

## **Trustees' Report for period 6.8.2019-5.8.2020**

Teazle Wood Trust, Registered Charity no. 1160532

**The object of the Teazle Wood Trust CIO is:**

**To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of woodland known as Teazle Wood in Leatherhead, Surrey.**

An extraordinary year for the world and for Teazle Wood.

We focused on individual tree types in autumn 2019, such as blackthorn and hazel, promoting them one by one as an educational project to the local community. Two of Teazle Wood's 'Friends' Hugh & Janet Baker celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 2019, and their family decided to sponsor a tree variety in Teazle Wood in celebration. We suggested the rare Wild Service tree, as we have a parent tree and lots of younger trees that need our gentle input in order to thrive. Hugh & Janet are keen educators, so we ran a social media campaign to share the fascinating information about this tree – lots of local people (including us!) now know much more about Wild Service trees; we also now know where all the young saplings are; some careful tree surgery has been carried out on the branches of an adjacent oak that had grown against the parent tree; and volunteers are propagating new trees using a variety of methods (we harvested some berries, extracted the seeds and subjected them to 'cold stratification'. We also transplanted some tiny saplings that were growing right on the public footpath where they would be destroyed underfoot, and these are doing well).

The Wild Service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) is a hermaphrodite, from the Rosaceae family, and is native. Sometimes called 'Chequers' because its distinctive bark is 'cracked' into square plates, it is an Ancient Woodland indicator.

Teazle Wood had an autumn visit from Rare TV and the writer/naturalist/presenter Helen Macdonald, who were making a programme for BBC4 about special hidden places close to motorways. Our fungi expert Professor David Hawksworth kindly came along to show the team some of Teazle Wood's fascinating fungi, thriving quietly so close to the M25.

Building on the success of its first spring dig, Surrey Archaeological Society's autumn dig on the 'Rowhurst Teazle Wood' site was another great event. Despite torrential rain, which made the London Clay even more challenging than usual, the archaeologists (led by Nigel Bond) excavated a trench that rewarded them with plenty of interest including a posthole, Roman amphora and numerous sherds from a large Late Saxon pot. This last item is very significant, as it is the first Saxon find recorded on the RTW (Rowhurst Teazle Wood) site, and of course is interesting in the light of the theory that King Alfred the Great's missing Royal settlement and church may lie in this northern part of Leatherhead.

Braving the downpours, a delightful group of students from West Hill School (Special Educational Needs) in Leatherhead joined the archaeologists and were thrilled to find plenty of modern live worms along with plenty of finds, including a very large animal tooth – probably from a cow.

Lucy Quinnell spoke at the Medieval Studies Forum in Guildford, and Surrey Archaeological Society planned to hold a forum on site in April 2020 to discuss all the evidence in order to decide the best strategy before digging was due to re-start in May 2020.

The developer responsible for the unauthorised demolition of the Royal Oak pub, which had strong historical links to Teazle Wood, did appeal against the MVDC decision to refuse the retrospective application to demolish and build 24 flats, and won. The Planning Inspector agreed with the Councillors and community, but in the absence of a Local Plan showing where MVDC will provide residential development, applied a 'tilted balance' in favour of housing.

Our Forestry Commission Management Plan was approved. Thank you to Chartered Ecologist and Woodland Consultant Petra Billings for her skill and sensitivity in helping us with this – she understood the emphasis on gentle handling of the woodland and community involvement, and created a plan with just the right balance. We commissioned our latest professional tree survey to assess the safety of the ash trees adjacent to the public footpath, which are now quite badly affected by *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (formerly called Chalara dieback of ash). Sadly we have had to reduce and in some cases fell a number of diseased ash trees to ensure users of the public footpath are safe, but we took a ‘minimal intervention’ approach ensuring that trees which remain safe and stand a chance of survival have been left to be regularly assessed in the hope they will make it. The silver lining is that Petra had recommended ‘punching a hole in the canopy’ of the very crowded ash trees close to the ridge in Teazle Wood, and the tree surgery required and carried out in February 2020 has simultaneously achieved that. A surprising number of young elms, hawthorns, field maples, hazels, oaks and hornbeams were extant but failing to thrive under the over-crowded, tall and straggly ash, and these can now grow healthily. All wood has been left in habitat piles, extending earlier habit piles that have now become a major haven for stag beetles in particular.

Tree surgery is very expensive, and we are indebted to a Friend of Teazle Wood who *incredibly* generously paid for this round of tree work required.

It rained, and rained, and rained... After such dry years, with empty ponds and stressed flora and fauna, it was a relief to see Teazle Wood soaking again, with its ponds full and the streams flowing, although our thoughts were with those adversely affected by flooding down in the town. The winter brown teasle heads sagged in the rain, saturated, and in the mild temperatures the seeds germinated on the heads, which we have never seen before.

On 6 January we held a conservation task day, with the aim of clearing scrub, letting in light and establishing a pathway through dense brambles and blackthorn to an intriguing feature on the LiDAR map of Teazle Wood. We discussed whether this might be connected to a 1292 local records entry for a medieval rabbit warren, built in Patchesham by owner Sir Eustace de Hache who lived just 300m away from our circular feature, as there is also a double-banked mound nearby that looks very like a ‘pillow mound’ rabbit warren. Sir Eustace superintended the building of Caernarfon Castle for Edward I, and Piers Gaveston was later Lord of Patchesham Manor. This discussion caused us to find out more about medieval rabbit warrens, and we came across Thetford Warren Lodge, which looks strikingly like Teazle Wood’s near neighbour Rowhurst. Have we struck gold in understanding this huge terraced ridge in North Leatherhead? Rabbit warrens were sometimes built on old Iron Age hillforts. Only time and more work will tell!

Teazle Wood Trust joined the new Mole Valley Environment Forum as well as a group formed to improve the neglected roundabout at Tesco and B&Q. A kingfisher sculpture is planned to boost the town’s understanding of the superb ecology it has and must nurture.

Litter picks had continued regularly, but the Sunday before the litter pick due to take place on Monday 3 February 2020 saw four volunteers struck down with a severe cough and fever. Lucy Quinnell wrote an email which in hindsight is an interesting document – she described an unusually violent cough and was concerned that it could be devastating for certain vulnerable volunteers to get this. She had decided to be safe and to very unusually cancel the February litter pick. It now seems very likely with hindsight that this was Covid-19. The disease had a huge impact locally, and tragically some of our wonderful supporters died or were extremely ill over the next few weeks and months.

Unaware that Covid-19 was yet in the UK, however, hard work continued on responses to the Mole Valley District Council Draft Local Plan. The impact on the ecology of Teazle Wood of numerous planned housing estates adjacent or nearby would be devastating, and detailed responses were submitted, including an extensive professional report by consultant and Teazle Wood Trustee Hilary Livesey. With the nation locking down and in chaos, and with several of the Friends suffering badly healthwise, the deadline for submissions was 23 March 2020 and we met that, but many members of the public were unable to

comment as they had planned to because of dealing with illness and with sudden shifts in work and domestic arrangements for the pandemic.

As the nation adjusted to a very unfamiliar way of life, and as people started to get used to the idea of daily exercise, Teazle Wood came into its own as a place of sanctuary and uplift at a very difficult time indeed. Coinciding with the glorious spring weather that helped so much, and a very quiet M25, were the woodland's many acres of wild garlic and bluebells in flower. Lucy Quinnell managed the situation with routine monitoring and external advice. Other outdoor nature spots close by had closed because of pressure from visitors (Polesden Lacey, Box Hill, etc.), but by shutting down the usual promotion of Teazle Wood, it was possible to keep it open and enable a distanced flow of families and individuals (mainly from the North Leatherhead community – an Area of Social Deprivation where many people have no garden) to safely take their daily exercise in a special, beautiful and healthy setting. Lucy was very struck by how Teazle Wood was playing such a crucial role that could never have been imagined when the community took the woodland on as a project – the wood looked stunning, healthy and free now from over a hundred tonnes of dangerous junk and litter hauled out by volunteers over the past few years of community ownership. How great that so many people were able to tread gently in a setting that seemed like a paradise in the midst of so much distress and confusion. It was very obvious that people had a new-found appreciation for local countryside and wildlife, and it was good to see so many people discovering nature photography and becoming much more interested in local landscapes. Many people were walking in countryside for the first time.

Cancelled talks about Teazle Wood were gradually replaced by Zoom versions as everyone got used to new ways of doing things.

The Rare TV / Helen Macdonald wonderful documentary – 'The Hidden Wilds of the Motorway' – aired on BBC4 in early July 2020, and we were delighted with the thoughtful section about Teazle Wood.

Oak Processionary Moth emerged as a real new challenge by the summer. OPM nests were identified on adjacent land on two edges of Teazle Wood, and skin reactions in two people occurred (one very serious, requiring hospital assessment and treatment). Warning signs were placed along the public footpath, and oak trees in Teazle Wood monitored for nests – again, no actual tree within Teazle Wood has yet been identified as infested, but it is (as before) inevitable that OPM will affect Teazle Wood if it hasn't already. We are following Forestry Commission guidance carefully and keeping a close eye on the situation.

Fundraising was hit by the pandemic – the usual events did not take place – and the Trustees are addressing how best to replenish funds as we move forward.

# Teazle Wood Trust

Registered Charity no. 1160532

## Financial Statement for the year ending 5 August 2020

### Cash balance at start of year 06/08/2019

Lloyds TSB Treasurers Account £36,004.08

L&DCPS £ 4,100.00\*

*\*The grant of £5,000 from the **Leatherhead and District Countryside Protection Society** has been made to Friends of Teazle Wood, with conditions regarding expenditure (the money can only be spent on goods and services associated with the constitutional objects of the L&DCPS - ecological and archaeological surveys, tree work, signage, projects concerned with litter clearance, etc.). These funds will be held by the L&DCPS for use as required.*

### Income

Donations £17,180.00

### Expenditure

Nil £00,000.00

*(Zero expenditure because all services during this year's activities were given gratis on a voluntary basis)*

### Cash balance at 05/08/2020

Lloyds TSB Treasurers Account £53,184.08

L&DCPS £ 2,924.96\*

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Signed by the Treasurer John Adam Boydell:

*John Adam Boydell*

Signed by the Chair of the Trustees Lucy Elizabeth Quinnell:

*Lucy Quinnell*