

# News from the Ouse

ISSUE NUMBER 9  
DECEMBER 2013

## Little Ouse rejuvenated

LOHP Trustees and volunteers and other local people, along with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, have been negotiating for this restoration for years, knowing that the river channel was in a poor state, choked with vegetation and with little flow as a result of past engineering works.

Chris Gay captured these dramatic before and after pictures.

Why not choose this riverside route for a winter walk and see what you can see?

*Read more on page 6.*



Chris Gay



Chris Gay

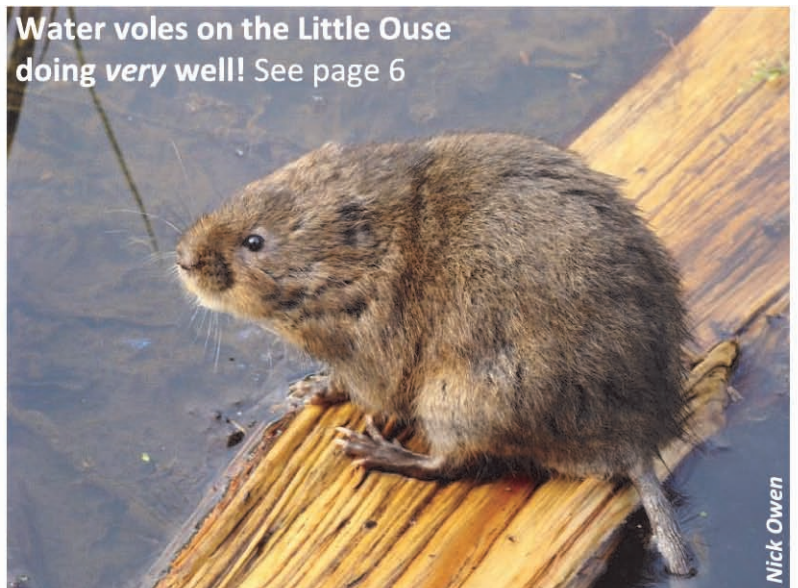
## Managing our sites

The LOHP has made a change to the way routine work on our sites is managed by setting up a management contract with Peter Frizzell Ltd. Peter and his team, based in South Lopham, are expert conservation contractors and have worked with the LOHP since we were first established.

Peter is now responsible for checking our sites on a regular basis, and carrying out most of the routine work. We are pleased that by using some of our funding in this way, LOHP is able to contribute directly to the local economy.

We still have plenty of jobs for our volunteers though!

**Water voles on the Little Ouse doing very well! See page 6**



Nick Owen

## WELCOME

to the newsletter of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project. I hope, like the schoolchildren featured in this edition, you have been able to get out and about on our sites recently - it turned out to be a wonderful summer and autumn for wildlife, after

such an unpromising start to the year.

Winter brings with it our AGM/Annual Talk, and the now traditional Winter Walk – please do join us at these events.

*Jo Pitt, Chair*



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## Hopton Primary joins in: LOHP sites feature in a whole school topic

On 10th Sept 60 children from Hopton Primary School spent the day exploring Thelnetham and Blo' Norton Fens.

Starting with a tour of Thelnetham Windmill the children discovered how flour was made and watched and listened to the sails, then had a quick lunch before their walk onto the Fens.

As they walked, the children were challenged to collect items for a 'journey stick', creating a visual reminder of their walk. Their finds included wool, feathers, leaves of all sorts, acorns, and reeds which were a beautiful crimson and brown. They greatly enjoyed making these collections, and it sparked off lots of discussion and questions. The sticks have been used to create maps of their walk and also to compare with things found at Market Weston Fen.

The Headteacher, Marc Careless, told them about a magic moment when the staff visited in the summer and a water vole chose that moment to swim by. The children measured the width and depth of the river and later made maps in school. This day was one of a series which the LOHP supported, as the school took the LOHP and fens as their whole school topic for the Autumn term. **Rosemary Humphries (LOHP) and Kate Jones (Hopton Primary School)**



Kate Jones

## Garboldisham Primary children make an impact



Tamsin Young

One question that kept being asked was, "When can we 'do' something at Broomscot Common?"

The 'do' was the children wanting to make a difference that they could see and show others. They are now used to using the Common as a learning resource and had observed changes made by other people.

They wanted the chance to be useful themselves, and to carry out some tangible and meaningful work. Mr Langston had discussed with us the planned work on the Common, but many of the jobs were not really suitable for children. We

feared they would lose interest quickly, which is the last thing we want. They had learned the meaning of conservation and were keen to get their hands dirty, so one sunny day at the end of June, Rowan Tree class donned sun hats and sunscreen and met Mr Langston at the Common ready for duty as he had found some important child-friendly jobs.

Last winter the gateway had been impassable because of mud so the children added hardcore to raise the level of the path above the wet and then compacted it by trampling. They also cut back overhanging gorse and bramble to ease access.

The children sprang enthusiastically into action, working brilliantly in teams, supporting each other, checking that they were doing the right thing. This is education at its best.

The sense of achievement and pride at the end of the day was immense. The children not only had carried out important conservation work, but they had learned some life skills – path laying and how to use shears and loppers safely. Overall a fantastic experience, one we hope to repeat soon.

**Tamsin Young, (Garboldisham Primary School)**

*We all had a great time;  
it was like watching  
ants work, all seemed  
random rushing round  
yet the jobs were done  
in half the time.*

**Reg Langston, LOHP Trustee**



Reg Langston



## Broomscot Common, Scarfe Meadows and Webbs Fen: Three years of restoration

The restoration work began almost three years ago on these new sites, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).



Peter Frizzell

**Webbs Fen, Thelnetham**, bought with HLF money, has been transformed. First, a recent plantation of non-native trees was removed, the old roots taken out and the surface peat scraped off. This peat had been dried out and degraded by the tree growth and wouldn't support the kind of fen habitats we were aiming to restore. A shallow pool was made, similar to those created by the villagers who used to dig peat for fuel. The peat and roots from that were used to fill in the field ditches which formerly drained the central area. The last task was to fence the site and to graze and mow the tall grasses which grew up on the wet ground. Already we can see the first sign of the old fen re-emerging – stoneworts growing in the scrape, and fen rushes and flowers growing in the hollows.

Webbs Fen scrape in summer

Arthur Rivett

**Scarfe Meadows** is a series of wet meadows in the floodplain at Garboldisham. Here we have concentrated on re-fencing the meadows for cattle and restoring the ditches. Alder and willow trees had grown up along the banks, shading the ditch flora and making them unsuitable for the marshes rarest resident – the water vole. We have opened up the ditches again and graded back the banks to provide a gentler slope. Our final job this autumn will be to install a sluice which will allow us to raise water levels in the ditches.



Peter Frizzell

Scrub clearance

Our third site was **Broomscot Common**, also in Garboldisham, an area of heathland, meadow and fen. It's an outlier of Breckland, a link between the sandy plains of the west and the wetlands of the Waveney valley and the Broads. Rabbits had maintained much of the heath. We cleared scrub trees from the fen and undertook mowing to allow the smaller fen plants to flourish. We also opened up the pond at the head of the small ditch, and coppiced the gorse to provide a more diverse structure. Sheep now graze the site, supplementing rabbits especially in the more vigorously-growing meadow and fen areas.

### After an assault on Broomscot's litter



We would like to say a huge thank you to the volunteers and to Peter Frizzell and his contracting team. Together, they have ensured that these sites can flourish for wildlife.

**Mike Harding**



Pond restoration



Peter Chapman + owl box



# Famous Author Falls in Little Ouse

(but it *was* over 100 years ago)

*The 24 year old Virginia Woolf (surname at that time Stephen) and her sister rented Blo' Norton Hall in August 1906 for a holiday. Her diary preserves her impressions of the Headwaters area at that time.....*

We are 7 miles from a railway; & every mile seems to draw a thicker curtain than the last between you and the world. So that finally, when you are set down at the Hall, no sound what ever reaches your ear. . .



*The approach to Blo' Norton Hall*

The river, the Little Ouse, deserves its diminutive; you may leap it – fall in as I did this afternoon – but all the same it is not a hazardous jump. You are sure of the mud at any rate. . .

I found the real heath, not a mile from our door. It is a wild place, all sand & bracken, with innumerable rabbits, & great woods running alongside, into which I plunge ....

It is a strange lonely kind of country; a carriage comes bowling over the hill, & you watch it pass & disappear & wonder where it comes from & whither it goes, & who is the lady inside. . .

The fen plays you false at every step – I walked through a jungle of reeds & fell up to my nose in mud. And if one foundered here, the weeds would wave & the plover call, & no robin redbreast would bury one!

And truly, it would need a careful & skilful brush to give a picture of this strange, grey green, undulating, dreaming, philosophising & remembering land; where one may walk 10 miles & meet no one; where soft grass paths strike gently over the land; where the roads are many & lonely, & the churches are innumerable, & deserted.



## John Webb

The sedge was cut off the middle fen. It used to be a sedge fen, and the sedge was cut to thatch stacks, or at least to top the thatch off with it. Local farmers and people would come and mark with a scythe, actually, then load it up and thatch the corn stacks.

## Alec Bull

We arrived there – I was to be one of six cowmen for a hundred cows, nowadays there's one cowman looking after three, four, or five hundred cows, and all the rest is done automatically.



## Leslie Flatman

There were rabbits about, more of them than we get about now. A lot of rabbits about – they were the main dinner at harvest time. When harvesting, you'd catch a rabbit out of the cornfields, then take it home and see if you can eat it!



## Local voices remembered

words transcribed by James Baill



## Malcolm Baker

We used to go shooting on the tenth of May, every year. We'd shoot the young crows, cut the breasts off, and it'd make a lovely pie. We used to collect the cobnuts out of the woods at the back of the farm. Also, during the war years, we used to collect blackberries and take them to a lady at Lopham who used to buy them off us, for a bit of pocket money.





### Doug Atkins

It [Broomscot Common] was reasonably open, and we were able to set up goalposts at the southern end of the common, but it was pretty rough, with rabbit holes and moles mainly. I would've said at the time – late fifties – I don't remember a great deal of gorse on the area. There could've been some low-lying heather maybe, there may have been small patches of gorse but I don't remember a great deal.



### Mervyn Cater

My Mum said to me that if you watch people – what they bring out of their dinner bag – you can tell just how well the family are doing. So I started to take notice, and she was right. Just after Christmas everyone had got goose-grease to go on their bread, and no cheese, but as January turned in, they'd have an onion, and dry bread. Then it'd get even worse, just a red beet; no eggs, not until the spring.



### Roly Farr

After the harvest - a gyrotiller came to do these fields – to break them up. That was a great machine - with two machines, turning at the back. They used to work all night, there used to be a gang of men, and they used to have an old hut to live in. These things turned, they used to have great iron shears [...] when I was a boy they used to throw those shears, when they were worn up, onto the borders and banks, and I used to go round and gather them up and we'd sell them for scrap iron.

## Limbering the area

ie, photos by Mike Harding

*LOHP volunteers have been busy making recordings of some local people's memories. Here are a few fascinating snippets.*



### Brian and Kim Lambert

The fish we used to catch years ago [at Scarfe Meadows], there were roach, dace, gudgeon, pike, sticklebacks, eels – there were a lot of eels down there – it was good for fishing. This was before 1968, when they straightened the river out. After straightening it out, the fish went into decline, and there's next to nothing down there now.



### David Orr

Blackberries, of course – that was a traditional thing. But you didn't go and pick from Mrs So-and-so's hedges; not that they were her hedges of course, but they were where she got her blackberries, enough to make the jam that she needed. People used to pick blackberries and take them to the village shop, where they'd be sent to the jam factories down in Essex.



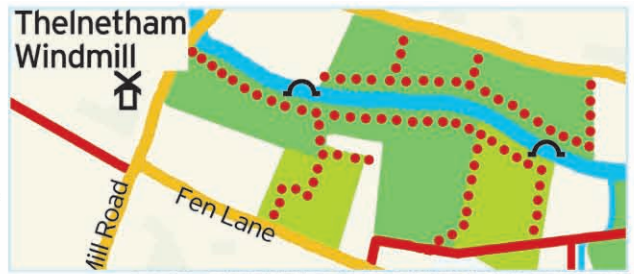
## Putting the flow back in the river

### A sluggish river in need of help

A whole kilometre of “our” section of the Little Ouse was chosen for a make-over, funded by the Environment Agency as part of the European Water Framework Directive.

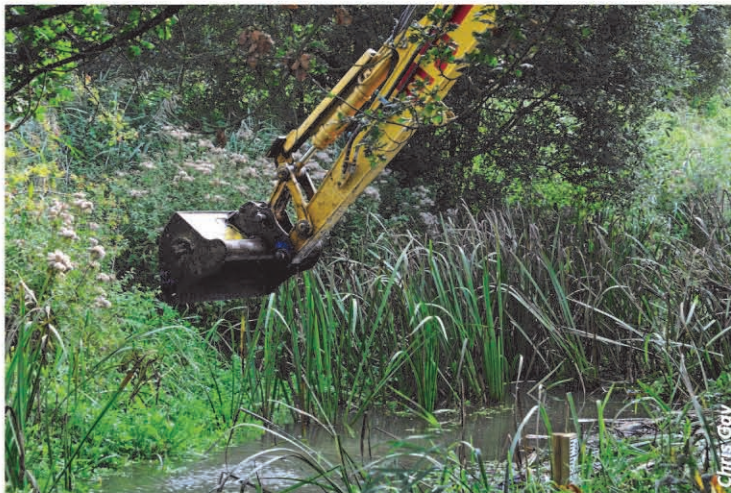
The river drops by only about 30 cm in this whole 1 km stretch upstream of the ford and bridge at Parkers Piece. Before the works no water movement was visible in the river, reeds choked much of the channel and deep black mud covered the river bed.

under the vegetation for the presence of burrows. If they found evidence of voles they marked that area with hazard tape for the digger driver to avoid. Over the course of three days, Trevor Butler the digger operator and Dr Nigel Holmes, project overseer, carefully made their way upstream re-profiling the banks and sculpting the silt from the bed (and where they were high enough from the banks themselves) into new formations. Much of the time Nigel looked like an enthusiastic orchestral conductor, gesticulating with arms and hands to show Trevor exactly where to dig and where to deposit material.



*We've been able to create more variation than I expected. That was a very nice surprise.*  
Nigel Holmes, project engineer

*When the digger was working you could feel the ground shaking under your feet from 20 metres away.*



The effect overall has been to give the river a more sinuous path, narrowing the channel available when water levels are low, thus helping it to use its energy better, and keep itself more clear of silt. In places

This technique has been used in other parts of the country with good results.

**Please keep an eye on the river as it develops and tell us about any interesting wildlife sightings.**

Watch out in 2014 for Nigel's book.... ***British Rivers – a Natural and not-so Natural History.*** The evolution of rivers, how we assess them, the wildlife they support and why rivers are different around the country. To be published by British Wildlife.

The aim of this long-discussed restoration project, masterminded by river ecologist and engineering consultant Dr Nigel Holmes, was to improve the functioning of the river, increase the diversity of habitats and to give it a better chance of keeping itself clear of silt, by increasing the speed of its flow. The works were designed to have either a beneficial or no effect on local flood risk.

### So what was actually done?

The first step was to survey the banks thoroughly for water voles. Penny Hemphill of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Julia Massey of the Environment Agency put on their dry suits and got down into the river to feel along

pools have been created and steeper stretches of bank which water voles prefer for their burrows.

The transformation was dramatic and delightful. Not only can you now see the water flowing but in many places you can also hear it. Let's say that again – a Norfolk/Suffolk river which you can **hear!**

### Will it work?

A similar project at Knettishall Heath, done by the same team last year, has been judged very successful.



Penny Hemphill and Julia Massey found huge numbers of signs of water voles

***Five years ago we found one or two signs of water voles along here. This time it was continuous all the way along. It's staggering. I've never found so many signs before on a stretch of main river, and now - we hope - we've made it even better for them.***

Penny Hemphill, Suffolk Wildlife Trust  
Water for Wildlife officer



Who can say whether the intense heat or the Wimbledon final were to blame for the small number of hardy folk who turned out for the pre-barbeque guided walk? Jo Pitt and Helen Smith nonetheless led a fascinating tour of the Hinderclay, Blo' Norton and Thelnetham sites, opening our eyes to exactly what all the past year's hard work-partying has achieved. With wellies almost melted to our legs, we arrived back at Thelnetham's picturesque village hall to a bustle of barbeque lighting, roll slicing and sangria mixing. Volunteers came bearing a wonderful spread of salads and a sumptuous display of desserts. The sun shone throughout an evening of celebration of another year of hard work and rewarding achievement. Thanks to all who contributed to the feast, to those who manned the barbeques, and to all of the LOHP's volunteers for another fantastic year.

Alice Baillie - LOHP volunteer

## Volunteers' barbecue

*Haven't had such  
a good natter  
for ages.*



## Rare Breeds in Action: LOHP's Heritage Walk

Richard Young, Head Warden at Redgrave and Lopham Fen greeted us with the news that the Konik Ponies weren't in their usual favourite spot nearby but in the woods on the far side of the reserve - a long walk away. On the way Richard explained the Fen's history and geology and answered our many questions. We watched a hobby swooping over the lakes catching dragonflies and Richard pointed out the source of the River Waveney – an unimpressive muddy ditch.

When we found the ponies Richard explained they're an extremely hardy, ancient breed originating from Poland, and thrive on the scrubby and reedy areas of the Fen. Horses graze by cutting through stems and leaves with their teeth unlike the cattle, grazing here in the summer, who use their tongues to wrap around the grass and pull. After lunch, on the nearby LOHP site, The Frith, we met the grazier Denis Jenkins. He proudly introduced us to his prize-winning red poll cattle explaining they are an old



breed, once very rare but now increasing in popularity. Being hardy they don't need such rich grazing pasture as more modern commercial breeds. We then met his flock of Norfolk Horn sheep - also able to thrive on low quality, dry pasture. Denis explained the grazing regime helps prevent the more vigorous plants from smothering the smaller, more delicate ones. Last of all we went on to the Lows to meet Denis's flock of South Down sheep. This area is moister, richer grazing making it suitable for this less hardy breed.

The day was really enjoyable, partly because of the lovely weather but mainly because of the knowledge and enthusiasm of Richard and Denis. We're very grateful to them.

Sue Lawrence - LOHP volunteer





## Membership application

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as an:

Ordinary member:	(£2 per annum)	
Friend of the Fens:	(£10 minimum per annum)	
Junior member:	(25p. per annum)	

Please tick one category and indicate the amount paid for Friend of the Fens. Please make cheques payable to 'Little Ouse Headwaters Project'.

I wish to donate £..... to the Little Ouse Headwaters Project

I want all my subscriptions and donations to the LOHP to be Gift Aided until I notify you otherwise. I pay Income Tax/Capital Gains Tax at least equivalent to the value of my contribution.

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Registered Charity No: 1098232

*giftaid it*



## Contact the LOHP

Email: [enquiries@lohp.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lohp.org.uk)

Write: LOHP, Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, IP22 2JN

Phone: 07500 044587 [www.lohp.org.uk](http://www.lohp.org.uk)

Newsletter editor:

Nicky Rowbottom 01502 578470

## The LOHP needs you!

The LOHP relies on volunteers to run the charity and help with conservation (and other) work. Might you have some energy and some time? We'd love to hear from you. To get involved, and for more info, send an email to [enquiries@lohp.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lohp.org.uk) or ring: **Bev Blackburn**, Volunteer Coordinator and Event Manager on 07747 691285 or **Pete Fox** on 07500 044587.

## Work parties

Get out and enjoy yourself whatever the weather at a LOHP work party. Monthly on Sundays (dates below) and weekly on Wednesdays.

**Note** - These could change subject to ground conditions.

**8 Dec** Hinderclay Fen - scrub bashing

**12 Jan** Betty's Fen - scrub clearing

**9 Feb** Blo' Norton - scrub control

**9 Mar** To be decided - watch the website

Check details on the website or ring for information:

**Reg & Rowena Langston** 01379 898009 (Broomscot)

**Jo-Anne Pitt** 01379 898684 (Blo' Norton)

**Nigel Clark** 01379 890460 (Hinderclay)

*The Creative Group's Exhibitions in October were a roaring success thanks to the hard work and inspiration of the Sainsbury*

*Centre for Visual Arts; the talent, time and enthusiasm of the group members and the energy and dedicated support of the LOHP volunteers. Look out for the special edition of News from the Ouse - out in the New Year.*

**SAINSBURY CENTRE**  
for Visual Arts



**The LOHP annual talk, members' evening & AGM at the Lophams' Village Hall Tuesday 3rd December 7.30pm**

**Talk by Dr Nigel Holmes,**

mastermind of the recent river channel restoration work on the Little Ouse.

The talk will be preceded by a short annual general meeting and followed by seasonal refreshments.

Contributions of finger foods very welcome.

**ALL WELCOME**

**Winter Walk, Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2014, 10.30 am**  
See our website or call for details