

Please see below for your information the latest newsletter from The Packhorse Bridge Society

Here we are again at the end of another interesting year for The Packhorse Bridge Society, which has seen most of the work going into the reinvigoration of the island after the pause caused by Covid, when only very necessary work was carried out and our membership fell drastically.

Early in the year, many young native trees were planted courtesy of Braintree District Council, together with bulbs, and part of the island was seeded with wild flowers. Repairs and maintenance was carried out on the shed and seats, and the paths were re-established by Dicky Downes and George Nicholls, giving access in a planned manner allowing visitors to enjoy the island whilst protecting it as a wildlife haven.

During the Summer months, almost every time I visited the island, I met residents of Kelvedon and Feering and often visitors from further afield, who all reported enjoying this quiet haven between the two villages. The hot, dry Summer of 2022 which encouraged visitors to the island, did however mean that the new trees and plants had a hard time establishing, as we did not have the manpower to keep them watered through their first year. It won't be until this coming year that we see how many have survived.

Rubbish bins have been installed, and the amount of litter, drinks cans etc dropped on the island has been reduced now that visitors are using the bins. A new gate post has been fitted on the entrance, and weed cleared from the river. In the Spring, the brambles will be trimmed to keep them in check and ongoing maintenance will be carried out on the shed and seating, as well as cutting the grass and paths. R.J. Printers in Maldon have kindly agreed to supply a new poster for the island, showing all the wildlife reported on the island in the last year, and we would ask everyone to continue letting us know of sightings on the island which adds to our knowledge for this wildlife project.

In the Summer, we hosted a visit from e2e who carried out a survey of the island, and we await their report with interest, and River Catchment Officer, Natalie Singleton, also visited to look at the causes of the low river water level and how this effects fish in our part of the River Blackwater. Certainly, the Chairman of our local angling club has expressed similar concerns to The Packhorse Bridge Society. It will not happen overnight, but we are hopeful that action can be taken to improve the river in the coming year or two.

At the current time, all the ducks seem to have disappeared from the river both here in Kelvedon/Feering and at Coggeshall. It can only be assumed that this has something to do with the Avian flu outbreak, but if someone knows anything about their disappearance then please do let me know. Children have always enjoyed feeding the ducks and swans on the river by the Packhorse Bridge and Island and it is to be hoped that we will once again see them on the river in the coming year/s.

In 2023 we do need to increase the membership of The Packhorse Bridge Society and I would encourage everyone enjoying the bridge and island reserve to join the Society. In order to open the bridge and island to the public we need to have Public Liability Insurance and the cost of this insurance is the main expense for the Society, as well as maintenance costs which have also increased. The Society's only income is our £5 per annum membership fee plus some donations, for which we are extremely grateful. As you are all aware (and apologies for mentioning it), membership fees are due on the 1st January, 2023. Some of you already pay by Direct Debit or Standing Order, but for those who don't, then we look forward to receiving your membership fee either by cheque - made payable to The Packhorse Bridge Society and sent to 2 High Street, Kelvedon - or if you would like to pay by internet banking then the details are as follows: Account Number 20666378 Barclays Bank Limited, Sort Code 20 - 97 - 40. If you are paying this way, then please do let me know.

In 2023 I would like to see the Society with a presence on the internet and would appeal to anyone who could help to contact me at chrislpapworth@btconnect.com. Talking of publicising the Society, I hope you all heard the little piece on BBC Essex Quest recently when they visited the bridge.

Finally, a big thank you to all those who have helped throughout the year, particularly Dicky Downes and George Nicholls, and Lee from R.J. Printers. I look forward to meeting many more people on the island in 2023.

Kind regards - Chris Papworth
Chairman
Packhorse Bridge Society