

Autumn
Newsletter 2022
ISSUE 46

Open 10:00am –
4:00pm weekends and
Bank Holidays from
April until October.
At other times the key
may be borrowed from
The Norris Museum or
One Leisure with a £20
deposit.

**UPCOMING
EVENTS
CHRISTMAS
FUNDRAISER**

see back
page for details.



like us on facebook:
Holt Island Nature Reserve

Visit our website:
www.holtisland.org

The Friends Group
is a voluntary
organisation dedicated
to the promotion and
protection of Holt Island,
Wilhorn Meadow and
the Thicket in St Ives for
the enjoyment of all.

Registered Charity Number:
1198894

CHAIR'S NOTE

We've seen the back of one of the hottest summers on record, and it has had subtle effects on Holt Island. The ground has cracked, and stayed so - much to the benefit of badgers which have excavated some of these cracks, making little minefields as they have sought earthworms which have gone deep.

A drier summer has also affected the flow of our part of the Ouse, with levels some 10-15cm lower for much of 2022 compared with 2021. This seems to have aided the invasion of nettles, bindweed and hops into the reed bed as soil moisture dropped. The Committee is discussing options for maintaining and managing the reed bed with national experts.

In all of this gloom there have been plus points. Year-round, I do counts at or near dawn of birds on the Island, from either the meadow or the Waits. I'm now often seeing otters in the river. Hopefully, we'll find that our purpose-built otter holt becomes pressed into service. So far, there are no signs of them using last year's log pile hideout.

Tim Reed, Chair

HOLT ISLAND WINS AWARDS - ANGLIA IN BLOOM 2022



On Thursday 14th July, Anglia in Bloom judges Paul Robson and Chris Durham visited Holt Island and Dr Tim Reed, our Chair and Julian Limentani, Membership Secretary, gave them a guided tour of the Island.

Julian Limentani together with St Ives In Bloom representatives attended the Award Ceremony on the 7th September at Orsett Hall in Grays, Essex.

To our delight, we were awarded a Gold Award in the Wildlife/Conservation category and were an Award Winner for Best Conservation/Biodiversity Project for 2022.

The judges' comments were:

"Holt Island is an amazing place to explore."

"Holt Island is a wildlife haven in the centre of St Ives, for everybody to use. Whether you want to help the team, learn or just observe the flora and fauna, it caters for everybody."

"Bird and bat boxes were used to great effect especially on Holt Island, with sightings recorded and monitored with help from the British Trust for Ornithology."

"Holt Island clearly has a dedicated and knowledgeable community that maintains and manages the area, and plans for the future."

The committee gives special thanks to all our volunteers and supporters in helping us to achieve such well-deserved awards.

Jill Burt

BLACKCAP AYN6685 FLIES TO GIBRALTER

We catch a lot of Blackcaps on Holt Island in the spring months. On the 17th May 2022 at 5.30am we caught a first year male Blackcap and ringed it with ring number AYN6685. It was a normal weight of 17.4g and its wing length was 75mm. It was not caught again on the Island so it may have been passing through to a nearby breeding area.

On 17th October 2022 the same bird was caught at Jews Gate in Gibraltar by the local Ringing Group; it was a little lighter at 16.4gm and its wing was a millimetre longer as it had moulted between the two measurements being taken. It has also travelled 1849km SSW.

Many Blackcaps now overwinter in this country but those that winter abroad normally go down to the south of France, Spain and to North Africa, so it is likely to be somewhere near its wintering quarters. More so as it was caught again on 24th October in the same location and

it had not put on any weight but lost a little.

Julian Limentani

On the subject of warblers, please visit our website to view Julian's 2022 report on warblers on Holt Island. Unfortunately there isn't room in this issue of the Islander for the full report. Here are some of the photos to be found in the report.



Juvenile willow warbler



Juvenile sedge warbler



Juvenile chiffchaff (on left) and juvenile willow warbler

THE GEORGE DENNIS DAY BENCH

Back in spring 2018 we reported in The Islander 32 the installation of a full-size family bench kindly donated by Sheila Day in memory of her grandfather George Dennis Day. It is sited under the ash tree at the end of the central meadow. The Day family has strong connections with the town as three generations of George Days were Clerks to the Town Council, and their name lives on through the solicitors Leeds Day. The family home was Rheola in Broadleas, and it was there that a nephew of Sheila, Miles Jeffrey Game Day, grew up to become a famous First World War flying ace and poet. He was shot down over the North Sea aged 21. The 100th anniversary of his death was celebrated in an audio-visual presentation by the Town Team in March 2018, followed by a commemorative book Gamelyn, still available from the Norris Museum.



Although she lived in Norwich in the latter part of her life, Sheila remained passionate about the town, and especially Holt Island. She visited as often as she could with her carer Maryann Mwalwaka, but sadly passed away in December

2021 aged 91. [The Friends are fortunate to have received a legacy from her estate which will be ring-fenced as an emergency contingency fund].

To commemorate Sheila's passing and that of her own mother Elizabeth, Janet Widdows, a great granddaughter of George Dennis Day, requested that the Friends organise a plaque for the bench, which we have now done. We shall also be planting a memorial tree for Sheila – an Alder – on the Island later in the year.

The photographs show Sheila Day in thoughtful repose on a visit to the Methodist Church in November 2018, and family representatives, Janet and Carey Widdows with Maryann marking the occasion of the new plaque on the bench in April this year.



photos: Ian Jackson

Ian Jackson

HOLT ISLAND HISTORY TOLD THROUGH PICTURES

The Norris Museum holds an impressive set of images in its archives. Some, but not all, can help us see the history of Holt Island through the ages. This one, from the 1830s flatters and deceives. Holt is an island. The Ouse splits west of the Church, into the Backwater and the main channel. The result is an island: Holt Island. Here we see a nice

meadow in the foreground, no Backwater, and no island. What should be the island is carrying an abundant willow crop. Unfortunately, the island has gone missing- only achievable in the highest of floods, and not on a splendid day for promenading as shown here. Perhaps not all pictures are reliable as evidence.

Tim Reed



RECENT EVENTS ON HOLT ISLAND

FAMILY FUN DAY 25TH August

Treasure Island was the theme of this year's Family Fun Day (our 12th!).

Despite the weather (it poured with rain) we had 130 visitors.

The children and some adults took part in 'Walking the Plank' which was a great success, making Pirate hats and flags, finding all the Parrots hidden on the Island, visiting our Nature Table and being scared and entertained by our very own Pirate - *I won't divulge his name as the mystery will be broken, but I'm sure you all know who he is!*

From all the positive comments we received on the day it was a great success.

A big thank you to Basil, Julian, James, our photographer Nigel, Paul for preparing the Island and of course our



Pirate Mad Jack

Pirate Mad Jack, who all made it such a successful event.

Also, I must thank all the following merry band of volunteers as without these people the event would not have been possible:

Veronica Bonnet, Julie Branch, Janet Clarke, Jade Gunnell and Emily, Liz and Bob Hardy, Debbie Heigham, Tracey Hipson, Gilly



Jackson, Theresa Norris, Janet Reid, Mick and Diane Shanely, Helen Whatnell and her daughter Sarah, Jeanne Whybourn and the support from Hannah from the Norris Museum.

Donations in our tins on the day totalled £48.20.

Jill Burt



HERITAGE OPEN DAY 17TH SEPTEMBER

The weather was perfect and we were blessed with glorious sunshine as visitors enjoyed the day.

Visitors had the opportunity to have a go at 'stripping the willow' using the only remaining tool that was used on the island called a 'willow brake'.

It was only the women and children who used this tool after which the willow was bundled into bundles called 'bolts' and taken by barge to the Quay where they were unloaded and taken by horse and cart over St Ives Bridge to Filberts walk to Harrison's Basking Making workshop.

The Holt mounted a special display of heritage photos and a display of Harrison Baskets that were kindly loaned by Charlotte Jordan (nee Harrison) as well a display of original tools.

If you want to find out any more information about J. Harrisons and Sons commercial basket makers business this can be found on our website.

Visitors also had the opportunity to have a go at a family friendly Heritage Quiz.

On the day there was the opportunity to obtain (in exchange for a donation) our own Holt Island honey and our new 2023 desk calendars (see back page for details of how to obtain your own).

The HODS scheme was once again organised by our St Ives Civic Society.

Jill Burt



Stripping the willow Photo: Jill Burt

ST IVES ROTARY CLUB

We were delighted to once again support St. Ives Rotary Club with their annual visit for residents from Field Lodge Care Home, Rheola Care Home and St Ives Dementia Group and Singing Café. Some 50 guests along with their carers and supporting Rotarians enjoyed a tour of the Island hosted by Tim Reed.

They then adjourned to the Methodist Church for refreshments and entertainment.

This has become an important annual event for us, being part of our close working relationship with St Ives Rotary Club, and we are ever grateful to them for their continuing support.

Nigel Sprowell



Photo: Tim Reed

RANGER'S REPORT

Rangers report September and October 2022

In September and October our practical volunteers carried out nine work parties, equating to around 280 hours of work. Our Friends' committee and volunteers carried out around 400 hours of work.

We haven't done much grass cutting this year as the grass has not grown much throughout the summer – but thankfully at least some areas stayed green! Grass path, boardwalk margin branch and light vegetation trimming continued throughout the summer. In late September the grass path was cut, with one more cut on both the grass path and the meadow likely this year.

The dipping pond was refilled using a pump borrowed from Hinchingsbrooke Country Park which took about 45 minutes to set up and about two minutes to fill the pond directly from the river, a process we can repeat whenever we need to.

Grateful thanks go to Colin, Roy and George who installed the new picnic bench in the meadow. They carried out extra work to complete fitting the new grid at the main entrance part of the boardwalk, and they also replaced the rotten wood at the interpretation board which supports the leaflet dispensers and the U-Turn audio information point.

The new storage shed is progressing well. All four sides are now almost completely walled – there is some finishing before we can permanently secure the sides ready for the roof. The new steps to the storage shed are almost complete, with just the bottom step left to do.

A biological audit was carried out on the Island by a company based in Milton Keynes - MKA Ecology - and we are awaiting results for Holt Island as well as many other sites across the district.

Paul Claydon

ArtsFEST Saturday 10th December 10 – 4pm. St Ives Corn Exchange FOHINR will have a stand at this exhibition of art and photography.



Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve

Christmas Fundraising Day

Wednesday 23rd November
Barnes House, 1 Church St, St Ives.
10.00am - 3.30pm

Come and browse over an excellent range of **Flamingo Paperie** Christmas cards, wrapping paper, Advent calendar cards etc. whilst enjoying coffee, cake and a chat! 15% of proceeds going to the **Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve.**

Also on sale the Perfect Christmas Gift!



ADOPT-a-BOX on Holt Island
£10.00



Friends of Holt Island Desk Calendar
£7.00

Including one **FREE** Raffle Ticket!
Venue by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Whatnell



Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve
www.holtisland.org

TAKE A LOOK AT OUR CURRENT FUNDRAISERS!



We have delicious honey from the Holt Island bees for a £5 donation per 250g jar. To claim your treat call Ian on 07836 248360.



And we have the perfect Christmas stocking filler - a spiral bound desk calendar for £7 plus pp. To order mail Jill at jillburt@btinternet.com



For spring, there is an early chance to reserve a nesting box for next season for £10. For your ADOPT-a-BOX application form call Julian on 07802 166722

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