

Barnes in Common

Newsletter for the Barnes Common Friends – Winter 2022

FoBC – Thirty years on

In 2022, we celebrated thirty years since the 'birth' of the Friends of Barnes Common at a meeting held on 24th November 1992.



The cricket pitch in the winter of 2010

Although a friends group had existed since the 1970's, marking this milestone does provide an opportunity to pay tribute to our founders, especially those whom we are still able to thank in person. **Keith Clarke** took the Chair and really set the example of hands on conservation work while his wife **Sue Clarke**, helped with all the publicity and newsletter. There were around 35 Members.

Mary Clare Sheehan has over the decades, conscientiously monitored the botany of the Common, sharing her wisdom with so many of us, despite our failure to learn and use Latin names; her

summer evening botany walks were a yearly highlight. As FoBC's first Treasurer, she recalls, "in those early days there were just half a dozen of us and it was such fun".

Maisie Brown was Secretary. Better known as the doyenne of local historians, Maisie's research provided a wonderful insight into the Common's rich social history. Her name will, we hope, pass down into history whenever we talk of Maisie's meadow.

Thanks also to **David and Margaret Sharp**, inveterate ramblers, creators of the Thames towpath walk and supporters of the Beverley Brook walk. David took over from Sue editing "On the Common", where his journalistic eye for a story kept each issue lively, informative and a joy to read.

Others we also wish to recall are **Colin Stamp** who organised all the litter picking activities while **John Baker** in his conservation role, shared his love of botany and photography with so many, handing over his role in 2005 to a complete novice – our current Chair! *Continued overleaf*

Common experience: Vine Road

It's growing at Vine Road Growers

For the last year, our Community Growing Project at Vine Road has been under the leadership of volunteers Rashadee Miller and Claire van Rhyn and certainly undergone quite a transformation!



Established in 2016, this volunteer led project aims to encourage people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to grow food together, at the same time, inspiring engagement, participation and ownership by the whole community and in turn, helping to reduce social isolation, build wellbeing and strengthen community cohesion and resilience.

Using growing methods that are organic and regenerative, cultivating soil health and encouraging biodiversity, last year, we successfully started all but a few of our crops from seed. In the fenced, raised bed area – referred to as The Encampment – there has been an impressive range of shared crops grown including broad & French beans, sweet corn, potatoes/sweet

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Others included Anne and John Abbott (ornithology), Pam Foster (litter picker extraordinaire), Jane Harris (publicity), Sue Boyd, Heather Britton, Barbara Tank, Margaret Ventom as well as staff at the BCA and Eve Risbridger, then Ecology Officer at the Council.

We are truly grateful to them all. We hope they appreciate the ongoing work being done to conserve the Common and preserve its character against the ever increasing pressures of modern living. We know that without them Barnes Common Friends would not be here today.



potatoes, fennel, turnips, strawberries, garlic, oca, squash, tomatoes, peppers, chillies, aubergines, tomatillos, cucumbers, chard, amaranth, quinoa, Jerusalem artichoke and carrots while the brassica crops are well underway for winter and early spring harvests. We also made a particular effort this past season to interplant both wild and cultivated flowers to support pollinators and establish a better growing ecosystem. The flowers have delighted visitors and passers-by alike and we even won an award at the Twickenham Beekeeper's annual show.

We have also started two new key projects. The first of these has been establishing regular food box deliveries via the Richmond Foodbank Network at Castlenau

Community Centre, where we successfully managed to provide 15 weekly deliveries of fresh, organic produce that benefitted many local families in need. We are now making plans to scale this support in 2023 and hope to build closer ties between the Growing Project and the families the Network serves.

Our second project has been to engage with the International Seed Sovereignty campaign and establish seed saving as part of our annual seasonal tasks. Besides becoming more self-sufficient in seeds for the next season's main crops, e.g. tomatoes, we have also been able to contribute seeds of five locally adapted varieties to the London Freedom Seed Bank to share with other community groups.



We are active throughout the year and in all weathers! There is always a range of tasks for all levels of skill and energy with support on hand to help participants along. Currently, we run weekly open sessions on Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays but please contact communitygrowing@barnescommon.org.uk if you would like to know more!

Our First Autumn Fayre

In celebration of National Apple Day on 21st October, we held our first ever Autumn Fayre at the Vine Road Recreation Ground on Saturday 22nd.

The main event comprised initiating our new apple press, using fruit kindly donated by Ringden Farm and those who brought their own. Everyone was encouraged to have a go at crushing and pressing, including The Mayor of Richmond, Councillor Julia Cambridge, who made a welcome visit. By the end of a very successful day, we had been able to make about 50 litres of juice. Hopefully, next year we will be able to use some of the apples and pears from our own orchard at the Goods Yard and certainly, if you have any

fruit trees in your own garden that have fruit ready in October, please bring them along if you would like your own bottle of apple juice.

There was also a nature table, conker competition, cake stall, willow weaving sessions, fascinating fungi walks and some fabulous weather, all organised by Jackie!

We hope to repeat this event next year with more activities and food offerings so that it becomes a regular event on the Barnes calendar.



Bulbs, bulbs, bulbs!

It has been a very busy first year for Barnes Community Gardeners (BCG). Led by Crispin O'Brien with Susie Pugh as Project Co-ordinator, the project was launched in autumn 2021 with support from FiSH Neighbourhood Care, the Barnes Community Association and Barnes Common Ltd.



by volunteers, children from local schools came together to learn about bulbs and the importance of flowers. They decorated bags for the bulbs and also made willow wreaths intertwined with ivy and ferns and attached conkers to them with string. The joy of autumn and connecting to the natural world was palpable.

The bags of bulbs were sold a week later at a bulb sale on Barnes Green where we were especially delighted to sell so many English Bluebells. This in turn, raised funds for the purchase of more bulbs.

Then on a sunny morning at the end of October, some of the residents and staff of Paragon Asra Housing and two local councillors came together to plant the bulbs. Volunteers helped both old and young, including some toddlers to take part by placing bulbs in holes dug by their parents.

It was a terrific community event made more wonderful by tea, coffee and flower-themed cupcakes provided at Diana House. "I can't wait for Spring when we'll see all those flowers blooming and it was US that planted them," said one resident, 'That's special!'

We use sustainable community gardening and 'greening' projects to improve wellbeing and biodiversity by connecting people with nature and have been working in many FiSH clients' gardens, at the Barnes Green Centre, Walsingham Lodge, RHP Sussex Court, Essex House, Vine Road Park, Barnes Station and several local primary schools.

One of our many projects has been the planting of hundreds of bulbs at Walnut Tree Close. This project all began by bringing people together at a family workshop at Rose House. Ably assisted

Common ground: Barnes Common

Fungi everywhere!

With the warm, wet autumn last year, we have found over fifty new species of fungi not previously recorded for the Common.



There have been fungi of all different shapes and sizes ranging from the enormous giant polypore (*Meripilus giganteus*) to the fragile angel's bonnet (*Mycena arcangeliana*), while some like the flame shield (*Pluteus aurantiorugosus*) or amethyst deceiver (*Laccaria amethystina*) are vibrant and colourful. However, many are small, brown and tricky to see – which makes finding them even more rewarding especially as some of them are truly sculptural wonders. Other species such as beefsteak

fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*), found on the Common for the first time this year, are of particular ecological importance to oak woodlands, prolonging the life of the trees and creating habitat for a host of invertebrate species.

Fungi are a truly fascinating but still not widely understood group of organisms that play a crucial role in our ecosystems. Tree roots and fungi combine to form what is called a mycorrhiza where individual plants are joined to one another by



an underground network. Here, fungi obtain carbon-rich sugars from plant photosynthesis while the plants in turn, receive nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen that the fungi have acquired from the soil. However, the coming together of all these exchanges results in an incredibly complex and collaborative structure that has become known as the Wood Wide Web with growing evidence that trees and other plants can effectively communicate with each other through chemical messages.



Opposite page – Common Puffball
Top – Left: Sulphur tuft. Right: Parasol,
Middle – Left: Honey Fungus. Right: Shaggy Inkcap
Bottom – Black Bulgar Fungus.

Habitat Restoration

Thanks to a grant from the Rivers & Wetlands Community Days, over the last few months we have been carrying out further habitat restoration on stretches of the Beverley Brook running through Barnes Common.



The Beverley Brook has historically been realigned, straightened, widened and deepened, changing the course from its former meandering channel to the present.

Along the whole watercourse, only 3% of the banks are considered natural and unaltered. Lack of suitable habitat, combined with pollution and other urban pressures, has meant the Beverley Brook has failed its target of 'Good Ecological Potential' under the Water Framework Directive.

Straightened channels lack the flow and habitat diversity underpinning a healthy ecosystem. Our work aims to create a diverse mix of flow types, depths,



velocities, widths and cover. This will create the array of niches that is required to encourage a more diverse and complex composition of both fauna and flora to colonise and establish.

To achieve this, we used a variety of tried and tested river restoration techniques. Large Woody Debris (LWD) was pinned into the channel at various angles to create diversity in the water flow and to create scour as the water is forced around it. By accelerating the flow of water in certain areas, we were able to expose the underlying gravels which were previously covered in silt. These gravels provide spawning areas for fish and habitat for

aquatic insects. Brushwood faggots (bundles of brush), made from material sourced from the Common, were installed to stabilise eroding banks. Where the brook is retained by the concrete wall, pre planted coir rolls were added to increase marginal vegetation. The remaining toe boarding was also removed towards the end of the stretch. Finally, tree work was carried out to improve light conditions allowing marginal vegetation to flourish.

It's been great to see how the channel has already changed within a few months and fish are already utilising the new habitat. We're looking forward to seeing how it develops over the years!

Helping to save the Black Poplar

Did you know that Barnes happens to be one the most important areas in the whole of the UK, for our native Black Poplar (*Populus nigra ssp. betulifolia*).



Extensive genetic testing over the years, led by Jamie Simpson (Conservation Arborist), has identified the Borough of Richmond as having some of the highest levels of genetic diversity of Black Poplars anywhere in the country. Of greatest interest is the population along the Thames towpath at Barnes, which is believed to be a remnant wild population, consisting of veteran trees, many of which are rare female trees; there are only 600 female Black Poplars left in the UK! Many of these veteran trees are genetically unique, so if we were to lose them, it would be a huge loss to the genetic diversity of the species overall.

Since 2019 we have been working with Jamie and the London Borough

of Richmond upon Thames to help improve these trees chances of survival. Cuttings have been taken from over 40 identified unique clones and grown on in our nursery out on the Common. So far, over 150 trees have been planted out, some near their parent tree along the towpath and others across the country at important sites for nature conservation. We still have over 300 saplings within the nursery to go out over the next few years.

Through this programme of propagation and rigorous recording, we hope to ensure genetic diversity is not lost, to identify strengths and susceptibilities in specific clones and to highlight areas for further investigation and research.



O'er the fields we go, Yaffling all the way

Do you ever recall being told when you were younger that you should be 'seen but not heard'? I wasn't particularly good at obeying this rule. It never made much sense to me, particularly when in nature, it didn't seem to apply at all.

On Barnes Common, one particular species that is heard far more often than it is seen is the green woodpecker. Walking through the Common, especially around Mill Hill, you might hear the cackling laughter of this bird, teasing as it hops from tree to tree around you. This distinctive call is known as yaffling, yaffle being another name for the green woodpecker.

Our Yaffles Club was started 10 years ago by one of our trustees, Miranda, who took groups of enthusiastic children to the Common to explore the wildlife around them. Yaffles certainly seems an appropriate name for a group of excited youngsters, almost certain to be heard before they will be seen!

For our first session this autumn, we marched out onto the Common to see what we could observe at this exciting time of year. Fungi, snails, leaves, conkers, acorns and a magical wishing tree were among the highlights, but the showpiece was the red oak tree in Maisie's Meadow. The kids were encouraged to channel their inner artists and arrange the stunning leaves into various patterns and shapes. The result was an incredible collection of work as

varied as would be seen in any gallery – there was even a leaf sculpture of a giant cake for Yaffles 10th birthday!

Yaffles will be running on the 3rd Saturday of every month from November to May. This informal learning opportunity gives young people an opportunity to build confidence, ask questions, tell stories, make friends and express themselves in nature, whilst learning how to navigate the environment around them and develop a sense of place.

Join us next on 21st January 10.15 – 11.45 to explore the Common and maybe even spot an elusive green woodpecker!



Barnes Common Friends

Barnes Common Keystone Species – The Mighty Oak

Become a Barnes Common Keystone Friend

Keystone species play integral and important roles in the functioning and health of the ecosystem in which they exist. You can take a similar role within Barnes Common.

As a Barnes Common Keystone Friend your contribution will help our crucial work on local conservation and biodiversity improvement, as we preserve our green spaces for all its inhabitants today and in the future.

Our core funding does not cover everything we want to achieve, so your support is vital and your contribution will allow us to act quickly on agreed projects that we can afford.

Scan the QR code below or go to our website 'Support Us' page to become a Barnes Common Keystone Friend today!



£50 a year per person

25% discount on all events for you and up to 4 guests

Don't miss our future events

January 21st

Winter Walk with Paddy

February 18th

Annual Wassail, Yaffles Nature Club and Vine Road History Talk

March

Spring Walk around Leg o' Mutton Local Nature Reserve

Find details on our website

Book via Eventbrite
(search Barnes Common)

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