

# The Friends of the Forster Country

## Newsletter

Issue No 41. December 2015

## Memorial Lecture

The 4th John Hepworth Memorial Lecture was held on Saturday, November 28 in the Council Chamber of Daneshill House. Carole Smithies BA OBE spoke of her lifetime passion for high places. Carole lives near Leeds and was the first woman member of the Manchester-based Rucksack Club to which John Hepworth belonged for over seventy years.

Her talk included many facts about mountains, the history of epic climbs, early explorers and attitudes to them as well as personal tales of daring in Britain and abroad. She did focus on the Munros. These are mountains in Scotland which are over 3000 feet in height (now, ridiculously, 914.4

metres.) She was the 21st female to 'bag' them and ranks Number 192 in the famous Munro Tables.

We heard of the fear and discomfort involved in walking, climbing, cycling, skiing and paragliding in the hills as well as the sense of achievement and the camaraderie.

The lecture was accompanied by many stunning, and some rare, photographs, projected ably by Jim Callaghan.

We thank Cllr. Simon Speller for his sponsorship of this event and the Council for allowing us to use their superb venue, including the Ingleheim Room where we gathered for refreshments.



## NHDC Consultation

Regular readers will be aware that both North Herts District Council and Stevenage Borough Council issued Local Plans for housing development to meet government requirements earlier this year and these plans were put out for public consultation. FOFC responded in January to NHDC and in July to SBC. Outlines of our arguments were covered in the Newsletters for April and August 2015.

NHDC received a huge response to its public consultation which showed the officials to be out of sympathy with the vast majority of the respondents. The proposals for

development were overwhelmingly opposed and will therefore be delayed.

The more valiant members of our committee are wading their way through the 8500 responses online. We did register our own objections but it is always worthwhile noting other people's arguments and hoarding them away for possible future use.

Plans for building in North Herts and Stevenage are interdependent and Forster Country is situated in both areas. It is unlikely that one authority can build on it unless both do. SBC has yet to publish the results of its consultation.

The question of what constitutes 'exceptional circumstances' for building on Green Belt land has to be decided in court. There is a 35 page government document on this subject but, as an alternative, a new Garden City, as recommended by several local MPs, is being considered.

This would, of course, necessitate loss of a huge area of countryside somewhere in the region and reminds us of the dilemma stated by Forster: People must have houses but something irreplaceable will be destroyed.

# Peterkin Award

The Peterkin Award for a Rural Living Champion is presented annually to an adult who has made an outstanding contribution to rural living in Hertfordshire. This year there were six nominations.

We are very pleased to announce that Margaret Ashby (co-founder of FOFC and currently a patron) was given this award at the 2015 CPRE Rural Living Awards Evening at County Hall, Hertford, on 20th October.

Margaret was recognised for "her

determination and dedication in ensuring the protection of a precious area of Green Belt known as Forster Country" for over thirty years.

The judges' citation went on to say that "it is very unlikely that, without Margaret's energy and enthusiasm, this piece of countryside would still be undeveloped."

However, as we all know, despite Margaret's efforts it remains vulnerable.

Nonetheless, well done, Margaret!



Photo Jean Archer

## AGM

The Annual General Meeting was a select gathering in St Nicholas Church on 22nd August. The formal meeting was preceded by a half-hour organ recital by local musician, Peter Saunders. There being no changes to the Committee, which was re-elected en bloc, the business was concluded promptly.

June Pitcher then gave an interesting talk about the church as the focus of Forster Country, reminding us

that the young Edward Morgan, would have sat in the pews as we did every Sunday during his ten year residence at Rooks Nest House.

The usual refreshments in the Parish Room followed. We regretted that we had not planned for an outdoor venue as the weather was perfect for a garden party. Previous events having been spoilt by rain, however, has made us cautious. If only the weather were truly predictable six months in advance!

## Christmas card

The FOFC Christmas card this year pictures a fir growing in Forster Country which someone decorates at this time of year. We should like to know who that someone is!



## Birthday Walk

The walk commemorating E M Forster's birthday (136 years ago) will start as usual at the lych-gate of St Nicholas' Church, Rectory Lane, Stevenage, SG1 4DA at 2 pm on Friday, 1st January, 2016.

Though not long or difficult, the paths may be muddy, so come prepared. Adults, children, dogs - all are welcome and it is permissible to 'drop out' at any point and come back to the Parish Room of the church for tea and biscuits.

### Patrons of the Friends of the Forster Country

Margaret Ashby. Nicola Beauman. Barbara Follett. Sir Andrew Motion. John Pilgrim. Richard Whitmore

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