



# Newsletter

Autumn 2024

No 59

## Chairman's Letter

### Dear Friends

I am writing my first newsletter since taking over as Chairman of the Friends in May and I must begin with a sad loss: Jim McAllister, one of our longstanding landowners, a loyal supporter of the Friends, and a fellow trustee director, died in July. See page 4. We will greatly miss his wise counsel and generous support.

Meanwhile work in the Hurtwood continues. The rest of this newsletter, including the ranger's report, gives a more detailed account, but I would like to mention a few highlights. We have replaced the entrance signs into our car parks with a new design and are working next on new sign boards to place inside the car parks. We refurbished the access path from Holmbury Hill car park to the nearby view point, helped by a Surrey County Council grant.

In August we were at the Peaslake Fair with our regular stall managed by volunteers. We sold some beautiful photographs and received donations from supporters, some of whom we hope will become regular donors and members of the charity. I should mention here, as before, that we rely on donations to enable us to support widespread access to the Hurtwood. Our landowners provide about one third of our income and most of the rest comes from you, our members. I want to thank you all for your donations, in many cases giving both time and money. Many also have managed to increase donations over the last year or so. But we still experience steadily rising costs: fly tipping is a constant trouble, but day to day clearing of paths and bridleways, the maintenance of car parks, repairs to gates and signage all add up and the gap between income and expense grows ever wider, eating into our reserves, which are needed to replace equipment as it wears out. So once again, please consider whether you are able to increase your donations. While we know that not everyone can do so, we do hope that some can.

Our board of directors has shrunk a little over the last year. I have already mentioned the sad loss of Jim McAllister, and in the course of this year two other trustee directors, Dr. Mark Evans and Tom Davies decided to step down. We are governed by the board of trustee directors which oversees a smaller management team that handles day to day decisions. Next year we shall be on the look-out for new volunteers who would like to take on a role in either group.

Our Charity depends on widespread community support, and so on behalf of the many people who enjoy and appreciate the Hurtwood, I reiterate heartfelt thanks to our members, landowners, directors, the management team and our dedicated ranger, Mark Beaumont.

**Assheton Don, Chairman**  
**[chairman@foth.co.uk](mailto:chairman@foth.co.uk)**

### Expand your knowledge of trees and the Hurtwood

Friends of the Hurtwood is launching evening talks on topics of interest to members, supporters and local residents. The first one scheduled is for February 2025:

#### **Trees & Forestry, Climate Impact and Implications for the Hurtwood**

Tuesday, February 4, 2025, 7:30 for 8pm,  
Holmbury St Mary Village Hall, Felday Glade, Holmbury St. Mary RH5 6PG

Speaker: Alex MacKinnon, Director of Friends of the Hurtwood

Alex is a local forester who has spent nine years practising forestry nationwide. He now specialises in forestry for the purpose of generating carbon credits to combat climate change. The talk will discuss how forestry works across the UK with special attention to the Hurtwood and the type of forestry we have here.

Refreshments will be served – tea, coffee and wine. Tickets - £3 for members, £5 for non-members

## Ranger's Report

After a rather interesting summer weather-wise, we finally got some dry enough weather and managed to get on with repairing the disabled access track on Holmbury Hill that I last wrote about in the spring newsletter. The plan was to have had it finished in early spring but we hadn't been able to start due to the increased amount of wet weather.

The stone we wanted to use is dug from a quarry at Fittleworth in West Sussex, and we needed the weather to dry out a little first. The original surface to the disabled access track had become so badly damaged that it was no longer suitable for wheelchair users, so with a grant from Surrey Hills we managed to resurface using a finer stone which can only be dug from the quarry when it's dry.



We managed to keep costs down by using my normal contractors and just hiring in the equipment we needed – an excavator, dumper and whacker plate. Fittleworth stone is the same stone as we have here on the Hurtwood, though the path has gravel that has been graded into a smaller size suitable for paths. Once the 20 tonnes of stone had been delivered it was just a case of moving it out in piles and onto the old track. We then had to shovel it out onto the path laying it all down by hand. A relatively time-consuming task but I think the surface goes in much better once it's been done this way. After laying by hand it's all raked out and further compacted

with the whacker plate. Unfortunately, we weren't particularly blessed with good weather over the four days it took to repair the path but I think you'll agree it now looks much better and more suitable for the task. Since then I have spoken to several wheelchair users during the summer who have said how nice it is to use.

We have also done some repair work to the car parks, most importantly car park 1 (Holmbury Hill) which always gets seriously damaged over the winter. It's now been regraded and given a much harder surface so hopefully may last a little longer. At the same time we have worked on Walking Bottom car park which suffers from the usual problems with water runoff from the hill. Despite putting in new runoffs, rain water still ends up running through the middle of the car park and forming a deep gully. Once this starts to get too deep we have to regrade and fill it, so as rain never seems



to be far away these days, it's not long before it needs doing again, and ultimately we need to look for a long term solution.

Unfortunately, the summer has been marred by continual amounts of fly tip including some quite significant quantities that could only be removed by contractors with the grab lorry. Mostly household waste and building materials but also some of it with asbestos, again this can only be removed by specialist contractors at considerable costs. As you may know I collect the fly tip from the car parks and store it until we have enough for a 20-tonne grab load. The storage compound had eventually fallen apart, so this summer we also took the opportunity to rebuild it, albeit slightly smaller than before, but with the aim of getting it emptied more regularly.

All through the summer months I'm continually grass cutting the main rides and also some of the smaller paths as usual. I had planned to get the Hill Fort cut again this autumn, but having looked at it over the last few weeks, it's still too wet. As the Hill Fort is a scheduled Monument, care has to be taken not to disturb the surface, so unless we get a miraculous dry spell, I don't think it will get cut this year.

I've also been carrying out general cutting back of overgrown trees and clearing any fallen trees blocking paths. Vegetation this year probably was a bit more significant than normal presumably due to the warm wet weather over the summer.

You may be familiar with the term Ash dieback and have probably seen considerable quantities of Ash trees removed from the roadsides throughout the country. Fortunately on the Hurtwood we have very few Ash trees, but we did remove a few a couple of years ago when they first showed signs of the disease. Unfortunately we also recently had to take out a large Ash tree in Pitch Hill car park which I've been monitoring and hoping it was going to be ok, but unfortunately this summer it really seems to have been hit quite hard by the disease so we had no option but to take that tree down, for obvious reasons as it was on the edge of the car park.

I spoke in the last newsletter about our new signs at the car park entrances and the fact that some of them had been stolen. So we've replaced the stolen signs and made sure they couldn't be easily removed from the ground, but unfortunately instead, they were simply vandalised. See if you can spot the damage in the photo below? New signs have been reinstated and no longer damaged.

Just to prove no two days are the same on the Hurtwood, this drummer set up his kit on the side of the road one day. When I asked him why, he simply said it made a change from drumming at home!



As ever, if you see anything untoward when you're on the Hurtwood, please do let me know, and I'll get onto it asap.

**Mark Beaumont**



## Where The Wild Things Are: Notes on The Hurtwood Nightjars

Shafts of light from the setting sun splinter as they strike stands of Scots Pine. The last scratches of Dartford Warbler song filter through the Gorse. Soft Blackbird chuckles become frenzied alarms as the birds go noisily to roost. The sounds of the dying day are displaced by those of the dusk; The goblin-esque grunts and sharp squeaks of 'roding' Woodcock. Male and female Tawny Owl's call and response. The bark of a Roe Deer as it catches my scent. We are heading into the 'Nightjar zone'...

Nightjars are birds of heathland and in The Hurtwood they use open areas of recently felled timber or low growing heather, bracken and birch bordered by mature trees where they often roost in the day. They are a migrant species and arrive on our shores in mid-late May following a long journey across the Sahara and through Southern Europe.

Nightjars are crepuscular birds, emerging at dusk from their daytime slumber to hunt for moths and other insects in the twilight. The first indication of the Nightjar's presence is a brief stuttering splutter of 'song', closer to the sound of a Salmon stripping line off a fly reel or a giant stridulating cricket, than one produced by a bird. As the night draws in the duration of these outbursts increases until the air is filled with weird mechanical electricity. In The Hurtwood, males will sing on the ground or from a low post but more typically use a lofty perch in an Oak or a Scots Pine.



Before turning their attention to feeding, Nightjars engage in a daily ritual of territorial and bonding behaviour. To attract a mate, males perform an exaggerated butterfly-like flight, accompanied by wing-clapping and croaks and whistles, as they glide over the pines and heather. Once paired, Nightjars usually raised two broods before heading back to their wintering grounds in the grasslands of the Congo in late Summer and early Autumn.

To learn more about Nightjars and other wildlife follow me on Instagram [wearewherethewildthingsare](https://www.instagram.com/wearewherethewildthingsare) go to website [www.wherethewildthingsare.co.uk](http://www.wherethewildthingsare.co.uk) or email [ben@wherethewildthingsare.co.uk](mailto:ben@wherethewildthingsare.co.uk)  
**Ben West**

## RIP Jim McAllister

Jim McAllister, Hurtwood landowner, trustee and director, who died on July 26, was a countryman, an astute businessman and a philanthropist. Chief Executive of The Rutland Group, a privately owned property development, investment and management company, which he founded in 1984, he was a bold entrepreneur.

"Jim owned much of the Winterfold Forest and was a valued director on the Friends of the Hurtwood Board to which he brought his deep love of the countryside and the practical common sense proposals of a landowner addressing the difficulties of managing public access to such a popular and valued community facility. His contributions will be greatly missed," said David Wright OBE, Foth Director.

Jim purchased the redundant Dunsfold Aerodrome and he dreamed of building an environmentally sustainable eco-village on the site. Waiting in vain to see this realised, he let the site be used for the TV series *Top Gear*. He also opened Winterfold Forest to the film industry and there has been a constant stream of film units using the dramatic steep sided woodland setting.

When the Community Foundation for Surrey was established in 2005, The Rutland Group and Dunsfold Park Ltd became closely involved with supporting local communities throughout the UK, writes Chris Howard, President of the Surrey Hills Society. Jim was also a founder member of the Surrey Hills Society and the Surrey Hills Trust Fund, set up with the Community Foundation for Surrey. The Trust was set up to attract large legacies and donations to benefit the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Jim sat on the grants panel for this trust since its foundation.

He set up the Surrey Hills Challenge originally starting in Haslemere and running along the Greensand Way all the way to Denbies in Dorking. It later started from his land at Winterfold.



## Mushrooms, mushrooms, everywhere

It's a great shame to me that so many people are wary of wild mushrooms. Horror stories and deadly legends have bled into our psyches, punctuating our minds with a morbid certainty that any mushroom growing in the wilds of Britain should best be avoided. In reality, the vast majority of fungi species that produce mushrooms found in the UK are benign, with only a handful posing any real risk of harm if accidentally consumed. Another popular misconception is that simply handling a poisonous mushroom can be detrimental to one's health, whereas, only the act of ingesting a fair amount of a poisonous mushroom's flesh will lead to serious issues. Even licking one's fingers after handling the deadliest varieties (such as the *Destroying Angel Amanita verna* or the *Death Cap Amanita phalloides*) will present you with no harm, though, I would not recommend forming this peculiar habit!



So, what of the many delicacies to be discovered? Well, it's here where my real love affair lies. There are considerably more wonderful edible mushrooms to be found than there are harmful ones and many are truly beautiful to behold. That's not to say one can simply pick mushrooms to eat at random and hope for the best, quite the contrary. Mushroom foraging requires study and investigation. One must examine each find, often using both sight and smell to determine that the species being observed is the desired kind and not perhaps an evil twin. Mushrooms are by their nature highly variable owing to how complex their structures can be alongside the very changeable short life cycles of the fruiting bodies. It's this factor which contributes to my fascination with studying fungi. The endlessly twisting turns and ever-present mysterious nature of fungi keeps me coming back year after year to get lost wandering down the rabbit hole again. Some species can truly surprise, such as the stunningly beautiful yet ominously named *Amethyst Deceiver Laccaria amethystina*; a beautifully colourful gem of a mushroom (particularly when offered up to strong autumnal sunlight!) and a deliciously fruity edible for the pot.



Another aspect of mushroom foraging I enjoy is that each of us have our own favourites. Wild mushrooms can offer a richly versatile array of colours and flavour notes to many culinary dishes. Some examples of my own recent discoveries have been the dinner-plate sized *Trooping Funnel Infundibulicybe geotropa* which, although somewhat leathery textured when cooked fresh, dries very well and can then be crushed in a pestle and mortar to add a uniquely delicious edge to a meat sauce or pie. Also there is the *Cauliflower Fungus Sparassis*. This intriguing coral-like fungi grows around the base of some coniferous trees and offers a deep and sumptuous flavour brilliant for soups, pâté or stews. Although somewhat difficult to properly clean when picked due to the many folds and lobes within its structure, a good wash before slicing and thoroughly drying works a treat with this particular fungi. Others in my favourite repertoire include many of the easily identifiable *Boletus* species' (toadstools usually with a brown cap, thick tapering paler stem and always a sponge spore structure under the cap). *Chanterelles*, *Hedgehog Fungus*, *Oyster Mushrooms*, alongside the aforementioned ones above are also regular additions to my cold store once prepared and dried.

I truly hope this short piece finds you well and perhaps even inspires you to venture out in search of some of the wonderful mushroom varieties out there. I find taking photographs of mushrooms just as rewarding as putting them in my pot, but a simple rule I follow for safely enjoying mushroom foraging is to never consume a wild mushroom that I am not completely certain about, it's simply not worth the worry otherwise!

Recommended Publications: *Mushrooms*, Roger Phillips  
ISBN: 978-0-330-44237-4

*Entangled Life*, Merlin Sheldrake ISBN: 9781847925190

**Will Bagenal**



## Exciting future for Holmbury St Mary Youth Hostel

Late in 2023, 20 youth hostels throughout the UK were put up for sale by the Youth Hostel Association leaving their futures uncertain. This included one of the original purpose built hostels, Holmbury Hostel, which was constructed in 1935. This was designed as a new 'Model Hostel' by the architect Howard Lobb and was opened by Lord Allen of Hurtwood.

Over the years the hostel has welcomed travellers be it schools, families or individuals from near and far. These visitors would enjoy a comfortable but affordable overnight stay in the heart of the Surrey Hills from where they could explore and learn about the countryside whilst benefitting from the fresh air that the Hurtwood is famed for. Each year over the last 89 years thousands of overnight stays have been experienced at the hostel.

Covid brought its challenges to many businesses and the YHA were not immune. A variation on the business model was needed and a programme of hostel sales were put forward with a view to securing partnerships with like-minded individuals who could breathe new life into them. There was significant interest in the Holmbury Hostel from various parties but the YHA accepted a proposal from local business owners Matt Morris of the Hurtwood Inn & Hotel and Tim Metson of Coverwood Farm.

Holmbury Hostel will continue to be available for groups, schools and families to hire out the whole building as a great base for exploring the Surrey Hills, connecting to nature and taking part in walks and cycling. Alongside these continued bookings for schools and larger groups, Matt and Tim will be



re-introducing bookings for individual rooms in 2025; providing affordable accommodation for lone travellers, small groups and single families.

The hostel has a long tradition of connecting children and young people to the outdoors and over the coming year the hostel team are delighted that they will be hosting groups from Generation Green. This Government-funded programme brings children into National Landscapes and encourages young people to connect to nature and to protect the countryside.

Tim Metson reflects "responsible access to the countryside is at the core of hostelling and we are delighted to be able to host different groups at Holmbury. Alongside residential for school and youth groups we will also be connecting children to local farming to help them understand the 'farm to fork' journey and encourage rural careers".

Holmbury sits in The Hurtwood, at the centre of several walking and mountain bike trails. The site will place an emphasis on public transport and active travel. Information on walking, running and cycling routes will encourage use of non-honeypot sites and investment is being made in toilets, paths and way marking.

"As a keen mountain biker and provider of cycling experiences across the Surrey Hills I know the importance of responsible cycling that respects both the countryside and other users of tracks and trails. Holmbury will become an important hub not only for cyclists but also walkers and horse riders and it's location means that it will help draw people from existing overcrowded sites." says Matt Morris.

Surrey Hills National Landscape is 70 years old and Holmbury Hostel has been an integral part of access to the Surrey Hills. Rob Fairbanks – CEO of the Surrey Hills National Landscape welcomes the purchase that has saved the future of this



local asset. "In our recent celebration of our 70 year history we asked people to imagine Surrey Hills at our 100th anniversary. Having a venue that can host arts, recreation, connections to nature and local tourism is an essential part of our future vision and we are delighted that Holmbury Hostel will continue the journey with Surrey Hills."

Holmbury Hostel will continue to be a partner of the YHA and booking can be done through the YHA Website [www.yha.org.uk](http://www.yha.org.uk) (or directly through a call to the hostel on 01306 730777).

Matt and Tim have some exciting projects planned for the hostel and will share these with us as they develop.

### New life after vandal attack

It has been quite a year for one of the Hurtwood's most familiar landmarks. The cricket club pavilion at Holmbury St Mary on Holmbury Hill has been the centre of a major crowd funding appeal as the village tried to raise £32,000 to pay for a new roof.

The Pavilion was built back in the 1960s and the old cedar shingles which were installed at the time were very much on their last legs. When the pavilion was the subject of a number of incidents of vandalism, one of which left a gaping hole in the roof, the need to replace it became ever more urgent.

Thankfully an incredible response by over 170 members , friends and villagers plus grants from Sport England, The Surrey

Cricket Foundation and Surrey County Council (thanks to our local councillor Bob Hughes) saw the target reached in just six weeks allowing work to replace the shingles to start in October.



By the time you read this, hopefully all will be complete and the pavilion, which sits right by The Greensand Way, will be dry and snug for the winter and dreaming of the 2025 cricket season!

### Peaslake Fair 2024

Peaslake Fair was again a great success with perfect weather, dry and not too hot. The charity had a stall at the Fair, staffed by directors and volunteers, where information leaflets were shared with interested visitors and residents. Donations were accepted with the Collectin electronic machine as well as in cash. Photos by the Hurtwood photographer, Peter Chamberlain, were on display and for sale.

FotH is responsible for car parking and is allowed to keep some of the £3 entrance fee. There were two car parks, at Walking Bottom and at Peaslake Farm, with 2 or 3 volunteers per hour at each car park, which means a total of 21 volunteers were required. We're grateful to the folks that gave their time to help with the car parking.

Friends of the Hurtwood is one of the beneficiaries of the Peaslake Fair proceeds, which this year is estimated to be around £2,500.

Tom from B4SH (Broadband for the Surrey Hills) kindly set up a Wi-Fi link in the farm field enabling card payments which was a major bonus.

Friends of the Hurtwood would like to thank the Peaslake Community Council for the contribution from Peaslake Fair, a very welcome boost to its coffers.





## Peter Chamberlain ARPS CPAGB

Peter Chamberlain has had almost a lifelong interest in photography.

Following many years of using film, much of it processed in his own darkroom, Peter now works exclusively with digital equipment and processes the image files using Photoshop and selected 'plug in' software. The resultant prints are produced by Peter himself in what he ambitiously refers to as his 'digital darkroom'.

Peter has a longstanding association with Pitch Hill and the Hurtwood.

His family lived locally and he spent much time in the area as a child and, with retirement and a relatively recent move to Walliswood, he is now able to devote significant time to photography in the delightful woodlands that cover much of Pitch Hill, Winterfold and the Hurtwood.



The pictures in the Foth Gallery demonstrate his success in capturing the changing moods and colours of the woods.

Peter's fabulous pictures can be seen at <http://foth.co.uk/images-from-the-hurtwood/>



## Raising Awareness of Friends of the Hurtwood



Car park blitzes have continued to be held through the summer into the autumn at a variety of Hurtwood car parks.

Management Committee members and volunteers spend an hour on a selected day to meet visitors as they arrive.

The aim is to raise awareness of the

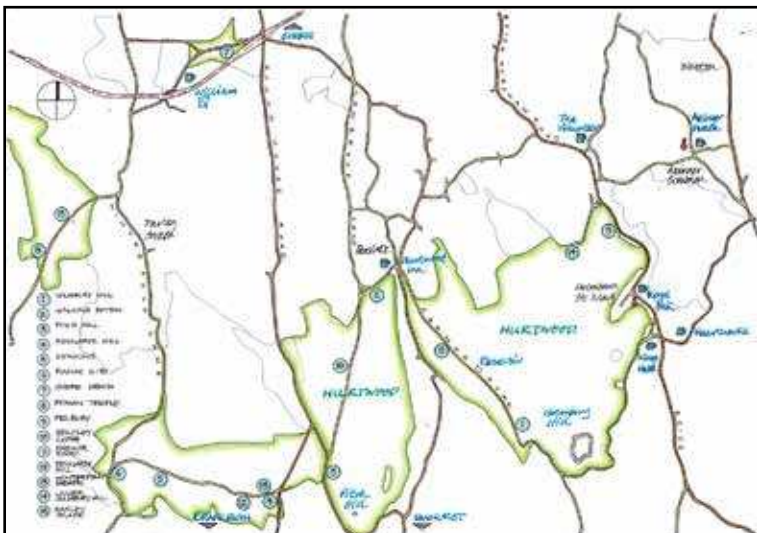
charity, reinforce the message that the visitors are getting a free parking service to visit the Hurtwood and prompt them to either donate on the day (in cash, some do!) or to set up a regular donation via the website.

We encourage those interested in donating to agree to a monthly donation, so the charity has a predictable income stream.

If you are interested in volunteering to help with the car park blitzes, please contact me at: **communications@foth.co.uk** You will be briefed and be issued with a high viz jacket and leaflets to distribute. We also do a quick tidy up of litter in the car park. Our aim is to keep the Hurtwood beautiful and available to all.

### Here are the Hurtwood Car Parks

This very useful map shows exactly where all the car parks are. You can download it by going to the website <https://foth.co.uk/hurtwood-location/> There are many designated car parks around the common and it is important visitors use them and not the lanes in and around the villages.



- Provide a full time Ranger, **Mark Beaumont**
- Manage 30 miles of registered footpaths and bridleways, 30 miles of unofficial tracks, a network of firebreaks and 14 car parks, to provide unrivalled public access across the Hurtwood.
- Protect and conserve the natural environment.
- Create and preserve wildlife habitats.
- Maintain the panoramic views from the tops of the Hurtwood hills.
- Clear and prevent litter and fly tipping.
- Protect three scheduled monuments including Holmbury Hill Iron Age Hill Fort.
- Promote educational activities to encourage children to treasure the countryside.



Please  
support  
FotH

Thank  
you!



### Friends of the Hurtwood

Administrators to the public rights of access to 2,500 acres of land in the parishes of Albury, Cranleigh, Ewhurst and Shere

Registered Charity 2000053

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