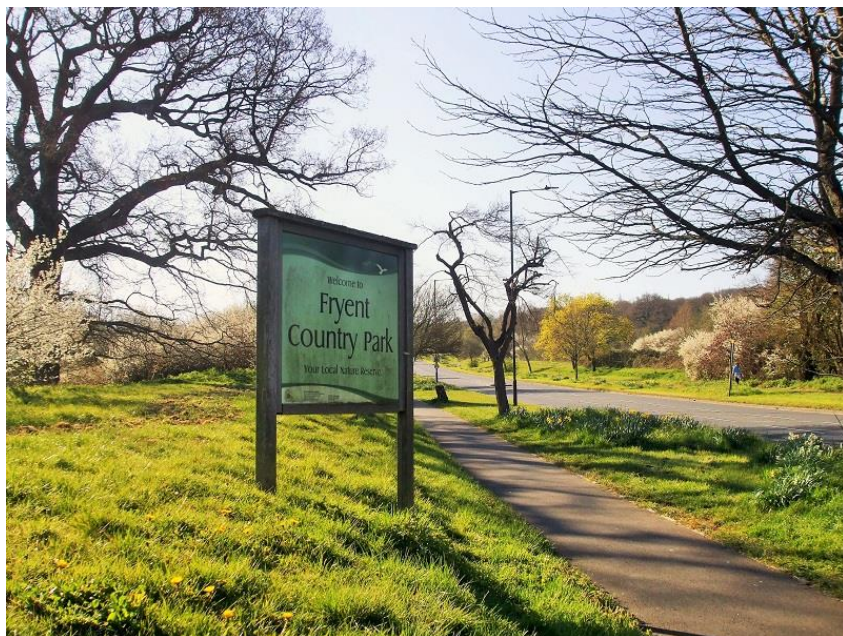


The Fryent Country Park Story – Part 6

Over the past five weeks, we have wandered through 1,000 years of our open space's history, up to 1980. Thank you for your company on this journey, and I hope you will enjoy the final instalment, which brings us up to date. If you missed Part 5, "click" [here](#).



1. A Spring morning on Fryent Way, as you enter the Country Park.

As part of its plans to improve its open spaces (including the Welsh Harp) in the early 1980s, Brent Council appointed two Countryside Rangers. In 1984, Brent combined its Barn Hill and Fryent Way lands, under the name Fryent Country Park. That year volunteers, who began to help look after this open space in 1983, formed the Barn Hill Conservation Group ("BHCG"),

Among the first steps taken was the restoration of the existing ponds, and the creation of some new ones, to encourage frogs and other amphibians. The ancient hedges also needed attention, to bring the fields back to the way they had been on the Hovenden Map of 1597 (see [Part 2](#)). BHCG members collected seeds from existing trees and bushes on the Park in the autumn, growing new ones on an allotment to replant missing hedgerows.



2. BHCG's 1988 illustrated map of the Country Park, with lists of species. (Photo of an old copy I still have!)

Group members also took part in nature surveys, to count the number of different species to be found there. Around 1990, the Park was declared a Local Nature Reserve. When BHCG members produced an illustrated map of Fryent Country Park in the late 1980s, it listed around 550 types of flora and fauna. The map included the old field names, and the rows of green dots marked new areas of woodland that were being planted at Beane Hill, in the south-east corner of the of the Park, growing ash timber for commercial sale.

Efforts to attract more public use of the Park were dealt a blow in August 1986, when Travellers occupied land beside Fryent Way. This was partly in protest against Brent Council's failure to provide a permanent site for them to use. Towards the end of the year there were up to 400 Travellers living there, without a water supply or sanitation, and fly-tippers took advantage of their piles of rubbish to dump more. The Council took court action to evict them, but then allowed 30 families to occupy a "temporary site", with portable toilets, near the Fryent Way car park, until a permanent site was built.



3. Traveller caravans at Fryent Way, December 1986. (Still from an RTE television news report)

The Travellers and their rubbish (tons of which had to be cleared away periodically) were a continuing source of complaint by local residents, even after the permanent "Book Centre" site in Neasden was completed in the summer of 1988. The last of the occupying caravans finally vacated the Country Park after further court action in 1990. Banks of earth were put in place along both sides of Fryent Way, to prevent vehicle access into the fields in future, and although these looked unsightly at first, they are now a grassy feature.



4. Hay meadow wildflowers and grasses, and a Gatekeeper butterfly. (Courtesy of Leslie Williams / BHCG)

An “organic” management plan is followed for the Park’s meadows, which have a rich mix of grasses and wildflowers, and are an important habitat for butterflies. Annual butterfly surveys have been carried out since 1986, to monitor the different types and their relative numbers, and several new species have established themselves. The grass is cut for hay, from July onwards, and where possible the Council markets the right to come and harvest the crop. In the photo below, from 2004, a farmer from Wiltshire was preparing to take the hay home, as winter feed for his organic herd of dairy cows, which provided milk to make Yeo Valley yogurt!



5. Hay baling in a field behind Valley Drive, 2004. (Photo by the late Ian Stokes, courtesy of BHCG)

A popular corner of the Park has always been the old Bush Farm, reached along its drive from the corner of Slough Lane. Two fields were fenced off, as grazing for horses that are still kept in stables there, and BHCG has worked to restore the farm’s former orchard (shown on the 1597 map), which as well as old apple varieties has damsons, mulberries, cob nuts and hops. A wheelchair accessible path has also been created there, to allow disabled visitors to enjoy some of the fields and ponds.



6. Horses in a field at Bush Farm. (Photo by David Howard, posted on the Flickr website)

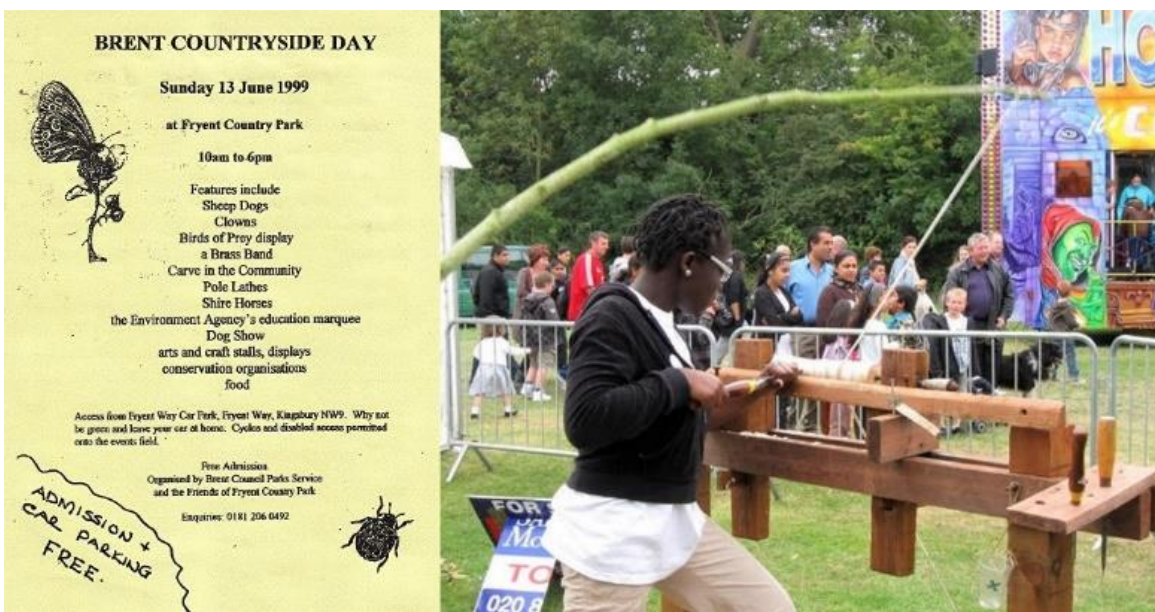
The Park is covered with a network of footpaths, and one of the tasks carried out by BHCG on their year-round Sunday morning projects is to keep these paths clear for walkers to enjoy. The

photos below show volunteers working on a path near Uxendon Hill, which is part of the Capital Ring. This 72-mile long circular route, around the green spaces of outer London, was devised by the London Walking Forum and, in normal times, can be walked in easy stages. The leaflet for Stage 10, "South Kenton to Hendon", describes Fryent Country Park as 'one of the best surviving areas of traditional countryside in Middlesex'.



7. Before and after views from a Sunday morning footpath project. (Photos by John Parker / BHCG)

Another initiative to encourage visitors to enjoy the Park was Brent's Countryside Day. From the 1990s, this annual show brought a range of country activities, information stands and fairground rides to the event field. Watching sheep dogs at work, or displays with birds of prey, brought crowds of many thousands. As well as seeing BHCG members demonstrating wood turning on a pole lathe, youngsters sometimes got the chance to have-a-go themselves. Unfortunately, funding for this event was one of the cuts the Council had to make after 2010.



8. A flyer for the 1999 Countryside Day, and using a pole lathe in 2010. (With thanks to John Parker and Rose Bennett / BHCG)

When London Transport sold their disused sports ground at Old Kenton Lane in the mid-1990s, an extra seven acres were added to the Country Park. This was a condition of the planning permission which had been given to develop part of Masons Field for housing. It was 2011

before Heritage Lottery funding was obtained to [restore the field](#) to a traditional hay meadow, with adjoining hedgerows, a green lane and an orchard. That has now been achieved through co-operation between Brent Council, BHCG and the local community.



9. Volunteers from Alperton Community School planting wildflower bulbs in Masons Field, Nov. 2013. (Photo by David McClements / BHCG)

An ongoing BHCG project has been to restore a local stream, Gaderbrook. This tributary of the Wealdstone Brook takes surface water from the Valley Farm estate, which had become polluted through incorrect connections of foul water drains to the surface water sewer. By clearing rubbish, and opening up the banks, the stream now has a better natural habitat.



10. The Gaderbrook stream, and BHCG volunteers clearing its banks. (Photos by John Parker / BHCG)

Although the Park provides open countryside, it cannot completely escape its closeness to Wembley. The Stadium's controlled parking zone on event days extends to its northern edge. For the 2011 UEFA Champions League final, Fryent Way through the Country Park was even closed, and turned into a coach park for Barcelona fans! Part of the route for the 1948 Olympic marathon was also used in the early years of the North London half-marathon.



11. The view across the fields from Gotfords Hill, with the Stadium arch on the skyline, July 2013.



12. Fryent Way as a coach park, May 2011.



13. Half-marathon runners on Fryent Way, March 2015.

Thirty-six years on from its creation, the 100 hectares of Fryent Country Park provide a beautiful area for the whole community to enjoy (once we return to “normal”), in the heart of built-up Brent. The Local Nature Reserve now has more than 800 recorded species of wildlife, and has

won Green Flag awards, as well as being voted London's Country Park of the Year in 2017. If you live near it, you don't even have to visit to enjoy some of its treasures. Butterflies, and colourful birds such as jays and [woodpeckers](#), may visit your garden!

I hope you have enjoyed the story of our Country Park. When you take your permitted exercise in it (if you live close enough), or when the "lockdown" is over and we can all visit it again, remember that you are walking through a landscape that has lots of history. It also has a future.



14. BHCG volunteers at a Repton woodlands project, on top of Barn Hill. (Photo by John Parker / BHCG)

You can be part of the Fryent Country Park Story, by just going to the fields and woods whenever you can. Or you could get some fresh air and exercise by joining the volunteers of Barn Hill Conservation Group, when they are able to resume their valuable efforts again. Visit their [website](#), or call in to their beautiful base at [Roe Green Walled Garden](#), when that reopens after the Covid-19 emergency.

Thank you for your continued interest in coming with me on this journey. And special thanks to my friends at BHCG and Brent Archives, for their help with pictures for these articles, and to Martin for allowing me to share them with you.

**Philip Grant,
Wembley History Society, April 2020.**