

HADRIAN COOK'S REPORT

Dear Friends,

Are you still doing that rain dance? After a wet summer (when our watermeadows are not permitted to be watered in any case!) it all went dry again. I hope that, by the time you read this, things will have changed. Dry autumns do not help, but our low water levels also result from over-abstraction from the chalk in the Wylye Valley that feeds the Nadder. Today, mean flows are some way below that which occurred historically and I represented the Trust at a low flows meeting at Wessex Water in July in order to put our needs in a broader perspective.

However, making a virtue out of necessity means the dry spell enabled much repair work to be undertaken. Once the foot and mouth disease restrictions were lifted, and access once more permitted, we have been able to continue the programme of improvements from last autumn. Thanks go to this year to the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Sparsholt College, our own various Friends work parties and Friends Provident staff from the City (working through Community Service Volunteers), and also to two friends, Tom Gainsford and Peter Martin, whose generosity in time and equipment has served us well. As a result much has been achieved in the traditional time for 'righting up the works'. It is now possible to water the lower parts of Martin's Mead and Lower Seven Acres during much of the winter and, when the river is especially high, irrigate upper Martin's and Sammell's Acre by the Town Path. My dream remains to take the citizens of Salisbury through the 'water meadow year' as they walk along the Town Path.

During July, I was able to access the meadows to the south-east of the area not owned or managed by HWMT in the company of ecological surveyors working on behalf of Natural England. With thanks to the owners, this enabled me to complete my mental image of the whole island area, and confirm what I suspected, that the entire area was carefully laid out for floating - although almost certainly on an earlier, medieval landscape. It is also interesting that there are banks constructed alongside the channels that meet up at the tip of the island; these would have protected the meadows from bank erosion during times of high flow. FA4 shows the remains of 'Sluice 29' that originally conveyed water under the track from Five Acres (in the Trust's area) to Four Acres, the westerly of the two meadows. The other picture FA22 shows an interesting culvert structure in the same meadow.

Thanks should also go to officers of the statutory bodies with whom HWMT deals. Natural England continues to support our work in advice, kind and in financial aid from Defra. These include Dr Kathy Stearne, Robert Lloyd and Martin de Rutuerto. From the Environment Agency, Roger Shrimpton and Adrian Moore are exploring options for improving the watering efficiency of our meadows.

Professional services to the Trust have continued to be supplied through Smith and Williamson (accountants), with personal appreciation to Susan Shaw and Rachel Watters. There is a change of land agent. After a couple of years of sterling service, Will Dobson's career is taking him into the Hotels and Leisure Department of Strutt & Parker (no, he does not appreciate Basil Fawly jokes) and we welcome on board Sholto Moger, as our new land agent with whom I am working closely. I can spot a brave man - Sholto is spearheading an application to Natural England under the new Higher Level Stewardship application that may replace the Environmentally Sensitive Areas agreement

and area payments we have been enjoying to date.

All this may sound rather technical, but it is our hope that the new funding will enhance our plans for improvement to meadow infrastructure. Personally, I am keen to see more small 'bunny hatches' to be re-instated to give us maximum control over flow. Kathy, Tom and myself now have a good idea where these should be located. Another idea we are thinking about is a limited restoration of traditional boundaries (hawthorn hedges and pollard trees). Here thanks are due to John Vickerman and Tim Tatton-Brown who are pondering the needs of birdlife and landscape archaeology, respectively.

This year has been a good year for not only working with schools and colleges, but for going out to talk to local history and local conservation groups, and engaging with local government. Increasingly I am able to host a return visit. I would like to thank the following for invitations to speak and or host a visit. In no particular order, they are Salisbury Local History Group, Mid Thorngate Society, the Atworth History Group, the Laverstock & Ford Downland and Watermeadows Trust, Codford Local History Society, Romsey and District Society, a group visiting from Wiltshire County Council, from Salisbury District Council, Woking Rotary Club and the British Association of Local History, the last arranged by Mike Cowan. Although the prospect of leaving one's nice warm home on a dark, wet and cold winter's evening is seldom agreeable, on each occasion I have been rewarded by the welcome and interest shown by local people, the length and breadth of Wiltshire, and beyond.

If you know of any other organisation who may like me to come and speak, and ideally come to Harnham on a return visit... you know where to find me!



FA4



FA22