

Volume 7 , Issue 2

Autumn 2005



FRIENDS OF CHARNWOOD FOREST

Autumn Newsletter

Your Committee-We need YOU!

Our former Treasurer, Mrs Barbara Bassett, has served on the Committee since the society was formed, nearly 20 years ago. She has decided to retire although she and her husband Frank will continue to help with our meetings and provide the wine and nibbles.



Mrs Barbara Bassett

This is the opportunity for some new blood. If you feel that you could help our work, and could give up a few evenings a year we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Call our Secretary, Dick Howard or speak to any member of the Committee.

Swithland Hall - Two Spring Days

We are most grateful to long-time members Mr & Mrs Adam Page for opening their lovely house and gardens to two visits from our members. Demand was so high that attendance had to be restricted and all those lucky enough to go were highly enthusiastic.



Many thanks!



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Coming Events

- Ms Jan Dawson-October 17th "Batchat"
- Meet the Members Dinner-November 23rd
Louis Scott's Restaurant
- Peter Gamble-January 23rd
"Leicestershire's Wild Flower Heritage"
- AGM & Clive Keble-20th March
"The National Forest-Where are we now?"

A Double Header-His & Hers

Our first talks of the Autumn season were, for the first time, given by two very different speakers.

First, Stuart Pearson, of Tilhill (the largest forestry managers in Britain) gave us a very interesting talk with great pictures (many from Charnwood), showing how woodlands can be established and managed with full care for all forms of wildlife. Gone are the days when miles and miles of boring conifers grew with no regard for biodiversity, with a black and dead forest floor. Now broad leaved varieties co-exist with conifers, though many of them will take 120 years to reach maturity and harvest. The economics of forestry are very complex and the advent of large supplies of good quality timber from Eastern Europe (new members of EU) has made commercial tree planting even more difficult than it used to be.

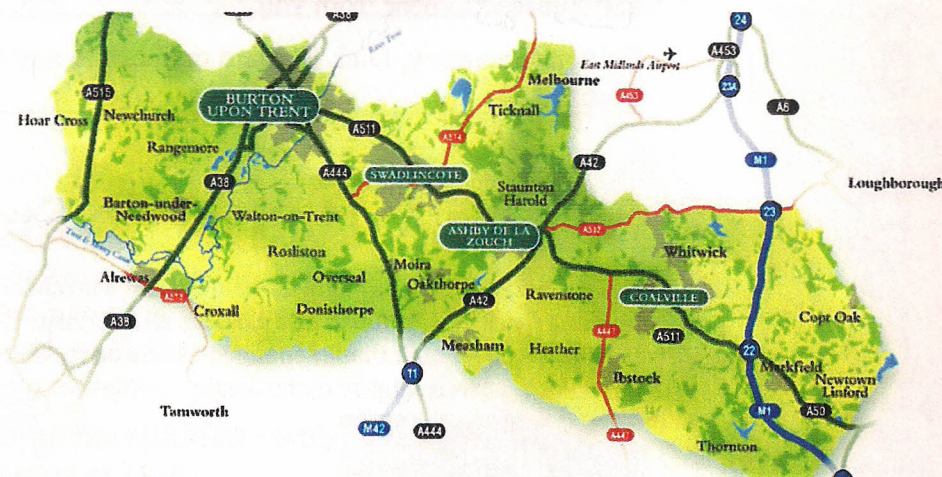
Then, Lucy Ashworth, the Landshapes Community Officer for The National Forest, told us about their interest in the life of the area and not just the trees. LANDSHAPES is a heritage project designed and hosted by the National Forest Company. The LANDSHAPES team wants to work with you to gather and create an archive of your knowledge and memories of the local area.

1. Tell others about your interests by setting up a profile page.
2. Promote your events and projects on the Community News & Events pages
3. Search and contribute to the archive.
4. Find out how to get a LANDSHAPES grant for your heritage projects.

Call Lucy Ashworth on 01283 551211 and see the website www.landshapes.org

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Where is The National Forest?



Money, Money, Money!

Have you a project needing funds?

If it is within 10 miles of Nottingham East Midlands Airport (and part of Charnwood Forest is) you may be eligible for a grant from NEMA Community Fund. The fund supports projects within a 10 mile radius that demonstrate environmental improvement, heritage conservation, environmental education, a bringing together of the community or encouragement and protection of wildlife. Since 2002 £128,378 has been donated to more than 180 projects.

If you think that your scheme fits the criteria, apply online to:

www.nottinghamema.com

or contact the fund secretary on:

01332 852819

When Charnwood Forest became world famous !

Of course, everyone knows the story of the 16 year old Leicester schoolboy, Roger Mason, and his incredible discovery of the first British Precambrian fossil, later named *Charnia* in a quarry near Woodhouse Eaves in 1957. Well you do, don't you? No? Alright then, one more time!

Roger and two friends decided to cycle from their Leicester homes one day in May 1957 to a quarry near Woodhouse Eaves for some very primitive (and probably very unsafe) rock climbing on the steep inclined slabs. As one of the boys was climbing, he spotted a strange impression on a bedding surface, with a very leaf-like appearance. He called to Roger, who was holding the rope, to come down and have a look. So Roger was not the first to see the fossil but he was aware enough to act. Roger, who had already developed a strong interest in geology and fossils, immediately realised that it must be a fossil. But, then again, he knew that ancient Precambrian rocks such as those in Charnwood weren't supposed to contain fossils. They needed a proper geologist. Roger's father knew Trevor Ford at the Geology Department of Leicester University and asked him to take a look.

Trevor was sceptical and said so, all the way to the quarry, when they set off a few days later. But he was in for a big shock, and he immediately realised that Roger was right - it was a fossil, and an extremely important one. These particular Charnian rocks were probably at least 580 million years old, and almost nothing was known in 1957 about fossils in rocks of this age. Similar fossils had been known from Australia but no-one thought they were Precambrian in age. This find in Leicestershire in rocks of known Precambrian age established without doubt that life was in existence at that time, and that is why the fossil was so important, as well as being the oldest fossil in Britain known at that time.

Roger's story hit the local, and national, news and has passed into geological legend. Trevor rushed into print with a description and gave the fossil the name *Charnia Masoni*, thus confirming the coup for Leicestershire. Similar specimens were later discovered in Bradgate Park.

The type specimen of *Charnia* was removed from the quarry in January 1958 and taken to New Walk Museum. It still holds pride of place in the main geology gallery to this day.

In 2002 the British Association decided that their annual meeting, the Festival of Science, would be held at Leicester University. Professor Richard Aldridge, head of the Geology Department, thought that it would be appropriate to celebrate Leicester's part in the story of early life by talks and even getting hold of Roger Mason (nowadays a leading metamorphic geologist, spending much time in China) and asking him to lead a field trip to the scene of his discovery. He (still fit at 61) and Helen Boynton (who has played a major role in unravelling the story of the Charnwood fossils) led a field trip which saw the main Bradgate sites and other important sites at Shepshed and Ratby though the original quarry was inaccessible.

Finally, the discovery has been proclaimed again to the world in Bill Bryson's best seller "A Short History of Nearly Everything."

(This article is based, by permission, on a longer piece by Andrew Swift of The University of Leicester)



Charnia Masoni at New Walk Museum, Leicester

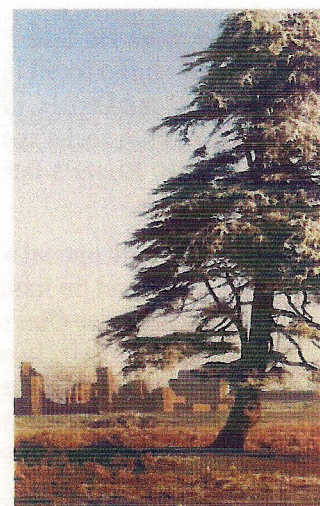
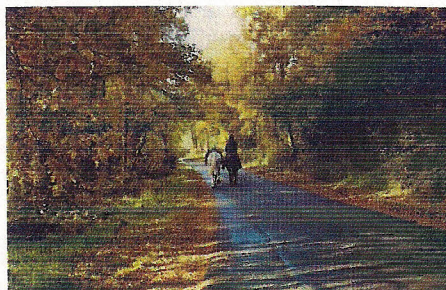
Send our postcards - £3.00 for 10

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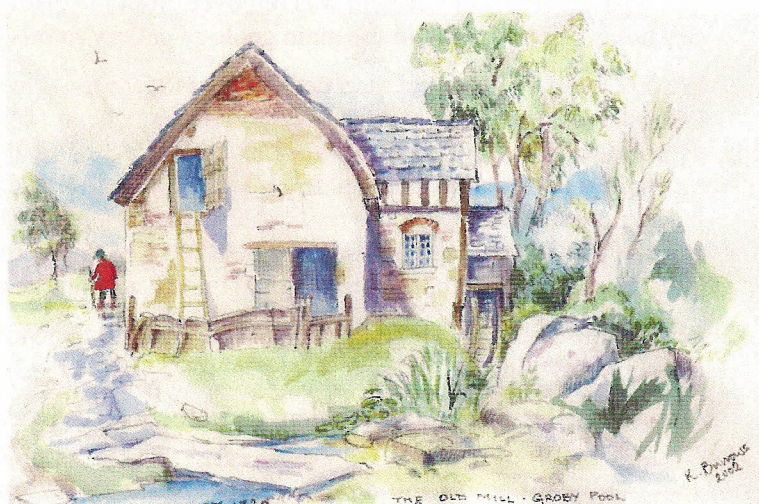
Polly Bott's Lane, Ulverscroft



Ruins of Bradgate

Kate Burrows, wife of Chairman Dick Burrows, is a talented artist. She has very kindly allowed us to copy some of her paintings of scenes in Charnwood Forest, and we shall try to feature them regularly in the newsletter..

Here is a watercolour of The Old Mill, Groby Pool (based on a painting of 1820)



Subscriptions will be due in January 2006 and should be sent to:

Miss Kim Turner

Hon Treasurer

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Rainbows Garden

Members who visited the garden at the Rainbows Hospice (designed and described at our AGM by Colin Green) will be delighted to know that our collection raised £80 for Rainbows' funds