



# BRANCHLINE



## ISSUE 49

## Spring 2007

### Sapcote Heritage Group

Sapcote Heritage Group was formed in June 2001, one of eight funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Initially, meetings were held in the upper room of the Red Lion, Church Street, and there were fifteen members. From our small beginning we now have upwards of 30 regular members and there are always non-members turning up to hear speakers. Our policy is to book good speakers with an accent on Leicestershire heritage, very rarely do we stray from this. We are already almost fully booked up for 2008 as this year's programme starts. Early on we decided to have outings during the three summer months and it has proved a worthwhile method of getting to know members socially, indeed visitors often remark on the friendliness of the group. We have found that the mention of being a heritage group opens doors that are normally closed. A visit this year has meant the group being vetted for any criminal records!!!

The year is usually rounded off with a Christmas social and faith supper with members providing the entertainment.

We have held three very successful open days involving the community and local schoolchildren, with most group members contributing in some way or other, either loaning items for display, showing old films, manning stalls or helping with children. We have also invited other local village groups such as the WI, Mothers



Union, sporting organisations and the bell-ringers to put on displays, in effect bringing the community together. These events are usually rounded off with a slide show of village photographs or a talk by a major speaker.

In 2005 a member of the Parish Council suggested that it would be in our favour to obtain charitable status. We took up this suggestion and became the first heritage group to achieve this.

As with other Heritage Groups a large number of members just come for the speaker. However, in the Sapcote group, we have a chairman, secretary, treasurer, publicity officer, health and safety officer, fundraising officer and a rota of members of both sexes who help with the refreshments.

Reflecting on the past five years, what have we achieved?

In the beginning there were just two or three active members involved in researching the village's historic and built heritage.



As a heritage group we are very aware that we must try and preserve what heritage we have left. We fought to save one of the village pubs and, although we failed even after over 1,000 letters were sent to the local council, we made the developer put in three applications, and we had a say in



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what the replacement buildings would look like.

We now regularly get notification of planning applications from our local district council and it has been noticeable how, in the five years of our existence, development, particularly within the old village centre, has been in keeping with and complimentary to adjacent existing building.



A major photographic survey of the churchyard memorials is almost complete and there is an ongoing photographic survey of the present day village. This includes photographing such services as the milkman, chimney sweep, public utilities, building sites, signs, and everyday objects, subjects which normally tend to be ignored in a village photographic survey.

Over the last two years more members have become involved in projects. Over 2,000 photographs of the village have been scanned, downloaded onto CD's, and put onto a village website. A photographic survey of the flora of the parish last year recorded some 311 species of wildflowers including a stand of over 300 orchids, previously unrecorded in the village. The survey did not include the trees and grasses although a start was made on a fungi survey. The wildflower survey which has also been downloaded onto a CD and put onto the village web site, will, we have been informed, be used as an example to other Heritage groups. Publications mentioning the village and all historical research to date have also been scanned. The one piece of woodland in the village has been the subject of an in depth photographic survey covering every month of the year. We have now made a start on photographing and recording the present day landscape of the parish –



the roads and footpaths, bridleways and streams.

Regular photographic displays are mounted in the village library and displays have been loaned to the village church for their open days. There is also a PowerPoint display in the library of a small section of our photographic archive.

Two members have prepared a series of footpath walks with the intention of having them produced in a leaflet for the public and will this year be organising our annual village walk.



Another member has spent many hours compiling a book on Sapcote in Wartime. A new member has expressed an interest in recording the trees and hedgerows of the parish and a number of members are assisting in the WI floral survey for 2007. All these have been done voluntarily and without grant aid because members wished to do it.



The Heritage Group has given donations towards the restoration of

Sapcote church spire and to the county appeal towards saving the Iron Age Hoard.

Work is in progress to design a suitable village sign and the Basset coat of arms has been researched for new parish council notice boards.

We have achieved much in the five years since we first formed our group. Our only regret is that there was nothing similar in the nineteen sixties when so much of our village was swept away by new development. At least we are able to preserve what is left for future generations and hope that our group continues to flourish in the years to come with the generation we are trying to encourage.

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**Who are you?** The Historic and Natural Environment (HNE) Team is the County Council's team of experts who look

after Leicestershire and Rutland heritage information and make it available to be used in the planning process and in support of the enquiring local enthusiast or member of the public.

**What information do you hold?** The County Council has a long history of collecting information about Leicestershire and Rutland. Much of it has come from its museums service which started in Leicester in the 1840s, and its ecology service which started formally in the 1960's. **What areas do you cover?**

The HNE team covers five main areas: The **Historic Buildings team** has the County's experts on historic building repair and restoration. The team:

- works with district councils on compiling and maintaining the Buildings-at-Risk Register and Conservation Area Reviews and Appraisals.
- maintains the County Council's list of Listed Buildings.
- gives grants to help fund restoration work of important local buildings, ensuring repairs and restorations are carried out properly in terms of materials and design.

The **Planning Archaeology team** looks after the Sites and Monuments Record or what is now known as the Historic Environment Record (HER). This is a list of all items of known archaeological interest, from the Stone Age right up to almost the present day. The team checks most of the counties' planning applications against the HER and advises the planning authorities. The team is also working with English Heritage to complete a Historic Landscape Characterisation Scheme.

The **Planning Ecology team** does a similar job to the Archaeologists, but using instead the information in the **LERC (Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre)** ecological archive

database and the many paper records which are behind it. In addition, the team surveys and monitors Local Wildlife Sites, and maintains the official register of them. We are trying to computerise as much information as possible. We have a legacy of enormous numbers of paper records, (too much to do currently!), so we are concentrating on records of protected species, the information supporting Local Wildlife Sites, and other information that is coming to us in an electronic format.

**Planning Geology** is undertaken when geological issues arise. The RIGS (Regionally Important Geological Sites) website has helped to put local geological information into the public domain.

The **Community Heritage Initiative** is the HNE's outreach project. The team has very successfully been running a wide range of natural history heritage projects. As well as being used by researchers and local interested people, the information is used more and more in the planning process. Most of each year's many thousands of planning applications in the two counties are checked against the information held by the HNE team at Holly Hayes and County Hall.

The HNE team also has a role in making the information held in the expert archaeological and ecological databases more available to the general public. We have embarked on two trial exercises: the RIGS website and the CHI-portal.

#### **How can I contact you?**

Historic Buildings team:

0116 265 7062 [jsharpe@leics.gov.uk](mailto:jsharpe@leics.gov.uk)

Planning Archaeology:

0116 265 8322 [riclark@leics.gov.uk](mailto:riclark@leics.gov.uk)

Planning Ecology:

0116 267 0006 [jmcphail@leics.gov.uk](mailto:jmcphail@leics.gov.uk)

LERC:

0116 267 0000 [dsumner@leics.gov.uk](mailto:dsumner@leics.gov.uk)

Planning Geology / RIGS:

0116 265 7063 [gwalley@leics.gov.uk](mailto:gwalley@leics.gov.uk)

Community Heritage Initiative:

0116 267 1377 [chi@leics.gov.uk](mailto:chi@leics.gov.uk)

#### **Do you have a website?**

For more detailed information on the work of the HNE team visit [www.leics.gov.uk/historic\\_natural\\_environment\\_team](http://www.leics.gov.uk/historic_natural_environment_team)

## How's it going so far?

Arthur Gardner, Heritage Warden,  
Barrow upon Soar

I was flattered when the Parish Council asked me to become a Heritage Warden. "Yes", I said, "*but I can't do much until I retire.*" Well, now that I've retired, it is still difficult to find time to do things!

It soon became obvious that one person can't tackle all the things that Holly Hayes wants us to do, let alone all the things I want to do. I decided, until I retired, to focus on recruiting additional Heritage Wardens for Barrow to swell the workforce. That proved to be impossible. I went and talked about the scheme to lots of village groups – in what seemed to be an entertaining way – but no one has taken up the torch. Or not yet. I'm determined to keep working at this as the idea of a heritage team attracts me more than the idea of a single warden. If anyone has a brilliant suggestion for recruiting new wardens, please tell.

Anyway, my intention of one day being an active Warden collapsed immediately after I retired as the village decided to create a Parish Plan (*the Rural Community Council can explain this process if your community hasn't already done one*). I saw this as a great opportunity to win some improvements for the village – and it has been – so I volunteered to be involved and, in fact, ended up Chairing the Steering Group. The Parish Plan process was more complicated and time consuming than any of us imagined. Three years on

we have delivered our agreed Plan but there is still more to do to make sure it happens.

So, has the heritage role suffered totally? No. It has not been a waste of time. I have not done those things Holly Hayes wanted me to do, nor have I done the things I meant to do but there has been progress. Considerable progress. That's why Carolyn asked me to write this article.

What has happened is that the Parish Plan survey of Barrow residents shows that they really value the fact that it is an attractive place to live, that they want their heritage to be preserved, and they want to know more about it. Armed with this, I applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to undertake several 'heritage' projects and, luckily, was awarded £18,500 to be spent over the next 18 months. This concentrates the mind!

I now have to manage a range of sub-projects dealing with: *archaeology; countryside walks; the history of the streets; identifying trees and shrubs; and using Photoshop Elements to manipulate digital images*. Each of these has to produce one or more leaflets/booklets to give to all households *and* a village exhibition *and* an article in the village newspaper *and* an entry on the village website. The central aim of the project is that it should raise awareness of/ understanding of/appreciation of our local heritage. That seems to me to be entirely consistent with the wide aims of the Heritage Warden scheme and the Community Heritage Initiative. And very importantly, from my point of view, because we have funding available, we have been able to

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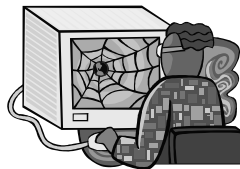
persuade lots of people to get involved in the projects who have never been active in the village before. Perhaps some of them will like it so much they can be tempted to become Heritage Wardens? Wouldn't that be nice? I haven't told them about that side of it. I'm playing a long game.



The part of this that most interested Carolyn and her team was the trees guide. My idea is to help people know what they are looking at when they walk

around the village. We won't list every tree or large shrub. That's impossible. Our plan is to select good examples and concentrate on these with the hope that if people learn to recognise them, they will recognise the others. So, the printed 'guide' will be a guide to *locating* named plants. We will not attempt to print a full guide like the Reader's Digest or Collins' guides I personally use. We will recommend people to carry such field guides with them. Our small, printed, guide will help them find the right place to see a good example of a particular plant. That should be useful but it is hardly exciting!

The bit you might find more interesting is that we are negotiating to create a special section of our village website (hosted by "leicestershirevillages.com") which will provide a web version of a much more ambitious guide. Not one you can take with you on the walks but



one you can study from home.

The idea is *to build an interactive database of useful and interesting facts about trees and shrubs*. Some of this will be specific to Barrow upon Soar (eg outside 95 Cotes Rd you will see XXX). Other bits will be generic (characteristics, history, suitability as a garden plant, how to use 'recognition keys', and so on). These are the core details. Beyond that, one can imagine: 'virtual walks' to see the trees; 'my favourite trees in Barrow' sections which can be added to by the community; a 'comments and questions' page; a 'photo gallery' of good examples from other villages. Whatever. *The point being that the web should enable us to show things and search for things that can't be done in a book* (or not a book that we can afford to produce and print!). Once we'd thought of that, Fiona and her colleagues realised that the same thing could be done for other villages and for other heritage domains (eg buildings, ancient trees, flowers). Barrow upon Soar might just be the first 'worked example'.

So, how's it going? Pretty good I think. Not much progress with the mainstream Heritage Warden stuff, but quite a lot of what the funders call 'capacity building' and 'community engagement' which bodes well for the future. And, you never know, I might still manage to recruit more Wardens.



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## Putting the wild back into wildlife

For thousands of years, people in Britain have sought to control nature. They have, for example, built sea walls and flood banks, drained marshes, cut down forests and destroyed predators and 'weeds'.

It seems to me that all this has resulted, in the lowlands at least, in the land becoming a very tame place, where people are in charge and nature is held in check. The fact that the country is so densely populated doesn't help.



Much of our wildlife is now confined to nature reserves and even they are 'managed' because, people say, nature is no longer 'in balance'. So we plant trees, cut down old ones, mow grass, clear around flowers that we think need some attention, introduce animals and plants we like and kill those we don't. Is this nature conservation? Surely it should be about conserving nature and nature is much more than animals and plants - it is the sum of all the natural processes that drive the earth *plus* wildlife. Let me give you an example.

There is a spectacular sub-species of the black poplar tree that is only found in Britain. It probably used to grow as a pioneering species in floodplain forests before people cleared them to create farmland. Storms and flood water created areas of bare mud that were essential for the seeds of the black poplar to germinate on. Without violent disturbance of its habitat, the tree could no longer reproduce and it became very rare and was only maintained by people who propagated it and planted it out in

the countryside. Today conservationists are trying to make sure that our black poplar does not die out, but this will involve never-ending propagation, planting and nurturing, unless we can do something to restore the tree's habitat. You could ask whether our remaining black poplars are really wild, as they cannot survive without human care, a bit like tigers in a zoo. The trees grow only where people have planted them.

For Black Poplars to again be able to reproduce on their own we need to allow floodplains to function naturally, to 'rewild' them. 'Rewilding' is a term that is now being used to describe an exciting form of conservation that lets natural processes, such as storms, flooding and disturbance, operate with minimal human interference. The wildlife that results is then accepted as much as possible without passing judgement on what should live and what should die.



Obviously there are limits on what can be achieved through rewilding in our busy part of the world and there will have to be compromises. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust is developing a big project in the valley of the River Soar that aims to rewild parts of the floodplain and work with other landowners to encourage nature even where there are other priorities, such as farming and recreation.

If you have access to the internet you can find more information on rewilding on the website of the Wildland Network [www.wildland-network.org.uk](http://www.wildland-network.org.uk), including details of a conference on the subject that was recently held in Leicestershire. Alternatively contact me at the Wildlife Trust office.

Michael Jeeves

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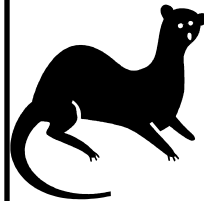


## Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan - an update

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (LLRBAP) covers a number of key habitats and species which are important locally. It identifies current threats and sets out various actions to prevent further losses and to promote expansion of these habitats and species. Each year Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT) produces a report giving details of the work various organisations have carried out towards achieving these actions. The latest report has just been published and copies are being sent out with Branchline. When reading this report it should be appreciated that it is very difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment of progress on the conservation of BAP species and habitats since not all organisations are able or willing to provide information on the work they have been doing. It has also been hard to quantify changes in BAP habitats and species since we still lack reliable baseline data for many of them. What is clear is that after the National Forest (where a significant amount of new woodland has been planted) the area where the greatest amount of new habitat has been created is in the Soar Valley north of Leicester. Here new floodplain wetland, reedbed, and wet woodland habitats are being formed, as for example by LRWT on their Cossington and Wanlip Meadows reserves. Where habitat restoration is



concerned a large amount of work has taken place on heathland sites, such as Leicestershire County Council's Beacon Hill country park and LRWT's Charnwood Lodge nature reserve. There has also been good progress on the restoration of ancient woodlands, especially by the Forestry Commission, who have been



removing planted conifers from many of their sites for a number of years.

The news on the species front is not so good with many still in decline or reduced to small isolated

populations. However otters have increased significantly and are now established throughout the catchment of the River Welland. They have also been recorded along the River Wreake and the Soar both north and south of Leicester.

If you are interested in learning more about the LLRBAP you can visit the LRWT website at [www.lrwt.org.uk](http://www.lrwt.org.uk) and click on the BAP link. If you have any observations of BAP species or information on BAP habitats please send them to me, (contact details below) as I will soon be looking for material to put in next year's annual report.

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## Work with young people

"The extinction of experience" (ECOS (2) Vol. 26 April 2005 p1) is the term that has been used to describe the lack of outdoor experiences and connections with nature by young people. Many natural history groups are facing problems with most members in the 55 plus age group - the result of 'a missing generation of young naturalists' ('The Nest Generation', Mark Cocker, Society Guardian, Environment, Wednesday November 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 p9). This is evidenced by some local natural history groups in Leicestershire facing closure over the coming years because of a lack of young members.

Additionally the perception of natural history, which is seen as 'nerdy' by many young people, has also led to disengagement in natural history activities.



CHI is focusing on natural history projects for 11-20 year olds over the next two years, developing a programme of activities which will take a creative approach using photography, drawing and a range of social media. These approaches are

increasingly being used to engage young people in natural history and have been shown to be effective.

By running projects with the 11-20 age group, opportunities will be created to enable young people to explore the natural world on their terms, gain experience of natural history and input their own ideas for projects.



We are hoping to involve natural history societies in some of the activities and would welcome societies getting in touch with us if they are interested.

In communicating the natural history message, it has to be fun first and facts afterwards. Computers, mobiles, MP3 players etc are here to stay. Natural history has to be given a make over for a broader appeal and a new generation of natural historians.

If you are a natural history society who would like to get involved in projects involving young people, please contact Kay Snowdon on the details below.

### ABOUT BRANCHLINE

Branchline is produced by Leicestershire County Council's Holly Hayes Environment & Heritage Resources Centre and is the newsletter for the Community Heritage Initiative (CHI), a project developed with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Rutland County Council. It aims to be a networking publication and used as an information source for Parishes, groups, and individuals interested in protecting and discovering more about the area's countryside and heritage. Mailings are free of charge as a service to the communities of Leicestershire and Rutland. If you have any articles that you would like to see in Branchline, drop us a line at Holly Hayes (details below), or e-mail them to [chi@leics.gov.uk](mailto:chi@leics.gov.uk). Articles are welcome and **the deadline for the Summer 2007 Edition is May 1st 2007.**

*The articles supplied do not necessarily reflect the views of Leicestershire County Council or the CHI partners.*

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