

### Seven years of Heath Hands



Volunteer baker Liz Jack oversees the cutting of the Heath Hands seventh birthday cake. From the Brew House at Kenwood Marian Stravsky does the honours.



Volunteer Anne Collins and Kenwood Senior Gardener Dave Gibbons enjoy the birthday party following the annual general meeting.



Volunteer Tony Grimes and Kenwood Head Gardener Paul Jackson trade notes at the annual general meeting.

### Christmas party brings us together



Pictures by Michael Shaw

Some 60 members and their guests supported the annual Christmas party, hosted this year by Guy and Annabel Wilson. Enjoying themselves here are, standing from left, Robin Neate, his wife Mercedes Neate Saenz, Gordon Beck and Bob and Liz Jack. Seated, from left, are Sheila MacLeod, Jenny Macdonald-Hay, Angela Humphery, Cynthia Frizzell and Leonor Troni. The party raised more than £1,000, helped by a silent auction which featured outstanding gifts from La Gaffe restaurant, Tribe rugs and from florist Henry and Williams, all based in Hampstead Heath Street.

### Conker champ supporters



Special events bring out Heath Hands to help, even when there's not a bramble in sight. At the autumn Conker Championship held at Parliament Hill are from left: Deborah Newbold, Eileen Willmott, Claude Rennert and Marianne Gelister.



Community Education Officer Sam Crosby, centre, gets to grips with the conker championships with help of Heath Hands, notably Robert Deane, left, and Dhanjisha Variava.



# Hands update

## New projects brighten up New Year

There are plenty of new projects in addition to our normal work programme, to keep volunteers busy in 2007. Coming up early in the year, for example is a project for veteran tree lovers, especially those who have already worked on the survey which helped the City of London to complete a computerised database of the Heath's veteran trees. Now there is the opportunity to tag all those trees to keep tabs on the management of these special features of the Heath. The yellow availability forms

(included with this issue of *Hands Update* for members only) give details of how to indicate your interest in the project.

Also new in 2007 are a series of improvements to the educational facilities, thanks to a £50,000 joint grant to the Heath and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The grant is expected to cover building a permanent pond in the wildlife garden next to the Education Centre, improvements to paths

to make them accessible by wheelchair users, and creating a raised bench and storage area in the Secret Garden to help children study their pond animals. Heath Hands will be invited to help with these projects, so indicate your interest on your yellow form.

Not least, 2007 will usher in the first training programmes for members who would like to work on administration and database maintenance, fund raising, publicity, press relations, newsletter and website production.



Pictures by Michael Shaw

Annabel at the agm

## Sheila sheds light on volunteer leavers

Checking the statistics on membership at every one of their six meetings each year, Heath Hands trustees noted that no one ever checks up on why there are lapsed members. More important, they wanted to know whether we should be paying postage to send material to inactive members. It took long-time member Sheila MacLeod to turn the query into a major project.

Clocking up some 43 hours (more than two years' worth of commitment) of work on the project, Sheila set about

making personal contact with all those from whom we had not heard for a year or more. She had the daunting task of contacting 99 'lapsed' members, only to discover that while some had indeed moved far away or were simply not interested any more, many wanted to stay in touch either because they intend to become active again or because they want to show their support for the organisation.

Acting on the survey results, trustees have agreed three different arrangements for

'leavers' who have varying levels of commitment to Heath Hands. These are:

- **Email only contact: free**
- **Receive three mailings a year to include *Hands Update*: £10pa**
- **Membership of Friends of Heath Hands who will now receive all mailings as well as invitations for visits to other open spaces and tickets to social events: the annual general meeting, the Christmas party and the annual summer tea party at Kenwood: £25pa.**

## Members thank Annabel Wilson

There was sheer delight at the annual general meeting in October when members showed their appreciation to Annabel Wilson for her six plus years of work first as secretary and then as treasurer.

Chair Bobby de Joia pointed out that not only does Annabel work regularly on the Heath, she spent many long hours developing our new accounting systems and hosted four of the seven Christmas parties in her own home. In addition, she supported Heath Hands financially in the early days. She received a special 'green' floral arrangement and a scrapbook of photos showing her hard at work on the Heath.

- The agm confirmed as elected the unopposed nominations for posts on the Executive Committee. They are Bobby de Joia, chair; Renate Shaw, vice-chair; Robin Moore, secretary, and Moira Young, treasurer. Elected volunteer representatives on the committee are Michael Shaw and Liz Jellinek.

## Wanted: your view of Heath management

Heath Hands members will have the opportunity to add their views on how Hampstead Heath should be managed for future generations at a meeting set for Tuesday 27 February at 6.30pm at Pax Lodge in Lyndhurst Road.

Members who plan to attend the meeting may wish to see the summary of the first volume of the draft management document. It is available on request from Heath Hands headquarters in West Lodge Kenwood, located in Hampstead Lane at the entrance



These City representatives, who discussed the proposed Heath Management Plan at the agm, will return to discuss it on February 27 at Pax Lodge. They are Alderman Bob Hall, chairman of the Hampstead Heath Management Committee; Simon Lee, superintendent of Hampstead Heath, and Jennifer Adams, director of Open Spaces.

to the Kenwood car park. The first volume of the long-range plan for Hampstead Heath management deals with strategy. Pax Lodge of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is just off Haverstock Hill, within easy walking distance of the Belsize Park underground station. Parking is available in the Pax Lodge forecourt.

**see page 4  
for more  
agm pictures**

# Burnham Beeches: a lesson in longevity



Ancient trees are a real draw for volunteers, so it was with much enthusiasm that 20 stalwarts turned out one Saturday in October to visit another of the City of London's open spaces. Volunteer **Liz Jellinek** reports. She shared the picture-taking with **Michael Shaw**.

Imagine a countryside completely barren as the result of human ignorance and the miracle of Burnham Beeches comes into sharp relief. This 280 hectare site is a wonderful lesson in how skilled management, based on a sound understanding of ecology, can save a landscape for future generations to enjoy.

The City of London saved Burnham in 1879 when it was threatened with a massive development. Now, like Hampstead Heath, it is a permanent open space for leisure and recreation. Walking and cycling are possible in parts while others are protected by wooden walkways.

Superintendent Andy Barnard and his keepers guided us through a richly varied and complex landscape, making us aware of the cost in terms of effort and finance needed to regenerate, protect and preserve such a place. Burnham hosts some 500,000 visitors a year, many of them with dogs, who come to meander freely through the Beech woodland and to follow well-made paths. Visitors also enjoy the presence of rare-breed cattle and other livestock. We came upon a splendid Black Berkshire sow. The animals are brought in to graze land to stop scrub taking over.

Interspersed among newer woodland are the trees that have

the most rarity and interest. There were once about 3,000 veteran trees, with more than 500 remaining by 1995. Now there are fewer than 450. One is some 700 years old and most (the pollards) are more than 450 years old.

Historically, the trees were seen as a crop and coppiced for their wood. Cutting them at head height when about 25 years old, protected them from browsing animals and tripled their lives. After the enclosures in the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the trees were no longer worked. There are now pollards with branches the equivalent of 200-year-old trees! These have taken on extraordinary shapes, and are packed with rare invertebrates that only live on ancient wood.

The work at Burnham has been rewarded and it is designated a National Nature Reserve and recognised by Europe as a Special Area of Conservation. This is not only for creating new pollards, on young trees (100 planted every year and cut every 10 years) but for discovering techniques to renew ancient ones (50 a year). Work is also being done with local land owners so that wildlife can depend on renewal from the size of landscape it needs. Burnham's management plan has been designed for the next 500 years.



**Top:** Keeper Jeremy Young gives the history of one of the more unusual ancient trees at Burnham Beeches. Other amazing specimens are shown above and at the bottom of this page.

**Middle:** Out came all the cameras when this Black Berkshire sow ambled through the wood.

**Below:** Rangers who welcomed Heath Hands to Burnham Beeches are, from left, Chris Morris, Nick Haugh, Jeremy Young and Ed Gilbert.



# They're the ones who prove the rule

Meet two volunteers who are proof that age has little to do with a love of the Heath. **Bobby de Joia** talks to **Gordon Beck** and **Emma Hollender**.

WHAT, PRAY TELL, can a bubbly, outgoing teenager have in common with a retired industrial chemist? A love of Hampstead Heath, of course, and a genuine desire to give something back to their favourite open space.

So it is with 17-year-old Channing School sixth former Emma Hollender of West Hampstead who works on the Heath with Heath Hands on two Saturday mornings a month, and Gordon Beck of Mill Hill. Gordon, just turned 87, normally works with Heath Hands on Thursdays at Kenwood.

Our goal at Heath Hands has been to make volunteering on Hampstead Heath an enjoyable, accessible experience for anyone over the age of 16. Early in our seven-year-history, the weekday activity appealed primarily to the newly retired and the unemployed. Sometimes 30 somethings in work turned up on Saturday mornings and that was that.

But we have grown in all the right directions and nowadays the membership ranges across the board from 17 to 87, with something for everyone to enjoy. The cross-generation working relationships and friendships give Heath Hands a dynamic difference.

Gordon Beck is one of those octogenarians who thoroughly enjoyed his retirement which began 25 years ago. "I have interests in museums, art, history and archaeology," he explains, "so I'm never bored. I can always find something to interest me." Nevertheless, when his wife died last year, time weighed heavily and he needed a new interest.

Management consultant son Francis went on line and gave his dad a shortlist of things to try. Heath Hands topped the list.

His only reservation was that there would be no other aging granddads. Of course, he was



Emma Hollender and Gordon Beck at a Saturday morning work session on East Heath.

wrong and was pleased to discover that he was. Gordon was born and grew up in West Hampstead, so he has known the Heath all his life. He served in the army in World War II and spent his entire career as an industrial chemist with ICI. His field was industrial water treatment for steam plants and cooling systems.

Now his favourite task on the

Heath is handling the wheelbarrow. "Don't laugh—I just love it," he says trying to conceal his own chuckle.

Friendly and outgoing Emma Hollender discovered Heath Hands as a way of completing the community service part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme which she is just a small project away from finishing.

How did she find out about Heath Hands? "I was on my way home from school," she explains and found myself walking down Hampstead Lane behind two boys about my own age. They looked wonderful in their bright green sweatshirts and I thought about how pleasant it would be to work outdoors on the Heath. Also, I really wanted one of those shirts..."

It was just a bit of a coincidence, then, that Emma spotted the boys. It was a Thursday afternoon and the boys were two of the Westminster School pupils who also volunteer on Thursday afternoons, as part of the school's programme to get their boys out into the community. She was only 16 at the time, and just past the minimum age required for Heath Hands membership.

"This has given me an opportunity to meet lots of nice people of all ages," she says. "I love being outdoors and I love the idea that I am preventing brambles from taking over the world. My favourite place to work is along the Boundary Path. Oh yes, and I really love the chocolate biscuits during the break."

Currently studying for A levels in maths, chemistry, geography and physics, Emma is looking forward to a career in pharmaceuticals. She plans to take a degree in natural sciences at university. Adding up her time spent on the Duke of Edinburgh Award, school work, swimming in the Lido ("only in warm weather") tennis, squash, violin and piano lessons, along with her insistence on walking at least part of the way to and from West End Lane to school in Highgate, one wonders just how she squeezes in Heath Hands:

"It's just a couple of hours on a Saturday morning," she says, with a wave of the hand. "Anyone can do that!"

Picture by Nigel Sutton