay around the area for a few weeks, returning to the nest at night and demanding food from their parents. In an attempt to get them to fend for themselves and find their own hunting territory, the adults withdraw food making the juveniles increasingly agitated until they finally get the hint and become independent. Having four sparrow hawks along the Brook has meant the smaller birds have become rather timid and seeing the speed in which a sparrow was taken from our garden bird feeder they were right to be wary.

Birds of prey have become increasingly common in the last years and we have two local pairs of peregrine (one being in the city itself) raising new broods every year. Kestrels too (easy to identify as they hover) also nest locally and the larger buzzards and red kites, which until recently were both rare in East Anglia, are often seen above the lakes. This is a real success story as many birds of prey became uncommon in the East of England. In some areas, peregrines especially suffered badly because some pesticides used in agriculture caused eggshell thinning which decreased the numbers of young birds able to hatch and fledge. A ban on the use of these pesticides has had a positive effect on our birds of prey, although there is still much work to do to ensure our native wildlife is allowed to thrive.

1950s Memories of Burnside & Cherry Hinton Brook

Cynthia Reavell, a new FCHB member, lived on Burnside in the late 1950s. She sent us some of her memories of the Brook and local people, for which we are most grateful. This is an abbreviated version: we will post the full version on the FCHB website. Cynthia has written about her earlier years in Cambridge here: <https://capturingcambridge.org/romsey/belgrave-road/21-belgrave-road/>

I lived with my mother at number 105 Burnside from about 1954/5 until 1962, when I got a job in the University Library and left home to go into bedsits. So, having lived as a child and teenager at the footpath end of Burnside for several years, I have clear and fond memories of the Brook, our kindly next-door neighbour Mr Wiseman, and the footpath to Cherryhinton. Before that we had lived at 21 Belgrave Road, about a mile further along off Mill Road, since I was five or six, and even then the brook at Burnside was familiar to me as, when my father came on his annual visit for my February birthday, he'd sometimes take me for walks there.

At our previous house we had a friendly postman, Mr Wiseman, and aware that my mother (known as Johny) was wanting to move he tipped her off that number 105, the house next-door to his own, was up for sale and, being in a neglected condition the asking price was affordably low (under £1000). It did indeed need a lot doing to it – I remember that the downstairs ceilings were smoke-blackened, and

the built-on bathroom walls were raw brick which Johny painted glossy blue enlivened by crude brightly-coloured fish. Part-way along Mill Road between Burnside and Belgrave Road there was a junk-shop, Turpins, with a large yard, and here she found all sorts of bits of furniture and utensils; she also used small wooden packing-crates – probably from Mr Playle the nearby greengrocer – draped with cloths as low tables, etc. My small bedroom had a sloping ceiling and tiny window which opened by sliding along sideways and looked out over open countryside. There were rabbits, and I even saw a sparrowhawk once.

I often walked along the brook to Cherryhinton; to the right were I think a playing-field and allotments, to the left open fields, and towards the far end across the stream stood a large landmark tree, gaunt & possibly dead, which I named 'Tosca'. The stream itself periodically ran sludgy grey, when the cement-works released their waste into the water. The destination village held the attraction for me, as a pony-mad girl, of Mill End Stables, where riding was relatively cheap. It was run by Sid (?), and a smooth charmer called Guy who later absconded with the funds and most of the tack. There were just a few horses & ponies, and I always rode Nigger (no racist connotations back then as it just indicated the colour black – shoe polishes, etc, were similarly named). There was also Titch, dappled grey with a tendency to bolt, and a stocky roan cob called Betty.

One day, walking the path, I encountered a woman leading a pretty little Exmoor pony being ridden bareback by her daughter, a well-built girl of about my age, her feet seeming almost to touch the ground. Flash was unbroken and feisty, bought from the cattle market for about £6 but was never really suitable for Joan to ride and ended up on Coldhams Common. Joan and I were to become best friends until I was packed off to boarding school. She was a tomboy, and I have a fond memory of her deciding to jump across the brook. Unfortunately she changed her mind in mid-leap, and landed right in the middle!

At the other end of Burnside, where it meets Perne Road and Mill Road, there was a flock of domestic geese which terrorised passers-by, chasing everyone with flapping wings and loud cackling. Years later I discovered that my husband, Tony, as a student cycling to his digs in Cherryhinton (via tarmac path and road) had also had to run the gauntlet of these same geese.

Right: Burnside in the 1960s/70s (origin of photo unknown; provided by Mill Road Local History Society).

My travelling days are over now but Tony and I paid what was for me a sentimental visit within the last ten years, and were even given a tour of our old house, which laid some ghosts. Burnside itself has become upmarket in its residents – professionals & so on – but the brook remains unchanged in appearance. *Cynthia Reavell (then Cynthia Dunbar-Marshall)*



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Monica Frisch (editor@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) 12th September 2022