

Valley Conservation Society



doing nothing is not an option

Members' newsletter No 167

We are a non-political organisation

August 2019

Barbecue Goes with A Banger

*Complimentary copy
for your interest*

The annual barbecue on Saturday, July 20, attracted around 180 people to the grounds of The Manor House at Hayle Place. This was the largest attendance we have ever had.

The extra numbers put added pressure on our team of chefs and there was some delay while they waited for the meat to thoroughly cook, but in the end everyone had as much chicken, and as many burgers and sausages as they wanted and we had some left over.

We were blessed with good sunshine on the day, though strong winds the night before had wrecked one of the gazebos we had put up. Dennis Usmar did a hurried repair job on it on Saturday morning to get us through.

The new band, the Swinging 60s, were well received. Everybody seemed to know the songs, which perhaps tells us how old we are all getting.

Although, this event is not run to make a profit, we are always grateful for extra funds and a session of reverse bingo raised £172 for the Society.

We also had an unexpected bonus. Long-time member Steve Small, from the Cow Shed in Cave Hill, is a carpenter by trade and he brought along a fine picnic bench that he had hand-made and had decorated on the top with the Union flag.

He donated it the Society to be auctioned and after a fierce bidding war between two members who were both keen to get the item, it was sold for a marvellous £265!

We had help from a larger team this year, both setting up and clearing up on Sunday, and we are grateful to them and to those who made the salads and desserts and who helped to serve. But our especial thanks go to Jane and Colin Holman for their kind permission to use their grounds.



Disastrous news

In our last newsletter we reported how thieves had attempted to break into the Conservation Cabin in Cave Hill, but had been disturbed. We are sorry to say that they returned a few weeks later and this time succeeded in breaking in and stealing all the Society's power tools.

Their haul included three strimmers, two chain-saws, two leaf-blowers, a hedge-cutter, two battery-powered drills, along with harnesses and helmets for use with the strimmers. The total replacement cost is estimated at just short of £5,000.

We were insured and hope to recover the money, but of course we will inevitably face higher insurance premiums from now on.

Furthermore, we are now faced with the problem of where to store the tools once we have replaced them. We will not want simply to put them back in the cabin and wait for them to be stolen again. One of the options we are looking at is laying on electricity to the cabin, so that it can be fully alarmed, but that is expensive and will incur an on-going cost.

Some members have kindly asked if they can make a donation to help the Society recover from this blow. The best way to do that is via the Local Giving website. Visit <https://localgiving.org/search/> and type Valley Conservation Society into the search bar at the top of the page. You can then make your donation and the Society will receive the added bonus of Gift Aid, boosting your sum by around 20%. Alternatively post a cheque made out to **Valley Conservation Society** and send it to Alan Smith, Bockingford House, Cripple Street, Maidstone, ME15 6DN.

From Ashes to ashes

An article by founding member Jim Williams

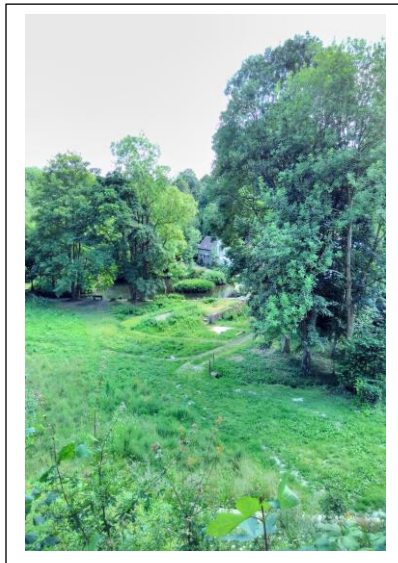
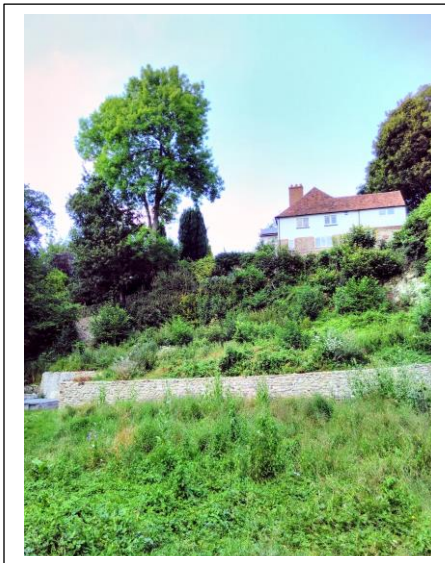
Did you notice how slow the Ash trees were in coming into leaf this spring? There is an old west country saying 'Oak before Ash and we're in for a splash (= dry summer): Ash before Oak and we're in for a soak (= wet summer).

This year the Oak tree in my garden was more than a month in advance of the adjacent Ash trees. But it wasn't only because of the dry spring. Rather it is due to a fungus that grows in the trunk of Ash trees and restricts the transport of sap from roots to leaves. This causes slow leaf appearance, especially in a dry spring, as well as inadequate water for the top shoots and leaves in a warm summer. The net result is that the infected trees 'die-back' from the top, until they are completely dead.

There are a significant number of Ash trees around the VCS ponds - especially the lower Reeds pond. Just opposite the VCS cabin gate is a sad example of a badly affected tree with just a few clumps of leaves and many dead twigs.

Opposite the adjacent gate there are a bunch of about 10 young trees, many of which are already dead. Even seedlings are dying, some only a couple of feet tall. Of the approximately 25 mature trees in the vicinity of Reeds pond and the footpath up towards the nature reserve, about half are Ash in varying degrees of degradation.

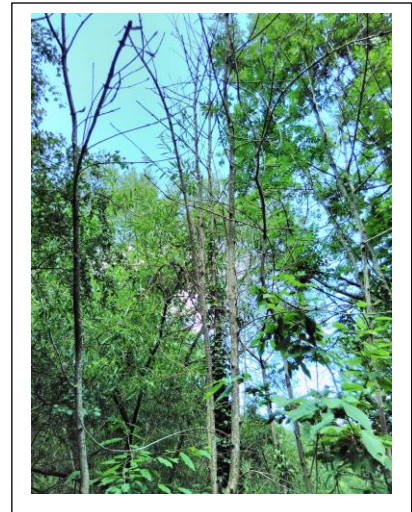
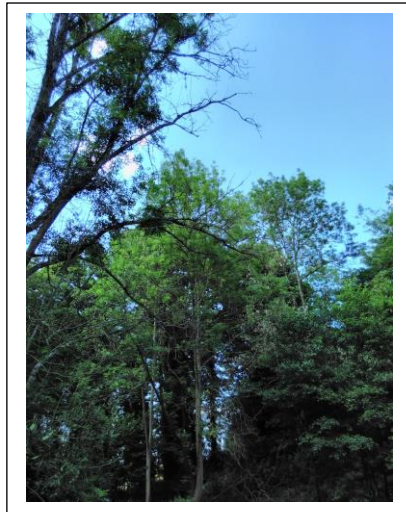
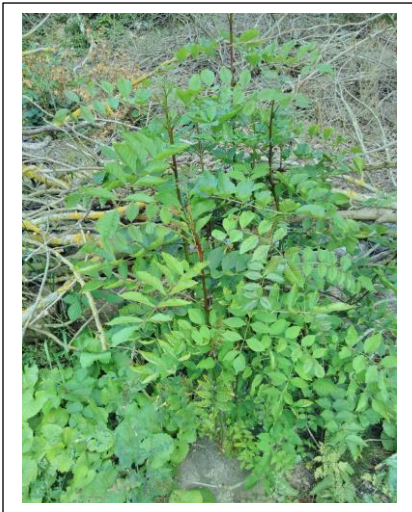
There are still a number of Ash trees in the nature reserve, and in all probability these will die as well. Their demise will affect the landscape. In places where there are a lot of trees the effect won't be so noticeable but the loss of isolated trees will be stark - such as the north end of Crisbrook pond and on the ridge adjacent to Mount Ararat. It will be much worse where the Ash is the dominant species - going up Bockingford Hill most of the large clump of trees on the right are Ash.



Left: *An Ash tree dominates the horizon at Mount Ararat: it was very slow to leaf this year*
Middle: *About half the trees around the area by the two ponds are Ash: we will miss them*
Right: *Quite a number of trees remaining in the nature reserve are Ash, and dying back*

Estimates vary as to the proportion of trees that will die. Figures between 90 and 99% are banded about, so if there happens to be a resistant tree growing near you please look after it and help it spread its seeds. Surviving seedlings need to be cherished with hope. The disease mainly affects the European Ash but other kinds are also vulnerable. It is particularly lethal for young trees and kills them in one season. Older trees resist but tend to decline in vigour season by season. There don't appear to be any management recommendations from Forestry Commission or MBC yet, apart from advice to cut down dead trees where they may be a danger to the public, though clearly there is need for replacement tree planting.

And it's not just our valley that is infected. Maidstone as a whole is suffering hard, as is Kent and all of Britain. In Wales there used to be many Ash, but visiting a favourite place there recently I was shocked to find it almost bare. The epidemic started in Poland in 1992. By 2008 the disease was reported from Scandinavia to Switzerland and by 2012 it had spread across the rest of northern Europe to Russia, Britain and Ireland. The open international market in young trees is blamed for the rapid spread of ash die-back. The financial cost to the nation is estimated at £15 billion.



Left: *Ash seedlings: note the 'pinnate' leaf with many small leaves coming off each leaf stem*

Middle: *Sparse leaf area and dead branches on dying Ash trees by Reeds pond*

Right: *Young Ash trees already dead by Reeds pond*

Some oldies may remember the demise of the Elm trees in Britain during the 1960's due to Dutch Elm disease. This was due to a similar fungus (same family) in virulent form imported from Japan. We also have the Emerald Ash-borer beetle imported from north-east asia. These are spreading invasively through Britain and are thought likely to kill off any ash trees that survive the die-back fungus. And there are other even more virulent plant fungi waiting importation. There is one currently affecting olive trees in southern Europe: it is subject to intensive control measures as it attacks many other types of plants as well.

It is important that we take heed of these epidemics and try and reduce risks. As we advance further with global heating and the loss of wild-life, our planetary ecosystem is under greater pressure to support an ever growing human population and consequently is becoming increasingly fragile. If we don't take radical action in response to the climate emergency and loss of wild-life then events like ash die-back will become more and more common, and life for our children and grandchildren will become increasingly harsh.

Dramatically increasing tree cover to absorb CO2 emissions is an essential component of any action plan, so we need to act accordingly and replace the lost Ash trees as a priority.

Jim Williams

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The barbecue band...



The barbecue dancing...



Work Party on road to success

The Tuesday work has been hard at it clearing the weeds from the base and top of our boundary wall with Hayle Mill Road .



Work in progress



And after

**The work party meets every Tuesday at the Conservation Cabin in Cave Hill at 10am. If you would like to help, just turn up or phone Bryn Cornwell for more details on 01622 746514.*



Swing time

Tickets for our next music night with **Five In The Bar** are already on sale. The show will be at Boughton Monchelsea Village Hall on Saturday, October 19. Admission is £15 to include a fish and chip supper. Five In The Bar play music by the likes of Frank Sinatra, Michael Buble and Bobby Darin. Their leader singer, Dorian Gray (above), was a Sixties star in his own right, appearing on Top Of The Pops with his chart-topper Got You On My Mind. Order tickets for the 7.30pm show from Alan on 01622 751926 or email a128smith@btinternet.com

Hayle Park Nature Reserve Trust

The Hayle Park Nature Reserve Trust held its annual meeting on Sunday, August 11. In a novel twist, the meeting was held outdoors in the reserve itself.

The Trust comprises nine trustees, who each sit for a four-year term, with three nominees from each of Maidstone Borough Council, Tovil Parish Council and ourselves.

One representative from each body changes each year for three of the four years, with the fourth year being blank. (The trust deed was set up in such a manner to fit in with the four-yearly elections for the borough council, so that effectively the three currently elected ward councillors can always be the borough's nominees.)

It so happens that this year was the blank year, so there was no changes in the trustees. Our Society's representatives are Bryn Cornwell, Jane Holman and Dennis Usmar.

The trustees select their own officers each year at the AGM, and Cllr Paul Wilby was re-elected as chairman, with David Hill, representing Tovil Parish Council, as vice-chairman.

Cllr Wilby reported on the year's activities and the trust's hopes for the future. These include the expectation that the Trust will soon acquire the wood at Mount Ararat to add to the existing reserve, and additionally is expecting shortly to acquire a second reserve at the top of Farleigh Hill, on a long-lease from Maidstone council.

There were a number of questions from members of the public, mostly requesting more public activities in the park, in particular a repeat of the Dawn Chorus birdsong event; a fungus walk and arboretum walk were also requested.

Arbor The Tree



Following on directly from Hayle Park Nature Reserve's AGM, the trust organised a free children's show for the public.

The show was presented by the Smoking Apples Theatre Company through the Applause Touring Theatre Scheme and told the story of Arbor and the woodland animals and their quest to escape the wicked developers.

Both the children and the adults in the audience loved it and of course the conservation message was spot on as far as the objectives of the Trust and VCS were concerned.

At the end of the show, the children had the chance to meet Arbor, a 17ft-tall talking, walking puppet operated by the crew in the manner of the Warhorse models from London's West End, and they were also given their own mini-tree to take home and look after.

The show was attended by around 140 people. Donations from a barbecue operated by VCS committee member Brian Shingleton brought in £211 for the Trust, and Tovil Parish Council has also kindly agreed to pay half the cost of the performance.

Chailey sneaks in changes

Chailey Homes, the would-be developer of the plot of land off the Postley Road extension that includes the existing Lodge house, has submitted an "approval of reserved matters" application to Maidstone Borough Council.

Back in July 2017, the developer was granted outline permission for 62 homes subject to issues of appearance, landscaping and scale being approved at a later date. Your Society is objecting to the latest application because we feel it is not simply finalising the details of the earlier approved permission, but rather has made significant changes: The location of several of the housing plots has been altered, the children's play area has been moved to a different place and the applicant is now introducing a SUDS drainage system, which was nowhere mentioned in the original application.

Residents in Richmond Way will have this new development immediately behind their homes and so may want to make their own submissions to the council. Similarly residents on the Hayle Park estate and at The Manor at Hayle Place are also likely to be affected and should consider making their own representations.

The current planning application reference number is 19/503702. (For comparison, the original was 13/2038).