

# Countryside Matters



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## CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

Welcome to the latest edition of Countryside Matters, the newsletter of the Clinton Devon Estates.

Our links with our local community and schools in particular are central to the Estates' ethos, so it was a pleasure to welcome almost 200 children to Dalditch Farm, one of our farms near Budleigh Salterton, this May for the 25th Kingfisher Award Scheme.

The scheme was established in 1992 with the first field day held at one of our farms in East Devon. Since then we have been proud to support the initiative, which gives children the opportunity to experience for themselves the vital link between wildlife, conservation and farming. Over the past 25 years, around 12,000 children have benefited from the scheme which culminates with a picnic and presentation event which this year was held at Bickton Arena.

Also inside is an update on the vitally important Lower River Otter Restoration Project which has taken a significant step forward after a favoured option on how the area should be future-proofed against climate change emerged.

You can also find out more about a dog walking code which was launched this spring to ensure dogs and their owners can enjoy the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths alongside the wildlife that lives there.

We hope you enjoy reading about our work, please feel free to share our news.



# Down on the farm, inspiring the next generation



A quarter-of-a-century ago a conversation over Sunday lunch between a group of friends, including the late poet laureate Ted Hughes, led to the foundation of an enduring project which has given around 12,000 Westcountry schoolchildren the opportunity to learn first-hand about the vital relationship between the countryside, wildlife and farming.

This summer marks the 25th anniversary of the Kingfisher Award Scheme which was founded by Ted Hughes and his wife Carol, Chairman at the time of the Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) John Martin, and Bill Tucker of Heavitree Brewery. The project has had a profound impact on inspiring the Westcountry's next generation about the important role birds, bees, worms, flowers, soil and hedgerows play in producing their food. It now operates in Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and Wiltshire.

The inaugural event in 1992 took place at Clinton Devon Estates' Otter Farm near Otterton and this year the scheme returned to its East Devon roots with six schools taking part in three field days at the Estates' Dalditch Farm near Budleigh Salterton, supported by Estate staff.

This year, East Devon's theme was 'From the Ground Up...' which involved approximately 200 children exploring the importance of soil to farmers, and learning about how cows "turn fields of grass into milk", through a series of three workshops at the dairy farm on the edge of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths. Soil Sifters explored the importance of good quality, well conserved soil to dairy farmers; Milk Makers investigated the importance of grass for cows and milk production; and Creature Seekers



**Up close and personal: children from Littleham CofE Primary School learn about the importance of hedgerows, insects, soil and grass to dairy farmers**







considered the important role of other mammals, such as harvest mice, in the wider farming landscape.

The enduring ethos of the scheme is that children learn by discovering for themselves, through hands-on, sensory experiences which at Dalditch Farm involved them catching insects in the hedgerows and mixing soil.

Following their field visit, schools have a month to produce student-led follow-up work on any aspect of the theme using a medium and creative outlet of their choice, for example art, songs, poems, games or food.

Everyone was invited back to a presentation at Bicton Arena on July 3rd, where the work was judged and the winning school, Otterton Primary, awarded with a carved wooden kingfisher trophy.

Dalditch Farm was among a number of farms across Devon, Cornwall and Somerset to host this year's annual Kingfisher Award field day, with a second Devon event held at Quicke's Farm, Newton St Cyres, famous for its award-winning cheese, where owner Mary Quicke has run annual field days on her farm for many years.

Chairman of the Kingfisher Award Scheme Caroline Fowle, said: "It's a great testament to the founders that in the past 25 years we've given many thousands of children the opportunity to learn first-hand about the symbiotic relationship between food, farming and wildlife, giving children the opportunity to go onto farms and explore the natural world and to touch, feel and see the relationship between the countryside, farming and conservation.

"The scheme plays a crucial role in educating the next generation about the origins of their food, a role that is increasingly important as pre-packaged and convenience foods take over our shelves."

The importance of the scheme has been emphasised by several recent surveys revealing a lot of confusion among children regarding the origins of their food. A recent study by the British Nutrition Foundation revealed that there is mass confusion among primary school children; almost a third surveyed thought cheese comes from plants and that pasta and bread come from meat.

Clinton Devon Estates Countryside Learning Officer Kate Ponting, who helped organise the event at Dalditch Farm, said: "You notice a change in the children shortly after they arrive. They start asking a







**The winning team - from Otterton CofE Primary School**

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few questions and then they just keep coming; that's the magic moment, when they're surprised at what they're learning.

"What's really nice about the Kingfisher Award Scheme is that after their farm visit, the children are able to go on and create their projects based on what they are most inspired by."

The Kingfisher Award Scheme is central to the delivery of FWAG South West's charitable aims to educate children and the wider public about the role that farmers provide in supporting ecosystems.

Since the first Devon scheme, others were set up in Cornwall and Somerset in 2008 and Wiltshire in 2012 and annually involve around 800 children across all four counties.

Participation is completely free of charge to schools and transport to and from the farms is provided.

The scheme is reliant on private sponsors and charitable trusts and Clinton Devon Estates has been pleased to provide support in the form of sponsorship and volunteer help since the beginning.

Littleham Primary School Head of Learning Sarah Padbury, said: "The project work in the classroom is very much led by the children; we embrace their starting point, we want to follow their lead.

"It's brought to life their learning."



**Kingfisher Award Scheme founders Bill Tucker, Carol Hughes, John Martin and Caroline Fowle**



# Wildlife habitats proposed at former quarry site

Google Earth image



Clinton Devon Estates has revealed plans to create more than five acres of heathland at Woodbury Common on the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths to compensate for a two-acre development proposal on the site of the former Blackhill Quarry processing plant.

The new proposed conservation area near the village of Woodbury is beside the quarry and is currently used as a commercial coniferous woodland which has relatively low wildlife value. Over a number of years it will be carefully established as natural heathland.

A bat hibernaculum - a purpose-built shelter for bats - would also be created as part of a significant ecological mitigation package presented to East Devon District Council detailing the measures being taken to compensate for a proposed expansion of existing business premises on a parcel of land at the former Blackhill Quarry near Woodbury. In addition to environmental and ecological enhancements for bats, the landowner also wants to create a rich habitat for a range of protected species including great crested newts and dormice.

A planning application was submitted at the end of last year to turn the existing two-acre concrete standing section, formerly used as the quarry's processing plant, into specialist facilities to allow adjacent Blackhill Engineering, which has been based at the site for 30 years, to expand.

The site represents only two per cent of the entire 64-hectare former quarry which is in a long-term restoration project.

Although under the new proposals the development wouldn't result in the concrete hard standing being turned into two-acres of heathland as envisaged in the original restoration plan, the successful delivery of this plan would likely have been compromised by the increased nutrient levels and alkaline nature of this site; heathland requires acidic and nutrient poor soils to thrive.

The new scheme means a much greater area of heathland would be created.

A series of reports have concluded that the proposed reconfiguration of the site will have no substantial environmental impact on the existing area of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths. However, Clinton Devon Estates has proposed extensive mitigation proposals so the eventual redevelopment enriches its environment and results in a significant net gain to local biodiversity.

Dr Sam Bridgewater, Head of Biodiversity and Conservation, at Clinton Devon Estates, said: "We are proposing a significant ecological mitigation package designed to ensure that the conservation value of the site is significantly greater than it would have been created under the original restoration scheme."



# Health on the heath



A University of Exeter research project exploring the links between environment and health and wellbeing has revealed that the economic value of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths in relation to human health is worth at least £450,000 a year.

The Pebblebed Heaths are recognised as one of the most important conservation sites in Europe, covering around 1,100 hectares across Woodbury Common and its adjacent commons.

Dr Carolyn Petersen, postgraduate research associate for the university's politics department launched the project, 'Understanding and quantifying the health and wellbeing value of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths' in partnership with Clinton Devon Estates, which own the core area of heathland, in November. The short research project is one of only 10 nationally to receive funding by the Natural Environment Research Council as part of its Valuing Nature programme, with the objective of quantifying the site's economic health and wellbeing value.

In order to make the calculation, Dr Petersen used the

World Health Organisation's Health Economic Assessment Tool which was designed to facilitate the economic assessment of the health impacts of walking and cycling, combined with data from a visitor survey of the Heaths undertaken by ecological consultancy, Footprint Ecology.

"The economic value of the Pebblebed Heaths relating to health and wellbeing is extensive and is calculated at more than £450,000," Dr Petersen explained. "This is the minimum value that can be attributed to health benefits of people walking on the Heaths, because it is based on figures for only the estimated 17 per cent of visitors who visit the Heaths very frequently and does not include the considerable mental health benefits that visitors get from spending time there, as these are much harder to quantify."

The East Devon Pebblebed Heaths have a huge cultural value, in addition to the 3,000 species it supports. Designated as common land, hundreds of years ago the Heaths once provided local communities with the bare necessities of life including timber, fodder, fuel and food. Today people value the site more for its





**Dr Petersen, centre, describes the health and wellbeing value of the heaths as "extensive"**



**Not only a nice view**

recreational benefits with walking, cycling and riding all important pastimes.

Dr Petersen's research also revealed that visitors, predominantly from the surrounding area including Exeter and Exmouth, are prepared to spend around £1.9m on travel costs to and from the Heaths each year, due to the welfare benefits they derive from the site.

Her work is hugely important in enhancing the understanding of the full cultural value of the site.

The project also involved a workshop at the recently launched Budleigh Salterton Health and Wellbeing Hub with private, voluntary and public sector organisations which explored the potential for collaborative working and identified how a partnership approach could enhance the health and wellbeing value of the site.

Representatives from 17 organisations took part, including from the Devon Countryside Access Forum, the RSPB, the Devon Wildlife Trust, Active Devon, the Otter Valley Association, LED Walking for Health, town, district and county councils and GPs' surgeries.

Strategies that were identified included improving the coordination of existing activities; expanded consultation of key stakeholders, for example disability groups; increased targeting of activities, such as group walks to include more disadvantaged groups, older people and/or people with specific health needs; securing funding sources to support health and wellbeing outcomes, and influencing policy.

Dr Petersen added: "The research has enabled us to demonstrate that there are quantifiable benefits to people exercising on the Heaths and reconfirmed how essential exercise in the outdoors is to people's overall health.

"Ultimately, we want society and policy makers to appreciate that the Pebblebed Heaths, along with other biodiverse natural environments, are an amazing public resource and should be valued and protected, not just for their wildlife, but for the full range of benefits they provide for local communities. This is particularly important given the uncertainties in future funding for the environmental sector as a result of the UK's decision to leave the European Union."



# Public and experts agree on future of river restoration

A major scheme to preserve and improve the River Otter estuary at Budleigh Salterton is being developed further following the selection of the preferred option for its future management.

Following a public consultation exercise last year, the restoration of the floodplain across the areas known as the Big and Little Marshes has emerged as the favoured option for the team looking at the future of the Lower Otter estuary.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project is working with local people and organisations to see how the estuary and downstream part of the River Otter can be managed sustainably in the face of climate change and failing sea defences.

The project, led by Clinton Devon Estates, which owns the land, and the Environment Agency, considered four options which were presented to the public at an exhibition in Budleigh Salterton.

They were:

1. Full-scale restoration which would involve digging new river channels, removing the old tip and embankments and raising South Farm Road on a bridge.
2. Assisted natural recovery which would be similar to Option 1, but without creating new channels, allowing the river to adapt naturally.
3. Big and Little Marsh floodplain restoration, which is similar to Option 2, but would keep most of the existing embankments in place. Breaches would be created in the Little Bank, the Big Bank and the River Otter Embankment, allowing water to flow through with new footbridges ensuring continuity of existing access.
4. Southern Big Marsh floodplain restoration, which would see no work to the north of South Farm Road and one-way valves preventing the flow of salty water under the road.

Feedback following the exhibition showed that Option 3 was most favoured among the public and was supported by 62 per cent of those who took part. Following further extensive surveys in the area, the project team has decided that Option 3 is the best one to take forward.

Dr Sam Bridgewater, the Estates' Head of Wildlife and Conservation, explained: "Option 1 was the most expensive and it was felt that the cost, estimated at £20 million or more, was too high when other suitable alternatives were available.

"Option 2 has been discounted because of uncertainties over how the river would respond to being left to adapt naturally, and Option 4 did not achieve the major aims of the project, which include delivering sustainable management of the estuary and maximising the extent of environmental benefit

through habitat creation.

"Our contractors have done extensive computer modelling of the effects of Option 3 and the predictions are very positive: water levels and flood risk would be no higher than they are now, and new intertidal and freshwater habitats would be created."

The landscape of the estuary today is the result of centuries of human activity. But the 200-year-old sea defences are now starting to fail and are becoming increasingly hard to maintain.

In addition, the historic modifications mean the lower River Otter does not flow in a natural way, which, together with poor drainage, results in flooding particularly around Budleigh Salterton's South Farm Road and cricket club.

The Project has been investigating the estuary and considering the best way to address these issues, hoping to create a more sustainable way of managing the estuary, an important site for wildlife and the public.

Mr Bridgewater continued: "Option 3, which would cost between £8 million and £9 million, allows us to secure and improve access and amenities, including Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club and the South West Coast Path, protect the old municipal tip which lies in the floodplain from erosion, while also providing new benefits for both nature and the public, which are all key aims of the project.

"We want to restore the estuary to something like its condition just over 200 years ago before embankments were built to claim new land for agriculture. These defences are now failing and we want to act before a catastrophic, uncontrolled breach occurs."

A Stakeholder Group meeting was held in East Budleigh this spring with the group keeping a wide range of local people and groups up-to-date with the progress of the project.

Talks are in process with South West Water regarding the existing ground-water drinking water abstraction and sewerage outlet pipe in the estuary and the project has submitted initial proposals to Devon County Council for an embankment with culverts to raise and protect South Farm Road, although detailed technical drawings have not yet been developed.

Should the project proceed, a new home would need to be found for the Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club, which has been very supportive of the proposals.

A further public exhibition on the project is expected to be held later in the year.

More details on the options and the feedback is available on the project website at [www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk/events](http://www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk/events).







# Brexit? A chance to sow seeds



## *Estates Director John Varley OBE shares his view on the opportunity Brexit presents for British farmers*

British agriculture is at a turning point. Although I voted remain, preferring to sort things out from inside the EU, Brexit presents Devon agriculture with an opportunity.

Decisions which we make as a result of Brexit will affect us all for generations to come. Perhaps not since the changes to agricultural support brought in after the First World War have we been at such a crossroads.

In light of Britain leaving the European Union and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Government launched a 10 week consultation into the future of farm support.

Currently, money is distributed under the CAP based on the amount of land farmed. The Government is proposing instead a new system which would see farmers paid "public money for public goods", principally enhancing the environment and investing in sustainable food production, as well as, perhaps, investment in technology and skills to

improve productivity. The potential impacts of the proposed changes on farming operations, large and small, will be significant.

However, whilst many observers are viewing the shift of payments from how much land you occupy and farm, to payments for delivering public goods, as bad news for farming, I take a different view. The potential changes offer an opportunity for land managers and farmers to demonstrate clearly to society what they are delivering for public money.

Current farming systems can pollute, damage natural environments and impact negatively on wildlife. We need to show, as we have done time and again, that we can raise our game and increase productivity, reduce costs of production, be market leading and at the same time make significant improvements to our "natural capital."

So whilst we face a lot of uncertainty and challenges, we also have a huge opportunity to take advantage of the new technologies and science available to us to raise our performance and be recognised as leading and facilitating work to deliver enhanced benefits to the natural



# ds of change...



environment and wildlife. We need to do this in partnership with others and we need to do it across whole landscapes and catchments.

Clinton Devon Estates own and manage more than 17,000 acres of farmland in East and North Devon, and our holdings comprise 30 tenanted farms, two share farms and two in-hand farms.

But this fresh approach should not just be for our farming operations - it cuts across everything we do; our housing and commercial developments, forestry, equestrian and our rented sector.

And while we look to the future we must not forget that we have a rich history of innovation and thought leadership - clearly exemplified by Lord Clinton's great grandfather, the 21st Baron Clinton, in a speech in the House of Lords in May 1922:

"To lift it from its slough, agriculture calls for a new and bold policy of adventure... It needs from successive Governments a permanent and, above all things, a practical policy. It needs sympathy and aid rather than subsidies and

doles. In brief, British agriculture calls for a coherent vision, for active assistance and scientific research, so as to place new knowledge at the farmer's disposal in a way that he can understand."

As a 21st century rural estate and property business with roots going back to the year 1550, we realise that businesses which society does not want to exist will not exist, and that innovation and transformation must be constant.

We are responding to the Government's consultation and also working up plans for our in-hand farming operations to be best positioned to maximise the opportunity presented.

We will also be talking to our share and tenant farmers and wider stakeholders and looking at how we can work with them make them more resilient and fit for purpose in the post-Brexit farming models.

The consultation is now closed and the government is analysing public feedback. For more information visit: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-for-food-farming-and-the-environment](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-for-food-farming-and-the-environment)



# Down in Devon, there's a little piece of heaven and the angels call it Beer\*

*Clinton Devon Estates' connection with the idyllic fishing village of Beer is centuries-old, so it was a pleasure to learn that Beer's charm has attracted national recognition as a finalist in Channel 4's Village of the Year, largely down to the enthusiasm and passion of the community for keeping its traditions, and its spirit, alive.*

**by Fran McElhone**

The historic fishing village of Beer snuggles in the crease of a deep verdant valley which leads down to a crescent moon of pebbles flanked by high white limestone cliffs.

A brook winds past independent shops, galleries and eateries in the direction of the beach where colourful fishing boats come and go, as they have done for an age, with people coming from far and wide to enjoy locally caught crab sandwiches or fish and chips and loll back in stripy deck chairs.

But aesthetic charm doesn't equate soul; that comes from the personalities that dwell somewhere, those who are intent on keeping treasured idiosyncrasies and traditions alive for future generations. And Beer has soul. Indeed, if it wasn't for Peter, Henry, Ursula, and Norah - and so many countless others - who I'll introduce you to shortly, many of Beer's endearing traits wouldn't exist and many other facets of its heritage would have been consigned to the history books long ago.

And besides, a pretty panorama alone doesn't guarantee you a place in the final of a national TV series: earlier this year, Beer became a runner up in Channel 4's Village of the Year with Penelope Keith, out of 400 that entered and 76 that were featured.



When I went to find out more about the village's recent designation from the locals, I discovered that Beer's pervading sense of community spirit, which is so ardent that some residents describe it as "one happy family", is, along with its good looks, the village's defining trait, and may well have its roots in the village's fishing heritage.

"There has to be a sense of community down here on the beach when you're fishing," fisherman of 70 years, Peter Bartlett, 86, tells me as we walk across the pebbles towards his old boat, the Barbara Jean. "To get your boat in and out of the water you need help from the other fishermen, you all have to help each other."

Born and bred in Beer, Peter embodies the village's fishing heritage, landing his first catch of shellfish on the beach aged 12 from a rowing boat. "There was a time when I came in one day with just a few lobsters and thought, I'm never going to be a millionaire doing this," he continues. "And then, I looked up at the cliffs and realised, I already was a millionaire, because I was born here. And this feeling gets better every day when you see what's going on in the rest of the world."

It wasn't long before I witnessed the widespread heart-felt fondness which won over the programme's judges who described Beer as "a village with a beating heart" where there is a "real warmth and passion for everything the village stands for", with Penelope Keith introducing the village as "intoxicating and stunning" and a "jewel in the crown of the 95-mile Jurassic Coast".

Beer is a worthy recipient of such felicitous tag lines; it is teeming with clubs and events, Beer Regatta, Beer Beer Festival, Beer Pumpkin Show and Beer Festival included. But with or without bunting, the village has inherent charm.

Gilbert and Woozie Taylor have run Woozie's Deli on the High Street for 18 years. "The spirit of the village comes from its sense of community," Woozie tells me, in between customers. As we chat, Ursula Makepeace wanders in. Ursula is the president of Beer Horticultural Society, which has been providing the village's floral decorations since





### Beer fishing boats



**Beer fisherman Peter Bartlett**

1985. The society has won Britain in Bloom awards every year since, most of them golds.

Ursula is also responsible for entering Beer in Village of the Year. "There's so much I love about living here," Ursula, who has lived here for 35 years, tells me. "There's a friendly atmosphere and there is a young vibe about it too, with many people who went to school in Beer, returning and starting families here."

Helping to preserve a treasured aspect of Beer's historical identity is Nigel Harding, commodore of Beer Luggers Club, which had a slot on the programme. The club founded in 1985 to preserve the tradition which can be traced back to smugglers who used to land on the beach in the 1700s. The group boasts an 80-strong membership and meets throughout the extended summer season, and not just for sailing.

Nigel describes the style of sailing, with its dipping the yard technique, as "complex", the same word he uses to describe the club's social diary. "The social bit after the sailing is as important as the sailing, we often end up in the pub," he smiles. "Luggers are unique boats," he adds. "We

just think it's our responsibility to keep them all going as long as we can."

Given that it's so bijou, Beer's myriad attributes are all the more extraordinary. For a settlement of its size, Beer had one of the largest cohorts of men to fight in the First World War; it is home to Britain's first, and oldest, 1920s Wurlitzer organ; and the village's rich lace making heritage dates back to the 1600s (a lot of Honiton Lace was in fact made in Beer), kept alive today by modern day Beer Lace Makers.

A few members of Beer Village Heritage Trust, which is integral to spreading the word about Beer's past, present and future, are waiting for me when I arrive at the heritage centre on the beach. The group's popular beach clean event also featured on Village of the Year.

"There is a physical evidence of the village 5,000 years ago," Henry Jagers says referring to the discovery of Neolithic flint tools. "And Beer Quarry Caves, which date back to the Roman times, would have given employment to hundreds of people," he adds. Beer stone has been used to build 24 English cathedrals including Exeter Cathedral's elaborately carved West Front. These days, the caves are an internationally recognised bat habitat for greater and lesser horseshoe bats as well as being a popular visitor attraction.

"Some of the surnames that are in the Domesday Book still prevail in the village today," adds Eric Cozens, a trustee and secretary, who reminds me that the Jurassic Coast only got World Heritage Site status in 2001 so this is a relatively new attribute for Beer.

And then there's the role played by a tiny piece of greenstone - a piece of Beer cliff which is millions of years

**\*Part of Beer Anthem, taken from an old poem which villagers sang on Village of the Year**



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### Beer stalwarts

old - which helped inform scientists involved in an 18-month European Space Agency exobiology expedition in 2008, about the survival in space of microbes found in the rock. "The club is not just here to educate and excite people about the past, but the future too," explains Henry's wife Norah. "Beer is not a village that dies in the winter," she adds. "There's something going on virtually every day of the year."

I learn that one factor influencing change in Beer in recent years is the increase in second home and holiday let ownership - an informal review conducted this spring by Beer Parish Council found that around 29 per cent of homes surveyed are either second homes or holiday lets. In 2013,

the council supported the formation of the Beer Community Land Trust to provide affordable housing in the village. Keen to support the community, Clinton Devon Estates, whose ties with the village date back 300 years, sold the Trust a site for seven houses which were built and occupied within 18-months.

So, what the judges said is true; a genuine fondness for the village, its diverse and wonderful history and sprinkling of quirks, is omnipresent and keeping Beer's ancient spirit alive. And when I found myself bemoaning the effect of the morning drizzle on my photos, Norah is quick to remind me that Beer is lovely, whatever the weather. She's quite right.

## FactFile

- **Clinton Devon Estates owns and lets around 50 residential properties in and around the village including the cliff-top allotments and the characterful row of flint-faced fishermen's cottages on Common Lane, whose architectural charm is thought to have set the tone for subsequent building in the village.**
- **Much of the Estates' residential housing portfolio had the original purpose of housing farm workers who worked on the Estates' farms as well as quarry workers who worked at Beer quarry, also owned by the Estate.**
- **Some of the village's key buildings represent the legacy of Clinton Devon Estates' forefathers with St Michael's Church built by Mark Rolle, in the late 1800s, at the site of a 16<sup>th</sup> century chapel. Mark Rolle also funded the building of the village's schoolrooms and a row of 10 alms houses.**
- **Clinton Devon Estates is as committed to preserving the built and natural environment and contributing to the community as its predecessor Mark Rolle was, and in recent years has worked with the Beer Community Land Trust to provide land for affordable housing.**



# Ancient iron age hill fort restored

An extensive project to restore the 2,500-year-old Iron Age hill fort of Woodbury Castle has come to an end after eight months.

Characterised by its deep earthwork ramparts enclosing a level interior of approximately two hectares studded with deciduous trees, the hill fort was originally home to a tribe of people called the Dumnonii - the deep valley dwellers - who spoke a language similar to modern-day Cornish and Breton. They called their home Dewnan, from where we get the word Devon. Nowadays people come from far and wide to enjoy this wonderful scheduled ancient monument located at the highest point of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths on Woodbury Common.

It is a nationally important archaeological site and prominent landmark under the custodianship of Clinton Devon Estates who have entrusted the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust with its long-term care. The site was put on Historic England's at Risk Register several years ago when it became apparent that the area was suffering, predominantly from erosion due to a high volume of visitors as well as damage from tree roots and scrub growth.

In 2016, the Trust secured funding from Natural England's Countryside Stewardship scheme to undertake the extensive restoration work that will result in its eventual removal from the at Risk Register. Between September and March contractors worked tirelessly to restore the site with work involving stabilising the impressive ramparts and improving access.

Kim Strawbridge, Site Manager for the Pebblebed Heaths, explained: "There were a number of elements to the



**Bird's eye view of the hill fort site**

project including improving access to and across the site which involved installing two new sets of steps.

"The main part of the project was repairing the earthen ramparts. This was predominantly carried out by the contractors and involved significant amounts of earth being moved onto the site from a local quarry with matching geology, to shore up the banks.

"The removal of several trees across the site was also necessary in order to let more light in so grass and ground flora can flourish and in turn protect the earth works for years to come."

The collaborative project benefited from additional funds granted by Historic England. Devon County Council's Historic Environment Team and the Devon Archaeological Society were also involved with the design work.

The Conservation Trust's regular volunteers as well as the local community and numerous school groups provided valuable support, filling thousands of sandbags and sowing grass seed.

Ongoing public support is deemed crucial for the hill fort's future preservation and the hope is to establish a volunteer archaeological monitoring scheme giving local people the chance to assist with its ongoing conservation.

Kim added: "It is hugely important that we do all we can so the monument can be removed from the at Risk Register. Our key message is for people to refrain from walking on the repairs so it is kept in good condition for people to enjoy into the future."

Evidence from geophysical surveys and excavations when the road across the heaths was realigned indicate that the original hill fort settlers built a number of round houses and a structure thought to have been a grain store. Improved interpretation will be established at the site to promote understanding of its national importance.

A short film commissioned by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust provides an insight into the hill fort's restoration journey and includes drone footage giving a rare bird's eye view over the site and its magnificent setting with views over Lyme Bay. The film also includes artist impressions by Devon illustrator Jane Read of what the site likely resembled 500 - 300BC based on evidence from earlier investigations.



**Click on the YouTube link above to watch the short film on the Woodbury Castle restoration project**





**Members of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust and Devon Loves Dogs who are supporting the campaign**

## **'Our dogs can share this space with wildlife'**

This spring has seen the introduction of two new schemes designed to help encourage responsible dog walking on the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths.

The introduction of a registration scheme and licensing policy for commercial dog walkers, and the establishment of a new Pebblebed Heaths Dog Walking Code, which both came into effect in March, will help to improve management of the area and the experiences of all who come to enjoy it.

The heaths, which consist of seven commons, including Woodbury, Bicton and East Budleigh, are home to more than 3,000 different species, of which more than 350 are of high conservation significance. The heaths are also a popular venue for dog walkers, both private and commercial.

In a move to help improve the management of the area, the registration scheme requires commercial organisations offering dog walking or training services to obtain a licence from the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, which manages the heaths, for £50 per year, which will be put towards the management of the area.

Meanwhile, dog owners visiting the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths are being asked to follow the new code to ensure they are enjoying the area in a way that respects other visitors, animals and wildlife.

It urges dog walkers to:

- Keep your dog in sight, on the path and think of other visitors, otherwise keep them on a lead.
- Prevent your dog from disturbing wildlife or grazing animals, particularly important during the bird breeding season from March to August.
- Always pick up after your dog wherever you are, take waste home or put it in a bin.
- Walk no more than six dogs and ensure you are confident in managing them at the same time
- Read and follow signs, report any problems

Kim Strawbridge, East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Site Manager, said: "The heaths, which many people will know as Woodbury Common, are an incredibly important site for many rare and threatened species. At the same time, the heaths are a very popular place for people to visit, with or without dogs. It's vitally important that we balance the needs of both people and wildlife on this popular and special site."

Devon Loves Dogs, a free membership scheme for dog owners and walkers, provided expert guidance on the new code. Project Co-ordinator Julie Owen said: "If we dog owners make a few small changes to our daily dog walks, our dogs can share this space with wildlife."



Image courtesy of the Fire Service



## Preventing fire on the Heaths

In April last year, fire swept across 40-hectares of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths taking 160 firefighters eight hours to extinguish. It was the third major fire at the conservation site in seven years.

It takes around a decade for habitats to fully recover after a fire, with spring fires posing the greatest risk to wildlife, particularly ground nesting birds.

The Heaths are owned by Clinton Devon Estates and managed by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust with Trust rangers playing an integral role working with firefighters from Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service during a fire.

This Spring, the Trust and the Fire Service collaborated to host a public event to raise awareness about fire safety on the Heaths which cover over 1,000 hectares on Woodbury Common and its adjacent commons.

The Heathland Fire Prevention event, took place in April near Warren car park and members of the public were given the opportunity to meet local firefighters and see their 4x4 fire engine, which is designed for tough terrain, up close.

Visitors were also able to see equipment used by the Trust's rangers and find out more about their essential



**Members of Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service and the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust**

work cutting fire breaks through the undergrowth to prevent flames spreading.

Experts were on hand to inform members of the public about the important role that they can play in the collaborative effort to prevent wild fires and to advise on what action should be taken, if they see one happening.

There are four key points the Trust wants to highlight:

- The greatest fire risk to the Heaths occurs after prolonged dry periods; particularly in the spring before the vegetation has started growing
- Vigilance is key in preventing the risk of fires starting: people should ensure cigarettes are disposed of responsibly, should not have camp fires or barbecues and take broken glass home
- Fires should be reported immediately by dialling 999
- Swailing is the controlled burning of heathland and should not be confused with wildfires; swailing is used in the ongoing management of the Heaths and is conducted by experienced staff following strict guidelines.





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